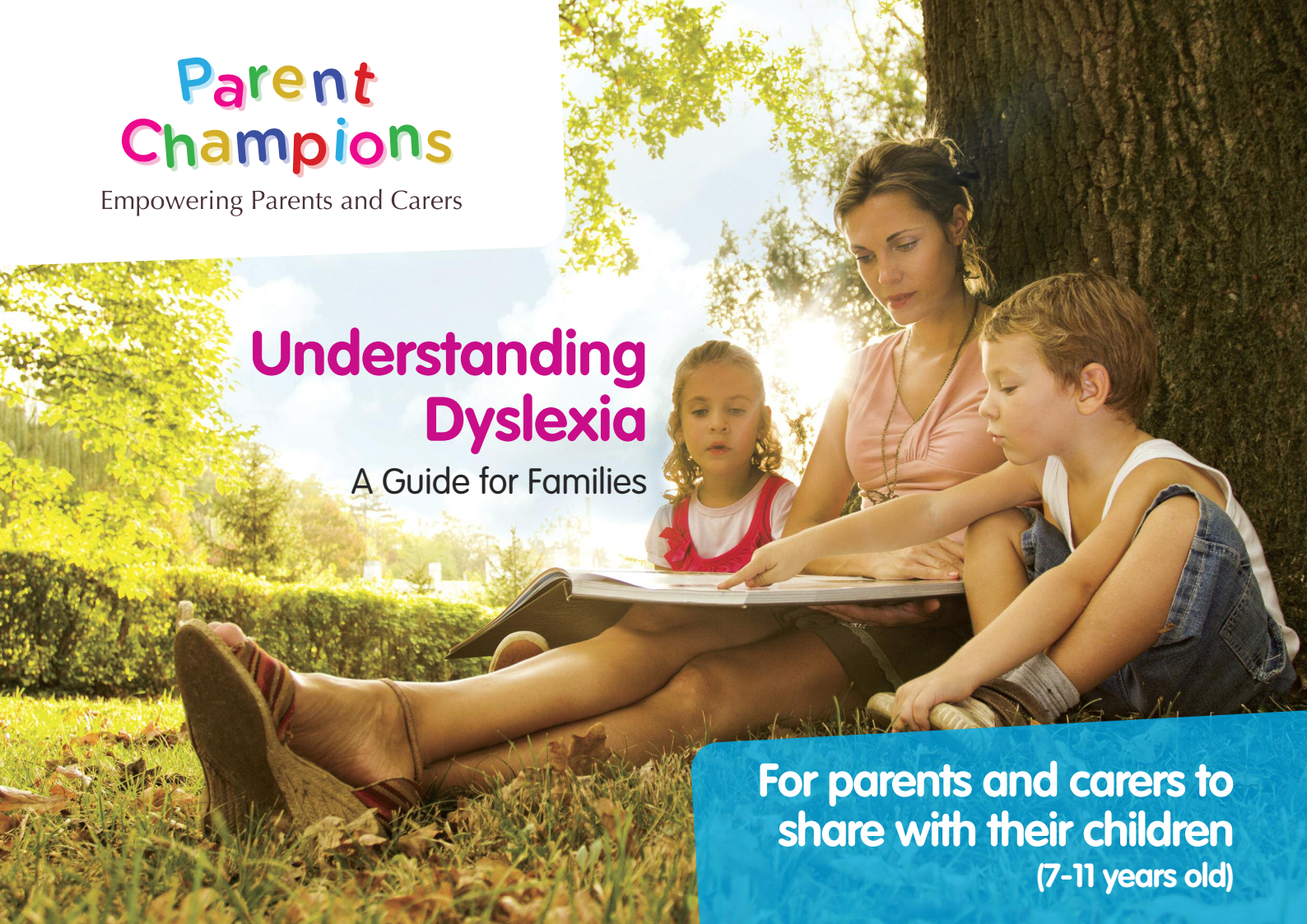
Parent Champions

Empowering Parents and Carers

Understanding Dyslexia

A Guide for Families



For parents and carers to share with their children

(7-11 years old)

Note to Parents & Carers

Finding out your child has dyslexia can be an overwhelming experience or in many cases, a huge relief to finally understand why your child has been struggling.

