Advocating for your dyslexic child in Tasmanian schools

Developed by Square Pegs Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc. with support from the Department for Education, Children and Young People, Tasmania

Square Pegs
Dyslexia Support & Advocacy

This resource provides Tasmanian-specific information to help parents and families advocate for their child with a Specific Learning Disorder (SLD), including dyslexia and dysgraphia.

This information is also helpful for families of those children without a diagnosis, who are experiencing literacy challenges.

Please note, individuals within the dyslexic community have different preferences in terms of the terminology used to describe themselves and their diagnosis. This document uses identity-first language, e.g., dyslexic person, however it is best to check what each person prefers. Additionally, this document uses the term 'dyslexia' over its formal diagnostic term 'Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in reading'.

For a deeper dive into understanding dyslexia and the best approaches to identification, instruction and support, the free online AUSPELD resource **Understanding Learning Difficulties: A practical guide for parents**[1] is essential reading. Links to other useful resources are available on the **Square Pegs website**[2].

We acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal community as the continuing custodians of lutruwita (Tasmania) and honour Aboriginal Elders past and present.

We value the history, culture and strength of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, and commit to listen deeply to Story and be respectful of Country in our collaborations with First Peoples.

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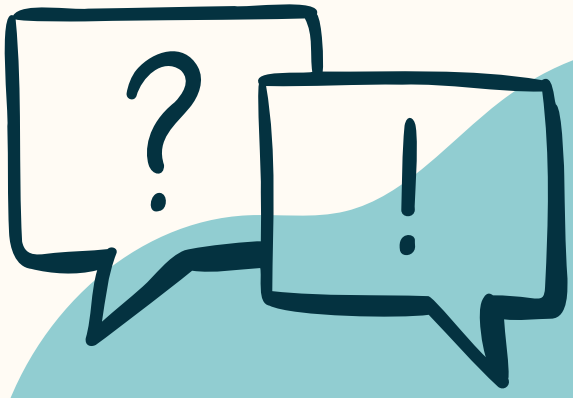


Lifting literacy for dyslexic kids

The Lifting Literacy framework, published in 2023, aims to raise the literacy rates of Tasmanians. The Tasmanian Government has committed to implementing the 23 recommendations made under the framework.

These guarantee that:

1. All schools will use a structured and explicit approach to the teaching of literacy. School principals are responsible for leading the changes in their schools and reporting on progress.
2. Reading instruction for all students will use evidence-based practices incorporating oral language, vocabulary, phonological awareness, phonics, comprehension, and fluency.
3. The National Year 1 Phonics Screening Check will be used in all schools to guide instruction. Schools will also have access to professional development in systematic phonics instruction.
4. An approach that recognises the need for additional time and support for some students will be adopted, with decisions on support based on rigorous assessments and monitoring of progress. Small group and 1:1 instruction will be provided to students requiring extra support, with the aim to transition back to whole class instruction.

The Government's commitment also includes improved access to allied health services, such as psychology and speech pathology, in all schools over the next few years.

This is all great news for dyslexic children. It's important to remember however, that some schools are further along on this journey, and some are just starting out.

You can find out more about the Lifting Literacy framework here[3].

What is my role as a parent?

The Lifting Literacy framework acknowledges the important role that families play in their child's learning and recognises that a partnership between educators and families is crucial. Knowing that you are an equal partner in this process will help you feel more comfortable, whether you are leading, prompting or being guided by, your child's school.

You know your child better than anyone and you will need to be an advocate for your child to ensure they receive the support they need to succeed. But what does this mean?

Advocacy has three elements:

Understanding your child's needs

Make sure you have a clear idea of the barriers or difficulties your child is facing. Educate yourself about dyslexia and talk to your child about how it impacts them.

Knowing what support might help

Understanding your child's needs will help you work out what is best for your child in the educational setting. It's important to keep an open mind because there might be solutions that you haven't considered. Look for quality information so that you can make an informed decision about what to do. And, importantly, know your child's rights.

Communicating these needs to others

Be solutions focussed. Offering solutions is more effective than criticizing. For example, you might say, 'My child finds it really tricky to copy text off the board. Can she use her device to photograph information on the board instead?'

Simply put, your role as an advocate is to make sure your child doesn't slip through the cracks in our busy schools and that responses to their learning challenges are timely, effective and targeted to your child's individual needs and circumstances.

While a young person often knows what they need to succeed, they may be reluctant to ask for help and often actively work to hide their difficulties. Empowering your child to self-advocate will help set them up for success in their future. There is more about this later.

While advocating for your child might seem overwhelming, you have the law, education policy, science, research and the hearts of good people on your side.

> **"At the start of each year, make sure your child's teacher is aware that your child has dyslexia, and understands some of the classroom strategies that will help (and benefit the other children in the class too). Don't assume this information is automatically passed on."**
>
> — Parent of a dyslexic child

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is the most common form of Specific Learning Disorder. Dyslexia involves challenges with reading accurately and fluently, alongside possible challenges with reading comprehension, spelling and writing. It can also involve difficulties with processing, attention, organisation and working memory. Dyslexia is unrelated to intelligence, hearing or vision.

The International Dyslexia Association[4] defines dyslexia as:

> … a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterised by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Other Specific Learning Disorders that have the potential to affect a student's school performance include:

Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in written expression, often referred to as dysgraphia

Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in mathematics, often referred to as dyscalculia.

