

Educational consultant *Janice Rolnick* explains how to identify dyslexia in a pre-school child

DYSLEXIA: CATCH THEM EARLY

the tell-tale signs and how to respond...

OVER AND OVER again I receive calls from parents concerned that their child might have dyslexia, told not to worry by teachers. 'You're over-reacting,' parents are hearing. 'Let's wait and see! He'll probably grow out of it,' or 'Children develop at different rates. He'll catch up!' or 'He's far too young! We can't test for dyslexia before he is seven.'

Time goes on; the child continues to struggle. He (or she) begins to realise he is failing and falling behind his peers. Reading is difficult and he begins to avoid it. He feels that his teachers and parents are not pleased with him because he is not 'clever'. He develops sophisticated avoidance strategies and may become depressed and even disturbed. Teachers may describe him as 'lazy,' 'wilful' or 'uncooperative.'

Dyslexic difficulties can be seen as a continuum: at one end is the child who takes longer to learn to read and has a spelling problem; at the other end is the child with extreme difficulty in learning to read, write, spell or calculate. Most strategies for dyslexic children have been developed for those who have already 'failed' but now that there is greater emphasis on learning phonics early, children with problems can be identified younger and provided with the extra help they need.

In the past it was thought the earliest a dyslexic profile could be identified was about the age of seven – when a child's reading, writing and spelling were already giving concern. However, it's evident that there are many signs before school age which may suggest dyslexia. A potentially dyslexic child may have walked early but not crawled, for example. He may have persistent difficulty in getting dressed, may put shoes on the wrong feet, and be late in learning to fasten buttons or tie laces. He will often be accused of 'not paying attention.' While such a child enjoys being read to, he shows no interest in letters or words. There may be a tendency to excessive tripping, bumping into things and falling over, along with difficulty in catching, kicking, throwing a ball, hopping and skipping, and in clapping a simple rhythm.

Where speech and language are concerned, a potentially dyslexic child may take longer to learn to speak clearly, may persistently jumble phrases up ('tebby dare' for 'teddy bear') or use near misses ('lampshade' for 'lamppost'). There may be difficulty remembering names of familiar objects, and confusion between directional words (up/down). Difficulty with rhyme, and with sequences (days of week, numbers, alphabet) are also indicators of a possible dyslexic profile.

This child may be a quick 'thinker' and 'doer' – although not in

response to an instruction; he can be very creative – often good at drawing, with a strong sense of colour – and have an aptitude for constructional or technical toys such as bricks, Lego, remote controls and computer keyboards. He appears bright but is an enigma.

It is important to note that not all dyslexic children experience all of these difficulties, and that many young children make similar mistakes. It is the *severity* of the trait *and* the *length of time it persists* that give vital clues to the identification of the dyslexic learner.

What can we do? We can wait for the child to begin to fail *or* we can carry out activities that build a solid foundation, foster the child's strengths and help him to overcome his weaknesses. This will not be a total solution, but it will be beneficial for all – and the sooner strategies are put in place, the better. Try some of the following ideas. Do them regularly: little and often, and, of course, make it fun.

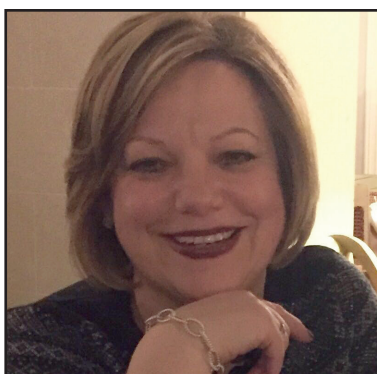
Say nursery rhymes together, read poetry and make up rhymes and jingles together; talk about pictures and reinforce prepositions (eg 'is the boy climbing under or over the gate?'); watch TV and discuss the story; play 'Simon Says,' the Hokey-Cokey, Follow my Leader etc.

For listening and sequencing skills, listen to everyday sounds and talk about them; clap a simple rhythm for the child to copy; play I Spy in several ways (something beginning with, something ending with, something rhyming with etc); play 'I went to market and I bought' adding one thing at a time; sing songs involving sequencing eg *Old MacDonald, Ten Green Bottles*, and songs that develop memory of sequences eg alphabet, days of the week, months of the year.

Looking and sequencing can also be developed. Play Snap or Happy Families and Pairs; sort objects into colours, shapes and sizes; put a tray of objects in front of the child, ask him to look away and remove one or two – can he say what's gone?; show several pictures and ask the child to arrange them in order to make a story.

For physical skills, play throwing, catching, skipping, hopping and balancing games; try classes in football, swimming, gymnastics, ballet etc to develop physical strength, balance and coordination.

Should you seek help? Parents are usually perceptive about their own child and may well have a feeling that something is 'not quite right'. Their comments should always be taken seriously. If you are concerned about your child's development, then seek the views of the nursery provider, talk to your health visitor and talk to your GP. ●



about the author:

Janice Rolnick qualified to teach in 1977, and soon began to work 1-1 with dyslexic children. She has the RSA diploma in Teaching and Assessing Pupils with Specific Learning Difficulties and was awarded a Master of Education degree in Special Educational Needs from the University of Hertfordshire. In 2010 she was awarded the Certificate of Competence in Educational Testing. She holds a Practising Certificate from PATOSS, and has recently undertaken training into assessing for dyscalculia and for carrying out workplace needs assessments. She has been a SENCO in both state and independent schools for the past 20 years, was awarded the status of Advanced Skills Teacher and has wide experience of a range of SEN issues. She carries out dyslexia and dyscalculia assessments, both privately and for the British Dyslexia Association.

Janice offers: advice for parents concerned about their child's learning/behaviour • full diagnostic assessments for dyslexia and dyscalculia • recommendations for strategies for both home and school • advice for schools on how to implement recommendations arising from assessment • help to find a suitably qualified tutor • training for teachers and teaching assistants on dyslexia friendly teaching

www.janicerolnick.co.uk • 07768 875286