Rankin County School District
TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

# Dyslexia Parent Guide

## Definition

The following definition of dyslexia was endorsed by the Board of Directors of the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) on November 12, 2002:

> Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/ or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties 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. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Therefore, dyslexia is a specific learning disability that appears to be based upon the brain and its functioning. It appears that dyslexia runs in families.

Individuals with dyslexia have difficulty with processing and manipulating the sounds in a spoken language. This is related to the ability to read words accurately and fluently. Individuals with dyslexia will also have difficulty with spelling. Some of the consequences of not reading accurately or fluently and thus having fewer reading experiences may include problems with reading comprehension and vocabulary.

## Common characteristics of dyslexia

Most people have one or two of these characteristics. That does not mean that everyone has dyslexia. A person with dyslexia usually has several of these characteristics that persist over time and interfere with his or her learning.

### Oral language

- Late learning to talk
- Difficulty pronouncing words
- Difficulty acquiring vocabulary or using age appropriate grammar
- Difficulty following directions
- Confusion with directionality; before/after, right/left
- Difficulty learning the alphabet, nursery rhymes, or songs
- Difficulty understanding concepts and relationships
- Difficulty with word retrieval or naming problems



## Reading

- Difficulty learning to read
- Difficulty identifying or generating rhyming words, or counting syllables in words (phonological awareness)
- Difficulty with hearing and manipulating sounds in words (phonemic awareness)
- Difficulty distinguishing different sounds in words (phonological processing)
- Difficulty in learning the sounds of letters (phonics)
- Difficulty remembering names and shapes of letters, or naming letters rapidly
- Transposing the order of letters when reading or spelling
- Misreading or omitting common short words
- "Stumbles" through longer words
- Poor reading comprehension during oral or silent reading, often because words are not accurately read
- Slow, laborious oral reading

## Written Language

- Difficulty putting ideas on paper
- Many spelling mistakes
- May do well on weekly spelling tests, but may have spelling mistakes in daily work
- Difficulty proofreading

## Other common symptoms that occur with dyslexia

- Difficulty naming colors, objects, and letters rapidly, in a sequence (RAN: Rapid Automatized Naming)
- Weak memory for lists, directions, or facts
- Needs to see or hear concepts many times to learn them
- Distracted by visual or auditory stimuli
- Downward trend in achievement test scores or school performance
- Inconsistent school work
- Teacher says, "If only she would try harder," or "He's lazy."
- Relatives may have similar problems

# Common characteristics of other related learning disorders

Individuals with dyslexia may have other related disorders. However, you can have dyslexia without other related disorders. Some of the co-existing disorders are described below.

## Dysgraphia (Handwriting)

- Unsure of handedness (right or left handed)
- Poor or slow handwriting
- Messy and unorganized papers



- Difficulty copying
- Poor fine motor skills
- Difficulty remembering the kinesthetic movements to form letters correctly

## Dyscalculia (Math)

- Difficulty counting accurately
- May misread numbers
- Difficulty memorizing and retrieving math facts
- Difficulty copying math problems and organizing written work
- Many calculation errors
- Difficulty retaining math vocabulary concepts

## ADHD- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (Attention)

- Inattention
- Variable attention
- Distractibility
- Impulsivity
- Hyperactivity

## Dyspraxia (Motor skills)

- Difficulty planning and coordinating body movements
- Difficulty coordinating facial muscles to produce sounds

## Executive Function/Organization

- Loses papers
- Poor sense of time
- Forgets homework
- Messy desk
- Overwhelmed by too much input
- Works slowly



If your child is having difficulties learning to read and you have noted several of these characteristics in your child, he or she may need to be evaluated for dyslexia or a related disorder.