Dyslexic individuals often have co-occurring conditions, such as ADHD or anxiety. It's important to watch out for signs that there may be more than one thing going on as these conditions may need a different approach and/or supports.

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD or dyspraxia) can also impact learning.

Signs of dyslexia

Specific learning disorder in reading (dyslexia) across the school years

Children who have a specific learning disorder with impairment in reading (dyslexia) will show some or many of the difficulties listed below. They may not display all of these characteristics.

1

Pre/Lower Primary School

- Difficulties with oral rhyming, syllabification, blending and segmenting of sounds in words
- Delayed speech and language development
- Limited spoken vocabulary
- Poor understanding of letter-sound links
- Difficulty in learning letter names
- Slow and inaccurate word recognition
- Inability to read nonsense words
- Difficulties understanding reading material
- Difficulties with tasks requiring reasonable working memory capacity – such as following instructions or remembering sequential information

2

Mid/Upper Primary School

- Reduced ability to isolate and manipulate individual sounds in words
- Difficulties holding verbal information (e.g. instructions) in working memory
- Slow to complete literacy-related tasks
- Reading is slow and laboured
- Visually similar words are often confused when reading
- Trouble decoding unfamiliar words
- Poor reading comprehension
- A lack of interest in or avoidance of reading tasks
- Ongoing difficulties in working memory

Secondary School

- Poor reading fluency
- Reduced reading comprehension (may need to re-read material many times to comprehend)
- Disorganisation and difficulties with planning
- Limited working memory
- Word finding difficulties
- A lack of interest in or avoidance of reading tasks
- Working memory difficulties may become more pronounced as the demands of schooling increase

3

*Reference: **Understanding Learning Difficulties: A practical guide for parents**[1], page 7*

Educating yourself about dyslexia is an important step to being an effective advocate for your child. AUSPELD also has an **online screening tool**[5] that can help parents make decisions about appropriate ways to support their child with possible learning difficulties. Although online screening tools cannot provide a formal diagnosis, this tool can provide advice on what to do next.

A word about terminology

It is important to know that the term 'dyslexia' will not usually be used in the early stages of communication between your child's school and you. There may instead be discussion about your child's literacy learning difficulties and perhaps a recommendation to refer your child to a psychologist or sometimes, a speech pathologist, for assessment. Even if a psychologist assessment shows that your child has dyslexia, the diagnostic report may not use that term. It will usually instead refer to a *Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) with impairment in reading*. This is the term that psychologists now use to in place of dyslexia. Similarly, a child having difficulties with writing might be diagnosed with a *Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in written expression*. This diagnosis was once referred to as 'dysgraphia'.

Know your child's rights

There are laws that mean a dyslexic child (or child with any other disability) has the right to participate and learn in schools on the same basis as other students.

1 Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE)[6]

The DSE helps education providers understand how to support students with a disability. The DSE talk about two important things:

- the rights of students with a disability
- what education providers must do.

Students do not always need to be diagnosed for this to apply to them. If a student is thought to live with a disability, based on reasonable grounds and supported by documented evidence, then they are also covered by this legislation. This is called an 'imputed disability'.

The DSE makes sure students can take part on the **same basis** as other students. This means that students with disability have the same rights as their peers to:

- enrol in education
- take part in learning experiences
- use support services

It does not mean that all students are treated the same; education providers must make reasonable adjustments to allow students with a disability to join in with their peers.

Education providers must follow the DSE.

2 The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)[7]

This Act makes disability discrimination unlawful except in certain limited circumstances.

The definition of 'disability' in the DDA is broad and does not rely on a formal diagnosis.

If a student with a disability is treated less favourably than a person without a disability because of the disability, that is **direct disability discrimination**.

Reasonable adjustments are any adjustments that could be made to 'enable the participation of a person with a disability that would not impose an unjustifiable hardship on the person providing them'. A failure to make reasonable adjustments to assist the person with disability is **indirect disability discrimination**.

3 Tasmanian Education Act 2016[8]

In this Act, the term 'disability':

a) is attributable to an intellectual, cognitive, neurological, psychiatric, sensory or physical impairment or a combination of those impairments; and

b) is permanent or likely to be permanent; and

c) results in –

   i) a substantially reduced capacity of the person for communication, learning or mobility; and

   ii) the need for continuing support services.

This means any Tasmanian student is entitled to appropriate instruction and adjustments from their school if they need it, no matter what school they attend.

4 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD)[9]

The Convention states that all people with all types of disabilities must have access to all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including access to education.

Article 24, 2 states:

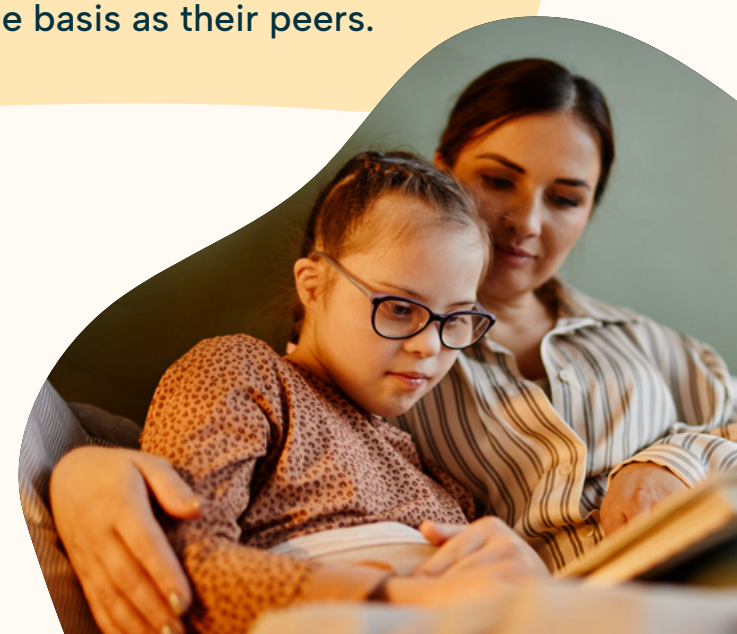
c) Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided

d) Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education

e) Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

This means dyslexic students should be supported to receive an inclusive education.

