



## Dyslexia Four-Part Professional Development

*Moderated by Stacey DeWitt*

*Founder and President*

*Connect with Kids Education Network*

### Module Three

## Dyslexia: Accommodations Across Grade Levels

In our previous modules we have addressed the definitions and terminology of dyslexia, signs to look out for even in our youngest students, and formal evaluation and testing procedures to diagnose the learning disorder. In this third segment, we will review how to support a student with dyslexia and the many classroom accommodations. Students diagnosed with dyslexia may qualify for accommodations through a 504 Plan; however, not every student diagnosed with dyslexia will qualify for a Special Education Services Individual Education Program (IEP).

Once a child is diagnosed with dyslexia, and has been found eligible for services at school, the child, his or her parents, and a team of educators will work together to develop a 504 Plan with accommodations, **or for those students who do qualify for special education services, an Individual Education Program (IEP) as required by federal law.**

*“It is a way to communicate to everyone involved with that child what kind of modifications they might need, like for example an untimed test, or to have tests read to them, to have some modifications on homework assignments.”*

– *Karen Walsh, School Psychologist*

The IEP or 504 may include access to many types of assistance throughout the school years. The IEP is a function of special education services. A 504 Plan is focused on outlining civil rights protections and accommodations to ensure that students with disabilities have the same free and appropriate access to same education as those students without disabilities. For more details about Section 504 regulations and federal requirements and policies, open the information links provided in the print attachment to this program.

Whatever the plan of action, researchers now know that the human brain has an incredible capacity to change – at every age level, as the following story illustrates.

Chad Boynton is comfortable on the football field, but in class, he wanted to hide.

*“When I had to stand up in front of class or read out loud, for like, English, I couldn’t do it. The words, I just couldn’t understand the words.”*

– *Chad Boynton, age 18*

His reading level was about five grades below his classmates.

*“I felt ashamed. Like embarrassed about it. People would laugh at me.”*

– Chad Boynton, age 18

The more he fell behind, the more frustrated he became.

*“And then you feel dumb.”*

– Chad Boynton, age 18

*“So many of them think that they’re dumb and stupid and they’ve heard it over and over and over again.”*

– Collette Duncan, Literacy Volunteers of America

*“You know we’ve still got people that assume that if they reach us in middle and high school, they’re not going to be able to read... and that’s not the case.”*

– Sharon Faber, Ed.D, Author

Dr. Guinevere Eden from Georgetown University did a study of adults who could not read. After six weeks of instruction they started using parts of their brain – lit up here in read – they had never used before.

*“They begin to use the same left hemisphere that you see in typical readers.”*

– Dr. Guinevere Eden, Georgetown University Medical Center

Still, many teens who read poorly will never read well. And the reason isn’t in the brain. It’s in the attitude of kids and parents and teachers.

*“These kids are seen as bad kids. They’re seen as ‘oh they can’t read, they act out. They act out because they can’t read.”*

– Emily Leicham, Long Beach Unified School District

Before this class, Chad was reading at a third grade level. He’s now just about at the level of a seventh grader. Dramatic improvement, and yet the scars won’t go away.

*“I avoid books... still to this day. I don’t like reading much.”*

– Chad Boynton, age 18

After high school, Chad will get some kind of job. Maybe in construction, he says, that won’t require a lot of reading or writing.

*“If I could read a little better like normal people... I think it might have been different. I wouldn’t be all sketchy about what I want to become. Will my reading get in my way... will it affect me?”*

– Chad Boynton, age 18

How do you help kids who don’t believe in themselves, don’t believe they can learn to read? Robert Hedges says they don’t need a pep talk, they need proof.

*“And if you try without some sort of proof to explain to them that they’re smart... even though they are... they won’t believe you. They need some proof.”*

– Robert Hedges, Long Beach Unified School District

When it comes to teaching students with dyslexia, how can we work to educate a future generation of reading, literate adults? We can categorize educational accommodations into three broad groups: those involving materials, those involving instruction and those regarding student performance. And experts agree, many of these systematic remediation practices can benefit *all* learners.

*“English is a code and we have to give the children tools to break that code. In the general education population, when they are given explicit systematic instruction, they get it after about 20 exposures. A child with dyslexia will need multiple exposures, always.”*

– Brenda Fitzgerald, Ed. S, Curriculum Specialist

Experts say the benefits of a multi-sensory approach to learning, often include four key components: **VISUAL, AUDITORY, KINESTHETIC and TACTILE.**

The **V** is **visual** so the child must see the skill.

The **A** is **auditory**. Meaning the child must hear and say the skill

The **K** is the **kinesthetic**. Kinesthetic focuses on motor memory. Motor memory is divided into fine motor and gross motor. Fine motor is actually writing so, as one expert explains, when a child hears the sound ‘a’ and the teacher has that ‘a’ written on the board, and the child writes the ‘a’, you have now really fired all three modes of memory.

