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Specific Learning
Difficulties SA

Dyslexia Checklist for a Primary School Student (suitable for Year 2 to Year 6 students)

The number of students with dyslexia in Australian schools is estimated to be around 10-15%. There is likely to be at least one student in every class who displays the strengths and weaknesses characteristic of dyslexia. Do you have a student who puzzles you, displaying well-developed skills and abilities in some areas and unexpected difficulties in others? This checklist can help identify potential signs of dyslexia.

BACKGROUND

- family history of literacy learning problems
- seems bright and capable but not making expected progress

Compared to their age peers, dyslexic students often display difficulties in the following areas:

READING DIFFICULTIES

- lacks awareness of the sounds in spoken words (e.g. has difficulty identifying individual sounds, sound order, rhymes, and syllables)
- difficulty learning and remembering letter-sounds links (phonics)
- hesitant, slow, inaccurate and laboured reading, especially when reading aloud
- relies on a visual 'look and say' approach to reading, often using the initial letters as the only cue
- relies on the context of the story and picture cues to identify words
- difficulty decoding unfamiliar words
- confuses words that look alike (e.g. was/saw, for/from, the/that, place/palace)
- mis-reads or omits small words (for, of, with, an, the) and word endings (-ing, -ed, -ly)
- regularly confused by letters which look similar
- loses his/her place when reading

SPELLING & WRITING DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty getting thoughts down on paper
- significant difference between the written work produced and oral language skills
- limited spelling vocabulary – tendency to use only those words they know how to spell
- unusual spellings that are difficult to decipher for the student and others (e.g. traffic/tapt, adventure/aferch)
- upper primary students tend to spell words phonetically (e.g. traffic/trafick, adventure/advencher) and avoid words with more complex spelling
- auditory discrimination difficulties leading to incorrect letter choice in spelling (e.g. p/b, t/d)
- omits letters from words when spelling (e.g. 'moring' for 'morning')
- mis-sequences the letters in words (e.g. friend/freind)
- spells the same word in several ways without recognising the correct version (e.g. spelling 'said' as 'sed', 'siad', and 'sede' within the same piece of work)

Checklist continued....

- inappropriate use of uppercase letters usually because the child feels more secure with the capital form (e.g. raBBit, Dog)
- produces untidy work with many cross outs and words tried several times
- difficulty reading back own written work
- difficulty copying accurately from the blackboard, particularly when under time pressure
- slow handwriting speed
- expends much effort with below age-average results in literacy tasks

MEMORY DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty remembering instructions
- overwhelmed by large volumes of verbal information
- difficulty with long-term verbal learning (e.g. memorising the months of the year, multiplication tables)
- slow or poor recall of maths facts

ATTENTION DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty sustaining attention on schoolwork
- tires easily because of the amount of concentration and effort required to cope
- requires assistance from an adult or others to complete tasks

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

- displays frustration
- employs work avoidance tactics such as sharpening pencils, looking for books or offering to 'help'
- becomes withdrawn and isolated, sitting at the back of the group and not participating
- displays disruptive behaviour to mask difficulty coping with schoolwork

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- difficulty with organisation (e.g. story writing, books and belongings, homework)
- has obvious good days and bad days with no apparent reason

If you have concerns about a student who is not progressing as well as expected, ensure the student has access to quality, evidence-based intervention to remediate the student's area/s of weakness. This checklist provides an informal understanding of the student's strengths and weaknesses. Formal diagnostic assessments of literacy skills will give a clearer understanding of important next steps for intervention. Even students who have completed their junior primary schooling will need access to quality, evidence-based intervention before undergoing assessments for dyslexia.

SPELD SA provides Specialised Education Reviews for literacy and numeracy, which provide direction for intervention. SPELD SA provides a psychological assessment for students who have completed most of their junior primary schooling. The psychologist can diagnose dyslexia from this formal assessment.