# Common Questions

## What kind of instruction does my child need?

Dyslexia and other related learning disorders cannot be cured. Appropriate instruction promotes reading success and alleviates many difficulties associated with dyslexia. Instruction for individuals with reading and related learning disabilities should be:

- Explicit- component skills for reading, spelling, and writing are explained, directly taught, and modeled by the teacher. Children are discouraged from guessing at words.
- Systematic and cumulative- has a definite, logical sequence of concept introduction; concepts are ordered from simple to more complex; each new concept builds upon previously introduced concepts, with built in review to aid memory and retrieval.
- Structured- has step-by-step procedures for introducing, reviewing, and practicing concepts.

## What is the appropriate reading instruction for a child with dyslexia?

Parents often ask, “What type of instruction does my child with dyslexia need in order to learn to read?” Almost ALL children with dyslexia can be taught to read if they are given specific, comprehensive, and intensive instruction. This structured approach to reading should be delivered by a highly trained teacher.

## Who is qualified to deliver this type of reading instruction?

IDA has published the Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading, which defines what teachers of reading need to know. All educators and paraprofessionals in Rankin County School District have received four hours of dyslexia awareness training in Standards One and Two of the Knowledge and Practice Standards. Rankin County provides dyslexia interventions to students in grades one through five that meet the established criteria. The intervention is provided by a qualified dyslexia intervention specialist for forty-five minutes every other day. Students will receive dyslexia interventions during their regular school day.

A highly knowledgeable and skilled teacher of reading, NOT a curriculum, teaches a child to read. According to a wise pioneer in the field of dyslexia, “A teacher who knows what to teach and how to teach it could use a stick in the sand to teach a dyslexic child to read.” A good curriculum just makes the process even better!

## What needs to be included in a remediation lesson for a child with dyslexia?

Although lessons vary somewhat from curriculum to curriculum, certain components are critical for the child with dyslexia. Below is a list of lesson components that are often included in dyslexia remediation.

## History of the Language

Introduce the history of the English language. This provides a meaningful platform for children to understand from where our language has come. Ultimately, it will allow children to understand the most basic layers of our language and how this affects both reading and spelling rules.

## Alphabet

Make certain that the child is secure in his knowledge of the letters of the alphabet. The alphabet is the cornerstone for all reading and spelling. Many students with dyslexia may be able to “sing” or “chant” the alphabet, yet they cannot touch and name nor recognize each of the individual letters of the alphabet.

## Phonemic Awareness

Include phonemic awareness activities in each lesson. For example, the word cat is made up of three phonemes, /k/ /a/ /t/, and the word ship is made up of three phonemes, / sh/ /i/ /p/. Phonemic awareness deficits are the underlying cause of dyslexia, and it is critical that children develop these skills. Practice must be independent of working with letters and must focus specifically on phonemes, or sounds.

## Phonics

Instruction should be based upon the most reliable patterns in reading and spelling, starting with the most common and progressing to the most complex. Children should be given the skills necessary to “break the code.”

## Fluency

Fluency practice should be at the word level, and based upon common patterns of syllables, syllable division patterns, and morphemes (the smallest meaningful unit, such as –ing). Students with dyslexia also need to tackle Instant Words, those common words in English that don’t “play by the rules.” Yet they are the most common words in the English language, as well as the first words beginning readers encounter.

## Comprehension

Comprehension, the ultimate goal of reading, should not be assumed to be a by-product of decoding. Children with dyslexia need explicit instruction in comprehension. Comprehension skills should include vocabulary, reasoning, grammar, analysis, and listening. Children should have exposure to these skills through both narrative and expository texts.

### Spelling

Spelling is perhaps the single most difficult skill for dyslexics to master. Spelling instruction should be delivered through a highly systematic approach beginning with the most common and reliable patterns in the English language. Spelling instruction should reinforce skills being taught in reading.

### Handwriting

Dyslexic students benefit from instruction in cursive handwriting. This instruction should focus on approach strokes, proportion, and directionality. Handwriting reinforces a multisensory approach to reading and spelling.

