

## **Factsheet: How parents can help the student with dyslexia at second level**

Consistent parental understanding, support and interest are vital components for the student's progress. The Task Force Report on Dyslexia recognised that the involvement of parents is central to meeting the needs of students with dyslexia. Parents may need support and advice but they have a major contribution to make in achieving effective outcomes. The Understanding Dyslexia DVD has a section which gives comprehensive advice on how parents can help. However the key contribution which parents make is to provide a safe and reassuring home.

### **Tips on organisation of homework**

- Negotiate a homework timetable that takes into account any sports or other commitments. Once agree, put it up in the study area and expect that it will be kept to.
- No distractions such as television or mobile phone.
- At a desk/table, with good light.
- Plenty of space with shelves to organise books and files.
- All necessary equipment that help with good filing and multisensory learning such as pens, pencils, crayons, staplers, punches, highlighters, plastic wallets, index cards, etc.
- Colour coded files for notes and copies, e.g. red files and copies for English.
- Calendar or planner on the wall with key dates marked in such as deadlines for assignments, exams, projects, as well as sports and other commitments.

### **Tips on routines**

- Ensure that the homework journal is used to take down homework in each class of the day. Homework consists of both written and learning work and that both are written in.
- If necessary, writing in the names of subjects in the journal the night before makes it quicker to take down homework.
- Get the student to use the homework journal to pack the school bag for the next day.
- If homework has not been entered accurately, do you have the phone numbers/emails of reliable students who could be contacted.
- Is there a school network which might have homework tasks listed on it?
- Negotiate a weekly 'housekeeping' session where the bag is checked and notes are filed.

### **Communication with the school**

Good communication between the school and parents is an invaluable support and can be fostered by the following:

- Ensure each teacher is aware of the difficulties the student may face. This could be done by sending the summary of the report or key points from it.
- If a teacher is absent for a period of time, send the summary into the substitute teacher.
- If the student does not read fluently aloud, teachers need to be aware of this before the student enters the school in September in 1<sup>st</sup> year.
- Monitor the homework journal for teacher comments or use it yourself to communicate with teachers.
- Ask teachers for written notices of events.
- Inform yourself about who is the key teacher to contact about supports such as accommodations in exams or subject choice.
- Inform the school if the student is stressed or homework is taking an excessive amount of time.
- Ask if the student could sit in the front of the class as it helps with concentration.
- Be informed about educational choices such as subject choice at school, types of Leaving Certificate programmes such as the LCA, exemptions from the study of Irish or a modern

language, reasonable accommodations in state and school examinations and be ready to act as an advocate for the student to access appropriate supports.

- If students in senior cycle are applying for DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) or for reasonable accommodations in the Leaving Certificate, they need a recent assessment (within 3 years). The CAO website ([www.cao.ie](http://www.cao.ie)) has a list of downloads on the homepage which detail the eligibility criteria and specify the tests which should be part of such an assessment for DARE. Alternatively the school can update an older report with new testing.
- Suggest through the Parents Association that the school organise an in-service for teachers on dyslexia and/or a talk for parents on how to help students with dyslexia.

### **Tips for helping learning**

- Be in the background when homework is being done to monitor that it is done effectively and to help sort any difficulties out. This should reduce as routines become established. Is the homework of good quality? Is the layout and writing good?
- Help them develop memory strategies. Students with dyslexia must make the material 'their own' to get it into long term memory. Receiving information in one channel such as language and expressing it in another such as a mindmap helps information transfer from working to long-term memory. Possible learning activities include talking, listening, debating, answering questions, drawing timelines or mind-maps, visualising, creating mnemonics or making up cards with key facts.
- If there are difficulties, don't do the homework for the student. Teachers need to be aware if students cannot cope.
- If teenagers are not feeling confident, they may be defensive and reluctant to accept help. Ask them for their ideas on how you can help. Possible strategies to help include:
  - Test new vocabulary which has been learnt.
  - Listen to the student explain a new topic which has been learnt.
  - Ask questions based on the textbook or revision book.
  - Help with the planning of an essay.
  - Show them how to make clear concise notes with bullet points, colour, numbering of points and headings. Then make sure the notes are filed.
  - Get tapes of texts for English, so that they can hear and read the text at the same time.
  - Some educational publishers may make digital copies of textbooks available.
- Revision books can help by giving access to keypoints for learning.

### **Tips for home life**

Parents can help the student enormously by activities in the home.

- Reading is a key skill at second level. Parents can foster it by ensuring the child reads for about 20 minutes every day. Paired reading may help or reading books with an appropriate reading level. The school library or local library may have literacy reading schemes with books with more adult content but which have been abridged and vocabulary simplified.
- Reading should continue through the summer, otherwise reading may regress.
- Listen to tapes of books on long car journeys so they are not missing out on the stories their peers are accessing through reading.
- Help the child be organised in the house. Have consistent routines. Make lists of jobs and chores to be done.
- Keep a masterfile where all the school reports and assessments.
- Inform yourself about dyslexia, read books, attend lectures or courses and talk to professionals so you are aware of what is available and can help the child.
- Encourage them to develop keyboarding skills so that they can use a computer easily.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) gives invaluable support. There is so much hardware and software available that it is easy to be overwhelmed by the choice. Ask teachers or get a demonstration/ free downloads to find out what is most appropriate.

### **Tips for developing self esteem**

Self esteem means children feel competent and when faced with new challenges, they feel that they can achieve. It is fostered by taking interest in their activities and giving genuine praise for achievement.

- Encourage the child to partake in activities that will yield success. Focus on their strengths. It might be in sports, drama, music, art, scouts, or voluntary social activity.
- Spend family time together where the child is listened to and contributes. Family discussions over meals or on outings can promote social skills and verbal expression. Watch TV programmes, films or the News together and give them an opportunity to express their opinions. Board or interactive games will help develop communication skills, problem solving and decision making.
- Ask them to contribute to decisions about planning holidays, home decoration
- Be open about the fact the student has learning difficulties. Reassure them that they can talk to you and you will listen and try to help.
- Discuss the assessment with them, judging the amount of information that is appropriate for their stage of development and how much they will understand. By the end of second level they should know how the dyslexia affects their learning and their learning strengths and weaknesses. They will need this information to be able to make appropriate decisions and to maximise learning.

### **Resources**

Department of Education      Understanding Dyslexia DVD  
 Cogan, J. & Flecker, M. (2004)    *Dyslexia in Secondary School, a Practical Handbook for Teachers, Parents, and Students* London: Whurr

### **Dyslexia Association of Ireland Publications**

*All Children Learn Differently: A Parent's Guide to Dyslexia*

Ball M, Hughes A, McCormack W. (2011) *Dyslexia, An Irish Perspective* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.

McCormack, W. (2007) *Lost for Words, Dyslexia at Second Level* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.