This guide has been written by a parent for parents. It is specifically designed for you to share with your child, to help you explain what dyslexia is, to create an opportunity to help your child talk about how they feel and to suggest ways that you can support them.

It has been produced as part of the Parent Champions initiative, a national project created by The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust.

Parent Champions is an independent information network which enables parents and carers of children who have dyslexia to directly access resources and support. It aims to empower and inform parents and carers so that they have the confidence to make the best choices for their children.

British Dyslexia Association

Dyslexia Action
Assessment • Education • Training

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Life-changing literacy

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The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust

Communication can create understanding.

Understanding can nurture support.

Support can be the positive change which can make all the difference.

Understanding Dyslexia

A Guide for Families

HAS BEEN WRITTEN BY
EMMA SEYMOUR AND HER SON ELLIOTT, AGED 8, WHO HAS DYSLEXIA

"After we found out that Elliott had dyslexia we wanted to sit down and talk with him about what dyslexia was, what that meant and how he felt. Like many parents and carers in this situation, we felt completely overwhelmed by the whole experience, not really knowing where to start. We felt isolated, stressed and in need of reliable information, resources and support. We did our best to answer Elliott's questions but looking back we would have loved to have a short booklet which we could have shared to support us through the questions we had and the feelings we needed to express and share.

We wanted to write this guide for parents and carers to offer something positive and practical that they could share with their children to help them understand dyslexia, to talk about their experiences and to point families towards the resources that are available."

Emma Seymour is a parent champion and lives in West Sussex

In this guide:

- What is dyslexia?
- Learning differences
- Who else has dyslexia?
- Facing challenges & developing strengths
- Support and strategies at home and at school
- Communication
- Well-being
- Resources for families

What is Dyslexia?

'Dyslexia is a learning difference: a combination of strengths and weaknesses which affects the learning process.'[1] This means that children who have dyslexia learn in ways that are different from other children.

Having dyslexia can mean that certain aspects of learning may be more difficult than others. It can also mean that certain parts of learning may be easier.

"My friends help me when we are playing computer games and I say how do you spell something and they help me. I am learning to type with all my fingers and I'm faster than they are."

Olivia 10 years

[1] British Dyslexia Association booklet on 'Dyslexia Friendly Schools'

Some children with dyslexia struggle with:

- Reading
- Writing
- Maths
- Telling the time
- Hearing certain sounds
- Spelling
- Handwriting
- Speech and language
- Remembering instructions
- Organisation
- Getting ideas down on paper
- Processing information quickly

These are some of the areas that dyslexia can affect, but you, as a child with dyslexia, may have noticed other things that you also find difficult.

- What do you struggle with?
- What would you most like some help with?

Learning Differences

It is important to understand that children who have dyslexia may or may not have difficulties in all areas of learning. Dyslexia is best understood as a whole picture; there are areas of learning you might find challenging but also those that you might find very easy.

We all learn and remember information using our senses. Some people learn best by using a particular sense or a mixture of two or three. It might be different when you are learning different things. For example, you might be able to visualise events but you might struggle to visualise spellings.

How do you learn best?

Seeing? You learn best through watching films, reading books, looking at maps, information charts or computer programmes.

Listening? You learn best through listening to stories, songs and talking about your learning.

Doing? You learn best through hands-on activities, making, building or through movement.

We all learn in different ways.

Learning which encourages you to use all of your senses is called 'multi-sensory learning' and helps you to process and remember the things you have learnt.

Once you understand *how* you learn and begin to have the right support you can usually succeed in whatever you choose to do.

"I'm writing a play with my friends and dad is helping. We say it and he types it for us. My teacher is going to let us act it out to the whole class on Friday."

Max 11 years

Who Else Has Dyslexia?

Many people have dyslexia. In the United Kingdom, 1 in 10 people have dyslexia.

Dyslexia affects boys and girls equally and can run in families. Many people who have dyslexia are very clever, they just learn in a different way.

You may know someone in your family or a friend or somebody at school who has dyslexia.

- Can you think of somebody you know who has dyslexia?

"My friend has dyslexia and can't read very well so I help her in the library. She helps me with cycling because she is really good at it. When she comes to my house we make up plays about witches."