### Study Skills and Learning Strategies

Children with dyslexia need guidance in developing effective and efficient study habits. Organization is often a weakness for children with dyslexia and they need guidance with time, space, and materials as well as an approach to the task at hand. This should include a variety of skills and strategies to help the student develop metacognition, or "thinking about thinking."

## How often should my child be seen for reading remediation?

Children need repeated practice until mastery. For most children, the highest success rates come when children receive frequent practice with the support and direction of a qualified professional.

## What else can I do to help my child with dyslexia?

Read to your child and help develop listening skills. Take advantage of recorded audio books. Help your child develop a love of listening as well as an appreciation for good literature.

Seek an evaluation from a qualified professional to determine your child's specific profile of dyslexia.

Be cautious of false claims of "cures" for dyslexia. They are abundant and expensive, and appeal to parents as they offer a "quick fix." Some of these include colored lenses or overlays, vision therapy, and brain training. [See Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia, and Vision. American Pediatric Journal, Vol. 127 No. 3, March 1, 2011]



## Why is evaluation important?

An evaluation is the process of gathering information to identify the factors contributing to a student's difficulty with learning to read and spell. First, information is gathered from parents and teachers to understand development and the educational opportunities that have been provided. Then, tests are given to identify strengths and weaknesses that lead to a diagnosis and a tentative road map for intervention.

Conclusions and recommendations are developed and reported. When a student is having difficulties with reading and spelling, an evaluation is important for three reasons.

1. Diagnosis- An effective evaluation identifies the likely source of the problem. It rules out other common causes of reading difficulties and determines if the student profile of strengths and weaknesses fit the definition of dyslexia.
2. Intervention planning- An effective evaluation develops a focused remedial program. Students who have a diagnosis of dyslexia need a specialized approach to reading instruction to make progress. It is crucial that this specialized instruction begin at the student's current level of reading skill development, rather than at the student's grade level. An effective evaluation helps parents and teachers see which specific skills are weak and where reading and spelling instruction should begin.
3. Documentation- An effective evaluation documents the history of a student's learning disability. One purpose of this documentation is to determine eligibility for special services, including special education. Documentation is also important for obtaining accommodations in college, or in the workplace.

## When should a child be evaluated?

It is possible to identify potential reading problems in young children even before the problems turn into reading failure. Screening tests, such as the Quick Phonics Screener (QPS); Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS); AIMSweb screening assessments; and a state approved dyslexia screener, developed by researchers for those purposes should be used with all children in a school. The process can begin in kindergarten, to locate those students who are "at risk" for reading difficulty. Preventive intervention should begin immediately, even if dyslexia is suspected. How the child responds to supplementary instruction will help determine if special education services are justified and necessary.

Before second grade, it is more important to focus an evaluation on the precursors of reading development. Measures of language skills, phonological awareness, memory, and rapid naming are more suggestive of being at-risk for dyslexia among young children than are measures of word reading, decoding and spelling.

Therefore, measures of phonological awareness, memory, and rapid naming are typically included in kindergarten and beginning of first grade. Screening tests can identify children who need targeted intervention to improve these critical skills so these children can meet grade-level benchmarks. Although there are many tests that may be used (in kindergarten and beginning of first grade) to assess beginning skills in reading and spelling, the standards for average achievement are generous.

## What should be included in the evaluation?

The following areas should be considered when carrying out an evaluation.

### Background information

Information from parents and teachers tells us a lot about a student's overall development and pattern of strengths and weaknesses. Because dyslexia is genetically linked, a family history of dyslexia indicates that a student is more likely to have dyslexia. A history of delayed speech or language also puts a child at risk for reading difficulties. It is important to know the types and length of time of any interventions the student has received at school, home, or through tutoring, as well as the student's response to the intervention. School attendance problems should be ruled out. A history of poor attendance, alone, can explain an identified weakness in skill development.

