Successfully
Homeschooling Your Child
with Dyslexia

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Disclaimer: This book is not intended (and should not be used) as a definitive guide to diagnosing or understanding your child: it's intended only to provide perspective on a range of questions and concerns that I have heard from many parents. I strongly advise parents with concerns about their children's development and academic progress to consult with competent professionals since there are a range of neurological and other issues for which early detection and treatment are invaluable.
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Part 1: Handling the Diagnosis

Getting the News

Sometimes, the news that your child has dyslexia comes at you like it did for me – like a brick through a window. Other times, the signs and symptoms sort of gradually sneak up on you. It might be the way your child skips over many of the little “connection” words like “his”, “with”, “or” in reading aloud. Or it could be the way they just don’t get the connection between the “s..s..s” sound you are making with your mouth, and the card you are holding up with the picture of the “scissors.” In those cases, you may simply have an instinct that something isn’t clicking, but aren’t sure what it is.

If you simply have suspicions about learning differences you see in your child, or if, like me, it was suggested to you by a teacher or therapist, you will need to get more information before jumping to any kind of final conclusions. Because children read and write at such different ages and stages, it could be that your child is just having “growing pains”, and simply needs more time and patience and focused instruction to reach his or her potential. The only way to alleviate your concerns, however, may be to pursue a professional evaluation.

What is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia, also called Developmental Reading Disorder (DRD), is a broad term covering many types of difficulties with information processing leading to reading, writing, and spelling problems. The difficulties that a child can experience with the disorder can be as mild as a simple delay in reading fluency or as severe as a complete inability to remember the order and sequence of letters in a word from one time to the next. The definitions of dyslexia range widely. For instance, typing “dyslexia” into Google might bring up inaccurate definitions such as this one: “impaired ability to learn to read.” The National Institutes of Health defines dyslexia as “a reading disability resulting from the inability to process graphic symbols.” I prefer the Wikipedia definition: Dyslexia is a broad term defining a learning disability that impairs a person’s fluency or accuracy in being able to read, speak, and spell and which can manifest itself as a difficulty with phonological awareness, phonological decoding, orthographic coding, auditory short-term memory, and/or rapid naming. Dyslexia is separate and distinct from reading difficulties resulting from other causes, such as a non-neurological deficiency with vision or hearing, or from poor or inadequate reading instruction.”
Dyslexia can be signaled in many different ways including:

- difficulty with early speech, or late acquisition of speech patterns struggling with the concept of rhyming
- struggling with sequential memorization such as days of the week, the ABC’s, numbers
- inability to make the connection between letters and the sounds they make
- difficulty in identifying syllables within words
- poor handwriting or other fine motor skills
- misreading simple words
- leaving out small words such as “and”, “with”, “she” when reading aloud

If your child is showing some of these signs of difficulty, you may want to consult a professional. Pediatricians can often recommend someone in the community – often either a reading specialist or psychologist specializing in reading issues – that can provide you with a full examination and evaluation of your child’s reading profile. The evaluation will usually consist of vision and hearing tests, a psychological assessment, and educational testing relating to reading and writing. There is no one single test for dyslexia, but most specialists include a battery of different evaluations that help them determine not only your child’s particular strengths and weaknesses, but also provide ideas for addressing them.

If your fears are confirmed, and your child is formally diagnosed with “dyslexia”, you may feel a range of different emotions – the first of which is likely to be “I can’t believe this is happening to my child!” This is a totally normal response, and one I definitely identify with. We want our children to have every possible advantage as they grow up, and a diagnosis of dyslexia can make it feel like a definite “two steps backward” in the journey. Especially if the dyslexia is not the only thing your child has been diagnosed with, or if you are having other stressors in your life at the time of the diagnosis, you can feel as though the odds are stacked against you.

