

Common Myths about Dyslexia

Just as we have learned what dyslexia is through empirical research, we have also come to understand what it is not. A closer look at what we have learned helps dispel common myths and misunderstandings about dyslexia. Below are six common myths and misconceptions about dyslexia, followed by the reality we have come to understand about it through empirical research.

Myth: Dyslexia is a problem that children outgrow

Reality: Dyslexia is not something that children outgrow if given more time to learn how to read and spell words on their own or from ineffective literacy instruction and intervention. Instead, individuals with dyslexia require direct instruction in how spoken sounds in the language pair with letters, allowing them to read and spell words. They also benefit from explicit instruction about larger written units found within words to improve their word reading and spelling abilities. Additionally, they need considerable practice applying what they learn through direct instruction to read and spell words in a connected text to transfer and consolidate learning.

Myth: Dyslexia is a visually-based learning difference

Reality: Dyslexia is not a vision-based problem. Individuals with dyslexia do not see letters backward, jump around, or wiggle on the page. A small percentage of children with dyslexia experience issues with visual crowding. However, research also indicates that children not identified with dyslexia can experience problems with visual crowding. Visual deficits are not a core factor that characterizes nor causes dyslexia.

Myth: Dyslexia is due to laziness

Reality: Dyslexia does not result from a child being too lazy to learn to read and spell. Individuals with dyslexia must work harder than others to perform well on written language tasks. Also, they have to work hard to benefit from intervention. These children often sacrifice opportunities to do activities they enjoy to get the help they need. Put simply, they sacrifice and work harder than their peers to learn and acquire foundational literacy skills.

Myth: Dyslexia is due to a lack of intelligence

Reality: Dyslexia does not result from a child lacking the intelligence to read and spell words. The consensus from research indicates that IQ does not help determine who has dyslexia. IQ does not predict how well an individual with dyslexia will learn how to read and spell when provided with appropriate intervention. IQ does not inform the differentiation of instruction and intervention to improve learning outcomes for students with dyslexia. Instead, IQ measures create barriers and serve as a gatekeeper in determining from which communities and backgrounds children are identified with dyslexia.

Myth: Dyslexia is the fault of the community or home environment

Reality: Dyslexia is not the result of a child not having a quality home literacy environment. Children with dyslexia come from homes with lots of books and homes with far fewer books. A quality early literacy environment in the home and community helps all children be better prepared to benefit from appropriate, direct literacy instruction in the early grades. Such an environment is a protective factor that can better prepare all students to benefit from quality core literacy instruction.

Myth: Multi-lingual and emerging speakers of English cannot have dyslexia

Reality: Dyslexia occurs in all languages. Individuals learning to speak English can struggle with acquiring foundational literacy skills due to dyslexia.