DECODING DYSLEXIA FOR EDUCATORS:
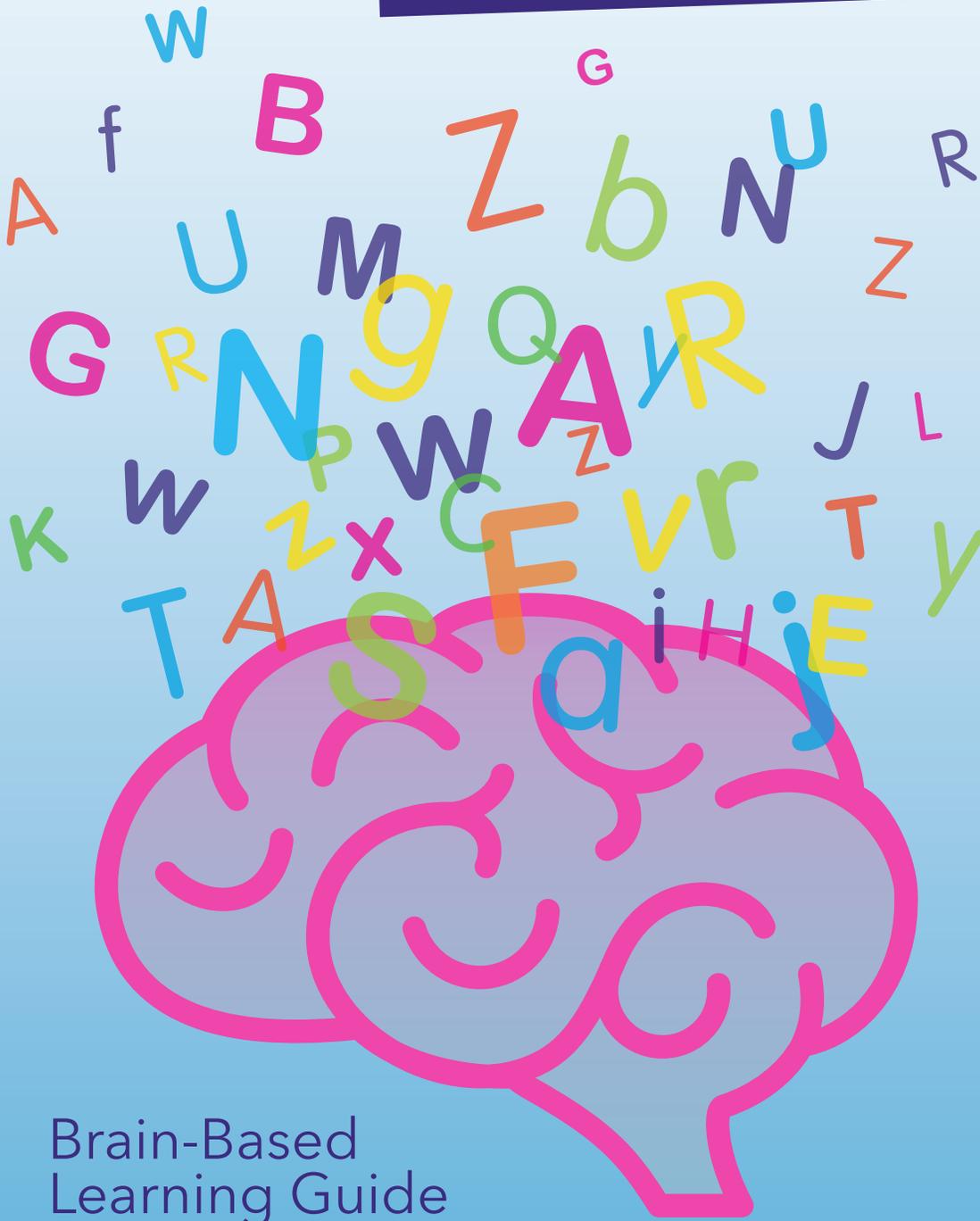
A Guide to Helping Students

HERE'S WHAT'S INSIDE:

Dyslexia Dos and Don'ts for an optimal learning environment

Checklist of Dyslexia Signs to know when to recommend a student for dyslexia screening

5 Ways Technology Can Help students with dyslexia reach their potential

Brain-Based Learning Guide

DYSLEXIA DOs AND DON'Ts

Did you know that dyslexia is not a problem with vision? It is primarily an auditory disorder with weaknesses appearing specifically in phonological processing. In the U.S., approximately **1 in 10 people** and **8 in 10 students** who struggle with reading are likely to have some form of dyslexia. That means that all educators should be prepared to have learners with dyslexia in their classes, from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Here are **Dyslexia Dos and Don'ts** to make your school an optimal learning environment for students showing signs of dyslexia.

Don't:

- **Assume that students with dyslexia have been identified.**
  Dyslexia ranges in type and severity, and many learners aren't officially diagnosed until adulthood. Treat any struggling reader as if their challenges are neurologically based like dyslexia is.

- **Tell struggling readers to "just sound it out."**
  One characteristic of dyslexia is the inability to match sounds to letters. So decoding or sounding out written words, is exactly what someone with dyslexia can't do.

- **Treat students as unintelligent or lazy.**
  Dyslexia is unrelated to intelligence or motivation. Your students are likely bright and just learn differently than their peers. And the last thing a student wants to hear when they're trying their best is to try harder.

- **Punish students for their learning differences.**
  Learners with dyslexia might not complete their work quickly or understand what you say—so they shouldn't be penalized for it.

- **Tell students that they'll outgrow it.**
  Dyslexia is a life-long condition, but key skills can be improved. Students need you to take their struggles seriously and offer the support they need to reach their potential.

