

1. Five ways to support your child with dyslexia at home

by Karen Mace - Head of Assessment, Education and Training, British Dyslexia Association

As a parent or carer of a young person with dyslexia, you are wearing many hats. In addition to all the work you were doing to support them emotionally and academically, you are now playing the role of teacher and dyslexia specialist.

In 2019, a survey for the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Dyslexia and other SpLDs found that 95 percent of parents and carers felt they lacked the skills and knowledge to support their dyslexic child. So, if you're struggling with your new roles, the most important thing to remember is, don't worry, you're not alone and it's perfectly normal to find supporting a dyslexic child's learning difficult.

There are some simple ways you can make home schooling more effective and enjoyable for you and your dyslexic child. Here are our top five.

1. Get a routine

For most people, routine is important but for learners with dyslexia and other neurodiverse conditions, it is even more critical.



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A good starting point is the creation of a visual timetable for each day, which will create structure and enable your child to have a clear vision of the day ahead. This ideally would include the use of relevant pictures and colour and these would be used consistently so the child identifies with them.

Once a timetable has been prepared, it's time to think about where the learning will physically take place. For some learning, you may need a table, but an outdoor space or floor space may also be useful for certain situations – the location of these should be outlined in the timetable.

2. Decide what to teach

The next step is to spend some time getting to know what learning level your child is at. The work should challenge them but not be inaccessible to them.

Bear in mind that every child is different and even more so for a learner with dyslexia who is likely to be at different stages in different topics. Also, remember their ability may be reflected in spoken rather than written work.

When deciding on what to learn, your child's interests and strengths should be a large factor. Yes, there are things your child will have to learn, regardless of whether they enjoy it or struggle with it, but don't fixate on these. Give opportunities to learn about topics that your child enjoys and can do well, as this will help them stay motivated. Also include non-curricular activities and life skills such as cooking, sewing and gardening.

3. Teach using a 'multisensory' approach

Multisensory simply means using more than one of a child's senses at a time. Because of the way the dyslexic brain works, learning this way is far more effective.

For example, if your child just reads a book they are using one sense, sight. But if they read along with an audiobook, they are using two senses, sight and hearing. This would be multisensory learning and would mean your dyslexic child absorbs and retains the information in the book far better.

An activity should include at least two senses –seeing something (visual), hearing something related to what is seen (auditory), some form of related movement of muscles, for example speaking or writing (kinaesthetic), and touching or feeling something (tactile).

Here is an example of how you might apply multisensory learning if your child needed to do some alphabet work:

- ○ Lay out an alphabet arc by putting the letters of the alphabet into an arc shape.
- ○ Sing the alphabet song while touching each of the letters in turn.
- ○ Discover the letter being introduced by taking items out of a bag that begin with the same letter.
- ○ The learner feels the objects, names them and pulls them out to check if they are right.
- ○ Identify the target sound and letter name.
- ○ Demonstrate how to form the letters on a whiteboard.
- ○ The learner explores forming the letter in sand, shaving foam, wiki sticks or similar.

Multisensory learning is useful for children of any age. For an older child, multisensory teaching can be as simple as, instead of getting them to read a book about Ancient Egypt, do a virtual tour of the British Museum and discuss the topic with them as you take a virtual walk through their Ancient Egypt galleries. At the moment, lots of galleries and museums are offering free virtual tours on their websites. There is lots of information out there on multisensory teaching.

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4. Embrace technology

Nowadays, there are so many free features embedded in our computers, tablets and smartphones that can make a huge difference to young people with dyslexia.

In particular the ones to look out for are text to speech features, which read out written words on the device; speech to text, which allows your child to dictate their work to a device; and advance spelling and grammar checkers. All the big technology companies have these features now and you will find lots of information out there about how to use them to support dyslexic learning.

Learning to touch type is one of the big skills that we find helps young people with dyslexia in education and on into the workplace. Lockdown is the perfect time for your child to start one of the great touch-typing programmes out there. There are many free options available including the [BBC's Dance Mat Typing](#). Young people with dyslexia, whilst they might not necessarily enjoy reading books, often take to listening to audiobooks and find a love of literature that way. With many audiobook companies offering free children's books during the school closures, now is a good opportunity to try audiobooks with your child. This would be a fabulous activity to do as a break from other learning or at the end of the day.

5. Don't overload your child

If you have been having to do a full school day at home, you will have realised that it is not a good idea. Learning one on one or small groups is much more intense than a normal school day. This is exacerbated for a dyslexic learner, because of way the dyslexic brain works, they tire faster.

It's much better to get a smaller amount of quality teaching time in each day, than fight to hit a six- or-seven-hour day because you feel you should match the school day.

Don't ignore that the COVID-19 lockdown is a psychological challenge for all of us. Learning at this time will inevitably be different and it is likely that at times you will need to prioritise mental health over keeping up with schoolwork. That is absolutely the right thing to do.

Karen Mace is Head of Assessment, Education and Training at the British Dyslexia Association. She has 25 years teaching experience in primary schools – both in the UK and abroad – including four years as a deputy headteacher and seven years as a SENCO.

If you're looking for more on dyslexia and how to support your child, the British Dyslexia Association website is full of practical information and includes the latest information on the support available for parents during the school closures.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z6mts4j>

See also: [More from our SEND collection Parents' Toolkit](#)