

MYTHS ABOUT DYSLLEXIA¹

Myth

'It will click', or 'The child will grow out of it', or 'They all learn at their own rate'.

Fact

Students who do not establish adequate proficiency in reading and writing skills in their first year of school are at risk of long term difficulties unless they are identified and provided with appropriate remedial assistance.

Early detection makes the treatments of reading difficulties much easier and helps to avoid the loss of confidence and motivation that can easily build up if problems are not recognised promptly. We know there are many early warning signs which tell us which students are at risk of long term learning difficulties.

An intervention program should be commenced as soon as difficulties are detected.

Myth

All students with reading difficulties are dyslexics.

Fact

There are other causes of reading difficulties, such as lack of appropriate teaching, emotional disturbance, general developmental delay or language disorders which need to be excluded before a remedial program is started.

A comprehensive assessment is essential to establish the cause of the difficulties before an appropriate program can begin.

Myth

The teaching of phonics is old fashioned.

Fact

Recent studies show that phonics are vital in the teaching of reading especially for those students who have reading difficulties. What other students pick up easily dyslexics may need to be taught step by step, over and over again e.g., the letters and their sounds, common spelling patterns etc.

Many dyslexic students have difficulties in phonological awareness (the ability to break words down into sounds or to blend sounds into words). Studies show that training in these skills can improve reading.

¹ From Dyslexia: Action plans for successful learning by Glynis Hannell. (2003) London: David Fulton Publishers.

Myth

All dyslexics see print upside down or in reverse and write in mirror image and are confused about left and right.

Fact

While some dyslexics do have difficulty with reversing letters and mirror writing, many do not. Current research indicates that many dyslexics have subtle difficulties with language and sounds. Laterality (how the left and right hemispheres of the brain organize information) was thought to have a direct link to dyslexia. In the light of more recent studies we realise that laterality is extremely complex and there are many factors as yet not fully understood.

Myth

If you have dyslexia nothing can be done.

Fact

Whilst learning may take a lot of extra hard work, there is much that can be done. Firstly, dyslexia must be properly diagnosed by a specialist (usually a psychologist) who has expertise in the area. Then a teaching program can be tailored to the individual's particular pattern of strengths and weaknesses. Ongoing review and monitoring of progress is important.

Myth

It is damaging to label a child 'dyslexic'.

Fact

The term 'dyslexia' helps to eliminate other common negative labels such as 'lazy', 'low intelligence' etc., which often lead to a sense of relief for student and parent alike.

Once a student is diagnosed as dyslexic, parents and teachers can access the extensive body of good quality information on dyslexia, which can lead to significant improvements in the approach used to teach literacy skills.

The label 'dyslexia' may entitle the parent and school to additional funding from government agencies. In addition, it may well entitle the student to special provisions in educational programs, special support and special provisions in examinations.

The label 'dyslexia' also means that the dyslexic is usually protected by disability discrimination legislation.

Myth

"If the student was better organised, better behaved and tried harder then there would not be a problem."

Fact

We know that some (but by no means all) dyslexic students do have motivational, confidence or social problems as part of their learning difficulty. They may have poor social judgment, may be impulsive and badly organised, or have communication difficulties. This may mean that they do not get on as well as others and may think that they are 'dumb'. The student may try to cover up difficulties by acting the clown, becoming disruptive or switching off. A dyslexic student may try their best with their school work, only to be told, perhaps time and time again that they should try harder. Facing constant frustration and failure often leads to loss of motivation and self confidence.

Myth

If the dyslexic student just practices more, the problem will be solved.

Fact

'More of the same' will not remediate deficits in the complex processes involved in reading and writing language. Specific difficulties need direct, planned intervention. Many suggestions can be found in the literature to assist in planning an appropriate program.

Myth

Dyslexia means that you will never be able to get a good education or employment.

Fact

Universities, colleges and other schools can all make provision for people with dyslexia to study successfully.

Myth

In the old days everyone was taught to read and spell well.

Fact

There have always been people (often highly talented and famous) who have had difficulties with reading and spelling. Nelson Rockefeller, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein and Agatha Christie are all said to have been dyslexic.