

Take The Dyslexia Challenge

*Experience
dyslexia through
a series of
activities*

by Liz Dunoon



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How Does My Child With Dyslexia Feel?

Of course the only way to really understand what it feels like to be dyslexic is to actually be dyslexic. Many parents and family members reading this book may be experts in this field because they too are dyslexic, but this is not always the case. Here are some ways to help you to understand the daily challenges that your child may face and also an opportunity to experience how your child may think.

Slip inside your child's dyslexic mind as you consider the following tasks.

Language Processing Challenges

1. The Thinking Challenge

Have a conversation with a friend where you are not allowed to use the words 'the', 'and' or 'a'. Make it a conversation that lasts for at least five minutes. What this will do is make your

brain continually think ahead to decide what you are going to say to make your conversation meaningful. Without being able to use these important little words, you will begin to speak slower. After five minutes if you try to keep going your brain will begin to scramble and you will begin to feel exhausted.

This is how your child with dyslexia can feel all day as they try to talk, read, spell, answer questions and recall information from their memory. Their brains are working overtime, but if we are watching them they can appear to be working in slow motion as they constantly process and search for the right words to say. Processing language can be extremely slow, difficult and tiring for dyslexics and this can be an all day, every day event.

2. The Spelling Challenge

Can you tell whether the following names are spelt correctly?

Catriona, Zachariah, Siobhan, Maeve,
Stephen, Bartholomew, Xavier,
Andreas, Jacqueline.

Choose a name you do not know how to spell. Now imagine you are writing a letter to apply for your dream job. The letter must be posted in the next five minutes to catch today's mail and whether your application is accepted or not will be determined by whether you know the correct spelling of the name of the Human Resources Officer. Where do you look? Is it on the internet or in the newspaper? Who can you ask? Do you ring someone? Do you have an old baby name book? Can you find it written somewhere in time? Proper names are not in the dictionary and are often difficult to find. Take a note of

the time it takes you to check the spelling. Did you get anxious, frustrated and panicky?

Spelling is not a strong point for most dyslexics as words are often not easily stored in their memory and are therefore difficult to recall automatically. This can make them slow to write and complete class work and related writing tasks. Other children can learn spelling words long enough to do well on a test, but won't be able to retain them permanently. Being a struggling speller is often time consuming and frustrating, which can greatly limit your child's output of written work and often their success on written spelling tests. Remember though, the words are usually there; they just can't always accurately retrieve them when they need to use them.

3. The Public Speaking Challenge

How do you feel about public speaking? Imagine you are going to hear a famous

scientist speak about the effects of global warming, greenhouse gas emissions and carbon trading. You arrive at the lecture hall and there are 1500 people in the audience, including television crews and the media, waiting for this ground breaking speech to start.

Suddenly, an official walks up to where you are seated and tells you quietly that the speaker has fallen ill and that you have been chosen to replace them. You walk up the steps and on to the stage in front of the huge expectant crowd. Massive overhead spotlights blind you. You look down at the written notes on the lectern, realising that the print is tiny; you cannot even pronounce some of the scientific words. You are so nervous you are shaking, your mouth has gone dry and no words will come out. It's like a bad dream.

This is often how your dyslexic child will feel when they are asked to read in public – absolute dread. Reading aloud can create huge amounts of anxiety and stress, even more so when there is no opportunity to mentally prepare or practice. Even if your dyslexic child is a reasonable reader, the stress of reading in public can cause your child to have an internal melt down, resulting in a panic attack.

4. The Listening, Understanding And Responding Challenge

Watch a foreign movie on television without the subtitles, or hire a foreign movie from the DVD shop. At the end of the movie imagine you are going to be asked twenty questions about the story, some related to factual information and some related to the outcomes of the storyline and how this film

relates to modern society. You watch the movie but you can't understand the language, or even follow the story. Can you tell what the movie is about? Did you zone out from listening to the language spoken? What else did you look at while watching the foreign movie to help you figure out what was going on?

Dyslexic children often get lost in classroom, family and social conversations as they struggle with the speed required to process all the words and instructions. When language becomes scrambled and blurry, dyslexic children will often use other methods to gain meaning, such as visual cues like facial expressions, setting, tone of voice used, watching responses of others and guessing. Quite often they can get the gist of what is expected of them in terms of a response or an action, but understandably the detail can be lost. It's a bit like listening to a joke which you don't really understand, and then

laughing inappropriately at the wrong time. When your dyslexic child responds inappropriately to any given situation it may be that they have been unable to process the language in the lead up to their response.

