

Dyslexia/specific learning difficulties

What is meant by dyslexia/specific learning difficulties?

Dyslexia can be described as 'an unexpected difficulty with written language'. 'Unexpected' implies that the child's difficulties can not be attributed to obvious physical, emotional or intellectual problems.

'Dyslexia' is often used interchangeably with 'specific learning difficulties' (SpLDs), and indeed the terms mean the same in the case of many children. However, it is possible to make a distinction between them. Children with SpLDs need not be dyslexic. For example, some children have little or no trouble learning to read, write and spell. Yet, they may confuse 'left' and 'right', have great difficulty noticing the exact details of shapes and directions, and have unusual difficulty with maths or arithmetic. Strictly speaking, these children do not have dyslexia, though they may have a specific learning difficulty. SpLD, then, describes children who have difficulty in one or two aspects of learning but who do well in other areas.

The debate about terminology, especially the use of 'dyslexia', has rumbled on for decades. At times, its use has been more popular among therapists, medical practitioners and the general public than among teachers and educational psychologists, though there is no simple polarisation of opinion. 'Specific learning difficulties' is a more flexible term than 'dyslexia'. However, many children with SpLDs will also have difficulty with reading, writing and spelling, and so can be described as 'dyslexic' also. The debate about the right word to use has often been remote from the fact that pupils need help when they have unexpected difficulties with literacy. The result is that probably more hot air has been generated in this area of educational support than in any other over the years.

Children with SpLDs need skilled assessment and teaching. The assessment begins with teachers but may move to educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. There is evidence that

appropriate teaching can reduce and often overcome the development of a reading and spelling difficulty.

References

Pumfrey, P, & Elliott, C (1990), *Children's difficulties in reading, spelling and writing*. Lewes: Falmer

Pumfrey, P, & Reason, R (1990), *Specific learning difficulties (dyslexia): Challenges and responses*. London: Routledge

Reid, G (1997), *Dyslexia: A practitioner's handbook*. Chichester: J. Wiley

Snowling, M (1987), *Dyslexia: A cognitive developmental perspective*. Oxford: Blackwell

Please note: Afasic does not hold copies of any referenced material. However, it may be obtained via academic libraries.

Other organisations which can help

British Dyslexia Association

98 London Road
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 5AU
Helpline 0118 9668 271

The Dyslexia Institute

Park House
Wick Road
Egham
Surrey
TW20 0HH
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