Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and ADHD

Key Characteristics and Strategies to Support

Common Characteristics

Dyslexia	Dysgraphia	ADHD
Slow/difficult reading	Difficulty with writing	Live in the NOW
Poor phonemic awareness (ability to think about the sounds in words)	Poor graphomotor (printing/handwriting skills)	Impulsive / Act without forethought
Difficulty decoding (sounding out words) / Stuck with sound by sound decoding	Difficulty with written organization and expression even though have good ideas when speaking	Trouble looking into the future to predict consequences. Don't seem to learn from the past
Difficulty remembering sight words	Poor punctuation, spelling, and grammar in writing	Poor sense of time passing /time orientation
Write with words they can spell so writing far below level of oral language	Write with words they can spell so writing far below level of oral language	Easily bored/ Sensitive to distractions
Strong visual-spatial thinking	Too tight or too light pencil grip and pressure	Trouble organizing tasks and activities
Creative talents/problem-solving abilities	Awkward or unusual wrist, body, or paper position when writing	Excessive movement / unawareness of movement
Poor reading comprehension in spite of good comprehension abilities	Poor spacing and letter formation/ Letter and number reversals	Often loses things or is forgetful
May have difficulty sequencing or organizing thoughts when speaking	Write slower than typical same-age students. Frequent erasing.	Intense and often creative
Strong negative emotion around reading and writing, even if can do it	Mixed upper and lowercase letters	Poor follow through and task completion
Omits, moves, changes small common sight words (the, of, if)	Frustrated with writing	Trouble holding attention and poor attention to detail
Avoid reading aloud	Avoid writing tasks	Avoids/reluctant to do tasks that require mental effort over time
Ambidextrous	Ambidextrous	Appears to not listen
Avoidance of schoolwork	Avoidance of schoolwork	Avoidance of schoolwork
Low self-esteem	Low self-esteem	Low self-esteem
Poor attention/distractibility with homework, schoolwork, and reading/writing related tasks	Poor attention/distractibility with homework, schoolwork, and tasks involving writing	Attention challenges pervasive and noticeable throughout day.

Perspective

Kids do well when they can. When they can't, there are typically under-developed or weak underlying skills that are not supporting them well enough.

A learning difference or attention challenge takes a great amount of mental energy and effort to cover, cope with, or manage. As parents and teachers, a first step to supporting these students is empathy and recognition and respect for the effort.

Strategies for Supporting Dyslexic Students

Context

Help dyslexic students take advantage of their strong comprehension and reasoning abilities by putting lectures, stories, and chapters into context before teaching or reading.

Teach students how to preview a chapter to get the general overview before reading.

Encourage them to read the title and synopsis before reading a fictional story or book.

Alternatives to Written Reports

Dyslexic thinkers often have talents in creative arts. Give them the opportunity to shine by allowing alternatives to written reports at times. You don't have to figure out the project; just give them parameters and let their creative brain do the work.

Audiobooks

Help students to access and use audiobooks in order to keep up with textbook reading.

Graphic novels / Materials

Using materials with photos, images, or cartoons support reading and are a better match for the dyslexic thinking style.

Tests

Read content tests or test items to them when it appears that reading will interfere with their ability to show what they know.

Don't penalize for spelling errors on content area tests or papers.

Cross Crawls

Cross Crawls activate both hemispheres of the brain to increase energy, focus, and clarity. When a student starts making a lot of mistakes, is losing focus, or is having trouble transitioning, cross crawls provide a good reset.

Cross Crawls support reading and writing fluency and attention.

Neurological Impress Reading (Teacher/Parent-Guided NIR)

The instructor sits across from the student. The instructor points to each word with finger above the word, and the student points below the word. Read slowly together using appropriate phrasing and intonation. It is okay if the student says the word after the instructor, but he must accurately say each word while pointing to it. Tap twice at each punctuation mark.

Neurological Impress Reading with Visualizing at Punctuation

The instructor and the students point to each word and read slowly orally together, using appropriate phrasing and intonation. The instructor is the guide so students must go at the instructor's pace. This focuses the eyes and attention on each word, supporting word recognition and comprehension.

Students will tap twice at each punctuation mark. This calls attention to the punctuation and gives students a chance to mentally regroup and think about what they are reading.