5. The Performance Challenge

When we are tired and unwell or we have someone looking over our shoulder, our writing or typing skills can suffer. This is a temporary condition and as we rest and recover or the stress of being watched is removed, our skills improve dramatically. To really understand how it feels to be dyslexic, you need to sit on your favourite writing hand and use only your non-dominant hand to type or write for a whole day. Your writing will become irregular, you will have trouble staying on the lines and you will get the letters around the wrong way as you try to increase your speed. More mistakes will creep in as the day goes on and the eraser and the white

out will become your best friend. How would your friends, family and workmates respond to your attempts to write?

Many dyslexic children are renowned for having clumsy, irregular handwriting with much overwriting and crossings out. The effort required to write perfectly can be enormous when you are dyslexic and it can take large amounts of time to complete writing tasks. The dyslexic child can often see that their writing is not meeting the classroom standards, but is unable to control the pen or pencil quickly enough to keep up with the other students. It can be extremely frustrating when other children seem to be able to do this with little effort, making many dyslexic children feel inadequate. Even though they are trying their hardest, students and teachers often tell them their writing is not good enough. Because of this, it is common for many dyslexic children to stop trying and they

begin to avoid writing tasks completely, often producing very little written work.

6. The Taking Notes Challenge

Find a passage in Greek, Russian or Chinese and set your timer for five minutes. Copy the foreign language as accurately as you can onto a new piece of lined paper. How well did you do? Ask a friend to assess your efforts and give you a mark out of ten.

Another great exercise to try is to copy a passage written in English, but you have to write it completely upside down in mirror image from right to left.

I can imagine you had to contemplate each symbol as a separate entity and check it's accuracy before you could move onto the next. Am I correct? Copying from the blackboard, the whiteboard, from the computer or from textbooks can be very slow and laborious for children with dyslexia.

Sometimes the meaning of the words gets lost as they copy letter for letter or word part for word part. Not an effective way to record meaningful information or to learn and retain spelling patterns in unknown words. Children will often rush to keep up with their peers when copying, making the formation of letters incorrect and the writing untidy.

Mathematical Processing Challenges

1. The Accuracy Challenge

Look at this address for just three second and then place your hand over it. Write it down on a scrap piece of paper. Check your accuracy.

*5976 Old Maroondah Road, Chesburg,
Williamsdale County BDN 98632.*

How accurate were you with the numbers?
Did you mix some of them up? Look at this mobile phone number for just three seconds

and then place you hand over it. Write it down. Check your accuracy.

0421 951 745

How accurate were you with the numbers?
Did you substitute some of them or mix them up?

Just about everyone can remember a time in their schooling when a mathematical task was difficult and challenging, no matter how good at maths they were. For dyslexics, the difficulty is often created when they try to recall the exact order of a number accurately. It is not that they don't know the number or can't see the number accurately, it is that on the way to being processed and memorised by the brain, the numbers can become mixed up. This can result in numbers being recalled wrongly and written down incorrectly.

Even when your child knows the correct answer verbally to a maths problem, they can write the answer incorrectly. As a dyslexic child becomes aware of this fault they can appear slow to complete their maths work as they double and triple check their work for accuracy. This trait can cause errors in many maths tasks, but particularly in those where there is an instant written response required, such as in mental maths where children have to write answers to a set number of maths questions within a short time limit.

2.The Writing Wrong Answers Challenge

Try using your own name, but then substituting your friend's child's details when filling out a medical form at the doctors. I'm sure you know some of the answers, but not the details, including health care numbers, weight, height and whether they have allergies.

When you go into a bank to cash a cheque, try writing your own name on a cheque, but then write the number of your best friends account. See what happens when you try to cash it.

Obviously you would never do these things, but if you tried to hand the form and cheque in, imagine the look of uncertainty on the receptionist and bank clerk's faces as they realise that the information you have provided is completely incorrect. They may make you feel stupid and assume you are ill or even dishonest.

Writing numbers and facts to fill out class work sheets and complete tests are common occurrences in a child's school day. Confusing numbers, letter and symbols means answers can be written down incorrectly. It can be frustrating, annoying and embarrassing, when children know the

correct answers in their head, but cannot retrieve them and write them accurately on the spot.

3. The Using Memory For Action Challenge

Drive down a street you don't know and try to find the house or building at number 231. Did it exist? Did you have any difficulty locating it? Did you need to ask for someone's help? Did they look at you strangely because maybe it didn't even exist?

