

6 Realities of Dyslexia and the Needs of Individuals with Dyslexia

1) Prevention is a supportive context for all students

Investing resources in prevention is better for everyone involved. It is better for children without dyslexia. It is better for children with dyslexia. It is better for parents. It is better for educators. It is better for society. Prevention requires schools to implement robust systems to support foundational literacy instruction and intervention starting on the first day of school. When we prevent reading and spelling deficits for most students, we create the educational context to identify those children with dyslexia. It makes their word reading and spelling issues exceptional within their school context.

2) Risk of dyslexia is different from a diagnosis of dyslexia

Some students identified as being at risk of dyslexia in kindergarten and first grade will never experience severe word reading and spelling issues because they receive intervention in kindergarten and first grade. This is a good thing. This is something to be celebrated. These children may never experience the heartache and adverse life outcomes that arise from failing at what is one of their only jobs as children – learning to read and write.

3) Dyslexia persists despite instruction and prevention

Even with the most robust preventive efforts in kindergarten and first grade, some individuals still experience difficulties reading and spelling words. This is dyslexia. It is real. Dyslexia is not an educational death sentence. Individuals with dyslexia learn to read and spell words, comprehend written language, and write with appropriate intervention. It takes resources to provide this intervention. Resources are freed up by ensuring that we each do our part to prevent as many students as possible from experiencing reading and spelling deficits in the first place.

4) It is never too late

Some students with dyslexia will slip through the cracks and not be identified until upper elementary, middle, or high school. These students should be identified and provided intervention. They, too, can and will learn to read and spell when provided with appropriate intervention.

5) Intervene in all aspects of literacy development

Ensure students with dyslexia have support in developing all aspects of literacy. These aspects include reading comprehension and written expression. The label “reading disability” used in federal and state policies and research has unintentional consequences by limiting the scope of intervention. Confining dyslexia to the limiting concept of a “reading disability” can lead to misinformed ideas not grounded in what is understood about the full range of oral and written language development. For example, a child with dyslexia who struggles to write legibly needs direct instruction in handwriting. That instruction should be provided regardless of an additional label of a learning difference, such as dysgraphia or a specific learning disability in written expression.

6) Accommodations are a hand up

Individuals who experience word reading and spelling difficulties can benefit from and should receive accommodations to meet their potential in other aspects of academics. For example, the well-documented spelling challenges experienced by individuals with dyslexia are pronounced. Spelling is a foundational literacy skill that is a basic mechanic of writing. Deficits in spelling hinder the ability of individuals with dyslexia to express themselves in writing. Technology and other accommodations can be provided to help them express themselves more freely and fully in writing despite spelling deficits.