

DYSLEXIA – A BARRIER TO NATURAL LEARNING

What is Dyslexia?

- It is the best known and most common learning difficulty in both children and adults.
- It is a learning disorder that restricts the brain from functioning appropriately.
- It shares many common challenges.
- It affects at least 10% of the population.
- At least 1 in 3 of a classroom of 30 pupils will have some form of dyslexia.
- It is not a disease, an affliction, contagious, hereditary, nor does it have any obvious physical symptoms, i.e. walking, sitting, talking, acting etc.

The barriers it can throw up are:-

- Poor literacy skills – reading, writing, spelling, instructional.
- Poor memory retention ability – in the short term.
- Slow processing – answer to is intellectually known but words do not come quick enough to get it out and when it does, it may be jumbled and unintelligible.
- Low self esteem – never seem to be able to do anything right – instils feelings of being a 'failure'.
- Concentration difficulties – difficult to focus on more than 1 thing at a time or prevents full conversations or dialogue from taking place.

All of these issues and others, are exacerbated when under pressure by being told to 'hurry up' 'be quick about it', 'go faster', 'try harder' or even, 'your' not trying hard enough'.

Whilst as stated earlier, there are no physical signs that can identify someone who is dyslexic, there are some signs that may point to the fact that someone is dyslexic (in no order of importance):-

- may show significant discrepancy between oral and written performance;
- may experience persistent or even severe problems with spelling, even easy or common words;
- may show some confusion over certain words, e.g. tops/spot; dog/god; on/no; saw/was; pets/step; sign/sing; and so on;
- erratic spelling, i.e. same word different spelling;
- difficulty in getting ideas down on paper;
- consistently fails to express real understanding or ideas, both written and physically;
- easily miss-reads and miss-writes words and sentences;
- loses place quickly when reading;
- tends to use finger or ruler to follow words being read;

- poorly constructed handwriting;
- does not understand figures when written three, six etc;
- unsure what is left or right;
- may appear colour blind as they do not recognise spoken colours;
- does not memorise things easily;
- does not seem to 'learn' by ordinary teaching methods;
- has difficulty in being aware of their mistakes/errors etc.

An example of handwriting from someone who is dyslexic (appendix 1]

What should be remembered, is that on some activities, some individuals may be feeling intense frustration which itself, can and often does, lead to:

*challenging behaviour;

*refusal to co-operate or comply with instructions;

*running off/away from or removing the self from the situation.

What practitioners should always keep in mind is:-

a)that some individuals may appear not to be listening in reality, they may:

*be having difficulties in remembering your instructions especially when more than one is given at the same time, for example:-

- i) when abseiling: -
'hold the rope with your left hand, keep your knees straight, lean right back and keep your hands away from the figure of eight'.
- ii) when rock climbing: - 'make sure you have three point contact with the rock face', don't grab the rope and move only one hand or foot at a time'.

*be having difficulties in getting their thoughts together coherently enough when reporting back after some fun activity, for example:-

- i) after a treasure hunt for 26 objects with names starting from A-Z of the alphabet.
- ii) describing participation in an activity at the end of the day.

*be having difficulties in understanding the sequencing of an activity, for example:-

- i) orienteering,
- ii) how to build a bivvy shelter, raft or anything that requires a logical sequence of events in order for the activity/event to take place.

b)an individual may be seen or thought of as being lazy when in reality, they may have:-

*difficulty in organising their role in a team event, for example:-

- i) when doing a team event where each member has been given a specific task to do and told to get on with it.
- ii) given a list of instructions and told to carry them out.

*difficulty in giving an answer other than orally, for example:-

- i) when asked to participate in a quiz where the answer has to be written down,

*decided that it is easier to keep quiet and say nothing when the group is being asked questions. This way they feel they do not make a fool of themselves. Alternately, when asked they may say immediately they don't know and then say nothing further. This may give the impression they are not interested in what is going on.

c)an individual may appear to be careless or lacking care or concern in doing what is asked of them, when in reality, they:-

*have a visual memory deficiency and therefore experiences difficulty when interpreting symbols, for example:-

- i) when trying to do a route (map & compass work),
- ii) being told to go to a store marked --- and collect something,
- iii) being asked to put all the red pegs in one bag and the blue pegs in another etc.

d)an individual may appear to be clumsy, awkward and uncoordinated when in reality, they:-

*may not be able to concentrate appropriately enough or long enough to understand the process of what they have been asked to do, for example:-

- i) multi-instructional task such as pitching a tent, unpacking a rucksack and then cooking a hot meal.
- ii) Pond dipping, putting results in appropriate jar, label them and make a note of what was caught, how many etc.

Some tips for teaching/instructing groups (you should always assume that in every group there is likely to be at least 1 individual with dyslexia and even if non of them have, these tips should be part of your working perspective as good practitioners:-

- 1) On general adventurous activities: Instead of saying 'well done', 'good', 'that's great' etc when someone does something that you feel should be recognised verbally, try to elaborate the achievement by saying: *'I'm pleased with the way you did that'* or *'that was a task well done'*. For the dyslexic, this will be less confusing in that each word has 'real' meaning to the dyslexic and so they are likely to understand that it is them as individuals you are referring to and the task they have just completed.
- 2) On climbing activities, have to hand pictures that show what it is that you will be talking about and what it is that you want them to do.
(plenty of good rock climbing for beginner books on the market)
- 3) When talking about three point contact and moving either a hand or a foot one at a time, align it with climbing a ladder. If on site, make sure a small ladder is nearby and this can be demonstrated by the group themselves. This way the dyslexic will know what is expected of them when on the activity.
- 4) You could have climbing boots (shoes) with different coloured laces, e.g. all left shoes yellow and all right ones red. This way you can always refer to specific shoe lace colours to indicate left and right. However, this is no good if someone is colour blind!
- 5) Similarly, you could have different coloured ropes, i.e. safety rope, climbing rope and abseiling rope.

- 6) When abseiling, just let them use one glove, on the hand that is not holding onto the descender, this way you can always refer to the hand with the glove on rather than the left or right hand.
- 7) Take with you several wrist bands of various colours. These can be used on any activity to help the individual know left from right.

In essence, if an individual cannot learn the way we teach/instruct, then we must teach them the way they can learn and if this means 'playing' with gear then so be it. It costs nothing to follow the above tips but it is priceless when you work with someone who is dyslexic.

Clearly, a dyslexic individual may have:

- a)poor sequencing skills
- b)poor auditory discrimination and memory,
- c)poor visual discrimination and memory,
- d)poor short term memory,
- e)poor self-confidence,

which may make the individual:-

- f)frustrated,
- g)disinterested,
- h)angry,
- i)short tempered,
- j)appear clumsy,
- k)appear 'thick' and 'stupid',
- l)uninteresting to the teacher/instructor,
- m)a group scapegoat,
- n)a victim of bullying,
- o)behavioural challenged.

THERE IS NO EXCUSE THE TEACHER/INSTRUCTOR CAN MAKE WHICH WILL JUSTIFY NOT BEING AWARE OF DYSLEXIA AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS, ESPECIALLY TO THE INDIVIDUAL WHEN PARTICIPATING IN ADVENTUROUS ACTIVITIES.

Essential Reading:

That's Me! – Dyslexia and Outdoor Learning by Mary Twomey and Pat Mee. By Pathways Publishing.

Dyslexia – The Facts by Mark Selikowitz ISBN 0-19-262661-2 by Oxford Univ Press.

F. Grant © 2004