Dyslexic children often mix up numbers and can find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. They may be searching for a bus number, trying to call a phone number, getting you to drive them to an address or trying to find a locker number or a classroom that doesn't even exist. They can feel sure they know the number or have written it correctly, but cannot find it. They end up feeling disorientated, frustrated and confused. The outcomes of these simple errors

can be varied. They not only waste valuable time, they may even get into trouble with a parent, teacher or friend for taking too long to complete a seemingly simple task, for being late or for missing an event altogether.

4. The Symbol Challenge

For this maths exercise the following symbols have been altered.

+ Looks like this o

- Looks like this Γ

x Looks like this Δ

÷ Looks like this /

Now do these sums quickly in your head

$$4 \Delta 3 =$$

$$10 \circ 12 =$$

$$25 \Gamma 6 =$$

$$35 / 7 =$$

$$11 \Delta 2 =$$

$$6 \circ 7 =$$

$$12 \Gamma 5 =$$

$$24 / 6 =$$

How did you go? How long did it take you to figure out which symbol was which in these simple sums? Such a seemingly simple task - I bet you could do these easily if the symbols were not unfamiliar.

Dyslexic children often mix up simple mathematical symbols and not just these ones. Think how many symbols there are in maths with time, fractions, less than and greater than, decimal places, measurement, algebra and geometry. The list is even longer if you take into account all the symbols we use at school and in life. Symbols can be prone to confusion in a dyslexic child's mind. There is no doubt some of spatial mathematic concepts are also difficult for some dyslexic children to grasp, but always ensure you take

into account that a wrong answer can be a simple case of symbols being mixed up.

5.The Tables Challenge

Do you remember the periodic elements table from secondary school science? Can you write down the symbol for oxygen and water? I bet you can remember those two. How about sulphur, magnesium, gold and copper? Maybe! I'll bet you can't remember beryllium, krypton or vanadium.

Learning times tables can be very difficult for dyslexic children and recalling the answers on any given day can be even more of a struggle. The answer to 6×7 was easy to remember yesterday, but cannot be recalled today during a test. Times tables are seen as something that children are meant to know and recall automatically. Some dyslexic children will eventually learn them with your help, but others will always struggle. This can be made even more difficult when some

schools now teach mathematics using a whole maths meaningful approach. This method does not allow for any rote learning or repetition to assist with brain training and memory retention.

Processing Information Challenges

1. The Listening For Detail Challenge

Remember back to a time when you were on an important phone call and at the same time somebody was trying to tell you something just as important. Could you juggle both conversations? Could you listen to all the information and respond accordingly to what both people were telling you? Did you get alarmed and annoyed while trying to work out which person to deal with first, the one on the phone or the one standing in front of you?

Dyslexic children are often bamboozled by too much information and too many instructions being given to them at the one time. This is again a processing difficulty and

in family homes, classrooms and on the sporting field there can be too much noise and information or too many instructions bombarding your dyslexic child at the same time for them to learn and understand what they are required to do.

2. The Reading For Meaning Challenge

Pick up a newspaper and choose an article. Read the headline and then read only every second paragraph. Do you know what the article is about? Did you miss any of the facts? Could you recount this news story to a friend accurately?

Often dyslexic children have trouble following a story or gaining the full meaning from written text. This means they may not be able to give a meaningful account of what they have read or answer detailed comprehension questions accurately.

3.The Calling Out The Wrong Answer Challenge

Next time you are driving along in the car, try this little exercise. Call out some obviously incorrect facts while appearing serious. Read the speed signs incorrectly and call out 80 instead of 100, confuse the make of the car in front of you and say it's a Hyundai when it's obviously a Honda, read the name of a café incorrectly and call it 'The Hunchback' instead of the 'Lunch Shack'. Make a note of how people respond to your errors. I'll bet they can't wait to tell you that you are wrong and look at you as though you are mad. They may even tell you that you need to have your eyes checked.

Dyslexic children often make these types of processing errors. By calling out an answer or just answering teacher's questions, they are sometimes putting themselves in a position where they can be ridiculed by those around

them. Imagine the child who has just spent precious minutes concentrating hard and working out the answer to a maths problem, just as the teacher calls out the next maths problem. The child, not realising that the moment has passed, puts their hand up and gives the answer to the previous question, which is accurate, but now out of context. All the children giggle and the child feels embarrassed and humiliated.

You can understand when this has happened on a number of occasions, why children with dyslexia can become very withdrawn and quiet class members. Children with dyslexia may very well know the answers to a teacher's question, but will not risk embarrassing themselves in case they make a mistake. These children may instead respond with an obviously incorrect or humorous answer to make the class laugh. This will ensure that the teacher directs their attention elsewhere.

