



*Hello Learners*

A FREE GUIDE FOR PARENTS



# A Parent's Guide to Dyslexia

Understanding your child's trouble with reading — the signs to look for, what the evidence says, and how to help.

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## A NOTE BEFORE YOU START

# You know your child is bright. So why is reading so hard?

You can see it in the way they tell stories, build things, ask big questions. So why does reading feel like such a battle for them — and why does it feel like no one's really getting to the bottom of it?

If you've been told *"give it time"* or *"they'll catch up,"* but something in your gut says this is more than that — you're not being a worrier. You're paying attention. And that matters more than you know.

This guide won't diagnose your child. What it *will* do is help you understand what dyslexia actually is, recognise the signs at your child's age, and — most importantly — show you what genuinely helps, according to the best available evidence.

### Why I wrote this

I'm a speech pathologist, and I started Hello Learners because I kept meeting the same family: a bright child, a worried parent, and a reading difficulty that nobody seemed to be addressing properly. Reading is a language skill — and when the underlying system isn't working, more practice alone doesn't fix it. The right help does. This guide is the first step.

— Darcie

## What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a common, language-based learning difference that makes it hard to read accurately and fluently, and to spell.

The core difficulty is with recognising and working with the **sounds inside words** — what specialists call the *phonological* part of language. This makes connecting sounds to letters, and letters to whole words, genuinely hard work. You may also hear it called a *specific learning disorder* or a *reading disorder*.

Importantly, these difficulties are **unexpected** — they show up in children who are bright, who are trying hard, and who have had good quality reading instruction. That's the heart of dyslexia: a reading difficulty that doesn't match everything else you know about your capable child.

**In plain terms:** dyslexia is a brain-based difference in how a child processes the sounds of language. It runs on a continuum from mild to significant, often runs in families, and frequently sits alongside other differences such as dysgraphia, dyscalculia, ADHD or autism.

### A pattern of difficulties

A child with dyslexia tends to show a *pattern*, such as:

- Difficulty reading single words
- Trouble sounding out unfamiliar or made-up words
- Slow, effortful, error-prone reading
- Poor or inconsistent spelling
- Understanding a story better when it's read *to* them than when they read it themselves

## What we know about dyslexia

### **It has nothing to do with intelligence**

Children with dyslexia are often exceptionally bright, creative and capable. The challenge is specific — it's about processing the sounds in language, not about how clever your child is.

### **It isn't laziness — and they won't simply "grow out of it"**

Dyslexia is lifelong. Your child is very likely working *harder* than their classmates, not less. The good news is that with the right teaching, children with dyslexia absolutely learn to read.

### **It's common — and it runs in families**

Around 1 in 10 people have dyslexia, making it the most common learning difference. There's a strong genetic link, so if reading was hard for someone else in the family, that's worth knowing.

### **It's not a vision problem**

Dyslexia is not letters "jumping around the page," and it isn't fixed by coloured overlays or eye exercises. It's a difference in how the brain processes the sounds of language.

**Why early matters:** the difficulties often show up in the first year or two of school. Spotting them early gives your child more time to build skills and strategies — and protects their confidence before "I can't read" quietly becomes "I'm not smart."

## Signs to look for, by age

Dyslexia looks different for every child, and the signs shift as the demands of school grow. Read the age band that fits your child best — and feel free to read the earlier one too. **Tick anything that sounds like your child.**

### Early risk signs — preschool / kinder (3–5)

At this age these overlap with normal speech and language development, so think of them as gentle flags to watch — not a diagnosis.

- Was a late talker, or hard to understand for a while
- Often mispronounces words (e.g. "beddy tear" for "teddy bear")
- Has trouble finding the right word — uses "thing" or "stuff" a lot
- Struggles to learn new words
- Finds rhyming hard, and trouble learning nursery rhymes
- Has trouble recognising letters and matching them to sounds
- Tells stories that are hard to follow, or out of order
- Finds learning sequences tricky — e.g. doing up buttons, tying laces
- There's a family history of reading, spelling or learning difficulties

## Signs in the early years

### Prep to Grade 3

- Bright in many ways, but slow to learn to read, write and spell
- Slow to learn letter names and the sounds they make
- Finds it hard to blend sounds into a word (c-a-t → cat) or pull a word apart
- Confuses letters that look alike (b, d, p, q) or sound alike (d/t, b/p, f/v)
- Can't reliably recognise common words like *the*, *to*, *as* — often skips or swaps small words when reading aloud
- Guesses words from the first letter or the picture, rather than reading them
- Substitutes words when reading aloud (says "house" for "home")
- Quickly forgets how to spell words they were taught
- Struggles to remember more than one instruction at a time
- Finds learning sequences hard — the alphabet, days of the week, months
- Difficulty learning to tell the time
- Worded maths problems are especially tricky

**Notice a cluster here?** A handful of ticks in this band — especially with a family history — is the pattern speech pathologists pay close attention to.