- **Hold students back a grade without addressing needs.**
  Grade retention without targeted intervention is the definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result.

Do:

- **Screen and test for dyslexia.**
  Proper treatment can only follow an accurate diagnosis. Different types of dyslexia will need different intervention planning.

- **Take a strengths-based approach to dyslexia.**
  Rather than viewing students with dyslexia through a deficits model, recognize their strengths. Research has found that those with dyslexia are strong in spatial reasoning, narrative reasoning, empathy, and critical thinking.

- **Allow modified or alternative assessments.**
  Give the option of an oral book review or spelling test instead of a written one. Include a variety of ways to respond to test questions, like circling an answer or making a voice recording, rather than fill-in-the-blank or short answers.

- **Don't take off points for spelling errors if it's not a spelling test.**
  A reading comprehension quiz evaluates reading comprehension, not spelling. Give students a fair chance to demonstrate their learning.

- **Offer extra time on assignments and tests.**
  Allow students to take home in-class assignments. Offer more time, a quiet area or a separate room for taking exams. Or, to avoid the stigma of being singled out, give the entire class extra time to complete an exam and have students who finish early work on other assignments.

- **Create opportunities for multisensory learning.**
  Practice writing with putty, sand, pipe cleaners, or beads. Have students perform skits or puppet shows about the assigned reading. Incorporate music and aromatherapy into the classroom environment.

5
Ways Technology Can Help Students with Dyslexia

1

Speech-to-text software
For writing assignments, students can use a voice recognition tool that converts spoken words into typed sentences on the screen. Microsoft Word®, iPad®, and Google Translate have this speech-to-text feature built in.

2

Text-to-speech software
Reading everything from books to worksheets can be made easier by being converted to audio files. NaturalReader is one tool that can read aloud Microsoft Word files, webpages, PDF files, and emails.

3

Smart pens
LiveScribe™ SmartPen digitizes the notes that a student writes in a notebook while also recording the lecture. Later, when the student is reviewing their notes, they can listen to what was being said at that moment.

4

Computer games that target phonological processing
Because dyslexia is primarily an auditory disorder, students should use a program that strengthens phonological processing. Fast ForWord is a reading and language program that has been proven effective in this approach by researchers at Stanford, Harvard, MIT, and more.

5

Spell checker
Spelling check apps that are especially helpful for students with dyslexia include American WordSpeller™ and Typ-O HD. But a pocket spell checker like the Franklin Collins Spellchecker might be better when writing with pen and paper. (The International Dyslexia Association recommends that kids start using spell check in fifth grade, after they've learned basic spelling rules.)

Checklist of Dyslexia Signs

Do you think one or more of your students might have some form of dyslexia? It can be difficult to spot because it's a spectrum disorder and looks a little different on everyone. To help you decide who to recommend for a dyslexia screening and evaluation by a qualified professional, here is a checklist of dyslexia symptoms to look for by age.

Preschool
- Not recognizing rhyming patterns (like in nursery rhymes)
- Struggling with remembering or naming letters, numbers, and colors
- Not recognizing letters in their own name
- Learning to talk late

Kindergarten-1st grade
- Not understanding that words break apart into sounds
- Not associating letters with sounds (that m sounds like *mmm*)
- Showing problems with speaking and pronunciation
- Having trouble sounding out words
- Misspelling easy words (like "dog")

2nd-8th grade
- Reading slowly and awkwardly
- Disliking or avoiding reading out loud
- Confusing words that sound alike (i.e. "furnish" instead of "finish")

9th-12th grade
- Spelling words phonetically and inconsistently
- Omitting small words and parts of longer words when reading out loud
- Struggling to remember common abbreviations, including social media slang
- Answering comprehension questions better when text is read aloud

See more symptoms here:

https://www.webmd.com/children/understanding-dyslexia-symptoms

https://www.healthline.com/health/dyslexia-symptoms-by-age

https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/signs-symptoms/could-your-child-have/checklist-signs-of-dyslexia-at-different-ages

RESOURCES

Brain-Based Learning Webinar Series

Watch live and on-demand webinars on topics like dyslexia, autism, poverty and trauma, and more.

https://www.scilearn.com/resources/webinars

International Dyslexia Association

Learn more about dyslexia and find available resources.

https://dyslexiaida.org

Free Samples of Fast ForWord

Get instant access to free interactive samples of the Fast ForWord reading and language program.

https://pages.scilearn.com/FreeSample

State Dyslexia Laws

Stay up-to-date on state legislation on dyslexia.

https://www.dyslegia.com/state-dyslexia-laws/

The Science of Learning Blog

Read blog posts about the science of the brain and learning. Check out these posts: "5 Myths About Dyslexia" and "Too Many Kids with Dyslexia Are Left Behind: Here's Why."

https://www.scilearn.com/blog

The IEP Process for Dyslexia

Know what the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process should be for a student with dyslexia.

http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/parents/living-with-dyslexia/school/iep-process-everything-you-need-to-know

Sources

https://dyslexiaida.org
http://dyslexiahelp.umich.edu/
https://www.edutopia.org/blog/understanding-causes-dyslexia-effective-intervention-martha-burns
https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dyslexia/
https://www.scilearn.com/blog/strengths-benefits-adhd-dyslexia
https://www.thoughtco.com/common-accommodations-students-with-dyslexia-3111001
Sanfilippo, J., Ness, M., Petscher, Y., Rappaport, L., Zuckerman, B., & Gaab, N. (2019, September 20). Reintroducing Dyslexia: Early Identification and Implications for Pediatric Practice. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/z4ryh

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