### Oral language skills

Oral language, simply stated, refers to the ability to listen to and understand spoken language as well as to express thoughts through spoken language. Oral language is made up of basic skills, such as recognizing and making the sounds within speech. These are skills that are needed for accurate and automatic word reading. Higher-level skills, such as getting meaning by listening to someone speak or creating sentences to express thoughts are needed for comprehension. Students with dyslexia typically have adequate higher-level language skills. Indicators of higher-level oral language skills include being able to understand an age-appropriate story and spoken directions, to carry on a conversation, and to understand and use words that are age appropriate. If a student has average higher-level oral language skills but much difficulty developing written language (reading and spelling) skills, the need for evaluation for dyslexia is recommended.

Although students with dyslexia usually have strong higher-level language skills, they typically have problems (a deficit) in basic language skills (see following section "Phonological processing"). This deficit limits the ability to learn to read and spell using the sounds of the language. Young children with dyslexia often have delays in language development, but their higher-level language skills are usually age-appropriate by the time they enter school. Difficulties with higher- level language skills suggest a need for a language evaluation by a speech-language pathologist to rule out language impairment.

### Word recognition

Word recognition is the ability to read single printed words. It is also called word reading or word identification. Tests of word recognition require that students read individual words printed in a list. The student is not able to use cues, such as the meaning of a sentence, to help them figure out the word. Tests of word recognition that score both accuracy and the time it takes for the student to read the words (fluency) are particularly useful. Students with dyslexia often become accurate but are still very slow when reading words. Both accuracy and the speed of word reading can affect understanding of what is read.

## Decoding

Decoding is the ability to read unfamiliar words by using letter-sound knowledge, spelling patterns and chunking the word into smaller parts, such as syllables. Decoding is also called “word attack.” Decoding tests should use nonsense words (words that look like real words but have no meaning, such as frut or crin) to force the student to rely on these decoding skills rather than on memory.

## Spelling

Tests of spelling measure the student’s ability to spell individual words from memory using their knowledge of, for example, letter-sound pairings, patterns of letters that cluster together to spell one sound (igh in high; oa in boat), the way plurals may be spelled (s, es, ies) and so on. Spelling is the opposite of word attack but it is more difficult. It requires separating out the individual sounds in a word, remembering the different ways each sound might be spelled, choosing one way, writing the letter(s) for that sound and doing the same, again, for the next sound in the word. Spelling stresses a child’s short and long-term memory and is complicated by the ease or difficulty the child has in writing the letters, legibly and in the proper order. Spelling is usually the most severe weakness among students with dyslexia and the most difficult to remediate.




## Phonological processing

Phonology is one small part of overall language ability. It is a low-level language skill in that it does not involve meaning. Phonology is the “sound system” of English. Spoken language is made up of words, word parts (such as syllables), and individual sounds (phonemes). We must be able to think about, remember, and correctly sequence the sounds in words in order to learn to link letters to sounds for reading and spelling. Good readers do this automatically without conscious effort. However, students with dyslexia have difficulty with identifying, pronouncing, or recalling sounds. Tests of phonological processing focus on these skills.

## Automaticity/fluency skills

Students with dyslexia often have a slow speed of processing information (visual or auditory). Tasks should measure Naming Speed (also called Rapid Automatic Naming). Sets of objects, colors, letters, and numbers are often used. These items are presented in rows on a card, and the student is asked to name each as quickly as possible. Naming speed, particularly letter naming, is one of the best early predictors of reading difficulties. Therefore, it is often used as part of screening measures for young children. Slow naming speed results in problems with developing reading fluency. It also makes it difficult for students to do well on timed tests. Students with both the naming speed deficit and the phonological processing deficit are considered to have a “double deficit.” Students with the “double deficit” have more severe difficulties than those with only one of the two.

