

# dys·lex·i·a

Recognition • Understanding • Action



 **Dyslexia Foundation**  
of New Zealand

Recognition • Understanding • Action



## What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is an alternative way of thinking which often runs in families. Brain research, including ground breaking work from Auckland University, shows that while most of us use the 'verbal' left side of our brain to understand words, dyslexic people use the 'pictorial' right side – making them slower to process and understand language, but stronger in creative areas like problem solving, empathy, leadership and lateral thinking. Recognition, understanding and effective action unlock potential and allow dyslexic individuals to access and use their talents.

These findings are confirmed and complemented by overseas research that focuses on the creative strengths which dyslexia can offer, rather than viewing dyslexia as a literacy deficit. In our culture, it is assumed that if you are good with words, you are also highly intelligent and if you struggle with words, you must not be so smart. But the experience of dyslexia shows this assumption to be false.



Dyslexia impacts much more than literacy alone. While the most immediate characteristic is a problem in decoding words and their meanings, this is still only one aspect of a broader spectrum of difficulties such as auditory and visual perception, planning and organising, fine motor skills, short-term memory and concentration. Some of these can make it especially challenging for individuals to follow multiple instructions, turn thoughts into words and finish work on time.

Dyslexia is both complex and a challenge. However, with "ownership" by the dyslexic individual and the right approach by those supporting them, dyslexia can be a blessing in disguise. Taking action and a positive attitude are critical.

## How many people are affected by Dyslexia?

A conservative estimate is that one in ten New Zealanders are dyslexic, including over 70,000 school children. These children begin school full of curiosity and eagerness to learn, but can quickly become disillusioned by unexpected failure in the classroom. If not recognised and addressed correctly in the early years, dyslexia can lead to alienation, low self-esteem and put youth at risk, fuelling depression and anti-social behaviour.

Overseas, British, American and Swedish research all suggests 30-52% prisoners are dyslexic, and there is no reason to suggest the New Zealand incidence would be any different.

Dyslexia is one of the few causes of social dysfunction that can be easily addressed, avoiding flow on social costs. Fundamentally, all of us are affected by dyslexia, which is why addressing dyslexia in the classroom, and through into the workplace is a very effective way of improving life for the whole community.







## Unlocking the potential of Dyslexia

The upside of dyslexia is the ability to perceive the world from many perspectives, allowing special talents and skills to flourish in fields such as invention, the arts, design, engineering, and entrepreneurship.

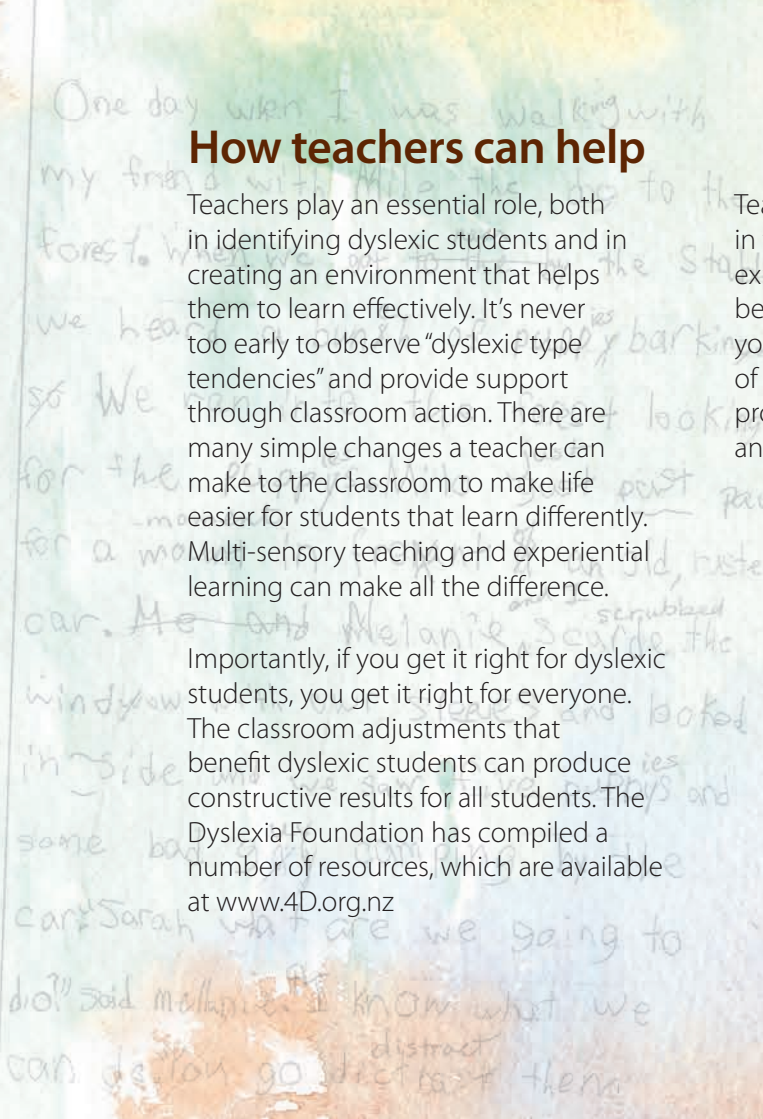
Dyslexia must be supported in education and in the workplace, and this requires simple accommodations, as well as awareness and understanding. It is also important that dyslexic individuals

