

Why Can't My Child Read? Common Learning Difficulties that Cause Reading Problems

As children enter and work their way through the early grades of elementary school, their number one focus is learning to read. For most kids, learning to read is a natural progression that happens as they are introduced to reading skills and are developmentally ready to retain those skills.

For other students, learning to read becomes a daunting and exhausting task and as they progress through school, they begin to see themselves falling farther and farther behind their peers and parents see their self-esteem plummet. Look at some facts:

- 2006 More than **8 million** U.S. students in grades 4-12 struggle to read, write, and comprehend adequately
- 2004 **only 3out of 10 eighth graders** read at or above grade level,¹
- In 2006, only **54%** of people aged 15-74 years had adequate or better prose literacy skills and **53%** had adequate document literacy skills.²

There are many reasons that a child could be struggling with reading. Some students just need more time and more practice to become fluent readers while others may need help from outside sources that specialize in reading instruction. It is even possible that a child just has a lack of interest in reading and it may never really be one of their favorite pastimes.

Then there is the group of kids who just can't seem to get it and find that they indeed have a learning disability that needs special skills and training to overcome.

Following is a brief introduction to a couple of the most common learning difficulties that cause reading problems and some signs that parents can look for as well as links to helpful sites that give more information on each type of reading difficulty.

[ADD/ADHD](#)

One of the most publicized diagnoses of children with reading difficulties is Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Both have become fairly common terms thrown around in many of our schools today and have quickly become some of the most talked about and most controversial of all learning differences.

ADD is a neurological condition that involves an inability to focus attention as well as impulsivity. ADHD adds an element of hyperactivity as well. Both of these conditions can be key contributors to a child's reading difficulties and show symptoms such as:

- ◆ Short duration activities and lack of persistence
- ◆ High levels of distraction

- ◆ Frequent changes in activity
- ◆ Easily distracted and limited time on task
- ◆ Excessive fidgeting and wiggling in relatively calm situations
- ◆ Physical restlessness

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is another reading difficulty that has made its way into the mainstream education culture as educators and doctors learn more and more about this condition.

Dyslexia is a processing disorder that hinders language development, both orally and written. Many children and adults with dyslexia can be very intelligent yet their brains process information in a different way than the average person.

A life-long condition, dyslexia is something that should be diagnosed as early as possible so that children can learn coping skills to allow them to function and even thrive in educational settings.

Dyslexia can show its mark in some of the following ways:

- ◆ Has difficulty making a connection between letters and sounds
- ◆ Can not spell phonetically (based on sounds)
- ◆ Consistent errors such as letter or word reversals or substitutions
- ◆ Relies on memorizing and/or guessing based on pictures and context
- ◆ May have difficulty with new vocabulary, learning new skills, or recalling facts
- ◆ Might hold pencil in an awkward manner
- ◆ May have difficulty recalling small words or reading words in isolation

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness

A child may have a lack of Phonological Awareness that is causing their difficulty in reading.

Phonological Awareness is the ability to break up spoken language into many various parts and move those parts around in syllables, words, and even sentences. Phonemic Awareness is the understanding that individual words are broken up into sounds.

Both of these abilities can be taught and assessed as a marker of student's progress in reading. Students who are having difficulties in this area early on in school may not have a reading problem, they just may be among the group that needs more time and special attention to acquire fluent reading skills.

Visual/Auditory Processing Disorders

Some children have difficulty in how they process information given to them. They may have problems with the letters or numbers they see (Visual Processing) or have difficulty

with things they hear such as verbal instructions (Auditory Processing). The signs of this type of difficulty can appear very similar to ADD or Dyslexia. For this reason, screening by a speech/language pathologist can be a valuable tool. Most schools have this type of professional on staff.

To find out more about if your child might have a learning disability visit this quick [Learning Disability Screening](#)³ and take the quiz. It will walk you through common signs and then give suggestions on what to do next.

All children learn skills such as reading in their own unique way. There is no magic formula to teach a child to read, and there are many barriers out there that can hinder the process.

Some children who appear to be readers may have difficulty comprehending what they read. Some children can completely understand what is read to them, but can't manage to read the words themselves.

As a parent, it's important that we read often with our children starting before school age, to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in this area and keep good notes as a documentation of their progress through the years.

¹ "Educational CyberPlayGround" Internet. Database available online. <http://www.educyberpg.com>. Date accessed September 12, 2005

²<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Chapter6102008>

³ http://pediatrics.about.com/od/screeningquizzes/l/bl_ld.htm

Website Links:

ADHD <http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/adhd>

Dyslexia <http://www.ncl.org/content/view/331/456008/>

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness <http://www.ldonline.org/article/6254>

Research Sources:

<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/digov-public/public/DisplayPage.do?parentFolderId=73>

<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~ebdstudy/disord1/add.htm>

<http://www.ncl.org/content/view/327/456005/>

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/6254>

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