

Deepening our Awareness of Dyslexia

Welcome to Module 10 of your SEN toolkit!

In this module we look specifically at Dyslexia, what it is, how to recognise it, how it affects people and what that might mean in your classroom.

Deepening our awareness of dyslexia is crucial, not only to bringing the best out of dyslexic learners, but to preventing the emotional and psychological toll of an education system that has previously failed to understand their unique learning style.

Aims

By the end of this module, I will be able to:

- understand why dyslexic learners have specific social and learning needs
- further adapt my practice to accommodate the specific learning needs of dyslexic learners
- take action to unleash the potential of dyslexic thinking



Understanding what's at stake

In this section you will discover some of the difficulties those with dyslexia are likely to face during education, if we don't create an inclusive learning environment.

Understanding the impact of Dyslexia on mental health can give us insights into some of the emotional repercussions unique to each dyslexic student.

Most dyslexic students learn early on to mask their difficulties and find strategies to keep themselves under the radar but, in reality, their internal dialogue is flooded with negative self-talk, frustration and anxiety. When experienced repeatedly over time, being unable to grasp the mechanics of a task can lead to symptoms that are in the same range of impact as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

<https://www.nationaleducationshow.com/dyslexia-and-mental-health/>

Current research indicates that as many as 20% of children with dyslexia also suffer from depression and yet another 20% suffer from an anxiety disorder. Many dyslexics (young and old) use self-harming strategies to try to cope with the emotional effects of constant failure in educational settings, as well as the direct and indirect bullying they experience from both teachers and their peers.

Scott R (2004) *Dyslexia and Counselling*. Whurr, London

Willcutt, and Gaffney-Brown 2004 "Social and Emotional Problems Related to Dyslexia." LD Topics | LD OnLine. Web. 15 Feb. 2017.

In a study by Alexander-Passe on self-harm and suicidal thoughts and attempts, half the dyslexic population studied regularly thought about suicide and less than half went on to actually attempt suicide. These thoughts, along with the high frequency of helplessness, suggest that suicide was viewed by many as an option open to them to cope with the pressures from schoolwork and that they felt their parents and teachers misunderstood what they were going through.

Alexander-Passe N (2015) *Dyslexia: Investigating Self-Harm and Suicidal Thoughts / Attempts as a Coping Strategy*. J Psychol Psychother. 5: 224. doi:10.4172/2161-0487.1000224

To get a better idea of some of these issues, **match the following terms to their definition:**

1. Learned helplessness

2. Generalized anxiety

3. Phonological Decoding

4. Extrinsic motivation

5. The Halo effect

6. Negative feedback loop

a) a cognitive bias that can possibly prevent someone from accepting a person based on the idea of an unfounded belief on what is good or bad.

b) what happens when the brain gets used to feeling a certain way and starts going there more and more because it's familiar and easy to get to.

c) a strategy that involves engaging in a behaviour in order to earn a reward or avoid punishments.

d) a conditioned response to continual failure that creates cognitive, motivational, and emotional deficits in children.

e) a normal human flight-or-fight response to a fearful / stressful situation.

Answers

1d, 2e, 3f, 4c, 5a, 6b

Reflexive questions

Learned helplessness occurs when dyslexic students learn through failure that there's no point trying so they develop self-defeating strategies that impact on their ability to learn.

Students with dyslexia face daily tasks that they find extremely difficult. When generalized anxiety is experienced, it is common to avoid the situation as a protective response. Avoidance behaviour can be interpreted as laziness or misbehaviour and may result in school refusal and learned helplessness.

Many dyslexic students lack the ability to phonologically decode, which can lead to a frustrating lack of comprehension.

Extrinsic motivation, when used appropriately, can encourage dyslexic students and enable positive associations to be made with school work, homework and classroom time.

The halo effect theory suggests that teachers tend to be influenced by their previous judgements of performance or personality.

Negative feedback loops are created over time but they can be broken or lived with more easily aside newly created and reinforced positive feedback loops.

Can you think of any occasions when you have seen this among your SEN - or indeed any - students?

It's not all bad news! There are also a multitude of high profile dyslexia success stories which can offer hope to students and their parents.

