

6a. Dyslexia, and speech and language difficulties

This section refers to children whose difficulties may not be immediately obvious, but who can experience significant problems in their learning. Dyslexia refers to a specific difficulty in learning to read and write. However, children with dyslexia may also experience other difficulties and there is a wide variation in their symptoms. The characteristics that are associated with dyslexia are as follows:

- a delay in learning to read
- difficulty generating written language
- poor spelling
- poor short-term (or working) memory
- a delay or deficit in understanding letter/sound correspondences.
- some initial difficulty in recognising rhyme
- poor mental arithmetic
- difficulty in learning labels (for example, names for new objects)
- difficulty in naming objects and word finding
- difficulty in learning sequences (such as the months of the year, the order of a sequence of tasks)
- slowness in learning text or verbal information.

Children with dyslexia may demonstrate some or many of the following signs:

- appear intelligent, but find it difficult to write anything down on paper
- have areas in which they excel, particularly drama, art, sport and debating
- clumsiness
- act as the 'class clown' to compensate for what they see as their academic failure
- become withdrawn and isolated, sit at the back and not participate in class
- be able to do one thing at a time very well, but unable to remember a list of tasks
- look 'glazed' when language is spoken too quickly
- find school exhausting as a result of having to put so much effort into learning
- be bullied.

Dyslexia affects individual children differently. It can take a long time for a child to be diagnosed with dyslexia, which can be mild, moderate, severe or profound. Therefore, it is important not to wait for a diagnosis before taking action if you think one of your learners may be dyslexic.



What can you do to support girls who may have dyslexia?

It is important to monitor how well a girl is responding to carefully structured literacy teaching, which emphasises phonics. This is because the severity of a girl's difficulties become visible in how well, or not, she responds to good teaching. She will not simply catch up with her peers without a concerted focus and support. But with this support, good progress is possible.

She will require additional teaching that focuses on phoneme awareness and linking phonemes with letters. This approach should be accompanied by reading for meaning (as found in the SAGE materials) to help the learner master irregular words. These materials should be structured and engaging.

Physical

- If a girl struggles with writing on paper because of fine motor problems, consider how the activity can be adapted. For example, providing question answers through underlining or selecting from a multiple choice, and having extra space for writing or using a chalkboard. You can be guided here through your discussions with the girl.
- A visual pictorial timetable of your session placed prominently in the Hub can be very helpful for the girl to keep 'on track' with your activities.

Social

- Make sure that all the learners in your class feel valued and important, including those who experience difficulties or struggle with learning.
- Encourage and motivate all your learners to do the best they can.
- Have high expectations for all your learners' ability to contribute in class but be realistic and reasonable about your expectations for their writing and reading.
- Watch out for signs of low confidence and self-esteem.
- Provide opportunities for all your learners to show their skills and knowledge. Learners with dyslexia will often be good at creative subjects or can talk very confidently. Giving them opportunities to do what they are good at will help to build learners' confidence and self-esteem.
- Be generous with praise and encouragement when a learner is successful, as well as when they are trying hard, even though their finished work is not so good.

Activities

- Explain things many times and in different ways – sometimes to the whole class, to a smaller group, as well as individually to any learners with dyslexia.
- Highlight essential information. When you give instructions, use few and accurate words, and use simple sentences. Allow time for the meaning to sink in.

- Check that all learners have understood – ask some individual children to explain the instructions back to you or another child.
- Guide the girl about how to work through tasks systematically. Take time to teach skills in a calm, systematic and repeated regular routine.
- Try to go through written work together with the girl. Make sure you first highlight what she has done right. Then identify some of the main mistakes and concentrate on those. Avoid overwhelming her by correcting every single mistake.
- While you are looking at her work, try to find out the reasons for any mistakes – give her the chance to explain what she has done and what she finds difficult.
- Remember that learners with dyslexia have to work harder than other learners. Look out for fatigue and allow them to rest by doing tasks that they feel more comfortable with.

Reference:

Adapted from: UNESCO (2015), *Teaching Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings*, Bangkok: UNESCO

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001829/182975e.pdf>

British Council article by Sally Farley, Speech and Language impairment

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/speech-language-impairment>

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<http://www.open.ac.uk/about/international-development/projects-and-programmes/gate-girls-access-education>

<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=2579>

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