

# A Guide for Parents or Carers who want to Support their Children with Literacy Skills



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## Neil MacKay, a leading dyslexia specialist suggests

that SpLD is viewed as a **Specific Learning difference** ; therefore the definition of Dyslexia is defined as:

**" A specific learning difference for any given level of ability, which may cause unexpected difficulties, in the acquisition of certain skills."**

**The British Psychological Society** defines dyslexia as:

"evident when accurate and fluent word reading and/or spelling develops very incompletely or with great difficulty. This focuses on literacy learning at "word level" and implies that the problem is **severe and persistent despite appropriate learning opportunities**. It provides the basis for a staged approach of assessment through teaching."

Pupils may have weaknesses in the areas of speed of processing, short-term memory, sequencing, auditory / visual perception, spoken language and motor skills. All of these will, to some extent impact on literacy, sometimes numeracy and the way a pupil learns.

**When thinking about your children and their literacy difficulties, it is always best to discuss the nature of your concerns with your child's teacher in the first instance. From this discussion partnership working can begin.**

All children should have the enjoyment and satisfaction that comes from reading and writing. This booklet gives practical suggestions on how you, as parents/carers, can assist in your child's learning.

As parents/ carers you have a huge influence on your child's attitude towards reading and writing.

**Remind** them that everybody is good at something and even though they may find reading and writing difficult, they have many other strengths.

In order to succeed, your child needs to feel **confident**.

**Believe** in them and show them how proud you are of them.

**Praise** them when they make an effort.

Praise lets children know when they are doing the right things and motivates them to keep on trying.

When you praise children it is very important to **tell them why** you are pleased with them, and then they can see for themselves that what they are doing is right.

## Reading

Children do not enjoy the experience of learning to read if they are not successful or making progress.

♦ Share books/comics etc and **talk about** the pictures, headlines, front cover and so on

before starting to read the words.

- ◆ Set aside a special time and place for reading. Don't let the 'phone, TV or other technology distract you or your child.
- ◆ When you listen to your child read, give plenty of praise.
- ◆ Don't rush - let your child turn the pages. Enjoyment is the key.
- ◆ Help to keep your child interested and enthusiastic about reading by giving him or her a wide range of reading materials, including comics/ magazines etc.
- ◆ Make sure the book is not too difficult. Most of the words should be easy for your child. None of us understands or enjoys reading if it is too hard.
- ◆ Everybody enjoys being read to. If your child is interested in, but can't read a particular book, read it to him or her.
- ◆ Discuss the pictures and guess together what might happen in the story.
- ◆ Share the story with your child, reading as little or much as s/he feels comfortable with.
- ◆ Let him/her re-read favourite stories if s/he wants to do so - practice makes perfect!
- ◆ Correct your child only if the meaning is lost or changed. If your child is stuck on a word, leave it out and read on to the end of the sentence. Then have a go at the unknown word using the first letter /picture/rest of the sentence to help. If this doesn't work - give the word.



**(Ask school about paired reading too ! )**

### **Spelling**

**You can practice and play together to improve your child's spelling.**

Here are some things you can get your child to try:

- ◆ Decorate or illustrate the words.
- ◆ Draw round the word to feel its shape.
- ◆ Type the words or write them out in salt, sand, sugar, flour or foam trays.
- ◆ Say the word slowly as you write.
- ◆ Look at the word. Concentrate on the part that might be tricky. Shut your eyes and think about the word. Then try and write it down.
- ◆ Colour and trace over the word five times in different colours. (say it as you write)
- ◆ Take one of the words and make as many other words as you can by adding to it, e.g. at, bat, cat, sat etc.
- ◆ Write the words on paper. Cut each letter out. Jumble them up and see if you can rebuild the word.
- ◆ Write out the spelling words leaving out some letters. Fill in the missing letters the next day.
- ◆ Make the words using magnetic / foam or wooden letters.



**For the older child :**

- ◆ Encourage the use of a simple dictionary (make sure your child knows the alphabet).
- ◆ Encourage the use of a Spellchecker if s/he has access to one.
- ◆ Encourage the use of a key word list - place this in a pocket at the front or back of the exercise book concerned. (make their own glossary)
- ◆ Encourage him/her to look through their work and try to identify words that are spelled incorrectly or s/he is not sure about.

- ♦ Test your child on difficult words if s/he will accept this. Remember s/he must always write the words down. (saying the word as they write can be helpful too)
- ♦ Look through newspapers and magazines and highlight spelling list words.

**Use the Look, Cover ,Write, Check method.**

**Use Mnemonics!** (ask school for more details)

An example of a mnemonic : **Because** = **big** elephants can always upset small elephants.

