



READING THE SIGNS

Dealing with dyslexia

By Xena Fox

Dyslexia is a common condition that causes difficulties with reading and writing.

Prevalent across the world and all age groups, it's estimated that at least five to 10 per cent of the population has some degree of dyslexia. It is classed as a 'specific learning difficulty' as it causes problems in certain areas but, unlike a learning disability, does not affect intelligence in general. However, it is a lifelong condition that can have a profound effect in many areas, as difficulties with reading and writing can make everyday life significantly more complicated and negatively affect self-esteem.

Thankfully, dyslexia is now much better understood than in previous generations. There is a wide range of support available for both children and adults, which can help people improve skills, find ways to work with, and around, challenges and to enjoy a successful education and career.

What is dyslexia?

Children and adults of all intellectual abilities can be affected by dyslexia. Its manifestation varies greatly from person to person, and everyone will have a very individual pattern of strengths and weaknesses. However, all will experience some level of difficulty when it comes to reading, writing and, in some cases, comprehension of the written word. Nevertheless, only a very tiny percentage may never learn to read effectively. Most will have some level of skill, and many will be able to read well, though some



↑ *It is often when schoolchildren begin to learn to read and write that symptoms become very obvious*

→ *It's never too late to get help to improve your reading skills*

of these may still find it difficult to write and spell.

Usually, people with dyslexia will understand information that is given orally perfectly well, but have difficulty when it's written down. There can also be associated problems, such as having a short attention span, finding it hard to carry out a sequence of instructions, experiencing problems concentrating, having limited planning and organisation skills, and possibly a poor short-term memory. Nevertheless, many people with dyslexia often have aptitudes in other areas, such as creative thinking and problem solving.

Though there are many adults who have never been diagnosed – or received any help or support – nowadays symptoms are normally recognised



when a child starts school, or even before.

Some of the most common signs in very young children include difficulties pronouncing words, problems expressing themselves and/or delayed speech development, mixing up phrases or letters, or showing little comprehension of rhyming words. However, all children develop at different rates and the above can also be part of a normal progression or signals of other conditions.

Generally speaking, symptoms become more specific when children begin learning how to read and write.

At this stage it may be more noticeable that they do some or all of the following: have difficulty learning the names and pronunciation of letters, confuse the order of letters in words, write figures and letters the wrong way round (though many children do this when first learning), or cannot easily copy written words. They may

read or write very slowly, have trouble recognising the individual sounds that make up words, have inconsistent spelling skills (spelling the same word many different ways), and/or be unable to recognise words they have seen many times before.

In addition, some may struggle to follow a series of directions

one theory suggests that genes affect how relevant areas of the brain develop in early life.

Getting help

Diagnosis for children can be a long, and sometimes frustrating, process, especially as symptoms aren't always obvious, can be easily confused



↑ *Many adults have undiagnosed dyslexia*

or have difficulty with learning sequences like the alphabet or days of the week. A few people with dyslexia also report visual disturbances when reading, such as letters and words being distorted, blurred or seeming to move around.

Any of the above can apply to older children and adults as well, in whom the more usually advanced skills may also be absent or not as developed. This can include being less able to transfer held knowledge onto paper, having problems writing essays or similar, and experiencing difficulties with remembering sequences of instructions.

Though it is known that the condition originates in the brain, the exact cause has not been pinpointed. However, it can often run in families so

with other conditions, and may also be concurrent with other complaints such as ADHD. Unfortunately, awareness and resources in Spain and the Canary Islands are only now beginning to improve, so difficulties are perhaps even more likely to still be mistaken for general 'bad' behaviour or a lack of willingness to learn. Nevertheless, attitudes are changing, and the earlier a diagnosis can be achieved, the more effective educational tools can be.

If you are a parent who believes your school-age child may have dyslexia, the first step is to speak to their teacher. Ideally, extra support can then be arranged, either in the class and/or in the form of tuition with a specialist educator. In some cases it can also be worth



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