Your child's school ***must*** consider the strengths and challenges for your child and provide appropriate support so their learning needs may be met. This includes access to evidence-based instruction so they can learn to read and write, as well as adjustments so they can access the curriculum on the same basis as their peers.



Finding your voice

If you think your child is struggling at school … listen to your instincts. If you see some of the indicators listed in the earlier table, don't wait. Get in touch with your child's teacher, as early identification and support makes a big difference.

You may feel overwhelmed, as there is a lot of information to take in, and often the conversation is focussed on areas of weakness. Even with the most supportive of schools, raising your concerns or participating in meetings can sometimes be emotional, intimidating, and frustrating, but it can also feel good to know that supports are being put in place that will help your child.

Evidence shows that structured literacy is the most effective approach to teaching all students to read and write. If the teacher is using an evidence-based, structured literacy approach some dyslexic students can learn to read and write alongside their neurotypical peers. Other dyslexic students will need changes to the frequency, intensity or duration of their literacy instruction. This means they may need some additional teaching, in a small group or individually, over a longer period.

> **"I wasted so many years just skirting around the edges and not knowing what questions to ask, who to talk to and how to be heard. I knew something wasn't right, but I didn't know why."**
>
> — Parent of a dyslexic child

Additionally, dyslexic students may also need appropriate teaching adjustments (sometimes known as accommodations), so they can access all areas of the curriculum despite their literacy challenges. Effective adjustments might include modification to tasks, access to assistive technology or even somebody to read work aloud. More information about adjustments is included later.

Reaching agreement with your child's school on what is reasonable or appropriate for your child's circumstances is not always easy, and this is where your role as an advocate is important. If you're unsure, ask questions, so you are completely informed and can make valuable contributions and decisions.

Who do you talk to about your child's learning?

The following pages show the people who are available to support you and your child, from when literacy learning challenges first emerge, through the journey to diagnosis and development of a Learning Plan (LP), if needed.

In all cases, start with your child's teacher if you have concerns that:

- your child's reading and writing isn't improving
- your child is anxious about going to school
- your child avoids tasks with written language
- your child has difficulty concentrating
- your child is acting out, has low self-esteem or becomes withdrawn.

Find other staff members to talk to if:

- you don't understand what you're being told
- you feel like you're not being included in the decisions being made
- you feel like your concerns aren't being taken seriously.

Remember: If at any time you feel unsure about any conversation, ask clarifying questions or take your questions to another person. Do not settle for a way forward that doesn't allow your child to access to the instruction and adjustments they need.

Government Schools

There are key people in every Department of Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) school who can support your child if they are having difficulties with their learning. Not everyone will have the same level of knowledge or skill in supporting dyslexic students, so if you're not satisfied with the response you receive at any point, ask someone else. Keep asking until you are confident you're on the right track.

Teacher

If you are worried, or think there is something not quite right, speak to your child's teacher first. The teacher is also the most likely person to contact families if something doesn't seem right in the classroom. In high school this might be your child's homeroom teacher.

Additional specialist teachers

There may be specialist teachers within the school. This includes a Literacy Coach, who works alongside staff only, who oversee the implementation of the school's literacy program, or a Support Teacher, who supports teachers to support students with a disability. Enquire within your child's school about which specialists you may be able to speak with.

Grade/Year Coordinator, Assistant Principal, Principal

Depending on the school's size and context, it may have a senior staff member you can speak to. You can request an appointment to speak to a senior staff member about your child's learning, they will ask you to make sure you talk to your child's teacher first.

Inclusive Practice Team

The Inclusive Practice Team is a service for schools, to support their continual improvement in inclusive practice. This includes inclusive teaching strategies, and planning, implementing and evaluating strategies and supports for students with disabilities.

Catholic Schools

There are some key people in every Catholic school who can support your child if they are having difficulties with their learning.

Teacher

Your first and main contact is your child's teacher, or homeroom teacher in high school. Students who are not progressing as expected, despite quality differentiated teaching, may participate in further targeted instruction based on their need. Teachers can approach their **Student Support Coordinator (SSC)** to discuss your child's needs. The SSC has access to a School Service Leader, who can provide them with support.

Student Support Coordinator

There is an SSC in each school. This is a key person in the process, who can organise access to a quality intervention program, and complete some further assessment.

Year Coordinators and the School Leadership Team

These staff members can also be approached if you are not sure about the information you are given. You can ask to meet with a leader in the school who focuses on supporting students' learning.

Independent Schools

Each Independent School is governed by their own school Board and is different. The 'chain' of who you talk to in an independent school varies from school to school.

Teacher

In any independent school, you should start with your child's teacher. The school will have a process of referral to a specialist, which your child's teacher or homeroom teacher should know how to follow. If they don't, keep asking until you find an answer.

