

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, is kneeling in a field of tall, dry grass. She is holding a large, open book with a light blue and yellow cover. A young child, wearing a white bucket hat, a brown long-sleeved shirt, and pink and white striped pants, is sitting on the grass next to her, looking at the book. The background is a vast, open field under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

DYSLEXIA

A Complete Guide for Parents
and Those Who Help Them

Gavin Reid

Second Edition

WILEY-BLACKWELL



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“Gavin Reid is a trusted friend and advisor to parents and teachers of children who learn ‘outside the box’. In this extraordinarily comprehensive guidebook, he explains current research on why some children have difficulties and offers practical suggestions on how to help. This valuable resource should be essential reading for anyone concerned with children’s learning.”

***Jane M. Healy, Educational Psychologist and author of
‘Different Learners: Identifying, Preventing, and Treating
Your Child’s Learning Problems’***

“There is no-one better placed than Gavin Reid to provide such a comprehensive, up-to-date and clear guide to dyslexia. He tackles the confusion and controversies that surround this area, and empowers parents to communicate as partners with teachers to achieve the best for each child. His approach is calm, considered and respectful, valuing the range of abilities and also acknowledging the emotional needs of young people with dyslexia. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who has a child who is, or who might be, dyslexic, and to all who are involved in teaching children and young people.”

Jennie Guise, Chartered Psychologist, DysGuise Ltd, UK

“Informative, engaging and empowering... Gavin’s new book is a must read for all educators and any parent who has a child who learns differently. Gavin’s clear style, unique care, passion and expertise help provide the keys to unlocking the potential of our young people with dyslexia. With his insights and practical recommendations this book will be extremely beneficial in homes, schools and colleges worldwide.”

***Mandy Appleyard, Principal Teacher & Educational
Consultant, Fun Track Learning Centre, Perth, Western
Australia***

“Gavin Reid’s humane and informed approach is ever more evident in his second edition. His insights into the difficulties encountered by parents are highly accurate and very helpful as is his advice on how to counter them.”

Craig Dobson, *Head of Science, Thames High School, New Zealand*

“Gavin Reid has produced a wonderfully written book offering a fresh perspective on dyslexia. A very useful guide, offering clear and concise information, together with invaluable insights, designed to inform and empower parents seeking help for their children. Most certainly a work that I would consider an important addition to all professional libraries.”

Marcia Mann, *Founding Fellow and Vice President, Academy of Orton – Gillingham Practitioners and Educators, New York*

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Gavin Reid is an educational psychologist based in Vancouver, Canada. He was also visiting professor at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, Canada and is currently a consultant on learning disabilities at the Center for Child Evaluation and Teaching (CCET) in Kuwait and a consultant with Global Educational Consultants, the Institute for Child Education and Psychology (Europe) and the Open University in the UK. He was a senior lecturer in the Department of Educational Studies, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh from 1991 to 2007. He wrote and developed the first master's course on dyslexia in the UK in 1993, which became the basis for the Open University (OU) course 'Difficulties in Literacy Development'. He has been a consultant for the OU since 1999.

He is a co-founder and director to the Red Rose School for children with specific learning difficulties in St. Anne's on Sea, Lancashire and co-founder of the Lighthouse School in Cairo, Egypt. He has made over 800 conference and seminar presentations in more than 65 countries, including Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Iceland,

Poland, Republic of Ireland, Slovakia, Croatia, Ljubljana, Estonia, Greece, Cyprus, Thailand, Austria, Slovenia, Malta, Israel, Egypt, Gambia, Canada, Dubai, Kuwait, Spain and Hungary.