**Dyslexia Is Not A Scary Word**

Getting a diagnosis of dyslexia for your child doesn't have to garner fear or create anxiety. When you consider that up to 20% of Americans are affected with some sort of dyslexia, you can begin to see that you are simply part of a strong group of people who are facing challenges and rising to the occasion. A diagnosis of dyslexia does NOT mean that your child will never read, is destined to make poor grades, or will not be successful in school or in a future career. It simply means that he or she learns differently from the mainstream reader, and with the right accommodations and support, can lead completely normal, successful lives. In fact, people with dyslexia have certain visual and mental strengths that make them stand out in particular tasks and talents.

If you are STILL not convinced that having dyslexia is not a diagnosis of “disaster”, check out the
following list of people who have never let dyslexia get in the way of their goals:

- **Steve Jobs** – founder of Apple Computers and CEO of Pixar Animation studios
- **Walt Disney** – one of the most famous motion picture producers in the world
- **Hans Christian Anderson** – Danish author and poet.
- **Alexander Graham Bell** – another inventor and scientist that we remember from time to time when the phone rings.
- **Steven Spielberg** - producer of a few films you might have heard of.
- **Diane Swonk** – senior managing director of Mesirow financial, one of the nation’s leading banks
- **Danny Glover** – acclaimed film actor
- **Henry Winkler** – best known for his role on the tv series “Happy Days” and has dedicated time and energy to students with LD
- **Anderson Cooper** – CNN news anchor
- **Thomas Edison** – inventor and businessman that you are probably benefiting from right this minute

If your child has been formally diagnosed with dyslexia, they are in good company. After you have come to terms with the diagnosis, it is time to move forward and find out how you can help your child meet their full potential.
Part 2  What To Do First

Sometimes, you discover your child has dyslexia from a school teacher or counselor. Other times, you suspect something yourself, and then have your child tested by a reading specialist. You may find the information out when your child is just beginning his school career, or you may find out after years of struggling in the classroom. No matter how you find out, or what age your child is when you discover he or she has dyslexia, there are some initial questions you will want to find out the answers to before you are able to adequately address the diagnosis.

What is your child’s learning style?

This may be the most important factor in whether or not you will be able to help your child succeed. Knowing your child’s learning style helps you not only understand them better, but also helps you choose materials and programs that will be specifically aimed at their needs. Several books have been written – some even specifically for homeschoolers – about how to discover your child’s learning style. Make it a priority to either check out one of these books, or buy one for your personal library. Then spend some time evaluating your child in light of what you discover in the book.

What is your child’s key reading difficulty (or difficulties)?

Knowing whether your child’s primary struggles are with comprehension, spelling, or auditory processing will be invaluable in helping you decide how next to proceed. Different programs designed for children with dyslexia aim at different “symptoms” of the disorder. You will want a clear picture of your child’s strengths and weaknesses in regards to reading and writing before you choose any specific remediation strategy. If you don’t feel qualified to make these evaluations, then schedule an appointment with a reading specialist who can give you a comprehensive assessment of exactly what your child’s main problem areas are.

What is your child feeling in relation to his or her reading difficulties?

Children are incredibly perceptive – especially in regards to anything they think might be “wrong” with them. If your child usually avoids the subject
of reading, and balks at most attempts to teach phonics, sight reading, or both, then you can guess that he or she is already feeling discouraged by previous attempts. This is a terrific opportunity to bring up the subject of dyslexia, being sure not to focus on the negative aspects, but to help your child understand that everyone learns differently, and dyslexia is just one of many differences that some people experience.

**What resources are available to you?**

This is the time to do your research! You need to find out your state's specific laws and guidelines about how much access you have to free targeted services to help your child. Most any preschool age child, for instance, that is labeled with a learning disability, has access to early intervention services – no matter which state they reside in. School-age students also may have access to special education tutoring from within the school system – even if they are homeschooled. Each state and sometimes even each local school district will have differing guidelines on what services are available and when you can access them. There are also national and state resources you may have access to, such as the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped which offers free audio books for students with a diagnosis of dyslexia. Other audio book services may be discounted according to your financial need or level of disability. And there are a host of different assistive technologies to help remediate the difficulties of dyslexia, which we will look at in more detail in a later section.

