

World Literacy Summit: Evaluation

Slide 1 The importance of early identification and evaluation of dyslexia cannot be overstated. My name is Dr. Margaret Kay and I have been in private practice for 40+ years providing evaluations for dyslexic children and adults.

Slide 2 Dyslexia is the most common of all the learning disabilities and affects at least 20% of the population. It is highly heritable but many adults with dyslexia were never diagnosed. Instead, they were placed in low academic tracks at school and often performed well below their peers with similar abilities.

Dyslexia is a spectrum disorder, meaning that the person can have a severe problem, a mild problem, or somewhere in between.

Slide 3 Risk factors which should trigger an evaluation of a child suspected of dyslexia include family history of reading and spelling problems, premature birth, speech or language skill delays and trouble learning the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make.

Slide 4 During an evaluation of a person suspected of being dyslexic, tests are given to identify the information processing strengths and weaknesses that lead to a diagnosis and a road map for intervention.

Dyslexia diagnosis identifies the source of reading and spelling problems and rules out other types of reading difficulties.

By determining the person's information processing strengths and weaknesses, as well as the acquisition of early literacy skills, a focused remedial plan and a specialized approach to reading can be developed and implemented.

Evaluation helps to target the specific skills that are weak – such as phonological and orthographic processing as well as rapid naming speed - and where reading and spelling instruction should begin.

Finally, evaluation is used to determine eligibility for special education programs and services. This is important because dyslexics require the careful implementation of appropriate synthetic phonetic instruction which comes under the broad knowledge base of the “Science of Reading”.

Slide 5 Testing of dyslexia involves careful assessment of cognitive abilities, which gives clues to the individual's information processing strengths and weaknesses.

Many dyslexic people have excellent **high-level language skills** with strong listening comprehension and good verbal communication ability. However, **low level language skills** are often impaired and may include -

- perception of speech sounds called phonemes,
- deficits in short-term auditory working memory,
- word finding difficulties in demand language situations, and

- mispronunciations of common function words.

Slide 6 Although dyslexic people are very bright and have strong ability to understand the “*big picture*,” their unique academic weaknesses include problems identifying and decoding words, spelling, writing, forming sound/symbol relationships and reading fluently and accurately.

If these problems are not addressed proactively and at an early age, difficulties literacy skill acquisition are likely to persist throughout the person’s lifetime.

Slide 7 The key to evaluation of dyslexia is to catch it early and address it educationally. The goal is to beat the disability by the end of third grade, which roughly approximates the end of the critical window of language development from birth to 10 years. It is during this period when the child’s brain is rapidly wiring connections to form sound-symbol relationships.

Slide 8 The first evaluation for dyslexia, however, will not be the last one. Dyslexia does not simply go away with the passage of time. Even when the student is performing within normal limits in basic literacy skill areas, processing problems persist throughout the lifetime and can have negative impacts in other areas.

For example, when children with dyslexia have been taught to decode and encode properly, they oftentimes do not have good reading fluency and still struggle to keep up with academic task demands. They may remain poor spellers which can adversely affect writing as they “*dumb down*” the content of what they write because they cannot spell the words that they can say.

Foreign language course requirements may need to be waived. Extended time may need to be provided for standardized tests given in high stakes situations. Board examinations for adults may require a reader or audio text, a scribe for writing and extended time to complete the test in a private exam room.

Slide 9 In summary, early intervention is critical to ensuring that the person with dyslexia develops essential literacy skills commensurate with age, grade and ability expectations.

Evaluation is also central to diagnosis, intervention planning, progress monitoring and ensuring equitable participation in school and in the workplace.

While early intervention is critical to achieve successful educational outcomes, ongoing evaluation at approximately three year intervals is necessary to ensure continued success educationally and in the workplace.