## Reading comprehension

Typically, students with dyslexia score lower on tests of reading comprehension than on listening comprehension. This is because they have difficulty with decoding and accurately or fluently reading words. It is important, however, to be aware that students with dyslexia often have strong higher-level oral language skills and are able to get the main idea of a passage despite their difficulty with the words. Further, reading comprehension tasks usually require the student to read only a short passage to which they may refer when finding the answers to questions. For these reasons, students with dyslexia may earn an average score on reading comprehension tests but still have much difficulty reading and understanding long reading assignments in their grade-level textbooks.

## Vocabulary knowledge

It is important to test vocabulary knowledge because vocabulary greatly affects listening and reading comprehension. Difficulties students with dyslexia might have had in learning language or with memory can affect the ability to learn the meanings of words (vocabulary). Independent reading is also an important means for developing new vocabulary. Poor readers, who usually read less, are likely to have delays in vocabulary development. It is important to note, however, that students with dyslexia may perform poorly on reading vocabulary tests because of their decoding problems and not because they don't know the meaning of some words. For this reason, it is best to administer both a reading and listening vocabulary task to get a true measure of vocabulary knowledge.

The profile of strengths and weaknesses of an individual with dyslexia varies with age, educational opportunity and the influence of co-occurring factors such as emotional adjustment, ability to pay attention in learning situations, difficulties with health or motivation. Nevertheless, clusters of distinguishing characteristics are frequently noted.

### Family History and Early Development

- Reports or reading/spelling difficulties across generations in the family
- Normal prenatal and birth history
- Delays/difficulties acquiring speech/language



### Early Childhood/Primary Grades

- Difficulty with rhyming, blending sounds, learning the alphabet, linking letters with sounds
- Difficulty learning rules for spelling- spell words the way they sound (e.g., lik for like); use the letter name to code sounds (lafunt for elephant)
- Difficulty remembering "little" words- the, of, said- that cannot be "sounded out"

### Middle and Secondary School

- Reluctant readers
- Slow, word-by-word readers; great difficulty with words in lists, nonsense words and words not in their listening vocabulary
- Very poor spellers- misspell sounds, leave out sounds, add or leave out letters or whole syllables
- Non-fluent writers- slow, poor quality and quantity of the product
- When speaking, may have a tendency to mispronounce common words (floormat for format); difficulty using or comprehending more complex grammatical structures
- Listening comprehension is usually superior to performance on timed measures of reading comprehension (may be equivalent when reading comprehension measures are untimed)
- Weak vocabulary knowledge and use

## Outcomes of an evaluation

An evaluation should result in a written report. This report should detail the kinds of information collected. This includes information related to the family literacy history, any significant medical issues the child may have, prenatal and birth conditions, and preschool development, including language learning. The education history should include information on school attendance, tests administered and test scores. These scores should be stated as standard scores. Standard scores compare the learner to others of the same age or grade. This material should provide the framework for the detailed evaluation of relative strengths and weaknesses across the various skill areas assessed as well as the overall fit of all information with the typical profile of dyslexia at the child's age. This should lead to a tentative diagnosis that states that the child's ability to learn to read, write and spell does or does not appear to be related to dyslexia. The specific evidence that supports the diagnosis should be explained in the report.

## Diagnosis

A diagnosis of dyslexia begins with the gathering of information gained from interviews, observations and testing. This information may be collected by various members of a team that includes including the classroom teacher(s), speech/ language pathologist, educational assessment specialist(s), and medical personnel (if co-occurring difficulties related to development, health or attention are suspected).

The task of relating and interpreting the information collected should be the responsibility of a professional who is thoroughly familiar with the important characteristics of dyslexia at different stages in the development of literacy skills. This professional should also have knowledge of the influence of language development and behavior on literacy learning. Often, school psychologists and/or speech-language pathologists are responsible for this task.

CAUTION: An initial diagnosis of dyslexia should be offered only as a tentative conclusion based on the data available. A poor reader may appear to "fit the profile" of dyslexia. However, if the learner responds quickly to appropriate intervention, the source of the reading problem is more likely related to earlier educational opportunity than to problems in the child's physical makeup that limit the ability to learn from the instruction provided. The ability of the learner to benefit from instruction that is focused

on the basic skills that support reading and spelling provides valuable information necessary to support or reject the initial diagnosis.