**What options do you have for homeschooling your child with dyslexia?**

Contrary to popular opinion, you do not need to have a special education degree to teach your child with dyslexia at home. Thanks to dyslexia remediation programs specifically designed for homeschoolers, assistive technology, and even online curriculum that alleviates many of the roadblocks of dyslexia, you CAN successfully homeschool your child. We will be looking at each of these in more detail in the next section.
Part 3: What You Can Do From Here

If you are homeschooling, and you received your child's dyslexia diagnosis from a reading specialist, they may provide you with some ideas for helping your child yourself, but most of the time, they will prefer to refer you to special education specialists within the school system or private reading specialists. It is up to you and your state homeschooling laws to decide if you will avail yourself of the services of the public school system. Some states make it very easy for homeschoolers to get reading help from their local school system, others make it nearly impossible. Preschoolers, however, usually have opportunities in almost every state to receive remediation for learning disabilities.

And if you can afford a reading specialist, that is another option, but if you can't, that in no way means that you cannot help your child with dyslexia. A reading specialist usually uses common approaches to helping children with dyslexia overcome their reading and writing challenges. These approaches often include phonics instruction, introduction to phonemes, vocabulary development, reading comprehension help, and spelling remediation. Although reading specialists have received specific instruction in these strategies, homeschool parents can often do enough research and preparation to be able to help their child right from home. By using a combination of reading and writing remediation programs, assistive technology, and targeted homeschool curriculum, you can be confident that your child with dyslexia will get a quality education right from within the walls of his or her own home!

Reading and Writing Intervention Programs for Dyslexia

The good news for homeschoolers is that many publishing companies are marketing their dyslexia remediation programs and products directly to them these days.

One of the most common approaches to dyslexia remediation is the Orton-Gillingham system. Orton-Gillingham is a multi-sensory program of reading instruction that attempts to aim reading instruction at all four levels of learning: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile, in order to help the child receive the maximum benefit from what he or she is learning. Many different dyslexia programs and products are based on the Orton-Gillingham approach. O-G has made many of its products available to parents, as well as tutors, so that this remediation can become part of an overall homeschool curriculum. Other publishers offer Orton-Gillingham based programs as well.

Another common approach to reading instruction for people with dyslexia is an intensive focus on phonics and phonemic awareness. Programs like Saxon Phonics for younger students, and Saxon Phonics Intervention for older students, and Verticy Learning are good examples of this approach. If your child's main reading difficulties are not with comprehension and vocabulary, but rather with spelling and writing, then a phonics intensive
approach may be your best bet. Many of these programs can be purchased either directly from the companies themselves, or used via Curriculum Resale websites or local homeschool curriculum sales.

Other programs with similar goals, but slightly different presentations include: the Barton System, Explode the Code, Reading Reflex, and Davis Dyslexia Association.

### Assistive Technology for Dyslexia

One of the key goals of teaching a child with dyslexia is helping him or her to feel as independent as possible within the limitations of their learning difference.

Assistive technology tools make this possible by helping the student to do reading and writing work without the constant aid of a tutor or parent. There are several different categories of assistive technology that are particularly beneficial to people with dyslexia, and we will look at each of those categories separately:

- **Reading Tools** – Almost any child can read almost any written document thanks to advances in technology. Text-to-speech programs allow any digital text on the computer or most tablets to be read aloud. But if you aren't near a computer, you can still get the reading assistance you need. Many books and magazines have audio versions that can be played on either an analog or digital playback device. And standalone or handheld text scanners translate words on a page into immediate audio feedback so that students can actually scan a sentence with a specially designed reading pen, and hear that sentence read to them by a simulated voice.

- **Writing Tools** – Many people with dyslexia struggle with the sequential and spatial aspects of writing. Assistive technologies have been specifically created to address these issues. One of the most popular types of writing assistance is speech recognition software. This tool allows a person to speak aloud into the microphone of a computer or mobile device and have the program attempt to recognize the speech and turn it into written words on the computer screen. Another type of assistive technology is the graphic organizer, which helps students arrange their thoughts and ideas visually before attempting to type them out.