Do you want to know 10 dyslexic Oscar winners? Be ready to be surprised! (either external link or use information with reference) https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/personal-stories/famous-people/10-oscar-winners-with-dyslexia?_ul=1*i22816*domain_userid*YW1wLWk0eEpiWFfpWXdUcWZwaS1MUUlwV2c.

Now you've read the stories of these Oscar winners, what are the stories that already exist in your classroom? What's the next chapter of their story?

Short story: Charlie's Christmas

You are about to read a story about a boy - we've called him Charlie, but haven't given his family name - who is at risk of having a very special time in his life spoiled by the difficulties he's struggling with at school.

What signs of depression, anxiety or self-harm have you observed in your classroom? Note them down. Read the following short story and note any signs that match your own.

It's the last day before the Christmas break and the school has taken on a festive air, tinsel and decorations garnishing the hallways, a majestic Christmas tree in the foyer surrounded by excited children. Other children run happily here and there, throwing their school books in the air in the universal gesture of "free at last". Laughter rings out from every corner.

Little Charlie Smith sits by himself in a high-backed chair, balancing himself on the edge, outside Ms Lawson's classroom, waiting to be called. Charlie was diagnosed with dyslexia two years ago but his life was hell long before that. The other children have nicknamed him "Dys-miss" and he cringes each time they taunt him, which is often. At this very moment, his face is set in his habitual grimace of dread and resignation. His legs, dangling from the edge of the chair, start to twitch and jerk from pent-up emotions. He hears his name called.

Ms. Lawson has had a rough day and Charlie is the last of her appointments before setting off for home and holidays. His detached attitude, his refusal to look her in the eye and his perceived sullenness almost bring her to the

breaking point as she remonishes him for falling behind in certain subjects. As her voice is raised higher and higher, Charlie seems to shrink inside himself. His muscles clench, his throat goes dry and he forces back the tears. His blood is pounding so hard in his ears that all he hears is blah, blah, blah.

She makes him stay behind one hour to catch up. He asks himself "How am I supposed to catch up? If I couldn't do it before, how can I do it now?". His whole body trembles with frustration. The few friends he does have have already left to make snow angels in the park. He looks blankly at the schoolwork in front of him and wonders why he even bothers. He'll never be able to finish it. Tears roll down his cheeks.

When he arrives home an hour later, he has to face his parents and explain why he is late yet again. Feelings of shame now double, triple to the point that he can barely breathe. Luckily, Charlie's parents do their very best to understand and, once again, talk their boy down from the ledge. They are genuinely scared for their son's future but the school is not listening. Despite all the meetings and phone calls, the teachers continue to reinforce a negative feedback loop that traps Charlie in a never-ending circle of confusion, anxiety and despair.

Charlie's dad takes him aside and tells him to forget about school work for a while and go outside and try to enjoy the holidays. Charlie sighs, looks up at his father and says "Dad, is the rest of the year going to be as bad as this term?". They look at each other knowingly and bow their heads in unison.

While Charlie is playing outside with his siblings and friends, his father decides to call the school.

Reflexive questions

What reassurances could you give this worried parent?

