

The Difference Between Dyslexia and Visual Processing Issues

By Kate Kelly

Dyslexia and issues with visual perception and processing might seem like they'd go hand in hand. They are very different issues, however. Dyslexia involves trouble with processing language. It causes difficulty with reading, writing and other skills.

Visual processing issues involve trouble with processing information the eyes see. So if a child with visual processing issues is reading, he may have trouble processing the words he sees on a page. That may be why some people confuse visual processing issues and dyslexia.

Use this chart to better understand the similarities and differences between dyslexia and visual processing issues.

| | Dyslexia | Visual Processing Issues |
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| What is it? | <p>A learning issue that mainly affects reading. Dyslexia affects the way the brain processes language. It is not a problem with vision.</p> <p>Kids with dyslexia often struggle with sounding out words and recognizing commonly seen words. They also may find it hard to isolate sounds, match sounds to letters or blend sounds into words.</p> <p>In addition to reading, dyslexia can impact writing, spelling and even speaking.</p> | <p>Kids with visual processing issues have trouble making sense of information taken in through their eyes. Like dyslexia, visual processing issues are not the same as vision problems. Visual processing issues can't be corrected with glasses.</p> <p>There are different types of visual processing issues. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trouble telling the difference between the size, shape, and color of objects• Confusion about written symbols like those used in math• Difficulty judging distance• Poor spatial awareness |

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| Signs you may notice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggles with reading • Has trouble sounding out written words and memorizing sight words • Doesn't understand what he has read • Understands text that is read to him better than text he read to himself • Avoids reading aloud • Has trouble with spelling, possibly leaving out letters, reversing letters or confusing the order of letters • Has trouble following a sequence of directions • Doesn't always get the meaning of spoken language • May have trouble with grammar | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks interest in movies or TV • Is distracted by too much visual information • Has difficulty with tasks that require copying (taking notes from a board) • Often bumps into things • Has trouble with activities like catching or kicking a ball • Frequently gets lost • Reverses letters or writes letters backwards • Has difficulty writing within lines or margins and spacing words • Doesn't know his left from his right • Frequently ignores function signs in math • Does a sloppy job with visual tasks, like sweeping the floor or sorting socks • Can't remember even basic facts that he read silently • Skips words or entire lines when reading, or reads the same sentence over |
| Possible social and emotional impact | <p>Not meeting expectations can make kids feel inadequate. Struggling academically, even though they're working hard, can affect self-esteem.</p> <p>Missing verbal jokes, sarcasm and subtle meaning in language can affect them socially. So can struggling to come up with the right word or a timely answer to a question.</p> | <p>Getting lost easily, or struggling with tasks that others find easy, can undermine self-confidence.</p> <p>Not enjoying or being good at sports can make it hard to fit in socially. Struggling academically despite trying hard can affect self-esteem.</p> |

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| <p>Therapies, approaches and technology that can help</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific instruction on identifying sounds, understanding how letters represent sounds in speech, decoding words, and developing the ability to recognize words by sight • Specialized reading instruction, either one-on-one or in a small group • Help from a reading specialist • A reading program that focuses on using all the senses to learn (a multisensory approach) | <p>Various interventions and strategies may help with visual processing issues, such as reading guide strips.</p> <p>Depending on the area of weakness, a child might work with a developmental optometrist, occupational therapist or neuropsychologist.</p> <p>You may hear about vision therapy, which some parents opt to use. But keep in mind that not all professionals view it as scientifically valid.</p> |
| <p><u>Accommodations</u> that can help</p> | <p>Dyslexia accommodations can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra time for reading and writing assignments • Access to the teacher's lesson notes to reduce the amount of note-taking • Simplified directions • Different ways to respond to assignments, like circling an answer instead of filling in the blank • Books on tape • Computer software | <p>Accommodations for visual processing issues can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A slant board or three-ring binder to bring the visual field closer • Wide-ruled paper to make it easier to write in the lines • Spoken as well as written directions • Class notes or a peer note-taker • Visual presentations that are also described out loud • Directions written in a different color • Handouts with simple directions and images |

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| What you can do at home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to read by finding books that are interesting to him. • Read with him in ways that make it fun. Read aloud to your child so he hears stories above his reading level. • Encourage your child to listen to audiobooks and use text-to-speech tools. • Help your child use spell-check programs designed for people with dyslexia. • For younger kids, recite nursery rhymes and sing memory songs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your child lots of opportunities to practice skills that are hard for him. • Do simple puzzles or read the <i>Where's Waldo?</i> books together. • Teach your child to notice major landmarks to avoid getting lost. (Avoid saying "right" and "left" when giving directions.) • Color-code materials for each subject in school, so your child can easily find them in a cluttered backpack or work space. |

Find out what do if you think your child might have dyslexia, or if you think your child might have visual processing issues. It's also possible to have both issues. No matter what the case, an evaluation can help you figure out how best to help your child. You can have the school do an evaluation, which will be free of charge. Or you can get a private evaluation.

Meanwhile, get answers to common questions about dyslexia and visual processing issues. You can also explore more signs of dyslexia and visual processing issues.

About the Author



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Chat With an Expert