- **Spelling Tools** – Students with dyslexia are notoriously bad spellers. But sometimes spell checking software is simply not enough to catch all of the errors. Word prediction software is particularly helpful to people with spelling difficulties because it works as part of any word processing software to make suggestions for words based on the first few letters typed. Many are even equipped with grammar checkers as well to remind students to capitalize and punctuate their sentences, or to point out other possible grammar snafus. Handheld spell checkers are helpful tools for students who do not accomplish all their writing tasks on a digital device.
Targeted Homeschool Curriculum for Dyslexia

Although assistive technology is extremely helpful for students with dyslexia, sometimes parents want more. They wish for an overall homeschool curriculum that would address many of the issues that students with dyslexia face. One curriculum I’ve discovered that fits this description is Time4Learning. Time4Learning is an online, multimedia homeschool curriculum for students in grades K-8. Here are some of the reasons that Time4Learning is well suited for students with dyslexia:

✦ **Time4Learning is visually appealing.** Many studies show that most people with dyslexia are highly visual learners, and have a difficult time grasping concepts that they cannot visualize. Time4Learning presents lessons using animations, visual representations, and audio/visual feedback.

✦ **Time4Learning is flexible.** If your child is working at a third grade level in language arts, and a fifth grade level in math and science, Time4Learning is fine with that. They will adjust your child’s instruction level based on where they are, academically, and then will adjust it anytime needed.

✦ **Time4Learning tracks progress.** With the Time4Learning record-keeping system, you can easily and quickly spot trouble areas in your child’s learning, and can adjust his or her level of review accordingly. Progress reports can be viewed and printed by date or subject, and are perfect for including in your annual portfolio (if your state requires one).

✦ **Time4Learning provides assistive tools for learning disabilities.** Many of the lessons in the Time4Learning curriculum are animated, or are read aloud to the student. But for those lessons that aren’t, Time4Learning is compatible with most text-to-speech software, so that lessons can be read to the child. Writing assignments are accomplished on the Time4Learning Odyssey Writer, which is equipped (depending on grade level) with a graphic organizer tool, outlining tool, notecard tool, spell-checker, and self-assessment tool.
Part 4: Outside Resources and Support

Many parents who homeschool a child with dyslexia do it completely without any outside resources or support. Using any of the tools mentioned in the previous chapter, it is definitely possible to do. But other parents either feel inadequate to the task, or do not have the time to follow through with the instruction. In these cases, they may want to seek assistance from outside sources. Let’s look at some of the avenues they might take for this.

Tutoring

If your child’s dyslexia is mild or is limited to a very specific reading or writing shortfall, it may mean that targeted tutoring would be helpful for bringing their skills up to gradelevel. When choosing a tutor, however, it would probably be best to go with someone who had at least some experience in working with students with learning challenges. Having an older sibling, for instance, or a family member doing the tutoring might offer some benefits, but isn’t likely to help your son or daughter compensate for the specific difficulties they are having.

Other options would be to check with your local school system and see if their teachers or aides are available for private tutoring. (Some states even allow homeschooled students with learning difficulties to work with special education personnel for no cost; check with your state’s guidelines about this for specific info). Yet another option is signing your child up with one of the many commercial tutoring services such as Sylvan or Kumon. Although most of these centers will tell you up front that they are not designed to treat learning disabilities, they will usually at least take the child’s learning differences into account when designing a tutoring plan. The biggest downside of these programs is cost; affording one of their tutoring programs can be quite prohibitive for many families.

Camps and After-School Programs

Because dyslexia has become such a widely-recognized issue recently, more and more community programs are being created to accommodate students with a diagnosis. Schools, universities, camps, medical clinics, and even churches are beginning to offer specific remediation programs for children with dyslexia. You might want to do an internet search for terms such as “Learning Disability”, “Dyslexia”, “Reading Intervention” and “Remediation” combined with your state, region, or city name in order to locate...
local offerings.