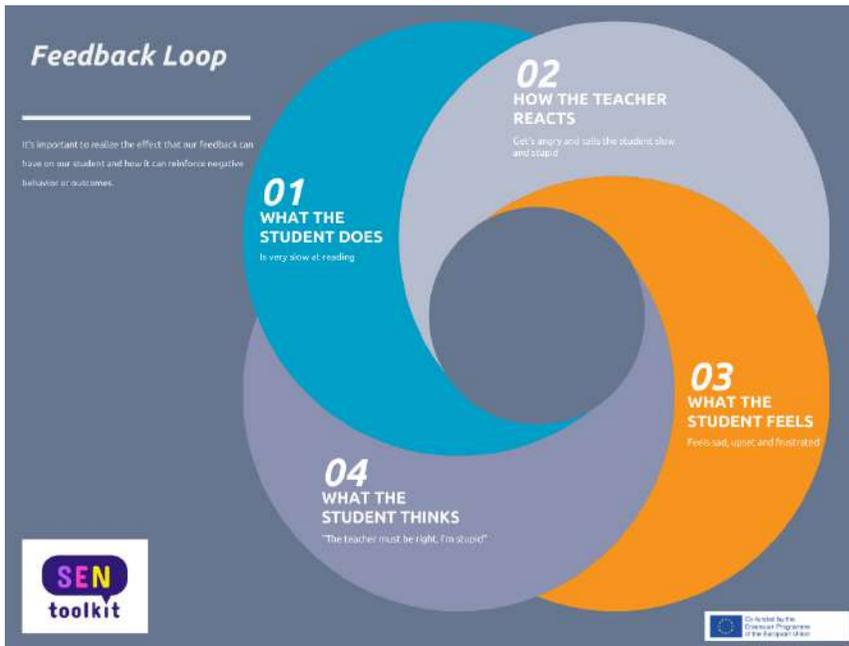
How would you alleviate some of the child's stress associated with going back to school after the holidays? What words would you use?

A raw deal from education?

According to a study carried out by the European Commission in 2013 entitled “Special Needs Children and Disabled Adults Still Getting a Raw Deal from Education” (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleaseAction.do?reference=IP/12/761&format=HTML&ages=0&language=en>), dyslexic students frequently leave school early before they can realize their potential and with few qualifications and are therefore much more likely to become unemployed or economically inactive. It is not necessarily the learning disability itself that causes the high dropout rate. The issue comes when the teachers do not know how to effectively harness the many sometimes hidden talents of the dyslexic brain.

Study the visual below and reflect upon why “traditional” ways of dealing with the mental health of dyslexic students are not working.

Part 1: Image: “Feedback Loop”



Misconception Quiz

Now see if you can answer these questions correctly:

1. Negative thoughts need to be pushed away

- a) True b) False

2. Negative feedback loops are not consciously controlled by students.

- a) True b) False

3. All negative feedback loops can be broken.

- a) True b) False

4. Suicide ideation is a common type of negative feedback loop.

- a) True b) False

Answers

- The correct answer is 'false'. Students need to be told that it's ok to accept these thoughts in order to take away their power.
- The correct answer is 'true'. Conscious teacher intervention can reverse the negative feedback loop.
- The correct answer is 'false'. This process takes time. Even if negative feedback loops are not totally broken, they can be lived with, without constant distress.
- The correct answer is 'true'. Self-harming strategies are a way for the dyslexic student to cope with generalized anxiety, depression and low self-esteem.



Flipping the Narrative

Think of 10 things that you do in everyday life that involve reading (tell the time, read a bus schedule, a recipe, check social media...).

Now, for each one, think of 2 possible consequences of not reading it correctly. Stressful, isn't it?

Now look at these common situations that cause anxiety for dyslexic students and, using what you have learnt in this module, think of how you could flip these "negatives" into "positives".

<p>Negative situation</p> <p>a) Students are taking turns reading aloud</p>	<p>Positive situation</p> <p>E.g, one student reads the text while the dyslexic student(s) illustrates the story on the whiteboard.</p>
<p>Negative situation</p> <p>a) a Dyslexic student is continually late</p>	<p>Positive situation</p>

<p>Negative situation</p> <p>c) Checking reading comprehension</p>	<p>Positive situation</p>
<p>Negative situation</p> <p>d) a Dyslexic student is restless and disturbing the class</p>	<p>Positive situation</p>
<p>Negative situation</p> <p>e) a long text needs to be studied</p>	<p>Positive situation</p>

Possible answers

- a) one student reads the text while the dyslexic student(s) illustrates the story on the whiteboard or puts up large emoji stickers to represent the emotions in the text
- b) help them set up several alarms on their mobile phone with different ringtones to associate with different stages of getting to class on time





- c) connect the text with emotions. Ask how do you feel? instead of “What do you think?”
- d) 5-minute full class yoga break with belly breathing. You can also start or end the class with yoga.
- e) set up the dyslexic student to have the text on a computer where they can adapt font, spacing and colors and use colors to highlight and separate parts of the text.

Now you take one of your favorite pages / activities / resources and flip it!

