

What is Dyslexia?

Introduction

Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty that can cause problems with reading, writing and spelling. It's a "specific learning difficulty", which means it causes problems with certain abilities used for learning, such as reading and writing. Unlike a learning disability, intelligence isn't affected.

It's estimated that up to 1 in every 10 to 20 people in the UK has some degree of dyslexia. Dyslexia is a lifelong problem that can present challenges on a daily basis, but support is available to improve reading and writing skills and help those with the problem be successful at school and work.

What are the signs of dyslexia?

Signs of dyslexia usually become apparent when a child starts school and begins to focus more on learning how to read and write.

A person with dyslexia may:

- read and write very slowly
- confuse the order of letters in words
- put letters the wrong way round - such as writing "b" instead of "d"
- have poor or inconsistent spelling
- understand information when told verbally, but have difficulty with information that's written down
- find it hard to carry out a sequence of directions
- struggle with planning and organisation

However, people with dyslexia often have good skills in other areas, such as creative thinking and problem solving.

Getting help

If you think your child may have dyslexia, the first step is to speak to their teacher or their school's special needs coordinator (SENCO) about your concerns. They may be able to offer additional support to help your child if necessary.

If your child continues to have problems despite extra support, you or the school may want to consider requesting a more in-depth assessment from a specialist dyslexia teacher or an educational psychologist. This can be arranged through the school, or you can request a private assessment by contacting:

- an educational psychologist directly - you can find a [directory of chartered psychologists](#) on the British Psychological Society's website

- a voluntary organisation that can arrange an assessment, such as a local dyslexia association

Adults who wish to be assessed for dyslexia should contact a local or national dyslexia association (see below) for advice.

Support for people with dyslexia

If your child has dyslexia, they'll probably need extra educational support from their school. With appropriate support, there's usually no reason your child can't go to a mainstream school, although a small number of children may benefit from attending a specialist school.

Techniques and support that may help your child include:

- occasional one-to-one teaching or lessons in a small group with a specialist teacher
- phonics - a special learning technique that focuses on improving the ability to identify and process the smaller sounds that make up words
- technology, such as computers and speech recognition software, that may make it easier for your child to read and write when they're a bit older

Universities also have specialist staff who can support young people with dyslexia in higher education.

Technology such as word processors and electronic organisers can be useful for adults too. Employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace to help people with dyslexia, such as allowing extra time for certain tasks.

Support groups

As well as national dyslexia charities, such as the British Dyslexia Association (BDA), there are several local dyslexia associations (LDAs). These are independently registered charities that run workshops and help to provide local support and access to information.

What causes dyslexia?

People with dyslexia find it difficult to recognise the different sounds that make up words and relate these to letters. Dyslexia isn't related to a person's general level of intelligence. Children and adults of all intellectual abilities can be affected by dyslexia. The exact cause of dyslexia is unknown, but it often appears to run in families. In people with dyslexia, it's thought that certain genes inherited from your parents may act together in a way that affects how some parts of brain develop during early life.

Source: NHS - <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

See also: British Dyslexia Association - <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk>

Famous people with dyslexia include:

- **Sam Allardyce**, English footballer and football manager
- **Anthony Andrews**, English actor
- **Jennifer Aniston**, actor
- **Princess Beatrice of York**, member of the British Royal Family
- **Alexander Graham Bell**, inventor and scientist
- **Orlando Bloom**, actor
- **Richard Branson**, entrepreneur
- **Marcus Brigstocke**, English comedian and satirist
- **Erin Brockovich**, legal clerk, socio-environmental activist
- **Max Brooks**, author and screenwriter
- **Lewis Carroll**, author and mathematician
- **Carl XVI Gustaf**, king of Sweden
- **Carl Philip** of Sweden, prince of Sweden
- **Cher**, singer and actress, and **Chaz Bono** (formerly known as Chastity)
- **Tom Cruise**, actor
- **Leonardo da Vinci**, painter and polymath
- **Thomas Edison**, inventor
- **Paloma Faith**, Singer-songwriter and actress
- **Michael Faraday**, scientist
- **Ben Fogle**, English television presenter
- **Noel Gallagher**, musician
- **Whoopi Goldberg**, American actress, comedian, TV personality
- **Jerry Hall**, model
- **Susan Hampshire**, actress
- **Salma Hayek**, actress
- **Anthony Hopkins**, actor
- **Steve Jobs**, co-founder of Apple Inc.
- **Cath Kidston**, designer and businesswoman
- **Keira Knightley**, actress
- **Jay Leno**, talk show host and comedian
- **Louis of Luxembourg**, prince of Luxembourg
- **Mika**, singer-songwriter
- **Jaime Murray**, English actress
- **Jamie Oliver**, chef and television host
- **Ozzy Osbourne**, musician
- **Brendan O'Carroll**, Irish actor
- **Pablo Picasso**, Spanish artist, sculptor
- **Keanu Reeves**, actor
- **Guy Ritchie**, film director

- **David Rockefeller**, American business executive and philanthropist
- **Jackie Stewart**, Scottish racing driver
- **Joss Stone**, singer
- Lindsay Wagner, actress^[168]
- Toyah Willcox, actress and singer^[174]
- Holly Willoughby, television presenter^[176]
- Henry Winkler, actor, spokesman for the Dyslexia Foundation^[177]
- Channing Tatum, Actor and model^[181]
- Benjamin Zephaniah, poet^[182]