are able to take responsibility for their unique way of thinking, turning it from an obstacle into an advantage. Successful dyslexics draw on their strengths to hit their targets in life.

Dyslexic students have the right to be dyslexic, and they also have the right to an education that gives them access to learning and the curriculum. Classroom accommodations are simple changes to the school environment and resources, and to the approach that teachers take – all of which make a big difference to levels of engagement and student progress.

For some, specific interventions are necessary. Schools should have a number of evidence-based programmes that they can deliver, carefully matched to the students learning profile.

Although each school's approach may differ, a dyslexic student's rights do not. Advocacy of these rights by parents and caregivers is often necessary.



## How teachers can help

Teachers play an essential role, both in identifying dyslexic students and in creating an environment that helps them to learn effectively. It's never too early to observe "dyslexic type tendencies" and provide support through classroom action. There are many simple changes a teacher can make to the classroom to make life easier for students that learn differently. Multi-sensory teaching and experiential learning can make all the difference.

Importantly, if you get it right for dyslexic students, you get it right for everyone. The classroom adjustments that benefit dyslexic students can produce constructive results for all students. The Dyslexia Foundation has compiled a number of resources, which are available at [www.4D.org.nz](http://www.4D.org.nz)



## DYSLEXIA ROBBS A STUDENT OF TIME

Teachers must empower themselves in this way rather than waiting for an expert to advise or a formal report to be produced. By taking this approach young students have the best chance of staying engaged and teachers can provide valuable insights to parents and other professionals.





# IS MY CLASSROOM DYSLEXIA AWARE?

## STUDENT ACCOMMODATIONS

### CLASSROOM CULTURE

### LEARNING PREFERENCES

### STRESS FREE

### COMMUNICATION

### TIME

### ENVIRONMENT

### COLLABORATIVE WORK

### RESOURCES

### RECORDING WORK

### HOMEWORK

- Calm and positive ethos
- 'Have a go' culture
- Free to make mistakes
- Stress free comfortable learning
- Flexible groupings
- Good transition process
- Group by thinking not just by basic skills
- Consistent approaches to behavior management
- Everybody counts
- Let the students teach
- Foster success through learning preferences
- Alternative ways of recording
- Opportunities to present alternative evidence of learning
- Adapt tasks to suit
- Use multi-sensory techniques
- Provide challenge but with accommodations
- Embed differentiation in the classroom
- Ability appropriate task
- Time to think
- Give control and responsibility
- Encourage student voice
- Free to make mistakes
- The right to pass- e.g., don't read aloud
- Encourage self-advocacy
- Remove time as a barrier
- Mark content not spelling
- Model all learning tasks
- Take account of diverse backgrounds
- Write instructions down and leave them
- Appropriate vocabulary
- Visual prompts
- Chunk learning
- Clear and explicit instructions
- Reduce teacher talk time
- Pause for processing
- 'Can do' attitude

- Short achievable tasks
- Less is more
- Brain breaks
- Remove time as a barrier
- Time to revisit
- Flexible deadlines

- Ability to refer yourself to a comfort room
- Lighting
- Seating
- Hygiene and cleanliness
- Flexibility around set up
- Structure and order
- Bringing Nature inside
- Aesthetically pleasing

- No Homework as an option
- Stress free and meaningful
- Personalised or differentiated
- Related to prior knowledge
- Flip the classroom
- Offer alternatives to writing
- Routine (set days) timetable
- Clear instructions
- Time driven NOT task driven
- Paste information into book
- Make photocopies available
- Audio, video or photographs
- Minimise copying from board
- Encourage mindmaps, flowcharts etc
- Non traditional assessment
- Colour coded
- Visual timetables
- Well labeled
- Familiar and consistent layout
- Easily Accessible
- Bring your own device (BYOD)
- ICT available
- Print on pastel shades
- Use bold to highlight
- Create lots of space
- Plain font of suitable size
- Bullet point key info
- Thin notes
- Peer marking
- Peer tutoring
- Inquiry learning
- Flexible grouping
- Paired reading
- Scribed work





## Dyslexia beyond the schoolyard

School is one place where dyslexic individuals need our understanding and help, but there are other places too.