Negative	Positive
Negative	Positive



10 Strategies to help dyslexic learners manage their stress and anxiety

Read the checklist below and pick the strategies that may be relevant for your classroom. When you've finished, add your own strategies to the checklist.

- 1 Play easy, fun interactive computer learning games with the whole class
- 2 Every day, ask students to describe what they did just before coming into class to help with time management difficulties
- 3 Let pupils record their work and homework on their mobile or computer, rather than writing it all by hand
- 4 Reduce noise distractions in the classroom
- 5 Provide reminder cards on which you've written the important points of the lesson or homework and when it is due
- 6 Play throwing-and-catching games at the start of the day
- 7 Present material verbally but supported by visual materials (the dual-coding method)
- 8 Practice mindfulness in the classroom

- 9 Use coping cards - a set of small cards or a little booklet with strategies for the student to control their anxiety, designed in conjunction with the student.
- 10 Use as many of the senses as possible at the same time, consequently tapping into more areas of the dyslexic brain so learning and memory can more effectively take place.

How will decreasing the stress and anxiety impact on your classroom, as a whole, over time? What will each strategy do?

Check your understanding

Take a short quiz to check you've understood the main points of the module.

1. The generalized anxiety, frustration even PTSD that dyslexic students often suffer from commonly leads to....

- a) laziness
- b) avoidance behavior
- c) misbehavior

2. Bullying is a global concern and a common complaint of dyslexic students. Teachers have the real possibility of lessening this threat by...

- a) using cooperative learning methodology
- b) punishing bullies and contacting their parents
- c) organizing mediation sessions between bully and victim

3. Which of the following is not true?

- a) Students with dyslexia have a three times higher risk of attempting suicide. From Suicidality, School Dropout and Reading Problems Among Adolescents. Journal of Learning Disabilities, vol. 39,6: pp 507-514. First published Nov. 1 2006.
- b) Students with dyslexia often have suicidal thoughts but rarely go on to actually attempt suicide.

- c) 89% of suicide notes have dyslexic-type spellings in them. From Learning Disabilities and Adolescent Suicide. Journal of Learning Disabilities, Vol. 30, 6: pp 652-659. Published first Nov. 1, 1997.

4. When a dyslexic student says "I can't" it means....

- a) "I don't want to"
- b) "I have failed so many times that I'm afraid"
- c) "I can't" because there are many seemingly simple tasks that dyslexic children cannot accomplish.

5. Learned helplessness stems from...

- a) faulty social programming
- b) experience with failures
- c) an excess of well-intentioned assistance

Which of the negative experiences from the quiz above do you think would be the worst for a student to endure?

Answers

1. The correct answer is b: Dyslexic students commonly suffer from severe generalized anxiety, frustration and/or PTSD symptoms and, as a protective response, try to avoid the situations that are causing the anxiety.

This avoidance behaviour can be interpreted as laziness or misbehaviour and may result in school refusal and learned helplessness. Using SEN-friendly pedagogical tools can alleviate these negative emotions, opening up the student to a positive learning experience where they feel valued and supported.

2. The correct answer is a: Many dyslexic students are victims of bullying but cooperative learning in classrooms can be used as a way to promote positive behaviors and combat bullying.

Cooperative learning experiences may be used to increase students' cooperative predispositions. Doing so will increase student engagement in prosocial behaviors and could consequently reduce the incidence of harm-intended aggression among students.

3. The correct answer is b: A dire consequence of our unwillingness to help students with dyslexia learn to read is the high suicide rate associated with learning disabled teens. Our failure to teach children with dyslexia to read is oftentimes literally killing them.

Of course, we want students to learn to read and spell words. But, what we really want is students competent with language and vocabulary with the ability to understand and express complex ideas. We must begin to understand that the act of "reading and spelling words" is neurobiologically difficult for 20% of our students and accept the fact that the skills-based competencies of reading (print concepts, phonological awareness, phonic and word recognition, word composition,

fluency and sentence composition) may be a life-long struggle for a large percentage of our students. We therefore need to learn how to expand our definitions of what reading and writing look like for these students and make classroom learning open and welcoming so they have the tools and desire to gain all types of knowledge and become literate and vital parts of our society.

