

Understanding dyslexia

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty characterised by challenges in reading, writing, spelling, and information processing. This can affect learning, remembering and recalling information, as well as organisational skills. Dyslexia falls under the umbrella of neurodivergence. This factsheet looks at some common facts about dyslexia, how it affects people and how to support colleagues with dyslexia.

Information about dyslexia

Between 1 in 10 and 1 in 5 people have dyslexia worldwide, but it could be as high as 17% in some populations. Dyslexic employees are some of the most creative and impactful employees an organisation could have with a variety of skillsets. Understanding ways to support dyslexic colleagues will have a lasting influence on the impact they could have on the organisation. Supporting dyslexic colleagues through reasonable adjustments is a legal requirement and will help ensure their skillsets are maximised.

Knowing that dyslexia is a difference and not a deficiency is imperative to understand

Managing dyslexia in the workplace can be difficult for dyslexic employees. Workplaces must make sure dyslexic employees are fully supported, and that any form of discrimination against them is dealt with appropriately. This means that understanding the difference that dyslexic employees have with reading, writing, and spelling is crucial.

It is also important to understand that dyslexia has a different impact on each individual and this of course will impact engagement and inclusion throughout the entire organisation.

What are some facts surrounding dyslexia?

- There is a genetic element to dyslexia, so it can be hereditary and common in families
- It is categorised as a Specific Learning Difficulty and not a Learning Disability
- It is a functional variation in the brain, which means there is nothing different about the physical structure of the brain but only in the way it is used
- The word dyslexia comes from two Greek words: Dys; which means difficulty, and lexis; which refers to language or words
- The Equality Act 2010 defines dyslexia as a disability
- People with dyslexia often have other conditions, including dyscalculia (difficulties with numbers), ADD (attention deficit disorder) and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), which are other types of learning difficulties and elements of neurodiversity
- 50% of the prison population has dyslexia, although there is no correlation between criminality and dyslexia

What affect does dyslexia have on people?

- Dyslexia has a list of common symptoms, but each person will experience dyslexia differently and each symptom has a differing degree of severity
- Individuals may take longer to read or struggle with reading entirely
- Individuals may find it difficult to learn and spell new terminology
- People with dyslexia may mix up words or letters, commonly similar letters like b's and d's
- It can cause low self-esteem and/or impact stress levels
- Individuals may struggle to organise themselves or their workload
- It can also impact coordination
- Individuals may struggle with short-term memory problems and concentration
- Dyslexia can increase anxiety and/or depression, although the cause of this correlation is unknown

- Some people also have associated symptoms such as sensitivity to noise, light or touch

What support can be offered for dyslexic people?

- Audit the recruitment process to reduce barriers
- Improve understanding and research – it's not a deficiency but a difference
- Create a safe space within the working environment for people to share experiences
- Advertise staff networks and other internal and external support that is available
- Audit training and development to make sure it is accessible
- Consider and possibly adapt performance management system measures
- Actively promote needs assessments and workplace adjustments
- Offer individuals learning coping strategies, such as ways to organise time and workload
- Provide documents ahead of meetings in a digital format to allow time for preparation
- Provide different formats of presenting information
- Use accessible fonts when communicating in written form such as Arial and ask if certain colours help dyslexic colleagues to read
- Give adequate time for completion of tasks
- Provide optional quiet spaces to work or flexibility to work from home if the person is feeling overwhelmed
- Be patient
- Encourage managers to talk openly and support dyslexia (using the [Inclusion Passport](#))
- Try to focus conversations on strengths and ways to develop – dyslexic people often have low self-esteem due to a lifetime focus on what they cannot do rather than what they can

Resources:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/>

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexia>

<https://eda-info.eu/what-is-dyslexia/>

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20210104113255/https://archive.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6676>

<https://www.dyslexia.uk.net/>

<https://www.dyslexia-help.org/>