Summer camps catering to children with dyslexia have boomed in popularity in recent years. The majority of these are led by special education professionals and combine specific reading and writing remediation activities with traditional camp fare. They are also usually focused on helping students to build confidence and self-esteem. To find a camp in your area, do a search engine query, or check out this search tool at KidsCamps.com

Readings Therapists or Dyslexia Specialists

One of the most common questions I see on forums for parents of children with dyslexia is “Should I hire a reading therapist for my child?” The advantage, of course, of sending your child to a reading therapist is that he or she will get someone specifically trained in remediating learning disabilities. That also means that the instruction your child receives will be targeted to his or her specific disability. Just as a child with a speech impediment would likely go to a speech therapist for treatment, the idea is that children with reading difficulties would work one-on-one with a reading therapist. The only difference (and it’s a big one!) is that reading therapy is not often covered under a traditional medical insurance plan. That means that all of the expensive treatments your child would receive would have to be paid directly out-of-pocket.

Another alternative to a reading therapist is a dyslexia specialist. This is someone who has been trained in a particular dyslexia remediation methodology, and will work with your child according to that technique. Common specialists you might encounter would be Orton- Gillingham instructors, Davis Dyslexia providers, or Barton tutors. The main thing to note if choosing one of these types of programs is that you would want to make sure that the homeschool curriculum you choose for reading and writing supplements its teaching style. It would be confusing for kids to be taught phonics one way by their specialist, and another way by their curriculum, for instance.

If you are homeschooling a child with dyslexia and you feel that you are unable to adequately help him or her at home, then asking for outside help is a viable alternative. Just keep in mind that because most of these services are not covered by traditional medical insurance that costs for these kinds of tutoring and therapies can begin to quickly strain a budget. If you go this route, do your research! Take the time to find out which type of tutoring or therapy would help your child’s learning difficulty the most, and don’t be afraid to ask for a second opinion. And if your child has spent a few months with a specialist and you don’t see much improvement, don’t be afraid to seek out a different specialist - - every instructor’s methods are different and will work better with different children. Hopefully, you will land on the very person or program that will help your child reach their full reading and writing potential.
Part 5  The “How’s” of Homeschooling

Making Sure You Have A Support System in Place

When homeschooling parents first discover that their child has dyslexia, they can feel overwhelmed. Very few of them have degrees in special education, so they often wonder if they are up to the task of helping their child learn to read and write. Homeschool-related social communities are full of questions from parents who are second guessing their ability to handle the education of a child with dyslexia.

The most comforting thing a homeschooling parent of a child with dyslexia can hear is that they are not alone. Thousands of parents just like themselves are successfully guiding their children through the challenges of a learning disability. I’ve been amazed over the last ten years to watch the explosive growth of online sites, blogs, and social network communities for parents homeschooling children with reading difficulties. If you want support and advice, it is as close as your nearest computer or mobile device!

There is no question too “stupid” to ask in one of these forums or groups, although I highly recommend that you spend some time reading through their message archives so that you don't make your first post be the same question that 1000 people have already asked and had answered. If you find one forum or group that you feel particularly “in tune” with, it can, over
time, become like a community that you can both lean on for support and be available for providing support to. This is definitely the ideal!!

**Do Your Research**

This is probably a no-brainer. After all, you wouldn't be reading this guide unless you were willing to make the time to find the most helpful information about homeschooling a child with dyslexia. But even with all the burning the midnight oil, there are a few areas you might forget to do your homework in. Be sure to add each of the following to your research list, if you haven't already:

**Learning Styles** (and what curriculum works best with each one)

**Visual-Spatial Learning**

**Different approaches to remediating dyslexia** (terms you will come across often will be: Orton-Gillingham, Davis method, Barton, Wilson, Vision Therapy, etc.)

**Assistive technology for dyslexia**

* Phonics vs. Whole-Word Instruction

* Other learning difficulties that can sometimes accompany dyslexia such as dysgraphia, dyscalculia, auditory processing disorder, expressive or receptive language disorders, visual processing disorder.

**Get Organized**

While many homeschoolers can take a “fly by the seat of your pants” approach to home education, this isn't really the case when homeschooling a child with dyslexia - - at least not at first. In order to give a child with dyslexia the same opportunities for the future as his or her grade-level peers, you must have a strategy in place for addressing the challenges that dyslexia presents. Once you have done your research, you will start to settle on a plan for helping your child use her strengths to overcome those challenges. For our family, that plan included:

* Choosing an overall homeschool curriculum that complemented our son's learning style – for our visual learner, this was the Time4Learning program.