4. The correct answer is all of the above. In working with dyslexic children it is critical that we determine which of the above is true. If we demand that they do something that they cannot do, we insure their failure which will lead to frustration, anxiety and damaged self-image. If on the other hand, we back off and don't insist that the child work to their potential, we may be teaching them to distrust their abilities and to quit simply because they don't want to do it.

In addition to providing encouragement, it is important for us to push children with dyslexia past their disability to help them reach their fullest potential. This process involves: helping the child past "I can't", promoting self discipline, confronting self-indulgent behaviors, promoting excellence and setting limits.

5. The correct answer is a and b: Learned helplessness results from a combination of faulty social programming and experiences with failures.

Faulty social programming occurs when dyslexic students buy into a singular message regarding how they can get their needs met. With an unawareness of other alternatives, dyslexic students experience a state of helplessness when they experience failure with the singular message. Learned helplessness can be overcome. Through the power of imagination or by having a vision of what could possible be, people can develop emotional resilience.

Reflect on the module

In this final section, think about what you've learned this module and how you can use this in your day-to-day working life.

1. How can you, in your classroom, mitigate the impact of dyslexia on your students' mental health?

2. What strategies would you readily employ to help your dyslexic students manage their generalized anxiety and lack of self-confidence?

3. How does knowing that you can really make a difference to the outcome of a dyslexic student's life affect your motivation to take action to unleash the potential of dyslexic thinking?

Now reflect on the following:

Quotes on the power of words: small things = huge impact

"There exists, for everyone, a sentence - a series of words - that has the power to destroy you. Another sentence exists, another series of words, that could heal you. If you're lucky you will get the second, but you can be certain of getting the first." Philip K. Dick, VALIS

"If you believe in the power of words, you can bring about physical changes in the universe." H Scott Momaday

"Words have a magical power. They can either bring the greatest happiness or the deepest despair" Sigmund Freud

"Grammar and spelling are a part of the thought process. If one knows the meaning of words, one may be able to better understand the meaning of everything." Sienna McQuillan

Additional notes

The most effective form of learning in most SEN students occurs when multiple sensory paths are involved. Multi-sensory teaching is currently seen as being at the heart of dyslexia support. A teacher Similarly, the 'dual coding' method – where teaching is presented verbally but also supported by visual materials - has been proven to enhance learning and memory retrieval in dyslexic students since they are processed through different channels in the brain.

It is very important for parents and educators to choose methods specifically based on the student's learning strengths.

It is equally important to monitor the child's progress to measure the effectiveness of the approaches used as it may be necessary to try different methods or use a combination of methods to meet a dyslexic child's learning needs.

Behavioral and Interactive Aspects of Dyslexic Students -

Dyslexia not only affects learning but also impacts on everyday skills and activities including social interaction, memory, and dealing with stress. Some of the signs of dyslexia therefore concern emotions and behavior. Regardless, it should be noted that other students may greatly benefit from the inclusion of SEN students.

Through an increase in familiarity, prejudice can be reduced over the long term. Neurotypical students need to be informed of those implications of the disorder which could be perceived as confrontational but which, if understood, become simply symptomatic of the child's condition.

Riddick describes how the problems encountered because of dyslexia were enough for dyslexic children to want to kill themselves, noting one mother's comment 'he

wanted to be dead, there was nothing for him. He wanted his tie so that he could hang himself'.

Riddick B (1996) Living with dyslexia: The social and emotional consequences of specific learning difficulties. Routledge, London.

Children with SEN frequently leave school with few qualifications and are much more likely to become unemployed or economically inactive.”

European Commission (2012) “Special Needs Children and Disabled Adults Still Getting a Raw Deal from Education, says report”, Commission Press Release (July)

Extrinsic motivation:

- Praise:
- Effort
- Strategy
- Focus
- Improvement

Promote :

- Autonomy- having control over a task.
- Competence- feeling that you can succeed.
- Relatedness- care and respect and connection.
- Relevance- school work needs to be engaging

www.codereadnetwork.com