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### Attempted Definitions of Dyslexia

**“A child of average or above average intelligence may be considered to have the disability of dyslexia if he has significant and persistent difficulty with reading, writing and spelling in comparison with his abilities in other spheres, of a degree sufficient to prevent written work reflecting his true ability and knowledge in spite of adequate teaching.”**  
*(Medical and Health Services Sub-Committee of the British Dyslexia Association).*

**“A disorder in children, who, despite conventional classroom experience, fail to achieve the language skills of reading, writing and spelling commensurate with their intellectual abilities.”**  
*(World Federation of Neurologists of which Dr Macdonald Critchley, leading world authority on dyslexia, was president).*

**“A specific language difficulty mainly concerned with the nitty gritty of words and letters.”**  
*(Dr Margaret Newton; Aston University).*

## Introduction

Dyslexia is still a dirty word and there remains a great deal of misunderstanding attached to it. Yet whatever its cause or nature, its manifestation is that the child has difficulty in reading, writing and spelling. Despite normal and often high intelligence, dyslexic children are frequently branded as slow learners or just plain lazy or daydreamers by those who teach them. In fact they are none of these. It just so happens that the methods of teaching reading and writing employed in most schools today baffle them.

There are three common but incorrect assumptions about learning to read, write and spell. The first is that all normal sensible and intelligent children naturally possess the ability to do them. The second is that any qualified and experienced teacher can teach reading to any child. The third is that all backward readers can be successfully taught together in remedial reading classes. The reality suggests otherwise. There still remains a percentage of children who, despite apparent sound intelligence and often high ability in other areas, just do not respond to traditional methods of learning our written language. Unfortunately many are never recognised as having a specific difficulty. Others are only identified by specialists when they are referred for behaviour problems, school refusal, abdominal pains, bed-wetting or worsening asthma; problems which are essentially secondary to the central issue, namely the child's failure to progress in reading and writing.

It can be very sad to see how crippled an otherwise intelligent child can be by his inability to deal with the sound-symbol system of written language. Some just long to be able to read and write like other children and to show their teachers and parents that they are neither lazy nor stupid. They have more than their fair share of problems. Not only do they suffer at school but many suffer at home when their parents, from whom they rightly expect support, become vexed, angry and unkind. Some are the victims of bullying by disappointed fathers. Excessive anxiety on the part of loving and caring parents can have equally adverse effects. The child may react by clinging to his mother or by acting the fool or resorting to other attention seeking behaviour. Too often they become aggressive and anti-social. It is of interest to note that a large proportion of juvenile delinquents have reading difficulties and of these many are doubtless simply dyslexic.

Forty years ago Dr Macdonald Critchley was received with scepticism when he spoke of 'dyslexia'. Today the subject is discussed with more composure and informed members of the medical, psychological and teaching professions who have studied the problem in children over a long time, do not question the usefulness of the term. It is hoped that before long the teaching profession as a whole will recognise the usefulness of the term and that specialised methods are required if the education service is

to honour its obligation to provide these children with teaching suited to their needs. For too long educationists have indulged in sterile arguments about causes and definitions of dyslexia. What is necessary is that they should now recognise what the medical profession has known for over forty years; that there is such a thing as dyslexia and that it can be helped and that the label 'dyslexia' itself is essential to ensuring that the right sort of help is arranged. For too long local authorities have been dragging their feet on the subject. Some just drift along hoping that parents will eventually become tired of complaining and will transfer their children to independent schools. Too many parents have been taken in and reassured that their child is receiving appropriate 'remedial help', not knowing that this may amount to no more than one or two half hour sessions a week when the child is 'heard' to read as a member of a group. For some parents the lesson may be not to indulge in fruitless correspondence with the local education authority but to get on with the job and enforce their rights according to the law of the land.

When parents are first informed that their child is dyslexic they may well feel confused and inadequate. Both the child and his family are likely to need support for some time. It is important that the parents should help the child to retain his self-confidence and to encourage him to continue with his hobbies and other activities in which he can succeed. Above all they should try to give him an insight into his problem and so help to alleviate his anxiety. This is a belief held by many adults who themselves have experienced dyslexia. It is the purpose of this book not only to offer some guidance on the subject of dyslexia but also to present that guidance in a way which will allow it to be read by a parent to a child who is suffering from the problem. It is of course appreciated that not every child is ready or able to face up to his problem in such a direct manner. Much will depend upon the sensitivity of the parent to his child's mental and emotional make-up. It is therefore recommended that the parent first reads the book and then decides whether it would be suitable to read the central section to his or her particular child. It may be that just by referring to certain pages or pictures in this section can, in the first instance, go some way in helping the child to understand his problem.