Currently he has 25 books in print in the area of teacher education in the field of dyslexia, literacy, learning styles and motivation, and classroom management. Many of his books are used as course texts in courses throughout the UK and in many other countries. These include: *Dyslexia: A Practitioner's Handbook* (3rd edition, Wiley, 2009); *Dyslexia: A Complete Guide for Parents* (Wiley, 2004); *Dyslexia and Inclusion* (2005); *Motivating Learners in the Classroom: Ideas and Strategies* (2007) and *Learning Styles and Inclusion* (2005). He is co-author with Shannon Green of *100 Ideas for Supporting Pupils with Dyslexia* and *Dyslexia: A Teaching Assistants Handbook* (2007). A number of his books have been translated into Arabic, Polish, French, Italian and Greek. He is also the co-author of a computer-aided diagnostic assessment and profiling procedures (Special Needs Assessment Profile [SNAP]), which has received three national award commendations and was winner of the Special Needs Category at the NASEN/TES book awards in Birmingham, UK in March 2006.

He has been invited to be external examiner at 15 universities worldwide for PhD candidates and master's courses. He was a member of the British Dyslexia Association Teacher Training Accreditation Board from 1996 to 2007 and was overseas patron for the Learning and Behaviour Charitable Trust in New Zealand. He is the international consultant for the Canadian Academy of Therapeutic Tutors and advisor to the International Dyslexia Association board (BC Branch) and consultant to the parents' organization All Special Kids (ASK) in Geneva, Switzerland. He is also on the Editorial Board of two International Journals in Dyslexia and Literacy.

Gavin Reid uses his experiences as a teacher, educational psychologist, researcher, university lecturer and, most importantly, as a parent in his work.

Preface and Acknowledgments

May I extend a warm welcome to you as a reader of this second edition of *Dyslexia: A Complete Guide for Parents*. You will note I have also extended the title to include ... *and Those who Help Them*. It is important that parents should not be seen as separate or isolated. Collaboration is the key and communication is the means. Parents and teachers need to work as informed partners and that is the thinking behind extending the title. I also feel that although this book is written for parents, many professionals will also benefit from reading it.

This second edition has developed many of the themes and ideas in the first edition (published in 2004). The overall theme of this book is to provide parents/carers and families with knowledge and understanding of dyslexia. The aim is to empower parents and to provide them with the confidence through knowledge and understanding to deal with the range of professionals they may encounter at different stages of their child's education. The book also considers post-school issues, such as college and the workplace, and provides insights into how the needs of people with dyslexia can be met beyond school. There is also a chapter on self-esteem and the emotional needs of young people with dyslexia. These factors are important in meeting learning needs.

The author lives and works in Canada and does a great deal of work in the US and Canada, but has a sound knowledge of the situation in the UK and Europe, as well as in Australia and NZ and the Middle East. It is anticipated that this knowledge will help to make the book applicable to international audiences.

There has been increased recognition of dyslexia in many countries over the years and the numbers being assessed

as dyslexic are increasing, but often the accompanying support and interventions are not available. This can be confusing for parents and it is the aim of this book to clarify any confusion and to provide straightforward guidance. Parents can be confused by the vast range of programmes and interventions as well by as the different policies and procedures adopted by different countries and school districts.

I hope you will find this book comprehensive, as it is intended to cover almost all the areas that parents will want to know about, including research, assessment and teaching. The most recent references and research have been considered. It is also hoped that parents will be able to identify with the case studies and suggestions and relate these to their own situation. This book also aims to clarify and explain some of terms used, particularly the terms used in psychologists' reports.

There has been a considerable number of significant breakthroughs and advances in the field of dyslexia in recent years and it is important that parents are kept informed and understand the implications of these for the current and future education of their child.

I have been fortunate to have benefited from considerable support in writing this book. Parents' associations have been happy to contribute ideas and examples, centers of good practice such as the Red Rose School in Lancashire, UK run by my good friends Sionah and Colin Lannen, my wife Shannon Green, who contributed with ideas, suggestions and critical comment when necessary, and my wide international network of friends and supports in many countries, particularly Canada, the US, Scotland, England, Ireland, Australia, Kuwait, Switzerland, New Zealand, Cairo, Hong Kong and Singapore, as well as participants in the online course for parents that Shannon Green and I run through ICEPE (Europe) (see appendix).

