

Dyslexia support strategies

The evidence-base

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a word-level reading disability stemming from an impairment in the phonological component of language. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition, decoding and by poor spelling. Dyslexia is not a visual processing deficit. Evidence-based interventions for dyslexia must address the underlying language deficit.

Effective reading instruction involves using the most equitable and efficient teaching practices to ensure all children in a class become literate (de Bruin et al. 2022). Such practices are informed by the most reliable research evidence.

Phonics and phoneme awareness

The evidence for the effectiveness of phonics instruction is extensive, with phonics instruction showing improved decoding, spelling and text comprehension for all, in addition to being an effective intervention for dyslexia (Ehri et al. 2001; Galuschka et al. 2014; McArthur et al. 2012). Effective instructional methods focus on phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, and phonological recoding; applying knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences to read and spell (de Almeida Sargiani et al. 2021; Hulme and Snowling 2013).

Synthetic phonics

Intervention studies demonstrate that high quality synthetic phonics is an effective word-level reading remediation (Kilpatrick 2015). Synthetic phonics is the process of synthesising or blending the sounds and letters to decode words, and the segmenting of sounds and letters to encode words. Students are taught to decode at the phoneme level and attend to all the sounds and letters in a word. Phonemic encoding and decoding are dependent upon the skills of phoneme segmenting, blending and manipulation. Evidence-based interventions incorporate explicit instruction in these skills, and importantly, practice applying these to reading and spelling.

Decodable text

One of the key elements in highly effective word-level reading intervention is applying skills and knowledge to connected text (National Reading Panel 2000; Kilpatrick 2015). Decodable texts are specifically constructed texts that contain elements of the phonetic code that the student has already learned. Decodable texts are important for students with dyslexia as they provide the opportunity to immediately and intensively practice and apply their new skills to build automaticity, fluency and confidence in decoding and spelling (Konza, 2014).

Education adjustments

Making reasonable adjustments to curriculum delivery and/or assessment in a unit is how diverse learning needs of students can be met. All students are entitled to demonstrate the full extent of their knowledge and skills in response to assessment against relevant aspects of an achievement standard using a preferred mode of communication. Only a small portion of each English achievement standard from Year 3 and beyond demands the demonstration of decoding and encoding, or using knowledge of letter-sound relationships when reading and writing.

Next steps

For more information, contact your school speech language pathologist or the Reading and Writing Disorders Advisory Service. The Advisory service may be accessed by telephone or email on weekdays between 8:30am and 4:30pm.

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