The **T** is **tactile**. The largest tactile system in our bodies is the skin. So, educators often use touch while a child reads in order to send a sensory message to the brain. This allows the child to organize the skill in his or her cognitive memory. The tactile piece is extremely important to learning.

Let’s take a look at just some of the many accommodations for dyslexia that are used in classrooms across the country.

At Oyster River Middle School in New Hampshire, Linda Rief’s goal is to change the way kids read.

*“I used to read a book in like three days... I’d go for it... I’d find the plot, I’d get the characters and it would just be a book.”*

– Gordon, Age 13

*“Well a couple of words that I didn’t know I’d always just skip them because I didn’t think they were such a big deal.”*

– Alyssa, Age 14

To get them to slow down... to think about the words an author chose and *why*... to uncover the symbols, the foreshadowing... Rief does what most English teachers do: she reads aloud. And she has students talk about the images, the metaphors that bring the story alive. But she also does something else. She has students choose a book... and when there’s a word, a phrase, a paragraph that seems memorable, she says...write something, draw something... paste something on the page itself. She calls it “transforming” a book.

*“The kids are at first thinking that this is about destroying a book. But I had to get them over that. That it’s not destroying it... it’s taking it to a whole other level of looking at it in a different way.”*

– Linda Rief, English Teacher

Alyssa is reading a book about a young girl reluctant to tell anyone that she was raped.

*“Here’s like a pocket of secrets and they all say like, you don’t know, and then there’s one of them that says ‘you don’t know that I was raped’.”*

– Alyssa, Age 14

And Ryder saw on one page... the word “clock.” It appeared over and over again... so he highlighted the word and thought – maybe it means something *more* than just a clock to the main character.

*“His idea might be wanting to hang onto his family as long as he can... so he figures if maybe he gets a clock he’ll know how much longer he has to make his life better and more interesting.”*

– Ryder, Age 14

Reading a book is a journey of discovery. The journey is challenging... but these kids say there is joy when you discover something all on your own.

*“They’ll write something and they want you to see something else. But they don’t give you the whole image, they just give you most of the image and they let you use your imagination to create the rest of it.”*

– Gordon, Age 13

*“I actually wasn’t expecting it to like, mean that much. I was expecting it to be a fun art project to do. But it actually does make a difference.”*

– MacKenzie, age 14

And the difference is that books become more meaningful... and a lot more fun.

*“I went all the way through school and never knew you could read a story for the pleasure of a story.”*

– Linda Rief, English Teacher

More about accommodations. Experts group recommended practices into three categories: accommodations involving **instructional practices**, those involving **materials** and those addressing **student performance**. Let’s review the list.

**Interactive Instructional accommodations** might include

- Using **explicit teaching procedures** – like an advanced organizer, demonstrating the skill, guided practice and corrective feedback
- **Using** and clarifying **step-by-step instructions** – in small and sequential steps, and having students underline or highlight significant parts
- **Repeating directions and emphasizing a daily review of previous learning** to help students connect new learning to previous knowledge
- **Recording directions, stories and specific lessons** for students to replay and to read and follow along with print materials

Accommodations with **materials** could include

- **Block out extraneous stimuli** to help a student who is easily distracted by visual stimuli. **Provide additional practice activities** like instructional games and computer software programs.
- At the secondary level, **provide a glossary** in content areas.
- **Develop reading guides** to help students focus on relevant content.

And consider these student **performance adjustments**:

- **Creating flexible work times** – additional time to complete written assignments and tests
- **Adjusting assignments with substitutions or changes in format** – projects instead of oral or written reports or vice versa. Tests can be given in oral or written format.
- **Designing hierarchical worksheets** – from the easiest to hardest.
- **Allowing the use of instructional aids** – letter and number strips, number lines, counters and calculators.

And a word about technology. Across grade levels – and particularly in the middle and high school years – technology in our classrooms, home and everyday life can benefit learners with dyslexia. Students with dysgraphia, a writing weakness, can use a laptop to take notes in class. Voice recognition software can allow students to dictate rather than write. And for some, a smart pen provides support, as well. But, as in all aspects of life and education, there's balance when it comes to technology and tried and true practices.

*“There are definitely times where we want to see that child doing more of the old-fashioned writing instead of the typing. Some of these kids we find who really need to be writing in order to help their memory. You know the more we move away from that, the less they are benefiting from that visual motor memory. It is a balance.”*

– Dr. Leslie Stuart, Psychologist

Again, the list of accommodations ranges from simple to complex. To see a comprehensive list of suggested accommodations, click on the document link provided as an attachment to this program.

We have reviewed some of the nuts and bolts of accommodations that can support students with dyslexia – some involve actual materials, some incorporate changes in instruction and others accommodate student performance. And we saw the ways that these changes can be put into action – and often benefit an entire class. In our next and last module, we will shift our focus from academics to the social and emotional impact of dyslexia.