



Dyslexia and Learning Differences Are a Family Affair

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Learning disabilities are a family affair. Each member of a family will feel the impact as limited resources of time and money are geared toward dealing with the issues created by a learning disability such as dyslexia. This situation is even more complicated if one of the adult family members is also dyslexic. Academic learning problems tend to run in families. It is not uncommon for a parent to share during a conference that they struggled during their school years with reading, spelling or math. Often a parent never had a name for what they were struggling with in their youth. One famous example is Charles Schwab who realized his child's diagnostician could have been describing himself as a young boy.

There are many emotional responses to having a child with dyslexia. There is the grieving stage where you mourn the perfect child. This is often followed by guilt over the fact you are disappointed in the child over something they had no control over. There could be anger at the parent with the "bad genes." Or there may be self-blame over not doing enough or not doing it soon enough. All these are normal but counterproductive. Family members need to openly communicate and seek knowledge rather than place blame. You may also need to divide and conquer.

My husband is a man of infinite patience. He was the one who sat for hours with our first grade daughter as she struggled with those spelling lists for the Friday tests. He thought of various creative ways for his little girl to learn what needed learning. I was in awe of his ability to do the task over and over without losing his temper. I was more than willing to do the laundry, pitch the baseballs, and transport the other children to their assorted activities while he worked on spelling words the entire school year. In hindsight, I realize he was modeling our Heavenly Father's patience with us as we need the same lessons of grace re-taught on a regular basis.



Potential conflicts in families with one or more dyslexic members may include some of the following:

- **Time for other children**

A parent may need to spend more time and attention on the dyslexic child to make sure day to day tasks are done as well as any school work. This child will need more practice and repetition to learn tasks that a non-dyslexic child learns easily. I know my non-dyslexic children resented getting less attention, while my dyslexic child resented needing the extra attention.

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- **Time for adult relationships**

Modern family life is full of time demands from so many directions between our children, jobs, and household chores. Adding dyslexia to the mix adds yet another demand on the adults in the family. This situation can easily put relations among adult family members at a lower priority. If one partner has assumed more responsibility for ensuring the dyslexic child gets the extra help needed at home, the second partner may drift into other activities. This doubles the burden of the enabling adult and resentment can build and communication may suffer. Teamwork is essential as is creating quality time to spend with your spouse.

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- **Financial Stress**

Paying for the interventions needed for a child with a learning disability will take away some of the family's financial resources. Other family needs or opportunities may have to be delayed or sacrificed. One parent may need to work a second job or a stay at home-mom may need to go back to work to pay for these additional expenses. All these may take even more time away from family time.

My husband and I worked hard to create a reasonable balance to cope with the needs of our child who happened to have dyslexia along with the needs of our children that did not. We often pointed out to all our children that fair in terms of our family meant giving each of us what we needed when we needed it. It was not about keeping score. Of course, we always tried to have this conversation over a special treat like an ice cream cone or a game of catch or something appealing to the child listening.



Information and communication will always be a critical element for families in any stressful situation. Some suggestions on strategies that may help families hold together gracefully while they deal with the needs of dyslexic family members include the following:

- **Expand your knowledge base.**

Parents need the total picture of their child. This includes the strengths as well as the weaknesses involved in dyslexia. Go to workshops and conferences. Taken in this broader view so you see it is not a disaster. This information will allow you to see beyond the academic struggles and into the future that can be very bright once your child finds his or her niche. Find a mentor for yourself and your child.

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- **Work together.**

Besides family members working as a team, they also need to enlist the help of teachers, doctors and specially trained tutors using multisensory researched based methods. Attend parent-teacher conferences, school events and IEP meetings if your child has qualified for services through the school. Many teachers will offer assistance even if the child does not qualify for services, as is so often the case under current district guidelines. You need to find allies.

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- **Emphasize the positive.**

Create an upbeat home where you lift up all family members' gifts while you deal with the weaknesses. Family members can combine their abilities to solve problems. Remember that children learn more from your actions than your words so your patience and perseverance now will serve all your children well later. Be a model of resilience.

Successful families always need to adjust their routines to incorporate successful outcomes for all the family members, including the ones who may just happen to have dyslexia.