## Intervention planning

Finally, the report should identify instructional programs that appear to be appropriate in meeting the specific skill gaps and weaknesses identified through the evaluation process. Many children have already mastered some beginning reading skills. Therefore, it is not always necessary or reasonable for a child to be placed in the very beginning lessons of a program. Although some programs have a placement test which helps the teacher to know where instruction should begin, many do not. For this reason, information about the child's specific skill needs should be detailed in the report to assist in identifying the starting point for instruction. Recommended programs or intervention strategies should be consistent with the types of content and methods that research has shown to be effective for students with dyslexia and other poor readers. If warranted, a recommendation for further testing- vision, hearing, fine motor control (occupational therapy), attention, emotional adjustment-might also be included.

## Documentation

The evaluation report should provide the documentation necessary to determine eligibility for special services, including special education. The specific guidelines for determining eligibility are based on federal regulations set forth by the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is important to note, however, that the specific criteria, such as cutoff scores for eligibility, vary from state to state.

The parent or guardian of a child with dyslexia must advocate for the best possible educational opportunities for that child. Effective advocacy requires understanding the diagnostic report and knowing the child's rights under the law. Information on related topics, such as teaching methodologies, accommodations, and instructional modifications are available in IDA fact sheets.

## Foremost, Educate Yourself

Attend conferences, read suggested books, and network with parents who "have been there." Listen attentively and read carefully. Learn all you can about the nature of your child's learning difficulties. Take notes of particular parenting or academic strategies that have been successful, ones that you think might work for your child. By educating yourself, you not only maintain self-confidence to help you deal with professionals in the field, but also, you are in a stronger position for making informed decisions about your child's educational career and emotional life.

## Create a Notebook of Your Child's Work

Invest in a 3-ring hole punch and buy a 3-ring binder. Compile your child's work: everything from crinkled homework sheets, to returned tests, to workbook pages. Organize the papers chronologically and by subject matter. Include anecdotal information as well. Bring it to meetings as written documentation of your child's progress (or lack of progress). As a chronicle of your child's day-to-day work, you are in a good position to do your own analysis. For example, one parent discovered that her son's poor grades on math tests were not a reflection of his misunderstanding of the concept, but a

simple mechanical error such as he forgot to reduce fractions to the lowest common denominator. In this case, it was a parent who uncovered the problem.

## Keep Your Expectations High

Too often teachers and parents lower their expectations because of their child's learning difficulties, when, in fact, these children need high standards and reasonable goals. When expectations are high, students are forced to face their difficulties. Within a supportive and encouraging environment, they will learn how to cope. Yes, there will be times of setbacks and moments of frustration, but that doesn't mean to lower your standards, it means to help your child persevere in the face of adversity.

## Visit Your Child's Classroom Often

Volunteer your time in your child's classroom in any capacity. First, it allows you to see how your child functions in comparison to their peers. Second, it increases your quantity time with the teacher. Your goal is to foster a close working relationship between you and the teacher. Your child will benefit from these frequent interactions because you will be "in the know," specifically in terms of assignment expectations. Further, you will have an "insider's view" of the teacher's teaching style. With this perspective, you will certainly feel more empowered when managing your child's education, in general, and more able to help with individual homework assignments.



## Keep a File of Potential References

Who might be included in this file?

For starters, names of reputable tutors who are trained in structured literacy and can help your child learn to read.

The name of a pediatrician who understands learning difficulties is a must. If you have medication issues that need careful attention, you will want to choose a doctor who is not only sympathetic, but knowledgeable about your child's special needs.

A counselor who deals specifically with emotional support and educational planning such as college placement for children with learning difficulties may be a useful resource.

A psychologist who treats children and adolescents with learning disabilities may be a name to store in your file. Adolescence is a trying time for most students, but it may present unique problems for children with learning disabilities.