Inclusive Education Coordinator or Learning Support Coordinator

Each school is different, but they all have a staff member like this who can support the staff, and your child.

Year Level Coordinator

In larger schools, you can ask to talk to the person responsible for the Year. This person is usually in a leadership role and works closely with your child's teacher(s).

Principal and School Board

You can escalate your advocacy if you feel the staff working closely with your child are not responding to your child's needs.

What are some questions to ask?

Listed below are some possible questions you could ask to help you understand your child's needs, the instruction and adjustments they are currently receiving, and what additional supports might help.

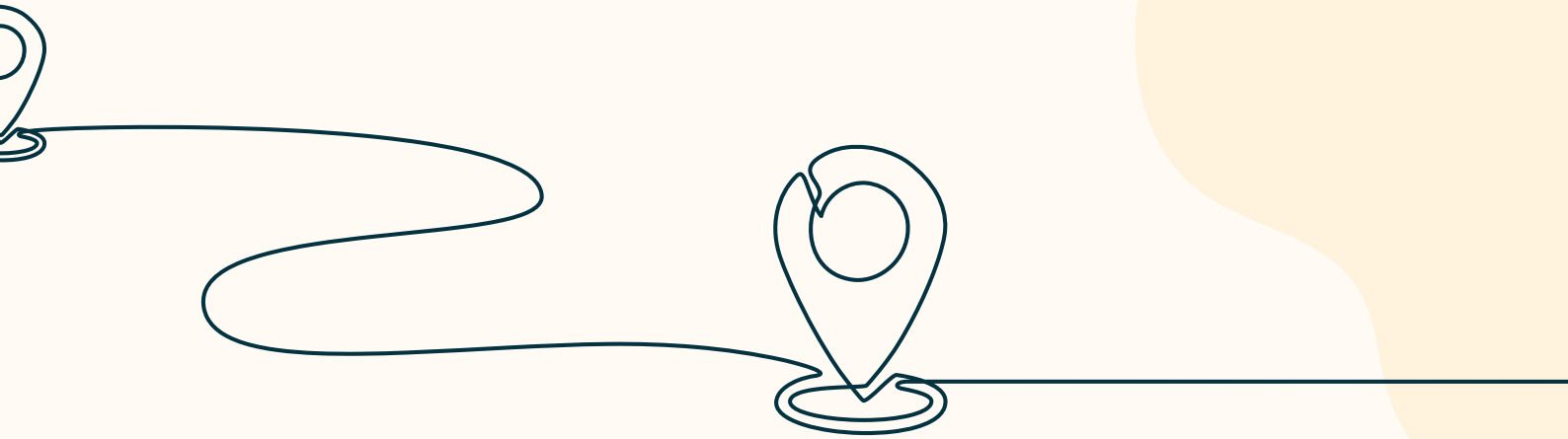
- "How is my child performing in reading and writing compared to their peers?"
- "Why do you think my child is struggling to develop their literacy skills?"
- "Is my child being taught using a structured literacy approach?"
- "What happens when my child doesn't respond to the instruction provided in class? Can they access small group work? What about individual instruction?"
- "How can I help at home?"

If you get answers that you don't understand or that are not satisfactory, **take your questions to someone else**. There will be different levels of understanding and expertise across staff and schools and talking to different people will help you find the person that you're most comfortable talking to and who is best able to help you.

Your child's teacher, or you (or your child), may realise more support is needed and work with you to put a learning plan (LP) in place. This is a document that outlines the instruction your child needs to develop their literacy skills. It will also describe the adjustments that the school can implement to help your child access the curriculum. The LP is an important record of the support that is being provided and is useful information if, or when, a formal assessment is completed. There is more information on developing LPs later.

Remember: A formal assessment, a formal diagnosis or individual funding is not needed to develop a Learning Plan.

The referral process



When you speak to your child's teacher, you may discuss referral for an assessment with a psychologist or speech pathologist. These are the professionals that can make a diagnosis; teachers cannot diagnose. Most families who suspect their child has dyslexia seek out a psychologist for an assessment. Please be aware, a dyslexia diagnosis from a speech pathologist is recognised within Catholic and independent schools. A speech pathologist diagnosis is not recognised within the government school system, unless supported by information from a formal cognitive assessment (by a psychologist).

A referral to an allied health professional is generally not made until after a period of 'evidence-based instruction', or at least six months of structured literacy. If this has not been implemented at your school, it may not be appropriate to seek an immediate referral.

> **"A teacher educated about dyslexia can be the one person who saves a child and their family from years of frustration and anxiety. That teacher can play a pivotal role in changing the whole culture of a school."**
>
> — Dr Kelli Sandman-Hurley[10]

Referral pathways

Possible referral pathways will depend on where you child goes to school. Below are the possible options:

Government schools

School staff are responsible for making referrals to professional support staff including school psychologists or speech therapists. Parents cannot make referrals but will need to provide written consent.

Catholic schools

Some Catholic schools have allied health professionals working as part of the school staff. Within most Catholic schools however, the SSC may make an application to the TCEO for funding for an assessment with a private psychologist or speech therapist.

Independent schools

Some independent schools have allied health professionals at the school and will guide you through the process of getting a formal assessment. Some independent schools, however, do not have access to these professionals. These schools can help you find private allied health professionals.