Tanya 11 years

There are many famous people past and present who have dyslexia. Actors, musicians, inventors, artists, writers, business people etc.

- Do you know any famous people who have dyslexia?

To find out you could take a look at **www.xtraordinarypeople.com**

People who have dyslexia can learn, achieve and succeed in a wide range of jobs.

Facing Challenges and Developing Strengths

Although having dyslexia may mean that there are some things which you find difficult or challenging, it is also important to remember that *we all have things that we are good at and these are called our strengths.*

You may be creative, inventive, a good problem solver, good at practical activities like making or building things, good at talking to people or creating new ideas or ways of doing things.

Using your personal and learning strengths will help you to build confidence in the things you can do. This confidence will then help you to find a different way to deal with the things that you find challenging.

By finding new ways of doing things you will gradually realise that there are many ways to approach something that is difficult.

- Can you think of all the things that you are good at? What are your strengths?
- What do other people say you are good at?

"I go to acting classes. I have to learn lines and act at the same time. It helps me to remember if I say them again and again."

Nila 9 years

Support and Strategies at Home and at School

Children who have dyslexia do not all struggle with the same things. Each child is unique and therefore needs different ways to help them succeed. These ways are called strategies.

For example there are many dyslexia-friendly strategies to help with:

- Reading
- Writing
- Spelling
- Maths
- Organisation

…and many other areas of learning.

Quite often it is the little things that can make a big difference and sometimes you might know what helps you to learn best.

"I love stories. I read with my mum. She reads a page and I read a page. We act it out and do voices."

Cassea 8 years

"My teacher writes a word and covers it up. I say it and then try to write it myself. If I get it right we do another word. If I get it wrong. We try again. It's like a game. It's fun."

Jon 9 years

Children with dyslexia share their top tips and practical suggestions on what works for them.

"I make up rhymes to help me remember my spellings so I remember how to spell SAID by saying Silly Ants In Dynamite."

Charlie 9 years

"I find maths hard so I learn riddles to help me remember my tables. One of my favourites is I ate and I ate until I was sick on the floor. 8 x 8 is 64."

Alice 8 years

"I like magazines more than books because they are funny and easy to read and have lots of good pictures. My favourite is The Simpsons."

Thomas 11 years

"I am really good at drawing but can't spell. I make up sentences to help me like BECAUSE is Big Elephants Can Always Understand Small Elephants."

Lucy 10 years

"I love books like Harry Potter. Some of the words are hard but I pretend I am in the book and I am Harry Potter."

Sean 9 years

As well as strategies, there are also people at home and at school who can help support you. At school there is your class teacher, teaching assistants and your SENCO, who is a teacher in the school who can usually help children with dyslexia.

The more that you use strategies to help you with your learning, the more confident you will feel both at school and with your learning at home. Remember, it's ok to ask for help.

At the end of the day try asking yourself...

- What went well?
- What did I enjoy?
- What am I proud of?

Look for positive times each day and build on them.

"Talking to somebody you trust can really help. I talk to my mum because she can help me. I can say what I like to her and I know it will be ok. There's no right or wrong way to say it. I just say what I feel."

Pierre 11 years

"Keep trying. Ask for help. Say to yourself I can do it not I'm giving up."

Molly 11 years

Communication

Having dyslexia might mean that at times you feel frustrated about the things that you find difficult. Sometimes you might feel angry, worried or scared. However you might also feel happy, positive and proud of yourself for your achievements.

Talking to your family, friends and teachers about dyslexia can help other people to understand your experiences. Sharing your feelings can help you to feel happier and more relaxed.

As well as talking about the things that you find difficult or frustrating, it is important to share your feelings about your achievements and the moments you are proud of. This can be a wonderful way of celebrating all the things that you have worked hard at and the challenges you have overcome.

"I used to worry about not being able to read very well but once I started talking to my friends about it I felt much better. They don't laugh at me. They help me."

Saskia 10 years

- Can you think of something you are really proud of?
- What achievement would you like to celebrate?
- Maybe you could create an achievement board which celebrates all the wonderful things that you are learning in and out of school. This might include swimming certificates, pictures of you enjoying a hobby or doing something new. Maybe you could put pictures up on the fridge using fridge magnets or on a pin board in your room.

