



'A brighter tomorrow'

How to support your child with a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD)

Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) a quick guide

A specific learning difficulty is not a term to be concerned by. It means that your child has been identified as having a difficulty with a certain area of the curriculum. With time this may be given a name, such as Dyslexia or Dyscalculia.

You may find that your child find some things difficult:

- Reading and spelling.
- Putting letters and figures the wrong way round.
- Remembering tables, alphabet, spelling/number rules.
- Leaving letters out of words or puts them in the wrong order.
- Confusing 'b' and 'd' and words such as 'no/on'.
- Needing to use fingers or marks on paper to make simple calculations.
- Concentrating.
- Understanding what he/she has read.
- Taking longer than average to do written work
- Processing instructions at speed
- Tying shoe laces, tie, dressing.
- Telling left from right, order of days of the week, months of the year etc. surprises you because in other ways he/she is 'switched on' and alert.
- Poor sense of direction and confusing left and right.
- Lacking confidence.

If this is the case, there are many things that you can do to support your child. Working in partnership with the school to establish routines and strategies that work is a first step. In school there will be a number of strategies teachers might try. These may include:

- Instructions on a child's desk to support processing information – e.g. how to get ready for home time
- Work broken into steps to make it less daunting
- A word mat of well used sounds or high frequency words
- A word log of difficult spellings and sounds
- Different coloured papers or pens
- Using mind maps or charts to collect or share information
- Using magnetic letters or numbers and magnetic boards to physically move letters and numbers to make words and sequences
- Using an overlay to change the colour of text
- Using a bookmark to hide text or numbers to enable processing
- Use of ICT to support written tasks

At home:

1. Be positive, patient and persevering:

Good home school links will go a long way. Develop a good parent/ teacher relationship. Set up the communication network and keep it going.

Be patient and persevering with your child - patiently teach them to do things for themselves; to dress themselves, tie shoe laces, dress themselves correctly, tell the time, left from right etc. Be patient also with the progress they make once strategies have been identified allow them to be independent and help themselves. For example, until they know left from right, see that their bicycle bell is on the left handle bar so they can ride on the 'bell' side of the road. Send them on simple errands, encourage them to use the telephone, particularly phones without built in memories.

2. Be aware.

Be aware of the problems, symptoms and signs of stress. They may be frustrated by many things besides school work - not comprehending the time of year in relation to the months, not knowing which day of the week it is, or not being able to differentiate between their nearest local towns. Planning ahead to realise risks and disappointments before they become a problem is valuable time spent.

Avoid failure situations at home. Home must be a safe place, so don't show your anxiety if you can possibly avoid it - it adds to their own feeling of inadequacy.

3. Be practical.

Unobtrusive help will be beneficial to a child that is aware they have a difficulty. Read to them- never mind their age. Up to 5, 6, 7 you will be doing this anyway - don't ask them to, but let them if they want to. There's a lot of reading to be done and many dyslexics find that after a while they are no longer comprehending what they are reading - that is when you come in. Even so, they may only be able to take in so much before their concentration goes, so it has to be done in short spells.

Story CDs or podcasts may be enjoyable, it may be worth visiting the local library to see what's available.

4. Buttons and bows.

Three of the most difficult tasks for a parent to teach their children are:
fastening shoes, fastening buttons and tying ties.

Buy slip-on shoes or gym shoes, a tie knot on elastic can be a stop gap measure, but it only postpones the issue. Yet once these tasks are conquered, they are learned for life - it is like learning to ride a bicycle.

Here are one or two tips that may be of help to one or two of you:

Firstly, you must realise that a left-handed person performs these tasks differently to a right-handed person. So, if you are right-handed and your child is left-handed (or vice versa) you will always FACE your child when showing them how to tie their tie or shoe laces. BUT, if you are both right-handed, or left-handed, you must stand BEHIND them.

Secondly, do encourage your child to put into words what he/she is doing (like in knitting - 'in, over, through and off').

For teaching children how to tie shoe laces, you could use either a piece of white cord, half of which is red, and placed on the right; or two different coloured boot laces fastened together. It is also useful to use a man's shoe, placing the toe of the shoe away from the child. This combination makes it easier for the child to distinguish the different ends and bows, etc.

It may be useful to buy grown-up laces for children's shoes. This gives them the extra length to play with. Some children find it easier after tying the initial half hitch to make two loops and then tie together to play with. Experiment!!

A tip for fastening buttons on coats or cardigans, shirts and blouses ALWAYS start at the BOTTOM, where you can see what you are doing - not at the top under your chin, or half-way down where it is guesswork.

N.B. Remove any 'spare' buttons that are put at the bottom of some shirts these days - it can be confusing.

When teaching a child to tie a tie, remembering to stand behind if you are both the same handedness, start off with the wide end of the tie twice as long as the narrow end, and DO remember to get the child to say what he is doing, e.g. 'Start with the wide end very long and the narrow end very short. Put the wide end over the narrow end, then under the over again' etc.

Parent Support

Wolverhampton has a dedicated SEND support team. Wolverhampton Information Advice and Support Service are there to support you in meetings, offer advice or be a friendly ear. Their leaflets are in the entrance hall, or alternatively you can call 01902 556945.

Some useful websites are:

<http://www.beingdyslexic.co.uk>

<http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

<http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/>

<https://wolvesiass.org/>