

Speak Up- your child needs you!



The education system can be a challenge for any student for a variety of reasons but when you have a child diagnosed with Dyslexia, or with other learning differences, challenges can start feeling like obstacles – the otherwise linear journey becomes a labyrinth. As you discover your child's learning differences, you may stir up some raw memories and feelings from others close by, maybe your own... it's a family journey.

Difficult yes, at times heart breaking, and frustrating for sure - but there is most certainly a way through. Firstly, start by researching to obtain the necessary knowledge and understanding. An important insight from this process is to see Dyslexia as a learning preference not a learning disability as many would have you believe. By understanding this truth you see a way forward.

Secondly you must now advocate strongly for your child's rights in the classroom. As difficult as this may be, you have the weight of law, educational policy, science, research, and the hearts of good people on your side - fingers crossed, your child's teacher is one of these!

Thirdly, empower your child. This starts in the early years as acceptance and nurturing. No child should feel less than another as a consequence of not acquiring basic skills as quickly as their peers. At the same time, your efforts of advocacy should see early, appropriate and meaningful classroom interventions.

As the years unfold the student starts to know what they require in order to gain success. This is a happy synergy with leading educators that understand the need and value of providing simple accommodations even in the Primary School setting. Extra time, use of computers, reader writers provide an even playing field and most importantly allow the student to succeed and thus not lose their love of learning.

With the move to High School an empowered young person begins their journey to self-advocacy and navigation of NCEA years. Fortunately, most Secondary Schools will respect, support and embrace the emergence of personal responsibility. But although you may now be fighting your teenager's desire for independence they still need your voice if theirs is not being heard.

Perhaps this sounds too idealistic and you could be right, but you can't allow this to stop you. The most critical ingredients to successfully making your way through the labyrinth is persistence, and trust in your instincts – you know your child better than anyone, well almost...

"Growing up, I knew I was special. I knew it from a young age. There were echoes at the back of my mind silently screaming, reassuring me that I had a purpose, a purpose that knew no bounds, if I desired.

Yet despite my unrelenting self-reassurance, I couldn't academically compete on the same grounds as other students my age. I felt mortified that I couldn't do what everyone else could do with ease.

This wasn't particularly noticeable to me for the first three years of my schooling but as soon as I reached year four the epiphany came like a thief in the night, I realised for whatever reason I couldn't stay at the school I was in.

I was frightened, my whole world was collapsing around me and I didn't know why. Six months after I was taken out of school, I heard my parents talking late at night (I should have been asleep) my mother sounded somewhat confused and my father, distressed. The following morning I was told by my mother (now calm) that I would be going to have some tests done.

It was an autumn morning when I was told that my academic and emotional stigma had a name: Dyslexia."