



Dear Pediatric Professional,

Decoding Dyslexia Pennsylvania (DDPA) is a grassroots movement whose purpose is to raise dyslexia awareness, empower families to support their children and inform policymakers on best practices to identify, remediate and support students with dyslexia.

Children are typically diagnosed with dyslexia at the end of second or beginning of third grade (and many much later), after they have already failed to learn to read over a period of time and have fallen behind their peers academically. The current wait-to-fail approach fails to capitalize on the most effective window for intervention, which is during an earlier period of heightened brain plasticity in kindergarten and first grade.¹

Dyslexia affects approximately 20% of our population or 1 in 5 students has dyslexia.²

- Dyslexia left untreated and undiagnosed can have severe implications for a child's mental health. Often perceived as lazy or "stupid", children may develop decreased self-esteem that can progress to anxiety and depression.³
- Children with speech sound disorders are at a greater risk for reading challenges.⁴
- Early screening is important as it takes four times as long to intervene in fourth grade as it does in late kindergarten⁵

Pediatricians play an influential and significant role in promoting early literacy development and skills before any formal reading instruction occurs and throughout various developmental stages of literacy. As a pediatric provider, you are vital in the multidisciplinary approach to the diagnosis, intervention, and counseling of children with learning disabilities and their families.

We invite you to join us in advocating for our youth to ensure they have a strong literacy foundation by

Warning Signs of Dyslexia

If a child has 3 or more of the following warning signs, encourage that child's parents to learn more about dyslexia.

In Preschool

- Mispronounces words, like saying "beddy tear" instead of "teddy bear"
- Struggles to name familiar objects and uses general words like thing and stuff instead
- Has a hard time learning nursery rhymes or song lyrics that rhyme
- Has trouble remembering sequences, like singing the letters of the alphabet
- Tells stories that are hard to follow; has trouble talking about an event in a logical order
- Has difficulty remembering and following directions with multiple steps
- Early stuttering
- Speech delay as toddler
- Family history of learning difficulties

Signs of Dyslexia in Grades K-2

- Has trouble learning letter names and remembering the sounds they make
- Often confuses letters that look similar (b, d, p, q) and letters with similar sounds (d/t; b/p; f/v)
- Struggles to read familiar words (like cat or the), especially if there aren't pictures
- Substitutes words when reading aloud, like saying house when the story says home
- Has trouble hearing the individual sounds in words and blending sounds to make a word
- Has trouble remembering how words are spelled and applying spelling rules in writing

Signs of Dyslexia in Grades 3-5

- Confuses or skips small words like for and of when reading aloud
- Has trouble sounding out new words and quickly recognizing common ones
- Struggles to explain what happened in a story or answer questions about key details
- Frequently makes the same kinds of mistakes, like reversing letters
- Has poor spelling; may spell the same word correctly and incorrectly in the same exercise
- Avoids reading whenever possible or gets frustrated or upset when reading.

Signs of Dyslexia in Teens and Tweens

- Reads slowly, leaving out small words and parts of longer words when reading aloud
- Often seems to be searching for words; may use substitutes like gate instead of fence
- Often doesn't "get" the joke; has trouble understanding idioms and puns
- Has an easier time answering questions about a page of text if it's read aloud
- Takes a very long time to complete reading assignments

administering an early screener beginning at the 48 months (four-year-old) well-care visit. Screening is intended to identify potential risk factors - not to identify or diagnose a reading disability. Screening refers to a brief assessment that determines the risk factors of having or developing dyslexia.

Utilizing an early screening tool and obtaining family history surrounding reading challenges allows caregivers and educators to be proactive in obtaining appropriate and targeted intervention for each child. Special thanks to the Gaab Lab at Boston's Children's Hospital for their curated list of dyslexia screeners. We have included a representative list of screeners that are appropriate for pre-school aged children, free and easily accessed online. Less than 7 minutes can afford a child and caregiver an opportunity to recognize the need for a formal assessment and referral to a specialist. A recent article published in Pediatrics titled Reintroducing Dyslexia; Early Identification and Implications for Pediatric Practice does a wonderful job at capturing the significant role the pediatrician plays of early risk identification of dyslexia and highlighting the evidence-based and practical strategies to help.⁶

To summarize, we urge you to join us in advocating for our youth, to ensure they have a strong literacy foundation, by administering an early screener beginning at the 48 months, (four-year-old) well-care visit and by collecting a family history of reading struggles. The intent of a screener is to identify potential risk factors in order to refer families to available supports. In addition to incorporating a brief dyslexia screener into your standard four-year well-visit routine, we ask you share this letter with your peer network and community to spread awareness about dyslexia and the support systems available.

Your partners in Literacy,

DDPA Action Coordinators Team
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¹ Sanfilippo J, Ness M, Petscher Y, et al. Reintroducing Dyslexia: Early Identification and Implications for Pediatric Practice. Pediatrics. 2020;146(1):e20193046

² Shaywitz et al, 1998

³ Sanfilippo J, Ness M, Petscher Y, et al. Reintroducing Dyslexia: Early Identification and Implications for Pediatric Practice. Pediatrics. 2020;146(1):e20193046

⁴ Preston et al 2013, Hayiou-Thomas et al 2017

⁵ Lyon & Fletcher, 2001

⁶ Sanfilippo J, Ness M, Petscher Y, et al. Reintroducing Dyslexia: Early Identification and Implications for Pediatric Practice. Pediatrics. 2020;146(1):e20193046

Dyslexia Screeners:

- Get Ready to Read!
<http://www.getreadytoread.org/screening-tools>
- Individual Growth and Development Indicators Early Literacy Assessment
<https://www.myigdis.com/preschool-assessments/early-literacy-assessments/>
- Lexercise Dyslexia Test
<https://www.lexercise.com/tests/dyslexia-test>
- Phonological Awareness Screening Test
<https://www.thepasttest.com/>

From Gaab Lab! Part of Boston Children's Hospital 's Laboratories of Cognitive Neuroscience: <https://www.gaablab.com/screening-for-reading-impairments> or for a full list of Gaab Lab screeners visit shorturl.at/OY016

Resources:

- Reintroducing Dyslexia: Early Identification and Implications for Pediatric Practice (also available on our website)
<https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-3046>
- Gaab Lab Boston Children's Hospital
<https://www.gaablab.com/screening-for-reading-impairments>
- National Center of Learning Disabilities
<https://www.nclد.org/>
- Understood.org
<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/signs-symptoms/could-your-child-have/checklist-signs-of-dyslexia-at-different-ages>
- The Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity <http://dyslexia.yale.edu/>
- Pediatricians Have a Role in Early Screening of Dyslexia
<https://dyslexiaida.org/an-invitation-to-pediatricians-for-early-dyslexia-screeners/>

Decoding Dyslexia PA is a parent advocacy group for dyslexia. We have included links to resources and tools to encourage you to review these along with your judgement, discretion and expert opinion.



To access a copy of Resources above easily, use your smart phone/device and "Scan" this symbol to get a digital version of this document along with a digital copy of Reintroducing Dyslexia: Early Identification and Implications for Pediatric Practice from Pediatrics article.