I have been fortunate enough to give talks, workshops and seminars to parents' groups in over 50 countries and to teachers in over 65 countries. It is always heartening and gratifying to speak with parents. One can learn so much from them, and their sincerity, and sometimes anxieties, can be heartfelt. As a parent myself of a young person with special needs I can understand and empathize with these parents and it has always been my personal and professional aspiration to provide as much support to parents as possible, both locally nationally and internationally. I sincerely hope that this book contributes to that support.

Gavin Reid
Vancouver, Canada

Chapter 1

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a term that most of you will have heard of and will have some idea of its features. Many professionals you deal with will claim they know what dyslexia is. Yet in reality there are many misunderstandings and misconceptions about dyslexia as well as a fair amount of controversy. This has a direct impact on parents, and particularly those parents finding out for the first time that they have a child who is dyslexic. In the United States and Canada we often use the term 'learning disability', an umbrella term, which also includes dyslexia. In the UK and Europe the term 'dyslexia' is used more openly – governments recognize it and legislation and educational policy take it into account. Similarly in New Zealand and in Australia, there have been considerable advances in the use of the term dyslexia in recent years. In the Middle East and Asia, both US and UK models are used and the term is also applied more openly there too. Dyslexia is an internationally accepted term and the condition affects children and adults in every country and in every culture irrespective of the language or the education system.

Every day more and more parents are told that their child is dyslexic and immediately alarm bells start to ring. They ask themselves, 'Could we have found out about this earlier? What are the social and emotional considerations? What are the educational implications, how might it affect exams, college and careers? What exactly is dyslexia? What can we do to help?'

Having been in the position of assessing and identifying many thousands of children with dyslexia, I am fully aware of the questions, anxieties, concerns and the hopes of parents. I am also aware that there has been good progress in acceptance and support for dyslexia. But there is still a great deal to be done and in many areas parents are left confused and concerned. I have also been in the position of being told by a professional that my son has severe special needs and although this is difficult to accept, one of the first feelings one experiences is that of relief – relief that your ‘gut feeling’ that something was not right was not just a figment of your imagination but was in fact correct. With this knowledge parents have a clearer idea of what they have to deal with, and at last can set about doing that. This last point is important because this book is not intended to be a catalog of despair, but rather a ‘lifeline’ and source of hope for many thousands of parents who may find themselves searching for answers and desperately seeking guidance and advice.

This opening chapter provides a straightforward account and description of dyslexia. It also touches on the overlap with other disabilities such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This potential overlap can be confusing and often prevents the most appropriate intervention from being put into place.

Shannon Green and I run an online course on dyslexia for parents which includes a discussion forum. It is interesting to receive communication from parents in different parts of the world regarding their concerns. In many cases I am struck by the similarities no matter where they. Consider this parent’s experience:

We have a nine-year-old boy and for three of his school years he displayed signs of dyslexia. This was only brought to our attention at the end of last year which was quite a shock as, if we had been told earlier, maybe I

would have handled situations differently with homework and so on. It took until this year to have him assessed.

This is not unusual, many parents wait a long time for a formal diagnosis. Most education authorities operate what might be referred to as a 'wait to fail' model. That means the child needs to be have fallen quite far behind before an assessment takes place – essentially, the child has to have failed. This is a reactive model and one that can cause considerable problems, frustrations and a sense of hopelessness. Some education providers are now attempting to redress this situation by developing more proactive policies. For example, in the US the policy known as 'response to intervention', in theory at least, is intended to be proactive and identify children with difficulties at a young age before the difficulty becomes too entrenched. This policy, although theoretically commendable, is not without its critics.

There are other examples of early intervention and school-based assessment procedures in the US, Canada and UK which seem to be successful and will be discussed in chapter 3 (Crombie, Knight & Reid, 2004; Dyslexia Scotland, 2010).