Families, for example, should keep a child's dyslexia in mind when giving instructions or helping with homework. Research shows that dyslexia is hereditary, so it may be that by finding out more about your child's dyslexia, further insights are gained about members of the extended family.

The workplace is another environment where understanding and recognition of dyslexia can yield positive results. While misunderstandings can reinforce low self-esteem and limit opportunities for both the dyslexic individual, and the business, recognising and harnessing talents and creative strengths has the potential to do the opposite and have powerful social and economic impacts.

To support the dyslexic people in your life, check out the resources listed at the back of this brochure.

### In short:

- Dyslexia does exist and it is widespread in society – so action to improve education and workplace outcomes is critical
- Dyslexia does tend to run in families
- Dyslexia does affect both boys and girls
- Dyslexia is not an illness or a disease
- Dyslexic people are not less intelligent
- Dyslexic brains are wired differently
- Dyslexic people think predominantly in pictures, not with the sounds of words
- Dyslexia is an alternative way of thinking and seeing the world
- Dyslexia is a learning preference
- Dyslexia does not only affect reading and writing – it can impact auditory and visual perception, planning and organising, fine motor skills, short-term memory and concentration
- Dyslexia can offer creative talents – this is the potential to be harnessed
- Unaddressed dyslexia leads to failure and poor self-esteem, which often results in behavioural and social problems – this is a powerful motivation to take action early on
- Dyslexia is a lifelong challenge so advocacy is critical



## It's a family journey – a story:

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 level the 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."*

SPEAK UP-  
YOUR CHILD  
NEEDS YOU!





## About DFNZ

The Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand (DFNZ) was formed in late 2006 to dispel the myths surrounding dyslexia and to provide a unified voice for dyslexic New Zealanders and those supporting them.

Our launch was funded through the generous support of our principal sponsor, the Cookie Time Charitable Trust, which has also funded several other key achievements along the way. Just six months after our launch, we were successful in having the New Zealand Government recognise dyslexia for the first time. Since then, we have been working hard to facilitate greater recognition, understanding and action on dyslexia.

The Dyslexia Foundation receives no Government funding and relies on the generosity of the community. Details on making a donation to the DFNZ are at the back of this brochure.

IT'S NOT  
ROCKET SCIENCE!



## The Dyslexia Discovery Exhibit

It can often be hard for people to truly understand what it feels like to be dyslexic. To provide insights into the dyslexic experience, and to challenge traditional views of it as a limitation or disability, the Cookie Time Charitable Trust commissioned the Dyslexia Discovery Exhibit, a public, outdoor gallery experience at 21 Worcester Boulevard, Christchurch.

The Dyslexia Discovery Exhibit provides knowledge, inspiration and encouragement by showcasing the achievements of four leading dyslexic thinkers: Lord of the Rings Academy Award winner Richard Taylor, the late maverick motorcycle designer John Britten, dyslexia innovator Ron Davis and sculptor Mackenzie Thorpe.

Since opening in 2007 the Dyslexia Discovery Exhibit has won a number of awards, with one Judge describing the Exhibit as "inspirational and exquisitely executed, combining design finesse with sound construction techniques and exceptional attention to detail".





## Further resources

Our challenge to parents, schools, Government and workplaces is to embrace, support and empower those who are dyslexic. The following resources will help you to do this.


The DFNZ website is designed to provide the most comprehensive and up-to-date reference for information about dyslexia in New Zealand. It also includes an extensive listing of solution and assessment providers throughout New Zealand.

[www.dfnz.org.nz](http://www.dfnz.org.nz)

The 4D suite of web spaces, are designed to provide cohesive and comprehensive dyslexia resources. They share expert advice for dyslexic individuals and those who live with, work with and teach them. 4D also stands for 4 Difference and 4 Diversity

[www.4d.org.nz](http://www.4d.org.nz)

Join the conversation:

 [dyslexiafoundationNZ](https://www.facebook.com/dyslexiafoundationNZ)

## Contacting the Foundation

For all general enquiries relating to the Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, email: [info@dfnz.org.nz](mailto:info@dfnz.org.nz)

To make a donation, go to [www.dfnz.org.nz](http://www.dfnz.org.nz)

Alternatively, simply send a cheque, made out to Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand, to our postal address:

Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand  
P.O. Box 16141, Hornby, Christchurch 8441

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