Regardless of which system your child is in, parents may consider the option of a private assessment. Make sure to request an estimated cost prior to going on any waitlists, as full assessments can be expensive. If opting for a private assessment, you may need to lead, rather than participate in the process. You may need to share any learning plans and school assessment information with the assessor prior to the assessment session(s) and pass along the report to the school afterwards. It will be up to you to make sure the school gets the information they need to support your child.

It can take a long time to get an appointment after a referral has been made. While you are waiting for the assessment, the school should not stop supporting your child. They should continue to deliver structured literacy instruction and provide appropriate adjustments. During this time, you may consider having your child's vision and hearing assessed to ensure another condition is not contributing to their learning challenges.

Identifying and diagnosing dyslexia

Once you have been through the referral process and your child has an appointment with a psychologist or speech pathologist, it is likely that they will collect some important background information about your child. The school should pass along any relevant documentation, including a copy of your child's Learning Plans, copies of any other professional reports, and any standardised assessment information. It is important that evidence showing your child has received at least six months of instruction be passed along.

It is likely that you will be contacted for additional information. This might be a face-to-face interview, or you may be asked to complete a questionnaire.

The actual assessment can take several hours to administer. It may take place over one extended session or be broken up into a few shorter sessions. Either way, your child will be able to take breaks when needed throughout the session. Parents do not usually attend assessment sessions.

The current guidelines for psychologists completing assessments state that Specific Learning Disorders with impairment in reading (dyslexia), written expression (dysgraphia); and mathematics (dyscalculia) are diagnosed through:

1. a review of the individual's developmental, medical, educational, and family history
2. reports of test scores and teacher observations
3. an evaluation of the individual's response to academic instruction.

In some cases, other tools may be used, including in-class observations and/ or checklists for you and your child's teacher to complete. A thorough assessment is important to accurately identify your child's learning strengths and challenges, consider whether a diagnosis may be appropriate, and make recommendations for the school and your family to implement. Once the report has been written parents usually meet with the psychologist for a feedback session. This may be over the phone if your child has been assessed by a government school psychologist. This is your opportunity to ask questions so make sure you speak up if there is anything you don't understand. Sometimes your child may also be invited to attend this session; sometimes a feedback session just for them is organised, or sometimes parents choose to discuss the results with their child themselves. It is crucial that your child develops a clear understanding of their diagnosis to preserve self-esteem, protect against possible mental health challenges and prepare for future self-advocacy. **Nessy**[11] has produced some great resources to help parents understand dyslexia, including information on **how to explain dyslexia to your child**[12].

Early identification of dyslexia is vital, and parents and teachers should not wait for a child to fail before they take action. In many cases, red flags for dyslexia are noticeable before Grade One, when children are beginning to learn the basic skills needed for reading. Teachers do not need to wait for a formal assessment to put support in place for your child. Your child should be accessing support while they are waiting for the assessment. If you are concerned that an assessment is being delayed, keep checking in on a possible timeframe. You may need to prepare yourself to feel like 'that parent' and be persistent!

More information about identifying a Specific Learning Disorder is included the AUSPELD resource ***Understanding Learning Difficulties: A practical guide for parents***[1].

What is structured literacy?

The evidence is clear that structured literacy is the most effective way to teach reading and spelling. This approach is also sometimes called evidence-based reading instruction or the Science of Reading. Structured literacy is explicitly, systematically and cumulatively taught. Progress is monitored in a diagnostic and responsive way to ensure all children learn to read. The Dyslexia SPELD Foundation (DSF) publication **Examples of high quality, evidence-based phonics programs and resources**[13] includes a list of high quality, structured literacy programs and resources.

Structured literacy instruction includes what teachers refer to as the 'Big 6' of reading:

1. **Oral language**
   understanding and using spoken English
2. **Phonological awareness**
   an awareness of the spoken sounds of English
3. **Phonics**
   the relationship between sounds and letters or letter patterns
4. **Vocabulary**
   knowledge of words meanings
5. **Fluency**
   reading expressively and at a good pace
6. **Comprehension**
   understanding what has been read

> **"They (children) have to learn how to read the words.** They have to get good at that, but learning how to read words is hard for a lot of kids. They need explicit instruction, repetition and practice before they can curl up in a cosy nook and read a book on their own. And I think people with good intentions wanted to get kids curled up with books in cosy nooks as fast as they could. They wanted to get kids to the good part. And they ended up teaching them shortcuts that don't get a lot of kids to where they need to go."
>
> — Extract from Transcript of Sold a Story E6: The Reckoning[15]

On the other hand, balanced literacy or whole-language approaches to teaching reading are not recommended as they do not have an evidence-base. Nessy has a useful video that explains the difference between structured literacy and whole language or balanced literacy here[14].

When students are identified as falling behind, they need to be provided with adequate support. All students should be provided with the opportunity to access high-quality classroom instruction, with additional targeted teaching offered to students who need it. Teachers should continuously monitor their students to identify learning gaps early on and arrange appropriate support immediately.

There are three tiers of support that should be available under the Lifting Literacy framework, with the intensity increasing depending on individual student needs:

Tier 1: High quality instruction (All students)

Learning gaps are prevented from arising by providing high quality, evidence-based instruction for all students.

Tier 2: Targeted and additional support (<15% of students)

Targeted and additional evidence-based support, usually in small groups, is provided to students who are at risk of falling behind.