So, what is dyslexia?

My view of dyslexia is that it is a difference in how children (and adults) process information. That is, how they take information in (input); how they understand it, memorize it and organize it in their mind (cognitive processing); and how they demonstrate they know this information (output). Children and young people with dyslexia can have differences (which can take the form of difficulties) at all of these stages – input, processing and output. Generally, these differences can be seen in relation to print, but other areas of learning can also be affected. That is why dyslexic

difficulties can persist even when reading skills improve. Dyslexia can have an impact on all areas of learning. As children go through school they often use compensatory strategies to deal with challenges and can become quite adept at this.

Characteristics of dyslexia

Dyslexia relates to how information is processed

This means that dyslexia involves more than reading, but affects learning, including understanding and following oral instructions, as well as reading accurately and fluently and presenting written work.

Children with dyslexia can have difficulty learning through the auditory modality

The auditory modality refers to listening. This can be problematic as much of the teaching in school is through the auditory modality. It is important therefore to ensure that teaching and learning is multisensory - auditory, visual, kinesthetic (experiential) and tactile (through touch).

Reading, spelling and writing difficulties

Reading, spelling and writing difficulties are characteristic of dyslexia. This includes reading speed and writing speed.

Reading

The common view is that children with dyslexia have difficulties with sounds (phonemes) – that is, the smallest unit of sound in a word. They can have difficulty in distinguishing between similar sounds and sound combinations. They may also have difficulty in identifying where in a word a particular sound comes and recognizing the same sound in different words. This is referred to as phonological awareness and is often one of the early indicators of dyslexia. It can sometimes be noted in a difficulty with nursery rhymes.

Spelling

Although spelling and reading use different processes they are both features of dyslexia. Spelling can often take bizarre forms and even after many years of tuition some children still experience difficulties with the same word. They may have difficulty in remembering and applying spelling rules so the word ‘easier’, for example, may be spelt ‘easier’. They may also make visual and phonological errors. Spelling can be problematic but with specialized spellcheckers such as TextHelp™, spelling can usually be quite readily corrected.

Writing

Writing can be difficult on two counts. Handwriting can be a problem and this will be discussed later in relation to the possible overlap with dyspraxia. But it is strongly advised that the young person with dyslexia, as soon as possible, becomes proficient in the use of a word processor. There are many excellent computer programs available to help with this (see Appendix 2).

Some – in fact quite a number of children with dyslexia – can become quite expert and very creative in writing. But this can still be a problem as often they have difficulty in expressing what they mean. This can be frustrating and can

result in under-accomplishment. With a clear structure for work this can be overcome. Indeed, many successful authors are dyslexic!

Dyslexia is individual

Children with dyslexia may have slightly different characteristics from each other. They may all have some common core difficulties, for example reading or spelling, but the actual characteristics and the nature of the difficulties can be different. It is important to view each child with dyslexia as an individual.

Children with dyslexia can have difficulty remembering information

Memory can be problematic. This can apply to working memory and short-term memory as well as long-term memory. This means that remembering oral instructions can be challenging, especially if a list of items is presented at the same time. The short-term, working memory can only hold a limited amount of information at any one time, and children and adults with dyslexia can have difficulty in remembering accurately even a limited amount, so it is best to provide one instruction at any one time.

Long-term memory relates to recalling information that has been learnt some time previously. Much of the success of retrieval of information learnt depends on how well the information is understood and organized at the time of learning. This will be followed up in some detail in later chapters.

Difficulty in organizing information

Whether we are aware of it or not, we always make some attempt to organize new information. We might group new

items to be remembered into one familiar category. Organizing information is important if we are recalling a sequence of events, and children with dyslexia can have difficulty with this. This can also affect their performance in examinations unless some supports are in place.

