



EDUCATIONAL DYSLEXIA INSTRUCTION

WARNING SIGNS OF DYSLEXIA

Preschool • Elementary School • High School • Adults

Could dyslexia be part of the picture?

Dyslexia can look different at different ages. The signs below are clues—not a diagnosis. A persistent pattern of difficulties, especially in language, phonological awareness, word reading, spelling, and writing, deserves closer attention.

A note about “3 or more signs”

The original Bright Solutions resource uses three or more signs as a prompt to learn more. There is not, however, a scientifically established rule that “three signs” means a person has dyslexia. What matters most is the **pattern, persistence, severity, and impact** of the difficulties.

Educational Dyslexia Instruction

UNLEASHING BRILLIANCE, ONE MIND AT A TIME

Preschool Warning Signs

A preschool child cannot be expected to read like an elementary student. At this age, the most useful clues involve **oral language, speech-sound awareness, memory for language, and early print knowledge**. The more signs that cluster together, particularly with a family history of dyslexia, the more worthwhile it is to seek screening or professional guidance.

- **Delayed speech or persistent speech/language difficulties**
- **Difficulty with rhyming** or recognizing rhyme patterns
- **Difficulty noticing or manipulating sounds** in spoken words
- **Mixing up sounds or syllables** in longer words (for example, saying a word in an unusual or simplified way)
- **Difficulty learning letter names or sounds** compared with peers
- **Difficulty remembering familiar sequences**, such as the alphabet, address, phone number, or names
- **Difficulty recognizing their own name** in print
- **Less interest in being read to** or unusual avoidance of books and early literacy activities
- **A close family history of dyslexia or significant reading difficulty**
- **History of speech or language intervention**

What About the Other Signs on Your List?

Families sometimes also report stuttering, frequent ear infections, late hand dominance, or confusion about left and right. These can occur alongside learning or developmental differences, but they are **not specific enough to dyslexia to use as stand-alone warning signs**. They are best considered as part of a child's broader developmental history rather than as evidence of dyslexia by themselves.

Phonological awareness is especially important. Difficulty noticing, blending, segmenting, or manipulating the sounds in spoken words is a key early literacy warning sign. These skills are important foundations for learning to decode and spell words.

Elementary School Warning Signs

As formal reading instruction begins, signs become easier to see. Pay particular attention to persistent difficulty with **phonics, decoding, word recognition, reading fluency, spelling, handwriting, and written expression.**

- **Difficulty learning letter-sound relationships or phonics**
- **Cannot reliably sound out unfamiliar words** or guesses based on pictures, context, or word shape
- **Slow, choppy, labored, or inaccurate reading**
- **Skips, adds, or misreads small words** such as *at, to, of*
- **Ignores endings and suffixes** or leaves parts of words out
- **Does not recognize a word consistently** even after seeing it recently
- **Persistent spelling difficulty**, especially spelling that does not match what has been taught
- **Difficulty remembering high-frequency words** and common spelling patterns
- **Difficulty with phonemic awareness**—blending, segmenting, deleting, or manipulating sounds
- **Slow or non-automatic handwriting** and/or significant difficulty with written output
- **Difficulty finding the right word** when speaking; frequent “thingy” or “what’s-that-word” moments
- **Difficulty learning and remembering sequences**, including multi-step directions or multiplication facts
- **Reading or writing avoidance**, frustration, or increasing school-related anxiety

A Note About Reversals

Letter or number reversals can occur during normal early development. Reversals alone are **not a reliable indicator of dyslexia**. Persistent reading, spelling, and language difficulties are much more informative. If reversals continue alongside broader literacy difficulties, they can be worth mentioning to the child's teacher or evaluator.

Look for the pattern, not one isolated behavior.

A bright child who is still struggling to decode, spell, or read accurately after appropriate instruction deserves attention—even if the child can memorize information, understands stories when they are read aloud, or performs well in other subjects.

High School Warning Signs

Adolescents with dyslexia may have developed strategies that hide some earlier difficulties. The signs may become more noticeable as school requires increasingly independent reading, writing, vocabulary, and foreign-language learning.

- **Continued slow, effortful, or inaccurate reading**
- **Limited reading vocabulary or difficulty learning new academic vocabulary**
- **Extremely poor written expression** compared with verbal knowledge and ideas
- **Large discrepancy between what the student can explain verbally and what they can produce in writing**
- **Persistent spelling problems** despite instruction and spell-check support
- **Difficulty learning a foreign language**, particularly its sound-symbol or spelling system
- **Difficulty reading printed music** may occur, although it is not specific to dyslexia
- **Difficulty organizing and sequencing written work**
- **Increasing avoidance of reading-heavy assignments**
- **Grades that do not reflect the student's apparent knowledge or ability**

Adult Warning Signs

- **Slow reading speed** compared with peers or what the task requires
- **Needing to read a page two or three times** before it fully makes sense
- **Persistent spelling difficulty**, even with spell-check
- **Difficulty putting thoughts into writing** or dreading emails, reports, forms, or letters
- **Difficulty reading unfamiliar or multisyllabic words**
- **A history of reading or spelling difficulty at school**
- **Difficulty with foreign-language learning**
- **A tendency to avoid jobs, courses, or activities requiring extensive reading**
- **Difficulty with directions or left/right** may occur, but is not specific to dyslexia
- **Occasional letter confusions when tired or stressed** can occur, but are not diagnostic

What Should You Do If You Recognize These Signs?

Seeing several warning signs does not mean that a child or adult definitely has dyslexia. Dyslexia is identified through a comprehensive look at reading, spelling, language, developmental history, instruction, and other relevant factors—not through a checklist alone.

Consider These Next Steps

- **Talk with the child's teacher or school team** about the pattern you are seeing.
- **Ask about screening or evaluation** when difficulties are persistent or significantly affecting learning.
- **Consider a qualified professional evaluation** when a more comprehensive understanding is needed.
- **Pay attention to phonemic awareness and decoding**, not only reading level or comprehension.
- **Do not wait for failure.** Early identification and targeted instruction can make a meaningful difference.

**One of the most important warning signs at any age:
Persistent difficulty with phonological/phonemic awareness, decoding, word reading, and
spelling deserves attention. These difficulties are central to many profiles of dyslexia,
although no single skill determines a diagnosis.**

Evidence-Based Sources

International Dyslexia Association — 2026 Definition of Dyslexia

Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling involving accuracy, speed, or both; phonological and morphological processing difficulties are common but not universal.

International Dyslexia Association — Preschool Dyslexia Screening

Provides preschool risk indicators including late talking, speech/language difficulties, difficulty learning letters/sounds, difficulty learning familiar information, sound mixing, and reduced interest in being read to.

International Dyslexia Association — School-Age Dyslexia Screener

Highlights persistent difficulty with spelling, letter names, phonics, slow reading, below-grade-level reading, and need for extra reading/spelling support.

National Center on Improving Literacy — Signs to Watch for by Age

Describes age-related patterns in preschool, kindergarten/first grade, and second grade and beyond, including rhyming, phonological awareness, letter-sound knowledge, decoding, spelling, handwriting, and reading fluency.

Bright Solutions for Dyslexia — Warning Signs of Dyslexia

The original source supplied for this handout. Its age-grouped checklist was used as a starting point, with wording adjusted where current evidence calls for greater precision.

Important: This guide is educational information, not a diagnostic tool. Warning signs vary by age, language, development, instructional history, and individual profile. A qualified professional should consider the full picture when determining whether dyslexia or another learning difficulty is present.

Educational Dyslexia Instruction • Unleashing Brilliance, One Mind at a Time