Tier 3: Intensive individualised support (<5% of students)

Intensive support, often on a one-on-one basis, is provided to students who do not respond adequately to Tier 2 interventions.

> **"Going up to learning support and having 1:1 learning has definitely helped me a lot."**
>
> — A dyslexic child

If this approach isn't in place, ask why.

For more information about structured literacy check out The Reading League's Science of Reading: Defining Guide eBook[16].

Learning Plans

LPs should include students' current strengths, interests, challenges, learning goals and the adjustments needed to access the curriculum. They are essential for students who are working below the expected standard in one or more areas. LPs are a working document, so when goals have been met, new goals should be developed in their place, until supplementary support is no longer needed. The class teacher, parents/carers, additional specialist staff and the student (if appropriate) should be invited to have input into the LP. The school is responsible for implementing the instruction and adjustments as agreed upon in the LP.

Having an accurate, relevant, and current LP is vital so everyone working with your child is aware of the support they need and provide this with consistency. It will also be needed for an application for adjustments for external assessments when they reach Years 11 and 12 through the independent regulator, Tasmanian Assessments Standards Certification[17] (TASC).

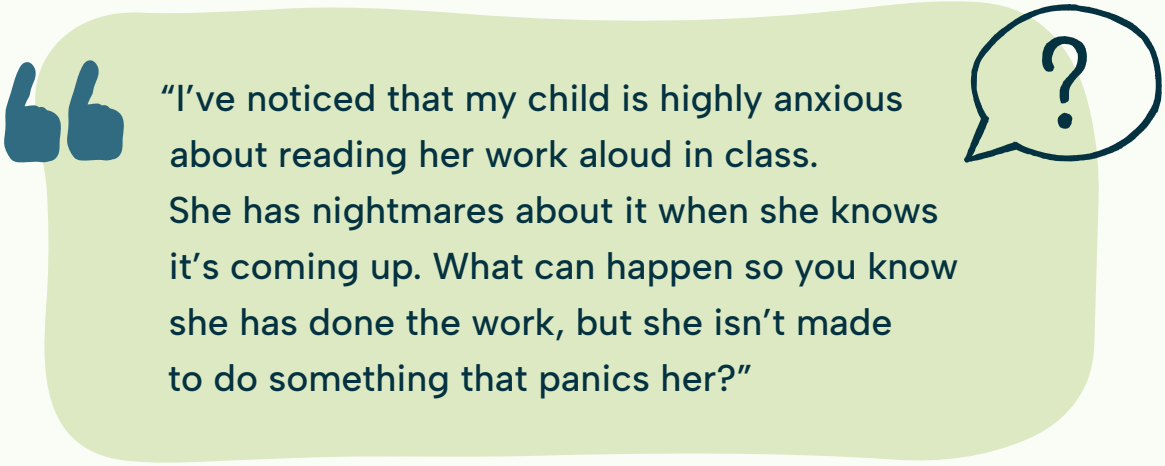
Additionally, schools use the information within LPs in the annual Nationally Consistent Collection of Data[18] (NCCD). This is a federal government requirement of schools to collect and share de-identified information about the adjustments they are providing to students with a disability. Funding provided to schools is based on this data. There is more information about this later.

Your child's school may suggest that your child does not need a learning plan as their learning needs as being met through 'Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice' (QDTP). This means that the class teacher is meeting your child's learning needs by providing evidence-based instruction and adjustments within the regular classroom, and they do not need any more intensive instruction. If this is the case, it is helpful to instead request a written summary of the QDTP adjustments the school are providing.

Preparation is key to developing a good LP and this is where understanding what will best help your child, and communicating this effectively, becomes important. Where possible, your child should be included in conversations about their learning. You know your child better than anyone and your views matter. It is equally important however to remember that school staff may see things at school that you do not, so try to be open to their observations as well. If you don't agree with something, communicate this and work together to find alternative solutions.

It's important to establish a partnership with your child's school. Always put the child at the centre of every conversation:

For example:



"I've noticed that my child is highly anxious about reading her work aloud in class. She has nightmares about it when she knows it's coming up. What can happen so you know she has done the work, but she isn't made to do something that panics her?"

Being organised and keeping a record of anything that is discussed or agreed with the school will help you to be an effective advocate. It is recommended that you buy a binder, or set up a digital folder, to store all the relevant information as you go along, such as school reports, assessments, learning plans, and emails. Make sure to request a copy of the minutes for any meetings. Organise follow up meetings to review your child's LP to make sure they are progressing as planned.

At times you may find that your child is not getting what they need at school. Teachers are responsible for many children and do their best with limited resources and pressed time. Adopting a mindset of a 'working partnership' with the school will help create a better environment for your child and keep the lines of communication open.

Learning plan goals

For dyslexic students, the **goals are one of the most important parts of a Learning Plan**. Your child's needs determine the goals, and the goals determine the support your child receives. Getting the goals right is very important, so your child gets the right support. There is no set number of goals that should be included in an LP however it is usually best practice to focus on a few goals (no more than five) and address these thoroughly rather than try to tackle everything at once.

Goals in LPs should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

Specific

What will your child aim to achieve? Make sure to only target one skill per goal.

Measurable

How will you know when your child has achieved the goal? Accurate and current data (not subjective descriptions) showing your child's current performance should be included. This should be used for comparison when the LP is reviewed.

Achievable

Is it realistic to think this goal could be met within the given time frame? What support is needed for your child to achieve this goal? Is this support available?