Overlap

There may be an overlap between other learning difficulties such as dyspraxia (difficulty with coordination and movement), dysgraphia (difficulty with handwriting), dyscalculia (difficulty with numbers) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; attention and focussing difficulties). Children with dyslexia can experience some elements of the other difficulties, but this would usually be secondary to the main difficulties relating to dyslexia.

Phonological difficulties

This is one of the main difficulties associated with dyslexia. These difficulties can be seen at various levels. Adams (1990) identified at least five levels of difficulty:

- knowledge of nursery rhymes, which involves only an ear for the sounds of words;
- awareness of rhyme and alliteration, which requires both sensitivity to the sounds and an ability to focus on certain sounds;
- blending of phonemes and splitting of syllables to identify phonemes – this demands an awareness that words can be subdivided into smaller sounds;
- phoneme segmentation requires a thorough understanding that words can be analyzed into a series of phonemes;
- phoneme manipulation requires a child not only to understand and produce phonemes, but also to be

able to manipulate them by addition, deletion or transposition.

It is important that intervention tackles phonological processing. It is much easier to find appropriate intervention for younger children as most reading programs deal with phonological processing and many books for very young readers emphasize the different sounds in words. But it can be challenging for older children as by the time they are teenagers they are usually more interested in the content of books even though they may have difficulty in reading them and phonics programs can be quite deskilling and perhaps demoralizing for them. In this case it is important to use an approach that relates to meaning as well as phonics.

Early indicators

There are a number of screening tests that can be used, but it is important to appreciate that these are not meant to be diagnostic – they can alert you to the possibility of dyslexia but a full assessment is necessary before you can be sure that your child has dyslexia.

Below are some areas that need to be considered in the early detection of dyslexia.

- **Communication and language:** Poor phonological skills and a lack of awareness of rhyme and rhythm can indicate that they may have later difficulties in learning to read and write.
- **Difficulty in listening to stories:** This can indicate that they have a difficulty with the auditory modality and following the sequence of a story, as well as attention and focusing difficulties.
- **Memory:** Children who are unable to remember more than two items of information, for example, may have a difficulty with working memory.

- **Sequence of events in a story:** This can be challenging for children with dyslexia as they may have difficulty in organizing information and placing it in an order of events.
- **Speech:** They may have some articulation problems, although this is not always the case.
- **Naming and ordering items in sequence:** Remembering the names of common items can be challenging. They may also show inconsistent performance in recalling names of objects (i.e., doing it correctly one day but not the next).
- **Physical development and movement:** This can be a feature of early identification. Young children with dyslexia may have some fine or gross motor difficulties, but again this is not always the case. Coordination skills can be identified at this early stage through observation in general physical activities and in writing. Balance has been found to be an important ability for learning. Fawcett and Nicolson (2008) reported on their earlier research in which they indicated that children who are poor at balance tasks while doing something else are likely to encounter other learning problems. This can be done by asking the child to balance on one foot while reciting a rhyme.

You will have noted that identifying dyslexia is not straightforward as there are many combinations of difficulties that children with dyslexia may have. The chapter on assessment (see chapter 3) will show how these can be narrowed down to arrive at a diagnosis. It is important for parents to understand this as they will have to interpret the school and educational psychologist's reports.

Some general factors that can indicate dyslexia

Pre-school

Concern may be raised in a pre-school child if some of the following are present:

- forgetfulness;
- speech difficulty;
- reversal of letters;
- difficulty remembering letters of the alphabet;
- difficulty remembering the sequence of letters of the alphabet;
- a history of dyslexia in the family;
- coordination difficulties (e.g., bumping into furniture);
- tasks that require fine motor skills (e.g., tying shoelaces);
- slow at reacting to some tasks;
- reluctance to concentrate on a task for a reasonable period of time;
- confusing words that sound similar.

School age

- reluctance to go to school;
- not enjoying school;
- reluctance to read;
- difficulty learning words and letters;
- difficulty with phonics (sounds);
- poor memory;
- coordination difficulties;
- losing items;
- difficulty forming letters;