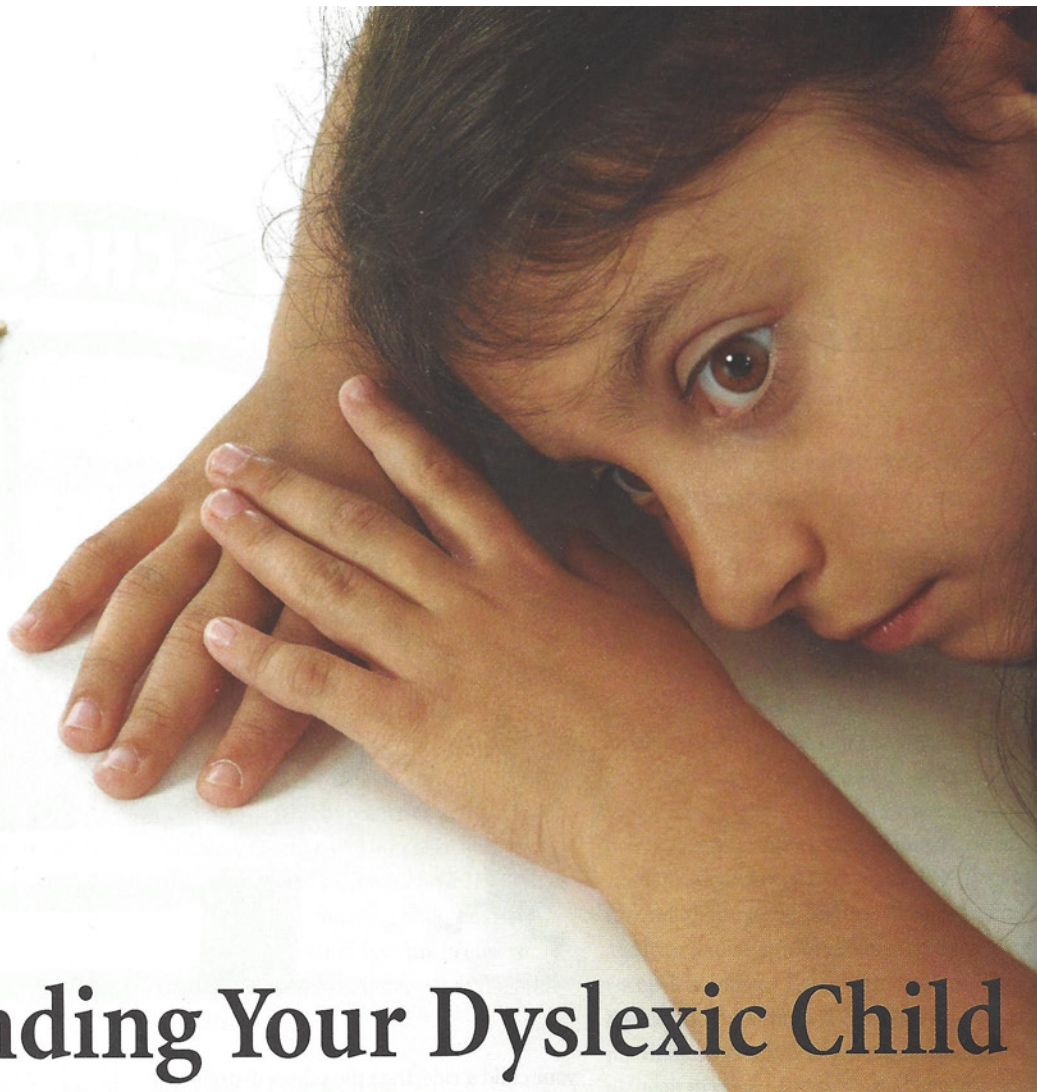


DYSLEXIA



# Understanding Your Dyslexic Child

**I**t is no secret that I have dyslexia. I've written about it many times on my blog. But in 2012, after seeing the documentary "The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia," I was flabbergasted. Why? Because it showed me that the effects of dyslexia reach so far beyond my basic difficulties with writing, spelling and being a slow reader. Many other aspects of my life are challenging as well, and until I saw this film, I never connected them with dyslexia.

An estimated one in five people have dyslexia. Most of them are never diagnosed. Tens of thousands of frustrated parents can't understand why their child has difficulty reading and writing. And many adults have struggled their entire lives without knowing the reason for their own difficulties. If you struggle with similar things, or if you are

a parent with a dyslexic child, perhaps reading about my experiences will help you gain a deeper understanding of what you or your child are experiencing.

Note: The symptoms and severity of dyslexia vary from person to person. Not all dyslexics have the same difficulties, although some symptoms of dyslexia — such as slow reading and difficulty writing — are universal.