* Choosing additional dyslexia remediation materials, and carving out a consistent daily time to work together on them.

* Accepting those areas of remediation I wasn’t able to address, and finding outside therapies that I could afford and that were most helpful to my son.

* Purchasing targeted assistive technology that was most beneficial to my son's specific challenges.

**Focus On Strengths**

Once my organization was in place, and I had my materials ready to help my son address his challenges, the next most important thing was turning my attention AWAY from his dyslexia and put it on those areas he excelled in. The true trick to
helping a child with learning disabilities is focusing as little as possible on what he or she struggles with and put the majority of the attention on what they shine at. For my son, this was anything engineering-related. Legos, Model Cars, K’nex, etc. were like second nature to him. With that visual-spatial brain of his, he could envision a building or structure from any angle in his mind and then go right to creating it, without a second thought. While letters and symbols on paper were a mystery to him, the three-dimensional world was putty in his hands.

So, with this knowledge in mind, we spent perhaps 10-20% of my son’s homeschool day on remediation for dyslexia, another 20-30% on traditional learning, and the remainder on building his confidence and self-esteem by letting him build and create the things that he saw in his head, and could always successfully bring to fruition in his hands. You might think this would have put him at a disadvantage, but the truth is that by using a large portion of our homeschool time focusing on his strengths, he was far less resistant to remediation than if that had been the focal point of our instruction. When homeschool time (or any school time) centers around a child’s disability, they are likely to begin feeling like something is “wrong” with them, instead of seeing that they are able to use their strengths to compensate for their weaknesses.

**Have Fun**

Can homeschooling – even homeschooling a child with a learning disability like dyslexia – really be fun? You BET it can! Homeschooling gives you, as a parent, the opportunity to spend a lot of time with the coolest kids on the planet....yours! With a combination of amazing online resources and hands-on creative materials, educating your child at home can be one of the most fun things you will ever participate in. Unlike classroom-based education, for you, the world is your classroom! The flexibility of homeschooling means you can spend an hour watching a millipede that is crossing your back patio, or make a field trip out of a simple trip to the post office. And that learning difference that plagues your son or daughter when they are trying to spell a difficult word can also be the very quality that makes them see the world in such new and exciting ways...and you get to be along for the ride!!

If you are starting to homeschool a child with dyslexia then you have just signed up for the adventure of a lifetime! I hope you enjoy this journey every bit as much as I have...
Appendix - Resources and Links

Dyslexia Information

- What is Dyslexia?
- Understanding Dyslexia
- The Truth About Dyslexia
- Maybe It's Dyslexia
- Book: How to Reach and Teach Children and Teens With Dyslexia by Cynthia M Stowe, M.Ed.

Learning Style Information

- Book: Discover Your Child's Learning Style: Children Learn in Unique Ways - Here's the Key to Every Child's Learning Success by Mariaemma Willis M.S.
- Learning Style Quiz
- Teaching Visual Learners
- Connection between Dyslexia and Right-Brained Learners

Dyslexia Intervention Programs

- Institute for Multi-sensory Education (IMSE)
- AVKO
- Bright Solutions (Barton)
- Davis Dyslexia Program
- Explode the Code
- Saxon Phonics Intervention

Homeschool Curriculum Recommended for Children with Dyslexia

- Time4Learning
- Verticy Learning
- Sequential Spelling
- Vocabulary Spelling City

Tutoring Options for Dyslexia

- Orton-Gillingham
- Barton
- Davis Dyslexia Providers
- Lindamood-Bell
- TutorMatch
- Online Tutoring for Remediation

Assistive Technology for Dyslexia

- Ghotit
- Reading Pen
- Text to Speech software
- Clicker Sentences Writing App
- Graphic Organizers
- Word Prediction Program
- Talking Calculator
- National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (available for people with dyslexia)