Contact information of school administrators and teachers is helpful when you have questions or need help in planning for your child's academic future and success.

## Be Patient on "Off" Days

An "off" day is when things just aren't in sync for your child. His or her oral reading, which may typically be slow, but accurate, is inexplicably slower and beset with multiple inaccuracies and retrieval difficulties. You'll know it is an "off" day not only by the increase in subtle distress signals such as yawning and heavy sighs, but also by a change in his or her general tolerance level. As a parent, keep in mind that inconsistency is part-and-parcel of having learning disabilities. It is important to help your child recognize these days and acknowledge feelings of frustration and discouragement. It is equally important to help your child develop strategies to manage these days. On a particularly heavy homework night, you may need to do a greater share of reading, be a scribe for the upcoming book report, or put off practicing math facts for a better day. Again, reassure your child that "off" days will occur, knowing that tomorrow will be a better day.

## Read Aloud with Your Child Every Day



Reading to your child makes a difference, not only in improving general comprehension and vocabulary, but in improving decoding skills as well. While your child is being remediated for underlying decoding difficulties, they are most likely reading controlled texts (ones which include sound concepts that have been taught). Once they "graduate" to less controlled texts, they will encounter words containing a greater variety of sound concepts, perhaps some that have not yet been formally introduced. At this point, they must rely on decoding skills to figure out the intended pronunciation of a seemingly unfamiliar word. If that word is in his or her oral vocabulary (learned from listening to language), then chances of reading the intended pronunciation when reading independently is much greater than if the word was not in his or her oral vocabulary. Those students, who have been widely read to, have a distinct advantage to those students who have not had the same exposure to language.

## Let Your Child Be An "Expert"

Whether it be a non-academic skill such as sewing, tree house building, or drawing- or whether it be a storehouse of knowledge about a specific subject, such as animals, sports, movies, computers, or music- help your child develop an area of expertise. Why? It can become a topic for open-ended writing assignments or oral reports. This area of expertise may develop into a life-long hobby, providing hours of fun and personal satisfaction. It may also provide opportunities for your child to shine in front of his or her peers and meet others who share a common interest. This is one way long- lasting friendships begin.

## Start A Dialogue with Your Child

Talk to your child about his or her learning difficulties. Be honest. Be matter-of-fact. Your goal is to demystify the notion that something is "wrong." Your child already senses that. Help your child acknowledge his or her feelings and put learning difficulties into perspective. A starting point may be to have a specific conversation about strengths and weaknesses or talk in general terms about how people with learning difficulties have special minds that just happen to learn differently. What you've done is establish the groundwork for a conversation that is going to continually mold itself over the years. As this dialogue develops, by the middle and high-school years, you may want to steer this conversation toward helping your child become his or her own advocate. Role-playing should be an integral part of the dialogue by this time.

Learning is a challenging, often a painful experience for children with learning difficulties. They need laughter in their lives, and lots of it!

# Resources

The Rankin County School District (RCSD) Dyslexia Parent Guide was adapted from the International Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Handbook: What Every Family Should Know. For Additional information click on the link to access the IDA Dyslexia Handbook.

The Rankin County School District utilizes qualified dyslexia intervention specialists who are highly trained in providing dyslexia intervention supports to students that have been diagnosed with dyslexia. For additional information on the dyslexia intervention program in Rankin County please reach out to Laurie Weathersby at lau532@rcsd.ms.

The Mississippi Department of Education has developed a MS Dyslexia Handbook Support Guide to provide guidance for Mississippi school districts, teachers, and parents in the identification and instruction of students with dyslexia. This support guide provides current information concerning the terms dyslexia, accommodations, modifications, and instructional strategies to meet the unique needs of students with dyslexia.

Snappy Words. *Cultivating potential: Innovative teaching methods for students with dyslexia*. Retrieved June 1, 2026, from Snappy Words