

A dyslexia primer for parents and educators

Submitted by PC Reads



COURTESY OF PC READS

Reading. Writing. Arithmetic. For some students, school is fairly simple and milestones are easily met. Kindergarten students know the letters and their sounds. First graders are reading unknown words by sounding out syllables. Third graders are reading fluently, memorizing multiplication facts easily and writing stories with few spelling errors.

When these milestones aren't met as expected, parents become concerned. Sometimes it's obvious that a child is struggling and other times it's just a gut feeling that something isn't quite right. When parents express concerns, too often they are told, "She just needs more time." "Read with your child more often." "Don't worry about spelling, everyone has spell-check."

Unfortunately, research tells us that waiting for students to catch up is rarely effective, especially with respect to struggling readers. About 75 percent of poor readers in third grade remain poor readers in ninth grade. As kids head back to classrooms, PC READS encourages parents and educators to review information about dyslexia, which is the most common reason for reading, writing and spelling difficulties.

DYSLEXIA IS COMMON. Dyslexia is the most common learning disability, believed to affect approximately 15 to 20 percent of the population. In a classroom of 25 students, up to five may be dyslexic. Dyslexia does not affect intelligence, and many young students with dyslexia are able to mask their reading difficulties until third or fourth grade. Knowing the signs of dyslexia can be the key to identifying struggling students and ensuring their success.

DYSLEXIA IS DEFINED. Utah state law includes the following definition of dyslexia, based on definitions used by the International Dyslexia Association and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "Dyslexia means a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin and characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities that typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction."

DYSLEXIA AFFECTS MORE THAN READING. Although difficulties with reading are one of the most common and obvious signs of dyslexia, the reality is that dyslexia affects many other aspects of life and signs begin early. During preschool years, signs of dyslexia include delayed speech, difficulty tying shoes, mispronouncing familiar words and difficulty learning letters and their sounds. Once in elementary school, signs include difficulty sounding out unknown words, slow or inaccurate reading, trouble with sight words and lack of capitalization and punctuation in writing.

Many dyslexic children love listening to stories, but avoid reading aloud. Poor spelling in written work is another common indicator; however, dyslexic students are often able to ace weekly spelling tests. Difficulty telling time and memorizing math facts are also dyslexic characteristics. For more information on identifying dyslexia, visit www.parkcityreads.org.

DYSLEXIA RUNS IN FAMILIES. Many people are surprised to learn that dyslexia is genetic. Research has found a 50 percent chance of being dyslexic when one parent is dyslexic. Knowing your family's history is important, keeping in mind that many dyslexic parents have never been officially diagnosed.

DYSLEXIA MYTHS STILL EXIST. Unfortunately, some common myths still include: dyslexics write backwards, dyslexia cannot be diagnosed until third grade, only boys are dyslexic, schools can't talk about dyslexia, kids grow out of being dyslexic and dyslexics never learn to read. None of these statements are true.

DYSLEXIA CAN BE IDENTIFIED EARLY. Preschool students can be identified as at-risk for dyslexia. Dyslexia can be identified in students as early as first grade. Thanks to the work of Decoding Dyslexia chapters nationwide, some states have started requiring dyslexia screening in schools. Identifying dyslexia when children are still learning to read is critical to ensuring students receive the support needed to reach their full potential.

PC READS is a local nonprofit advocating for recognition and education of dyslexic students. We promote elevating literacy through early identification of struggling readers, effective reading interventions and appropriate classroom accommodations. We provide support within our community through family advocacy, community education and school collaboration. To learn more about dyslexia and PC READS, please visit our new website: parkcityreads.org.