

Use The Word Dyslexia

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Policies at all levels of government, but especially in school districts, often resist naming dyslexia as a specific disability, making it harder to identify and help dyslexic individuals. But using the word itself, along with understanding what it means, is critical to providing support and opening opportunities for those diagnosed with dyslexia or who show signs of the disability.

“Dyslexia has a specific, highly relevant and explanatory meaning,” says Dr. Sally Shaywitz. “It offers a common language, facilitating communication among dyslexic individuals, educators, clinicians, scientists and parents.

“For those with dyslexia, knowing that they are dyslexic provides direction and a starting point for self-advocacy and accommodations. It helps them feel that they are not alone—that they are part of a community of dyslexics contending with similar struggles. They can look to other people with dyslexia who are succeeding and know that they can do the same. They develop greater self-awareness about the specific challenges they face and what they can do to succeed, rather than assuming they are stupid or lazy. And they can learn to identify and utilize their strengths in both school and, later, in the workplace, bringing their best assets to the job at hand, knowing what tasks to delegate and when to allow themselves a little extra time.”

In schools, using the word dyslexia also allows educators and parents to come up with clear plans and tailored support services to address the needs of dyslexic students. “Knowledge of dyslexia’s cognitive basis indicates what symptoms to look for so that symptoms of dyslexia in the classroom (and at home) are noted and acknowledged rather than, as currently happens, ignored or overlooked,” says Dr. Shaywitz. “This greater awareness and understanding of dyslexia and its impact will benefit both the teacher and student, both in the teaching of reading and in the climate and attitudes within the classroom.”

Dyslexia should be recognized not only by schools and on student support teams, but through public policy that acknowledges the millions of children and adults who are dyslexic and need to receive the evidence-based services they deserve and require.

Here are some tips to encourage the use of the word “dyslexia”:

- If you have been diagnosed with dyslexia, use the word when talking about your specific disability. Just using the word itself can bring a sense of comfort, confidence and identity.
- Own your own dyslexia. Talk about it and don’t be afraid to ask for help.
- For teachers and parents, be aware that instruction, intervention and related services must be based upon the child’s unique needs as an individual with dyslexia. Using a broad term such as “learning disability”

instead of the word dyslexia makes that far more difficult. Never use even less-specific terms such as “learning differences.”

- Using dyslexia as a term that follows the student from year to year helps each teacher provide continuity in supports and accommodations.
- Follow the example of the many successful people who openly call themselves dyslexic. Read their stories [here](#).

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