Dyslexia affects so much more than basic reading and writing skills. Here are just a few examples from the documentary of how dyslexia affects daily life:

- Students are often encouraged and sometimes required to take notes during a class or lecture. That's a great way to remember what the teacher discussed,

but for myself and other dyslexics, there's a problem with this scenario. We can't take notes — not good ones, that is. Why? Because we have to concentrate so hard on the act of writing the notes that we can no longer pay attention to the lecture, and in a short time we've lost the train of thought. My workaround is to take mental notes, and if I do write something down, it's usually brief, perhaps a simple word or two as a quick reminder.

- A dyslexic may be able to spell a simple word one day, but not the next.
- A dyslexic person will probably have extreme difficulty following and understanding basic written assembly instructions, but can easily assemble just about anything from illustrations.
- When a person with dyslexia leaves an unfamiliar place without a clear focal

point, he or she will frequently go the wrong direction.

Dyslexia never goes away. A dyslexic person must learn to compensate for it. After all these years of daily practice, I still read slowly and have to concentrate intensively on what I'm reading in order to understand and remember. Otherwise, I just mouth the words without comprehending them.

Many who know me find it surprising that I'm an author. To be perfectly honest, no one is more surprised than me. It has been a long road getting to this point and one reason why I am able to write is because I now have tools and strategies that I use to help myself.

Here are a few highlights from the documentary. Thankfully, many of them are becoming part of public consciousness.

#### STATISTICS

- One in five people have dyslexia, yet it is the most misunderstood learning difference.
- Dyslexia accounts for 80-90 percent of learning disabilities.
- 10 million American students have dyslexia today.

#### BRAIN MECHANICS AND DYSLEXIA

- fMRI scans (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging, or an MRI that measures blood flow in the brain of a person who is engaged in some kind of specific mental activity, such as reading) show that the left rear part of the brain is the automatic area for reading. People with dyslexia tend to show reduced activity in this part of the brain, and for them, reading becomes manual rather than automatic.
- This part of the brain is also involved in recognizing and processing the disparate sounds that make up words. That explains why reading is so difficult for a dyslexic person, but it also can affect

their perception of the different sounds of spoken words. Misspeaking is also common among dyslexics.

#### SOME GOOD THINGS ABOUT DYSLEXIA

- Dyslexia is not just a list of weaknesses, it also produces valuable strengths.
- A learning disability does not equate to a thinking disability.
- Dyslexia actually forces a person to have to think and figure things out for themselves, because learning is so hard. But that's a strength because the world needs thinkers more than it needs learners.
- Dyslexics can be imaginative people who think outside the box.

#### WILL IT GO AWAY?

- No. For a dyslexic person, reading never becomes automatic. Each word needs to be sounded out phonetically for life.
- The slow reading and poor spelling never go away, but patience and perseverance will pay off. Making the extra effort will become part of a dyslexic person's lifestyle, and in time, things will get easier as a dyslexic person gets more and more used to dealing with his or her specific difficulties.

#### SCHOOL AND DYSLEXIA

- A dyslexic person will never read quickly. No matter how brilliant a student may be, reading with dyslexia will always be laborious and it might take a dyslexic student more than double the time other students take to read the same thing. Dyslexia robs a person of time. Without accommodation in a learning setting (like extra time to take exams), there can be a tremendous strain to keep up, and often the capacity is not there.
- Remember that testing just proves how fast one can read and how much one has memorized. Life requires understanding, not just memorization.
- Each student has to crack the code of their own learning style.
- Care about and commend dyslexic

students' efforts more than just their grades.

#### COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT DYSLEXIA

- One particularly damaging misunderstanding of the condition is the belief that students who suffer from dyslexia possess diminished academic potential. This is not true.
- Many people think that because dyslexic students require adaptations and adjusted expectations related to reading speed, spelling accuracy and their mode of written expression (laptop versus handwriting,) that they will not succeed as well as their non-dyslexic peers. This is also not true. Many dyslexics have become heart surgeons, neurosurgeons, lawyers, writers, CEOs and more.
- Dyslexia is a mechanical disability, not a thinking disability. Teachers need to communicate this, parents need to understand this, and — most of all — dyslexic students need to know this.

I am especially appreciative of the candor of the participants in the documentary — children and adults with dyslexia, parents of children with dyslexia, and educators who create optimal learning environments and teaching methods for their dyslexic students. The emotional expressions about the impact this condition has on everyone involved are astounding and inspiring and not to be missed.

If you recognize aspects of your child's experience here, I encourage you to get your child screened for dyslexia as soon as possible. The earlier intervention begins, the better. ✿

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Don M. Winn is an award-winning author and dyslexia advocate. He has written numerous articles about dyslexia and helping struggling readers. His blog archives are available at [www.donwinn.com](http://www.donwinn.com).