4. The Thinking On The Spot Challenge

Pick up a pen and a notepad. You have five minutes to write an explanation of how an epidural works. Go to it. After the five minutes is up, you must stop writing with no changes to be made after the time allocated. How did you do? As long as you are not a medical doctor or a nurse, I'm sure you found this task challenging. Does your explanation make sense? Did you write it in a logical order? What would a medical doctor say if you showed it to them? What would they give you as a mark out of ten for your attempt?

Regardless of how much preparation a dyslexic student does, it is still possible that when they sit down to write, their thoughts are completely disorganised. They may know all the names of people and items that relate to their topic, but be unable to remember them when writing. They may know what they need to say, but be unable to structure it into a meaningful order with a beginning, middle and an ending.

5. The Here Today Gone Tomorrow Challenge

If you are a male, look in the mirror and shave half of your whiskers. If you are female put eye makeup on only one eye. Now shut both your eyes and have a go at doing the other side of your face without being able to see what you are doing. What was once a simple task and required little thought now becomes a challenge as you rely upon your other senses to attempt these tasks. I'm sure if you actually did this you would probably look very strange.

Dyslexic children can seem to be processing information effectively and accurately when completing a set task and then at another moment in time seem unable to complete the same task with the same level of processing skill. This inconsistency may seem unusual, but every dyslexic child is different. Many factors can cause this to occur,

including the time of day, how much sleep a child has had, the way in which information or instruction are given, the teacher, mental exhaustion and other distractions in the environment such as noise or lighting.

Spatial Skills And Order Challenges

1.The Sense Of Direction Challenge

How is your natural sense of direction?

Consider these tasks. Take a walk in your neighbourhood. Every time you reach a place where two roads meet, go left for the first two times and then right for the next two times. Did you get home using this method? How long did it take you? Did you want to go a certain way to get home only to discover you couldn't or you would be breaking the rules?

Have you ever been in unfamiliar shopping mall? You can start to wander and then discover you are lost. How long did it take you to find your way out again? Maybe

you have lost your car in a car park at a concert or sporting event. How did that make you feel?

Dyslexic children are often challenged by direction. This is again a processing problem which can result in an uncertainty of which way they should go. It can be as obvious as confusion with left and right or more complex as children struggle to try to find their way to seemingly familiar places like the local shop or even the school office.

This confusion and lack of natural direction can make a dyslexic child lose confidence and become reluctant to venture out. When they do, they will often need to concentrate very carefully on every decision they make to navigate accurately to get to a particular place.

2. The Create Daily Chaos Challenge

Get a small note pad out and write a down all the things you need to do before you leave for work each morning. Make sure you write each task on a different sheet of notepad. Now tear them off the pad and mix them up. Could you follow your new sequence of events? How would you feel about going outside to get the newspapers in your pyjamas or putting on your make up before you shower or wash your face? It feels very strange to be unable to predict what is going to happen next. It can leave you feeling unprepared for the day ahead and feeling like you have missed or forgotten to do something important.

Dyslexic children often have trouble thinking through and prioritising the order of a series of events, or knowing what they need to do next when performing daily tasks or following school routines. This difficulty can

make them seem disorganised, pressured, mixed up, slow and confused.

3. The Disorganised Filing System

Imagine taking all your bills for the year out of your filing system, throwing them in the air, collecting them back up and then filing them again randomly. How long would it take to find your credit card bill for last month or to find your electricity bills for the last six months so you can compare the charges? It may take time to find this information and would be rather annoying to have to go through this process to find what you are looking for. Maybe some of you just keep all your bills for the year in one big pile and go through this sorting process at the end of every year.

Dyslexic children often have difficulty mentally locating information from their memory when it is required. The other side of this processing difficulty is that your dyslexic

child may also have difficulty storing information practically; this can include difficulty writing down information in a logical sequence, or actually storing notes and paperwork correctly whether it is in a filing system, a folder, on a desktop or in an exercise book. What may not seem too important at the time can later cause all types of stress as your child tries to find a critical piece of information when it is required.

Perception Challenges

1. The Being Ready To Respond Challenge

If, on the spot, you were asked to walk into a lecture theatre filled with 200 students and lecture them about the importance of effective small business accounting, could you do it? Maybe! Maybe not! If you had no idea what to say, would it be a reflection on

your intelligence or more likely that you were just totally unprepared.

Dyslexic children often feel like this. Often in life they will be put into a position where they will feel totally out of their depth. This could be when they are called upon to give an answer in class, make an on the spot presentation, respond very quickly to a request for action or an emergency. It may seem to bystanders that your child is just not clever enough to respond correctly. Some dyslexic children can also fall into the trap of believing this. It is more likely that they have been put way out of their comfort zone and are just unprepared for what is expected of them.

