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Specific Learning
Difficulties SA

Dyslexia Checklist for a Secondary School Student

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

- hesitant, slow, inaccurate and laboured reading, especially when reading aloud
- dislikes and avoids reading aloud
- difficulty decoding unfamiliar words, particularly multi-syllable, subject-specific words
- relies on a visual 'look and say' approach to reading, often using the initial letters as the only cue
- uses the context of the story and flow of language to attempt words, often incorrectly
- confuses words that look alike (e.g. was/saw, for/from, the/that, unclear/nuclear)
- mis-reads, omits, or adds small function words (e.g. the, an, of, this) and word endings
- misses a line or repeats the same line twice
- difficulty with fluency and comprehension
- difficulty identifying and understanding the main idea in a passage
- difficulty using dictionaries, directories, encyclopaedia

SPELLING & WRITING DIFFICULTIES

- disparity between spoken and written language
- trouble getting thoughts down on paper
- difficulty planning and organising written work
- written work appears disjointed
- difficulty with punctuation and grammar
- frequent spelling mistakes
- phonetic spelling (e.g., anxiety - angsiaty)
- spells the same word differently in one piece of work (e.g. more, mor, moor)
- confuses similar looking letters (e.g. b/d, m/w)
- produces untidy written work (i.e. lots of crossing out, poorly set out)
- writes slowly and has difficulty completing written work on time
- problems copying notes at speed and taking notes in lessons

Checklist continued....

MEMORY DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty remembering instructions
- overwhelmed by large volumes of verbal information
- misunderstands complex instructions
- difficulty recalling learned facts in lessons and in exams
- difficulty learning foreign language vocabulary
- difficulty remembering basic number facts and tables
- difficulty doing mental calculations at speed

ORGANISATION AND TIME-MANAGEMENT DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty following a timetable
- difficulty managing daily tasks within a timeline
- often in the wrong place at the wrong time
- forgets which books to bring to lessons
- difficulty organizing homework and completing assignments on time
- overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of the tasks at their year level

SPEECH DIFFICULTIES

Students with dyslexia often have well-developed oral language skills but may display specific speech problems, such as:

- difficulty recalling the exact words wanted and substitutes non-specific words (e.g. thing, stuff, junk)
- difficulty pronouncing multi-syllable, subject-specific words (e.g. statistical, preliminary)

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- works more slowly than other students
- difficulty working under time pressure (e.g. exams)
- able to do one thing at a time, but difficulty with 'multi-tasking'
- obvious good days and bad days with no apparent reason

ATTENTION DIFFICULTIES

- difficulty sustaining attention on schoolwork
- tires easily because of the amount of concentration and effort required to cope

Checklist continued...

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

- low self-esteem and lack of confidence
- displays frustration
- employs work avoidance tactics
- becomes withdrawn and isolated, sitting at the back of a group and not participating
- displays disruptive behaviour to mask difficulty coping with schoolwork

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. SPELD SA provides Specialised Education Reviews for literacy and numeracy, which provide direction for intervention. Psychologists at SPELD SA can diagnose dyslexia from a formal psychological assessment.

Secondary students formally diagnosed with dyslexia are eligible for special provisions in their coursework and examinations in Australia. Students with dyslexia will benefit from guidance in managing their studies. Access to assistive technologies will help them manage the reading and writing components of their chosen courses.