## Signs in the upper years

### Grades 4 to 6

- Doesn't seem to know how to tackle an unfamiliar word
- Trouble with vowels — how they combine and change sound in different words
- Still struggles to hear individual sounds in words, or to blend them
- Leaves off word endings when reading or writing (the *sin* in cats, the *ed* in jumped)
- Reverses or muddles letter order (writes "bots" for "dots", "stop" for "spot")
- Persistent spelling difficulty — forgets how to spell words soon after learning them
- Slow to retrieve words (e.g. naming 10 colours or fruits quickly is hard)
- Avoids reading, or gets frustrated and agitated when asked to
- Still sounds out words others recognise instantly (like "where", "there")
- Has great ideas out loud, but little ends up on the page
- Finds it easier to answer questions when *you* read the text aloud
- Takes a very long time to finish reading and comprehension tasks
- Reads much more slowly than they speak

## What your ticks might be telling you

### A few ticks, here and there

Lots of children have the odd wobble as they learn to read. Keep an eye on it, and trust your instincts. If it isn't improving over time, it's worth a conversation.

### Several ticks – especially in one age band, with a family history

This is the pattern that warrants a proper look, rather than waiting and hoping. It doesn't mean your child definitely has dyslexia – it means the signs are adding up enough to get expert eyes on it.

### The most important thing to know

A checklist isn't a diagnosis, and it isn't meant to frighten you. Many of these signs can have other explanations. But here's the key: **you don't need to wait for certainty – or even a formal diagnosis – to start helping your child the right way.**

*A parent's gut instinct should never be ignored. You know your child best – and you're the only person who travels the whole journey with them.*

## What evidence-based support looks like

Children with dyslexia can absolutely learn to read. What they need is a specific approach — and decades of research point clearly to it.

### Structured Literacy

The International Dyslexia Association and a large international body of research agree: **structured literacy** is the gold-standard approach. It means explicit, systematic, step-by-step teaching of how sounds and letters work — taught in a logical order, built up cumulatively, and practised until it sticks.

At its core is **systematic synthetic phonics**: teaching the "code" of English so children can decode (read) and encode (spell) words, supported by *decodable books* that match what they've been taught. This is the same science behind what you may have heard called the "Science of Reading."

### Two things every parent should know

- **You don't need a diagnosis to start.** Early identification through screening and observation is enough to begin evidence-based support. A "wait and fail" approach is not recommended.
- **Earlier is easier.** Research consistently shows early intervention is far more effective — and far less costly down the track — than waiting until a child has fallen behind.

**A gentle caution on "what works":** approaches that rely on guessing words from context or pictures — or that skip explicit, systematic phonics — aren't supported by the evidence for children with dyslexia. Neither are coloured overlays, tinted lenses, vision therapy or brain-training games. Make sure the support you invest in is built on structured literacy.

A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING IT

## A sea of strengths

Dyslexia is a difficulty with decoding — surrounded by a whole sea of strengths. When we get the reading support right, those strengths are free to shine.



Concept adapted from Shaywitz (2005), *Overcoming Dyslexia*.

## How we help at Hello Learners

We're a specialist after-school literacy program for primary school children who need real help with reading, writing and spelling — and we're built around exactly what the evidence recommends.

- 1 Led by speech pathologists**  
Reading is a language skill, so it makes sense that the people who understand language lead the way. Our program is designed and led by qualified speech pathologists who understand the science of reading.
- 2 Structured literacy, always**  
Explicit, systematic, synthetic phonics — the approach with the strongest evidence base for children with dyslexia — using best-practice programs and decodable texts.
- 3 Small groups of 3–5**  
Small enough for genuinely individual attention, with just enough peers to rebuild the confidence that struggling readers so often lose.
- 4 No referral, no diagnosis needed**  
You don't need a formal diagnosis to start. If the signs in this guide sound like your child, that's reason enough to reach out.

We work with families across North Melbourne and the inner west — Kensington, Footscray, Parkville, Brunswick, Carlton, Ascot Vale, Moonee Ponds, Maribyrnong and Yarraville.

*Ready when you are*

## Let's see what your child needs

If this guide gave words to something you've been feeling, the next step is simple. Check availability for this term and book a time to chat — no referral, no diagnosis required.

**Check availability this term →**

[hellolearners.com.au/enrol](https://hellolearners.com.au/enrol)

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*"Reading is the key to so much of what we hope for our children. The earlier we identify dyslexia and take the right steps, the sooner a child learns to read — and to enjoy it."*

— adapted from Sally Shaywitz, M.D., Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity

### A note on the evidence

- International Dyslexia Association (2020). *Dyslexia Basics & Structured Literacy*.
- AUSPELD (2020). *Understanding Learning Difficulties: A Guide for Parents*.
- Kilpatrick, D. (2015). *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties*. Wiley.
- Seidenberg, M. (2017). *Language at the Speed of Sight*. Basic Books.
- Shaywitz, S. (2005). *Overcoming Dyslexia*. Random House.