### Handwriting

Ensure that your child :

- ♦ is sitting at a chair and table of the correct height.
- ♦ has enough light ( natural if possible).
- ♦ keeps the book or paper in the correct position (45 degrees to the left for right handed people and to the right for left handed people).
- ♦ keeps the book or page steadied.
- ♦ holds the pen or pencil in a tripod grip( between the thumb and first finger, resting on the middle finger).
- ♦ does not hold the pen or pencil too tightly or press too firmly on the paper.

### Helping

- ♦ Encourage correctly formed letters and practice by tracing them in sand / air with finger lights in a dark room!. (Use cursive script with a lead stroke)

### **For the older child**

- ♦ Encourage a well stocked pencil case —sharp pencils are a must.
- ♦ Encourage the use of cursive script with the lead stroke.
- ♦ Children with dyslexic type difficulties may have problems, not just with reading, writing and spelling, but with memory and organization!



### All children have individual ways of learning

None of these suggestions will suit everyone. The important thing is to try them and see which is successful for your child.

### **Thought showering and Mind Mapping**

**Thought showering** means thinking of as many ideas as you can about the subject and writing them down as single words or phrases. Once this process has been done, you can then link these ideas with lines or arrows. Highlighter pens can be used to colour code the ideas into meaningful paragraphs.

**Mind-mapping** is taking the main ideas as lines from a central subject and then showing other points arising from these as branches from these lines. (ask school or see Tony Buzan's books/ You Tube clips so they learn how to do it properly)



### **Organisation and Study skills**

You could help your child learn more effectively in the classroom by: -

- ♦ Using charts you have made together to help him/her to remember key things;

- ◆ Using timetables. These help with organisation both at home and at school (put these in places where they can't be missed and consider colour coding!)



- ◆ Make use of a weekly planner or diary . This can ensure that homework is recorded and things to be taken to school (e.g. PE kit) are listed.
- ◆ Establish good communication between home and school. This is very important in helping your child meet deadlines and understand/remember what needs to be done, e.g. regularly checking homework diaries.
- ◆ Decide on a special place near the front door for your child's schoolwork or other things that need to go to school. This is a great place for completed homework, signed permission slips, lunch money, and all items your child has to take each day.

### Homework

- ◆ Understanding the **purpose of homework** can help your child to plan the best way to do it. Here are the main purposes:-
- ◆ Practising a new skill.
- ◆ Finishing a piece of work started in class (consolidation).
- ◆ Learning for a test.
- ◆ Finishing or working on coursework.
- ◆ Finding out about a new topic (researching)
- ◆ When researching a new topic, your child will need access to **reference books**, at home or the library, or access to the **internet**. Your child will need to know the **alphabet** and be able to use a **contents** list and **index**. S/he may need help.



**Before** starting homework your child should:

- ◆ **Check** the details in the homework diary.
- ◆ **Sort** out books / materials needed.
- ◆ **Arrange** pens, pencils, highlighters etc.
- ◆ **Read** through the instructions carefully and repeat them back. **Underline** key words e.g **describe, compare, explain, contrast, calculate, just section C** etc.
- ◆ **Think** about the purpose of the homework.
- ◆ Get your child to **proof read** the work. It may help to read it **aloud**.
- ◆ When looking for spelling mistakes try starting at the right hand side of the page so you are only thinking about the spelling not the meaning.
- ◆ If s/he has been revising, **test** him/her.

**If s/he gets stuck**

- ◆ Encourage him/her not to panic.
- ◆ Tell him/her to **read the instructions** again or help with the reading.
- ◆ Ask him/her to **explain** the task to you. See if you agree and discuss if you don't.

**The 3 biggest difficulties with homework are:**

1. Getting started.
2. Knowing what to do.
3. Keeping up to date.

If these are issues for your child, **ask them what you can do to help**; make suggestions only if necessary.

**Remember: Einstein had poor spelling, was disorganised and got lost when out walking, but he did not do too badly!**



**Word processing** is really helpful for the dyslexic child for many reasons:-

- ◆ It is easier and quicker to press a key than to form a letter by hand.
- ◆ Typing looks good throughout the text and the pupil ends up with a piece of work s/he can be proud of.
- ◆ Print on the screen or on paper looks more like the printed form in which we usually see words, so pupils with literacy difficulties are more likely to recognise any mistakes.
- ◆ Working on a word processor, can be less stressful as it is easier to edit mistakes.
- ◆ Random thoughts, words or paragraphs can be moved and put into a logical order.
- ◆ Word processed work is easier to read for pupils and teachers.
- ◆ You can make several copies.
- ◆ It supports independent working.
- ◆ If you have a computer at home, word processing skills can be developed even if your computer is different from the one in school.
- ◆ Touch typing can be a very useful skill to develop. There are several computer packages readily available to teach these skills.



**We hope this booklet has been useful and that you feel more confident in working in partnership with your child's school.**

**Remember to discuss any concerns about your child with the school.**

