

DYSLEXIA RESOURCE GUIDE FOR GEORGIA FAMILIES

What is dyslexia?

The definition of dyslexia adopted by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) states: “Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

Dyslexia is one of the most common learning disabilities. People with dyslexia have many strengths, but have unexpected trouble learning to read. These difficulties are not related to a person's intelligence or motivation. Families, early childhood teachers, and kindergarten teachers are often the first to notice children having difficulty with reading skills or learning at school. It is important to pay attention to potential signs that a child may have dyslexia.

The following table provides examples of signs that may indicate a child is at risk for dyslexia. While any one sign does not necessarily mean your child has dyslexia, it is important to talk with your child's teachers if you have concerns. Children with characteristics of dyslexia can learn to read with the right instruction, especially when that instruction is provided as early as possible.

Characteristics of Dyslexia

- Weakness in phonological awareness tasks (for example, rhyming, phoneme segmentation, blending, letter naming fluency)
- Difficulty learning letter names and letter sounds
- Difficulty learning sound-symbol association
- Weakness in phonological memory (for example, non-word repetition)
- Weakness in word recognition fluency
- Weakness in spelling
- Weakness in oral vocabulary

An appropriate response to risk for dyslexia involves systematic, explicit, cumulative instruction based on the science of reading as defined by the [Georgia Early Literacy Act](#). Most importantly, the instruction/intervention should be matched to the child's need, regardless of label. Ongoing monitoring of the child's response to increasingly intensive instructional support is critical.



How does my child get screened for characteristics of dyslexia in Georgia?

Beginning in the 2024-25 school year, Georgia schools will screen all students in grades K-3 for characteristics of dyslexia. If your child is screened and identified as at-risk based on the results of the Universal Dyslexia Screener, your child will begin receiving additional support in the classroom and you will receive communication from your child's school to let you know of any other next steps.

Schools do not diagnose dyslexia. Diagnosing dyslexia requires testing by a qualified provider such as a licensed psychologist or other qualified professional. Your school or pediatrician might have local recommendations if you wish to pursue this. A diagnosis is not required for your child to receive additional support in reading.

What will change at school if my child is suspected of having characteristics of dyslexia?

If your child is identified as having characteristics of dyslexia (see [Georgia Reading and Dyslexia Screening Process \(Flowchart\)](#)), the school will provide your child with intensive interventions targeting specific reading skills and consider a referral for special education evaluation. Children with characteristics of dyslexia often continue to learn in the same classroom they were in before but may also receive extra support individually or in small groups. You will be notified about what the school is doing to support your child with learning.

Many children with characteristics of dyslexia, and even children with a formal dyslexia diagnosis, will not require special education services if they receive early identification and support. If they are still having difficulties after receiving specific and targeted instruction and intervention, a request for a formal special education evaluation should be made. In the instance that the child will need Special Education Services, the local educational agency will follow the requirements as outlined in 160-4-7-.03 (Child Find Procedures). In the instance that the child will need other modifications, the local education agency will follow the requirements for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Additional information about a 504 Plan can be found in the [Section 504 Implementation Manual](#).

Identifying Dyslexia as a Specific Learning Disability

School districts have a responsibility to identify and evaluate children who need special education. This is referred to as [Child Find](#). Either a parent of a child or a public agency may initiate a request for an evaluation to determine if the child is a child with a disability. If the district has reason to believe a child has a disability, then the district must engage in an evaluation. Families can start the special education evaluation process by sending a written request to their child's teacher and/or principal. Visit the GaDOE Special Education website to find the [Special Education Implementation Manual](#). The GaDOE also has an [Evaluation and Re-Evaluation Fact Sheet](#) for parents, which outlines the steps involved in starting the special education evaluation process.

In some cases, special education may be deemed necessary for the child. In these cases, dyslexia is categorized as a [Specific Learning Disability](#) (SLD). Once a child is identified as a student who has a Specific Learning Disability, such as dyslexia, and who needs specially designed instruction, that instruction is formalized and legally guaranteed through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). At least annually, and more often if needed, the [Student Support Team \(SST\)](#) uses the problem-



solving model to review the student's progress and revise the specially designed instruction as needed.

