

PARENT RESOURCE GUIDE

Understanding Dyslexia

A guide to recognizing the signs of dyslexia and supporting your child's reading development.

The information in this guide is drawn from the clinical expertise of Dr. John Carosso, Psy.D. and Dr. Robert A. Lowenstein, M.D., current research findings, and authoritative sources including the DSM-5 and the National Institute of Mental Health. It is intended for informational purposes and does not replace a professional evaluation.

What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability that affects reading, spelling, writing, and sometimes speaking. It is one of the most common learning disabilities, affecting up to 8% of elementary school children. Dyslexia is neurological in origin and is not caused by lack of intelligence, poor vision, or inadequate teaching.

Important: Children with dyslexia are often bright, creative, and highly capable in many areas. Early identification and targeted intervention dramatically improve outcomes.

Reading Development Milestones

Knowing what to expect at each age helps identify when a child may need support. Below are key benchmarks:

Ages 3–4 (Early Preschool)

- Shows interest in the sounds of language; plays with rhymes
- Identifies approximately 10 alphabet letters, often from their own name
- Begins to understand that sentences are made of words

Ages 4–5 (Late Preschool)

- Breaks spoken words into syllables (50% of children)
- Begins to break words into phonemes (20% of children)
- Recognizes and names a growing number of letters

Kindergarten (Ages 5–6)

- Compares whether two spoken words rhyme
- Pronounces the beginning sound in a word
- Blends phonemes into complete words
- Names all letters of the alphabet and knows most letter sounds
- Begins to decode simple words; recognizes common sight words

First Grade (Ages 6–7)

- Accurately decodes one-syllable real and nonsense words
- Links letters to sounds to decode unknown words

- Has a reading vocabulary of 300–500 words
- Self-corrects when a word doesn't fit context

Second Grade and Beyond

- Reads with increasing fluency — accurately, smoothly, and rapidly
- Reads and comprehends grade-level fiction and nonfiction
- Begins to use prefixes, suffixes, and roots to infer word meanings
- Reads voluntarily for pleasure

Clues to Dyslexia by Age

Preschool Years

- Trouble learning common nursery rhymes
- Persistent mispronunciation of words; ongoing baby talk
- Difficulty learning and remembering letter names
- Does not know the letters in their own name
- Lack of appreciation for rhymes

Kindergarten and First Grade

- Cannot understand that words can be broken apart (e.g., 'bat' = 'b' + 'a' + 't')
- Unable to associate letters with sounds
- Reading errors show no connection to letter sounds (reads 'big' as 'goat')
- Cannot read common one-syllable words
- Complaints that reading is hard; avoidance of reading activities
- Family history of reading difficulties

Second Grade and Above

- Very slow progress in acquiring reading skills
- Wild guesses at unfamiliar words; no systematic sounding-out strategy
- Stumbling on multisyllable words
- Omitting parts of words when reading
- Strong fear of reading aloud
- Oral reading filled with substitutions, omissions, and mispronunciations

- Disastrous spelling — words may not be caught by spell-check
- Homework seems never-ending; parents frequently recruited as readers
- Avoids reading for pleasure; finds it exhausting
- Lowered self-esteem

Speaking clues in older children: Mispronunciation of long or complex words; pausing or hesitating often when speaking; using vague references ('stuff,' 'things') instead of specific words; confusing similar-sounding words (saying 'tornado' instead of 'volcano').

Our Assessment Approach

Our clinicians assess for all signs of dyslexia and apply age-appropriate academic benchmarks to understand where your child is in their development. Evaluation targets:

- Phonological awareness — the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in words
- Phonics and decoding skills
- Reading fluency and accuracy
- Reading comprehension
- Spelling and written expression
- Oral language processing

Early identification is key. The earlier dyslexia is identified and treated with structured, evidence-based literacy intervention, the better the outcomes. If you have concerns, don't wait — request an evaluation.

Ready to take the next step?

Doctors Carosso and Lowenstein and our experienced team are here to help. Contact us to schedule an evaluation or to ask any questions.

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