



S

P

E

L

D

Specific Learning
Difficulties SA

Potential signs of dyslexia in young children (Suitable for Kindergarten, Foundation and Year 1 children)

The number of students with dyslexia in Australian schools is estimated to be around 10-15%. There is likely to be at least one student in every class who displays the strengths and weaknesses characteristic of dyslexia. Do you have a student who puzzles you, displaying well-developed skills and abilities in some areas and unexpected difficulties in others? This checklist can help identify potential signs of dyslexia.

BACKGROUND

- family history of literacy learning problems
- delay in the onset and/or the development of speech and language
- seems bright and capable but not making expected progress
- is unhappy soon after starting school

Compared to their age peers, children with dyslexia often display difficulties in the following areas:

SPEECH DIFFICULTIES

Children with dyslexia typically have well-developed oral language skills but can display specific speech problems, such as:

- muddles up sounds in words (e.g. says 'flutterby' for 'butterfly')
- mispronounces words (e.g. says 'jungled' for 'jumbled')
- difficulty recalling the exact words wanted (e.g. calls a 'stamp' a 'sticker' or uses words like 'thing', 'stuff' or 'junk')

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty distinguishing the parts of spoken language (e.g. sentences, words, syllables, sounds)
- difficulty hearing and manipulating individual sounds in words (phonemic awareness)
- difficulty recognising and producing rhyme (e.g. identifying the odd one out of sand/hand/cup)
- difficulty identifying words with the same beginning sound (e.g. identifying the odd one out of jam/jug/bed)
- difficulty blending sounds to hear words (e.g. the sounds /c/, /a/, /t/ is cat.)
- confuses similar sounding words (e.g. cone/comb)

MEMORY DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty remembering the words in nursery rhymes, songs, poems, etc.
- poor memory for names (of friends, teacher, etc.)
- difficulty remembering instructions

Checklist continued....

DIFFICULTIES IN ACQUIRING LITERACY SKILLS

In Pre-school or Kindergarten, children with dyslexia or literacy difficulties can show:

- enjoyment listening to stories read aloud but little interest in letters or words
- difficulty recognising letters and numbers after considerable exposure
- difficulty writing own name correctly after considerable exposure and practice

After starting formal schooling, children with dyslexia can also show:

- unexpected difficulty developing reading and spelling skills
- difficulty learning and remembering letter-sounds links (phonics)
- confuses the direction of print and attempts to read a word from right to left
- difficulty decoding - correctly sounding out and blending to read words
- hesitant, slow, inaccurate and laboured reading, especially when reading aloud
- a visual 'look and say' approach to reading, often using the initial letters as the only cue
- use of the context of the story and picture cues to identify words
- difficulty learning and remembering common sight words (e.g. you, have, like, come, etc.)
- difficulty recognising numbers after considerable exposure

A child who appears bright and capable and displays many of these difficulties may have dyslexia. However, it is important to remember that the levels of development and speed of learning in early childhood differ significantly for each child. A good starting point is talking with the child's teacher. Some speech difficulties are age-appropriate for young children. If you have concerns, consult a Speech and Language Therapist.

Ensure the child has access to targeted intervention to remediate the any difficulties. Providing intervention to improve phonological awareness and phonics using evidence-based programs will help children with weaknesses in those areas.

This checklist provides an informal understanding of the student's strengths and weaknesses. Formal diagnostic assessments of literacy skills will give a clearer understanding of important next steps for intervention. Before having an assessment for dyslexia, a psychologist will recommend the student has done at least 6 months of quality, evidence-based phonics intervention.

SPELD SA provides Specialised Education Reviews for literacy and numeracy, which provide direction for intervention. SPELD SA provides a psychological assessment for students who have completed most of their junior primary schooling. The psychologist can diagnose dyslexia from this formal assessment.