Relevant

Does the goal match your child's most important needs?

Time bound

When will this goal be achieved?

Reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes the school can make to ensure your child can participate and learn at school. They allow students to access their grade level curriculum.

A school doesn't have to make adjustments that are not reasonable for them to make. This is why you will hear or read the words 'reasonable' adjustments used by people in the school.

If a school, however, says they 'can't make adjustments', they must demonstrate why it is too hard to make them. **This is important information that parents or carers need to know.**

Your child's school must also think about how the adjustment will help your child participate and learn at school. In other words, the adjustments need to make sense and benefit your child – not just a random selection of adjustments that do not provide real benefit in your child's individual circumstances, or things that avoid the identified issues.

> "I work with a TA every day. They help me read questions and write words I don't know."
>
> — A dyslexic child

What is ‘reasonable’?

What is reasonable can be a matter of context or situation, so it is important to understand what helps most for your child and work with the school to help put these strategies in place. Be prepared for these discussions, with a list of solutions and goals.

Ask your child for their thoughts on what the barriers are, and what works best for them. Children can generate creative solutions to school issues and having your child come up with these solutions is also an essential part of building their ability to self-advocate.

Once in place, the agreed adjustments should be monitored closely. Changes should be made where an adjustment isn’t effective, or adjustments that are working well should be extended, where possible. It is also important that an adjustment isn’t replacing instruction or lowering expectations in terms of what your child can achieve academically. The adjustments should be designed to provide the support needed for your child to access the curriculum and achieve to their full potential.

Some of the following classroom adjustments may be offered routinely as part of 'Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice', or they might need to be included in your child's LP:

- 1:1 or small group support with an Education Assistant
- Allow more in-school time to complete written tasks
- Give frameworks, templates and models for writing tasks
- Allow student to read aloud with the teacher 1:1, instead of in front of peers
- Allow the use of a spell checker on an assignment when spelling is not being assessed
- Allow photographs to be taken of notes on the board
- Keep the amount of text to be copied to a minimum
- Provide a word bank or glossary of relevant terms
- Allow a reader for assessments
- Encourage the use of assistive technology for class work and assessments (where possible). This may include a C-pen or the text-to-speech and speech-to-text tools available on most laptops and tablets.

- Allow alternative ways for students to show learning, including oral or video presentations
- Allow access to audio books or graphic novels during independent reading time. Use written and audio text simultaneously for class novel studies.
- Create opportunities for a high level of repetition to reinforce learning
- Adjust the expectations of written tasks (i.e., fewer words, understanding over quantity)
- Provide feedback on one skill at a time, e.g., if working on spelling, avoid giving feedback on handwriting at that time to avoid cognitive overload
- Allow brain breaks, as needed
- Provide an individualised editing checklist for students to review before submitting work
- Minimise time spent on homework – the school day is already very tiring for dyslexic students
- Allow opportunities for students to explore areas of strength to build self esteem

Find out which teachers (if any) in your school have specialist training in learning difficulties or dyslexia – they may be able to help you to ensure that your class teacher has the knowledge and resources they need. If there are no trained teachers, encourage them to visit the Square Pegs website[2] for a comprehensive list of useful resources.

Funding

Tasmanian schools receive funding determined by the information collected in the annual Nationally Consistent Collection of Data[18] (NCCD). Schools must collect evidence of the support they have provided students in the last 12 months and categorise the level of support as Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice, Supplementary, Substantial or Extensive. The greater the level of support provided, the greater the level of funding they will receive. A thorough LP that outlines all the support a student is receiving is important so that schools can access funding to provide that support. Schools may use the funding in different ways, e.g., providing a C-pen for a student who struggles to read age-appropriate text, providing additional teacher assistant support to deliver a small group reading program, or funding the class teacher to complete professional learning on supporting dyslexic students.

Schools cannot wait for funding to be provided before they provide support for their students with a disability. If a child needs support outside what is offered within quality teaching practices of the classroom, there must be evidence that the support is in place before the school will receive additional funding. This also applies for students with a suspected disability.

More information on this funding model, specific to Tasmanian government schools, is available here[19].

What about the NDIS and Medicare?

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and Medicare don't directly cover the assessment of, or therapeutic supports for, dyslexia. Dyslexic individuals who have an additional diagnosis that ***is*** covered under the NDIS can use their funding to access support that aligns with their therapy goals.

If your child is diagnosed with another co-occurring condition, such as anxiety or depression, a mental health plan from your GP will enable you to receive Medicare rebates for psychological therapy. Please note that this funding cannot be used for educational assessments.

The importance of self-esteem and self-advocacy

While advocating for your child to be supported to achieve at school is vital, it's also important to give dyslexic learners time to build on their strengths and do those things that they most enjoy.

Self-esteem is critical and as parents we can provide opportunities for dyslexic children to recognise and grow their individual strengths and interests.

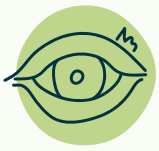
Dyslexic individuals often demonstrate skills in areas such as:

Material reasoning

The ability to understand the position, form, and movement of objects.

Interconnected reasoning

The ability to think about separate problems, ideas, and/or products, and recognize the potential in connecting and combining them.



Narrative reasoning

The ability to reason by using pieces of memory formed from past personal experience.

Dynamic reasoning

The ability to predict future events based on past trends and patterns.