"Instead of writing what people want me to I like to choose what I want to write about. It is easier to find the words because I want to. I like writing adventure stories.""

Finlay 11 years

Along with your strengths there are also things in life that make you happy.

When you feel bright and positive it is always easier to learn and enjoy your learning.

- **What do you love doing?**
- **What makes you happy?**

It could be playing a sport you love, enjoying a hobby, watching a movie with a friend, listening to your favourite stories or building Lego. The more you can do the things you love, the more positive you'll feel.

"I love listening to stories like Harry Potter, Lord of The Rings and The Hobbit whilst building Lego. I find the books very difficult to read so now I don't have to miss out on these amazing stories."

Elliott 8 years

"I love animals and I like reading books about them and drawing them. I want to be a zoo keeper when I grow up."

Freddie 8 years

"I like reading books even if it is hard so I can find out what happens in the end."

Carenza 10 years

Dyslexia may create challenges, but by understanding how you learn best, by focusing and celebrating your strengths and getting the right support, you can begin to feel more confident in your learning.

Believe in your ability to succeed.

Always aim to do your best.

Ask for help when you need it.

Trust your strengths and learning styles.

Do the things you love.

"Although having dyslexia means I find certain things difficult, I am really good at science, some areas of maths, practical things and thinking up new ideas."

Elliott 8 years

"I read out loud to my mum and little brother. He loves me reading to him. I look at his books and he looks at mine."

Guillermo 7 years

Note to Parents & Carers:

Although there feels like a lot of information to process at this time it is important to congratulate yourself on everything you are doing to help support your child.

By reading this guide with your child you have already opened the door for positive change through increasing their awareness and understanding of dyslexia.

Focus on what you have achieved and the positive changes you are noticing each day. Take one step at a time and ask for support when you need it, you will feel more relaxed and empowered to make the best choices for your child.

Each step you take in learning about dyslexia will strengthen your ability to understand more about how your child learns and how you can help them.

Your support and understanding will make a positive difference to not only your child's learning, but also to their well-being, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Resources for Families

Did you know?

You can talk to an expert at a **Dyslexia Action** Centre:
www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk
Tel: **01784 222 300**

You can call the **British Dyslexia Association** Helpline for up-to-date information and support.
BDA Helpline: **0845 251 9002**

There are many organisations that can help to support you:

The **Dyslexia-SpLD Trust** is a collaboration of voluntary and community organisations with funding from the Department for Education to provide reliable information to parents, teachers, schools and the wider sector.
www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk
Tel: **01344 381564**

British Dyslexia Association | Dyslexia Action (Assessment • Education • Training) | Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre | Springboard Life-changing literacy | Working together as | The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust

The British Dyslexia Association campaigns for a dyslexia friendly society. It provides impartial advice, sets the standard for professional accreditation, promotes research and disseminates best practice.
www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
BDA Helpline: **0845 251 9002**

Helen Arkell Dyslexia Centre provides a wide range of assessments, support options and professional courses.
www.arkellcentre.org.uk
Tel: **01252 792 400**

Dyslexia Action is the biggest dyslexia charity in the UK providing a wide range of services to people of all ages who have dyslexia and struggle with literacy.
www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk
Tel: **01784 222 300**

Springboard for Children believes in the power of literacy to change lives and works alongside disadvantaged children who struggle to read and write. Its provision of one-to-one tuition and mentoring combined with whole school services for teachers and parents work together to help children unlock and realise their true potential.
www.springboard.org.uk
Tel: **020 7921 4550**

Parent Champions

Empowering Parents and Carers

Parent Champions is an initiative set up by the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust to support parents and carers of children with dyslexia and other specific learning difficulties.

www.parentchampions.org.uk is packed with lots of practical resources and a wide range of expert advice including five short films with 'Top Tips' on reading, writing, spelling, organisation and memory.

Parent Champions is about giving parents and carers ready, relevant information and a voice amongst specialist organisations and policy makers. You can join our national team of Parent Champions at **www.parentchampions.org.uk** . We are also on Facebook and Twitter where you can share ideas, get support, be in touch with Parent Champions from across the UK – and air your views on any issue that is important to you.

You can download this publication free of charge at **www.parentchampions.org.uk**

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