Outside Clinical Diagnosis of Dyslexia

Parents can request a comprehensive evaluation if they suspect a disability or have received a dyslexia diagnosis by an outside professional. The school district is obligated to consider the request. If parents seek an evaluation outside of the school district, they are encouraged to share the results with the district. A diagnosis of dyslexia by an outside professional does not mean the school district must automatically identify the student as a student with a disability. However, the district should consider the information from outside professionals as they work to understand and meet the student's learning needs.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities provides information for parents and educators in [5 Questions Parents and Educators Can Ask to Start Conversations About Using Terms Like Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, and Dysgraphia](#).

Accommodations

Children who are eligible for Special Education services often benefit from instructional and assessment accommodations. Accommodations should be considered based on what the child requires to access the general curriculum. Any appropriate accommodations should be written into a child's 504 Plan or IEP. Instructional accommodations may include how instruction is provided, how the child is expected to respond to instruction, how the child participates in classroom activities and the kinds of instructional materials used. Assessment accommodations examples may include providing extended time, allowing for breaks, reading the test questions aloud, and/or taking the test in an alternate location. Assessment accommodations should only be included if they are also an instructional accommodation. Not all instructional accommodations are appropriate for assessment accommodations as they may interfere with the purpose of the measurement.

The International Dyslexia Association provides information in its [Accommodations for Students with Dyslexia Fact Sheet](#).

Considerations for English Learners

Districts use a variety of data sources to design instruction for children who are English Learners (ELs). Schools consider dyslexia screening information (see [Characteristics of Dyslexia Rubric](#)) along with other sources of data on students' language and literacy development. Some of these data, such as information from the WIDA ACCESS language proficiency assessments, are required by federal and state laws. WIDA ACCESS is used to determine the English language proficiency levels and language progress of ELs in the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Below are examples of additional considerations for understanding the language and literacy needs of ELs and guiding instruction:



- Is there a history in the family of academic and/or language difficulties?
- Is there a history of dyslexia or reading difficulties in the family?
- Did the student exhibit language delays in their primary language?
- Is the child currently experiencing trouble communicating effectively in the home setting when compared to similar age family members and/or peers?
- If the student attended school in another country, is there a history of academic concerns in the country of origin?

My child is struggling. How do I help them at home?

It is the school's job to provide a free and appropriate public education to your child, and you and your family are important partners with your child's school. You can ask your child's teachers for ideas for what you can do at home, consistent with what the school is teaching your child.

What should I tell my child about dyslexia?

Every family will take a different approach to talking with their child about dyslexia. Here are some ideas for you. It can be inspiring for kids and adults to hear examples of successful people who have dyslexia. Staying positive is important. You can say, "Our brains are like muscles, and we need to practice using them to help them grow. I love you, I am here to help, and so are your teachers."

Or, you could say, "You know how you've been having a hard time in school? I'm going to talk to your teachers about that. We all learn differently. We're going to find out how you learn best." Or, "Dyslexia means your brain can have a hard time matching letters with sounds. Your teacher is going to work with you on the things that you've been having a hard time with, and we can try some of those same things at home together too."

Where can I go to learn more about dyslexia and Georgia schools?

As always, your first and best resource is your child's school. Our educators in Georgia are being trained in the best instructional strategies to support all students. Other great resources are the Georgia Chapter of the [International Dyslexia Association](#), [Decoding Dyslexia Georgia](#), and [Understood.org](#). You can also visit the [GaDOE Dyslexia website](#) for the most up-to-date guidance and resources about dyslexia supports in Georgia schools. If you need a little more support from a parent/caregiver who has been through the process of working with their child's school, consider reaching out to [Parent to Parent of Georgia](#). You may also find this [list of Books about Dyslexia for Children and Adults](#) helpful.