2. The Wrong Place - Wrong Time - Help Me Challenge

Have you ever walked into the wrong toilet or walked in on a private meeting or conversation because you were in the wrong place at the wrong time? How did it make

you feel? Maybe you have rung the doorbell at the wrong house? Have you ever asked an inappropriate question at school or in a meeting or lecture? Think back to how others reacted to your mistake. What do you think would happen if you always had to ask the person sitting next to you at work to spell words and take notes for you, or even to do your work for you?

Dyslexia is invisible, but this is not the case for your child. It can often causes simple mistakes to occur and can be the reason your child constantly seeks reassurance and help from you and others, whether it be with their homework or for tasks in general. The answers to your child's constant questions or the reasons for their confusion and inappropriate behaviour may seem overly obvious to you, but this is not the case for your dyslexic child. Every day you need to consider how you and others react to your child's simple errors, requests for help and reassurance. You need

to understand why they continually ask you and others to give them answers to what appears to be overly simple questions. Dyslexic children are often publicly and privately subjected to ridicule, anger, frustration, exasperation, raised eyebrows, silence, sarcasm, hostility and accusations of being slow or stupid or even wasting people's time. Dyslexic children are often mistreated and verbally abused for just being dyslexic. It is important that parents provide support for their child and offer them refuge and relief from this often daily occurrence. The people within your child's social and school network can also be educated to support your child. It is important to remember that having dyslexia is not an indication of a child's intelligence, yet they are often treated with disdain and made to feel that it is.

3. The Starting Over Challenge

Do you remember what it felt like on your first day at a new job? Did you have any doubts

about your ability to actually be able to do the job or to fit in with the new people you met? It can feel unsettling when you begin a new class at night school or walk into a sporting club for the first time as a new member. Sometimes at work we are promoted into new more challenging roles and we have to prove our worthiness to our superiors. Often there is change of ownership or boss in our existing workplace and, as employees, we have to learn to work with and to please our new boss. It can cause us undue anxiety and stress.

Your dyslexic child has to face this challenge every year as they move from one grade level to the next and meet yet another new teacher and often a whole new set of classmates. The support structure that your child has built up during the past year disappears and not only that, your child knows that the level of class work will become more difficult and there will be more of it. It is

no wonder then that your child may be scared, worried, teary, behaving badly or losing sleep over starting a new school year or maybe even starting at a new school. As parents we need to be aware of these stresses, how they impact on our child and provide as much support at this time as we can.

How Parents Can Determine The Type Of Adult Their Child With Dyslexia Will Become

Without any support, school years can be a difficult, torrid and dysfunctional time for a dyslexic child. This is directly related to the current education system in which they learn, are tested and assessed. It is a period of time of approximately 12 years from the ages of 5 to 17 years, which must be endured by all dyslexic children. At no other time in their lives will having dyslexia be so challenging and measurable against non-dyslexic children.

Even in colleges and universities today there are often more flexible standards in place to assist those with learning disabilities, depending on their choice of study.

The adult your child will become is a direct reflection of how their childhood, schooling and home life has played out and how confident, capable and successful they will become. As an adult, your dyslexic child will make their own choices, be their own person and live by their own rules.

As you develop a greater understanding of how being dyslexic impacts on your child, you will be better equipped to help them to overcome and manage their learning obstacles and to begin to operate at their full potential.

“At the end of the day, all people seek to be accepted and valued for who they are. Your child with dyslexia is no different. They have as much right to be as valued and as successful as all other children and as parents we need to ensure those in positions of power provide our children with these rights.”

About The Author

Liz Dunoon is a teacher and a mother to three children all with dyslexia. It was through her own research to find ways to help her children that she discovered a huge divide between what is known by scientists about dyslexia and what is happening in our children's schools today.



Liz's determination to rectify this has culminated in her working with some of the world's leading dyslexia researchers to write this empowering, but simple and easy to read eBook.

Liz has also created a website full of free information, worksheets, resources, teaching aids, reports, interviews and personal stories. From one parent to another you will soon realise that you are not alone in your quest to support your child.

Liz Dunoon is also the author of:

Helping Children with Dyslexia

21 Super Strategies to Ensure Your Child's Success at School.

N.B. This eBook is an excerpt from this book

EBooks

Guide for Teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Read from Home

Guide for Teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Write and Spell from Home

Guide for teaching Your Dyslexic Child to Do Math from Home

Available from the website

www.dyslexiadaily.com

Reading, Spelling and Confidence Program

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