The instructor will question the students to see if they have created a mental image from the phrase or sentence just read. Do as much or as little questioning as needed to be sure that the students are imaging as they are reading. This will interrupt the flow of the reading at first, but gradually, the students will be able to mentally check their own images at each punctuation mark, without having to stop and discuss them.

This technique improves orientation and synchrony between what the student is seeing and saying when reading. In addition, it helps students consciously focus on creating images as they are reading. This is a critical factor in reading comprehension.

When students get comfortable with this technique, they can use it independently, reading orally or silently for studying and test taking by pointing to each word as they orally or mentally say it and tapping twice at punctuation and visualizing. This increases accuracy and attention to words and meanings.

Strategies to Support Students Struggling with Dysgraphia

Lazy 8

Before writing, have the student draw a small infinity sign or "lazy 8" with their finger or pencil, starting in the middle and drawing up to the left. Trace the sign 8-10 times. This helps integrate right and left hemispheres for writing.

5-Minute Power Writing Strategy

Principles:

- It is easier to write from a question than a statement
- The faster you write, the better you write
- This gives you a way to break writing into small manageable chunks so it doesn't drag or feel overwhelming.

Rules:

- Start with 3 power words (nouns or verbs) about the topic
- Your first word in your first paragraph must be one of the 3 power words.
- The other 2 words must appear in the first paragraph.
- Write for 5 minutes without stopping. No editing, erasing, or going back. No stopping to think.

Steps:

1. Take your main idea sentence or topic and turn it into a question.
2. Visualize the answer to the question.
3. Write 3 power words (nouns or verbs) that will help answer the question
4. Write for 5 minutes following the rules.
5. At the end of 5 minutes, edit, extend, and clarify the sentences.
6. Proofread with COPS.

COPS Proofreading Strategy

Here's a simple technique to help writers of any age become more independent in proofreading their written work.

Have the student write COPS on a 3x5 card or at the top of her paper. Explain what each letter in the acronym stands for and walk through the process together with everything the student writes, even single sentences. Very quickly, most students will begin to apply COPS all on their own.

COPS stands for:

- **C**apitalization
- **O**verall Appearance (Spacing; clean, clear, well-formed letters; mistakes erased completely)
- **P**unctuation
- **S**pelling (Have the student check spelling by starting with the last word in the sentence or paragraph. This takes the words out of context. The student should check to see if the word "sounds right" and "looks right.")

Have students go through each sentence checking for **C**apitalization. When done, they get to check off the **C**. Then check for **O**verall appearance, checking it off when done. Go on to **P**unctuation, followed by **S**pelling.

Strategies for Supporting Students with ADHD

Time Timer: Use a time timer to make time visible and build time awareness and orientation

Get in the Zone: Help the student to develop awareness of whether their energy and focus are too intense or too low.

Lowering the level of arousal: Our eyes and our breath are the two ways that we can consciously control our physiological stress response. When we step outside or walk forward, our eyes get a wider view and start to scan horizontally. This immediately down regulates the nervous system.

Breathing in through the nose and taking long exhales through the mouth is also a signal that tells the sympathetic nervous system to settle.

Increase level of arousal: Take long inhales and breathe out quickly. This increases mental energy and alertness.

Movement Minute: Movement is a proven stimulus for learning and attention. Even a little bit of movement, standing up and stretching, makes a difference.

Forethought: Help students develop forethought by having them visualize and verbalize exactly what they are going to do before they do it. This will take a great deal of practice, but the increased awareness and the ability to stop and think before acting will help reduce impulsivity and increase self-awareness and attention. This takes lots of practice and direction at first!

Problem-Solve Together:

Help students develop executive function by problem solving together.

1. Listen, observe, and explore to understand the student's perspective on a given, specific issue.
2. Share your concern or perspective without judgment and without giving advice or solutions.
3. Brainstorm, visualize, and dialogue about possible solutions.
4. Together choose one that meets both needs.
5. Commit to trying it.
6. Check back to see how it worked and modify as needed.

Get to the root of learning and attention challenges

Talk with a learning specialist. Testing and programs are available in person or remotely, for children, teens, and adults.

Schedule a Free Call

(877) 774-0444

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