Reference: Eide & Eide (2011)[20]

As with many of life's challenges, dyslexic children often develop a high level of empathy, resilience, and persistence which are also very valuable attributes.

Many dyslexic people go on to achieve great things. Some well-known dyslexic Australians include Jessica Watson (sailor), Jackie French (author), Vincent Fantauzzo (artist), Alex Edmonson (cyclist), Dr Cathy Foley (scientist), Professor Rufus Black (academic) and Greig Pickhaver (from Roy and HG). Richard Branson, Jamie Oliver, Keira Knightley, James Rallison and Magic Johnson are some successful dyslexic individuals from around the world.

In the early years of school, acceptance and nurturing are critical. No child should feel less than another because they haven't developed skills as quickly as their peers and it is often the parent or carer who does most of the advocacy on behalf of the child. Self-advocacy, however, is an important skill for even young dyslexic children to develop.

Understanding their strengths and weaknesses, what supports help them and being able to communicate this with confidence, will help to overcome some of the fear and frustration that they may experience. It will provide a sense of control of their environment. Self-advocacy will give your child greater confidence, self-awareness and success.

To start the path to self-advocacy, talk to your child about their experiences at school. What are the things they want their teachers to know about them and the way they learn? Your child's responses to this question can provide important information to include in their learning plan.

Sometimes it is hard for young people to know what to say. You could create a Learning Passport which summarises key information. Square Pegs has a free template here[21].

It may also be helpful to rehearse some sentence starters for common situations students may face.

1 *I need help*

The situation:

The teacher explains a task too quickly, and your child is having a hard time making sense of the written notes.

Your child could say:

> Can I talk to you about what I should be doing? I need to talk through the directions.

2 *It's part of my learning plan*

The situation:

A relief teacher doesn't realise you child listens to audiobooks during reading time and asks your child to read a printed book without audio.

Your child could say:

> I have dyslexia and audiobooks make it easier for me to understand the text. Using audiobooks is part of my learning plan.

3 *I don't want to stand out*

The situation:

Your child is upset that other kids are reading chapter books, and they are reading 'baby books'.

After class, your child could say:

> I don't want to stand out from my classmates. Can you help me find books that I can read, about things that interest me?

Reference: Morin (n.d.)[22]

Need help to advocate?

Building a positive relationship with your child's teacher and school is crucial, but sometimes when we're really worried about something it can be hard to communicate effectively. It's ok to ask for help to have these conversations.

It may be useful to take a friend or family member to these meetings. Or, if you are finding it challenging to be heard or to effectively communicate your child's needs, you could consider seeking an independent advocate to help you. An advocate can provide information and help you work through the issues. More information about access to advocacy services can be found here[23]. You can also visit the Square Pegs website[2] for a list of disability advocates.

> **"Dyslexia gives people distinctive ways of thinking about the world."**
>
> — Professor Rufus Black, Vice-Chancellor, University of Tasmania

Complaints processes

If possible, it is best to try and resolve any issues early, through conversations with the teacher, support staff and school leadership team. If you feel, however, you have exhausted all options for working with your child's school and remain dissatisfied with the outcomes, there are formal complaint processes available to you. If your child is at a government school, you can find more information here[24]. For Catholic schools, information is available in the Complaints Management Policy and Complaints Management Procedure documents found here[25]. If your child attends an independent school, the Non-government Schools Registration Board is your point of contact. Information is available here[26].

If you believe you or your child have been treated unfairly because of their diagnosis and you have worked through the complaint process but remain dissatisfied with the actions, decisions or conduct of the governing body, you can raise this with Equal Opportunity Tasmania – the office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. More information is available here[27]. You must make the complaint within 12 months of the discrimination happening. There is no fee for lodging your complaint. Alternatively, complaints can be made to the Australian Human Rights Commission. More information is available here[28].

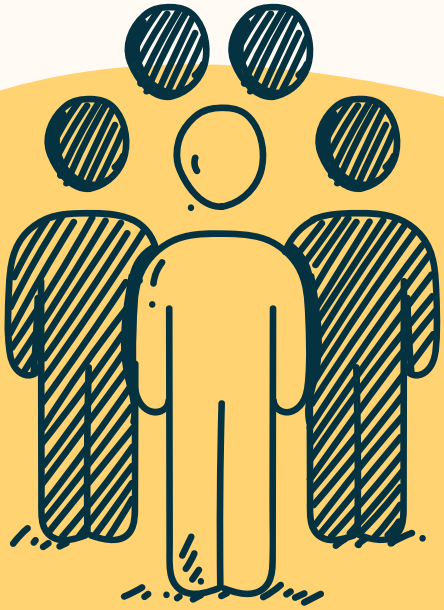
You're not alone

One of the most important steps to being an effective advocate is looking after yourself and asking for help. We encourage you to find other parents and families going through to a similar journey to talk to. And, there are lots of us!

Dyslexia impacts at least 10 per cent of the population, so there are bound to be a few families in your school or area. Or, subscribe to the Square Pegs newsletter[29] or Facebook page[30] to keep informed about upcoming parent meetings or other events to help you connect with a supportive community.

Watch Beautiful Minds[31]; a short film created by Square Pegs which shares the experience of dyslexic Tasmanians. And, there are more personal stories on our website.

> "Behind every successful dyslexic is a parent who never gave up."



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Developed by Square Pegs
Dyslexia Support and Advocacy Inc.
with support from the Department
for Education, Children and
Young People, Tasmania

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