HOW TO IDENTIFY DYSLEXIA

Pre-school children may show:

- difficulty in learning nursery rhymes or the name of things like ‘bed’ or ‘chair’;
- no interest in letters or words, though children like being read to;
- lack of attention;
- difficulties in getting dressed properly and putting shoes on the correct feet;
- problems with catching, kicking or throwing a ball, hopping or skipping;
- difficulty with following simple rhythms;
- delayed speech development;
- have specific difficulty in understanding what is read.

Primary school children may:

- not know the difference between left and right;
- have difficulty tying shoe laces and dressing up;
- have short-term memory limitations, for instance, finding it hard to remember arithmetic tables, the alphabet or classroom instructions;
- have specific difficulty in understanding the differences between addition, subtraction, multiplication and division;
- demonstrate reading difficulties. Look out for:
  - reading which lacks fluency
  - omitted lines or repetition of the same line or loss of place in the text
  - muddling words that look alike, e.g. ‘no’ and ‘on’, and ‘was’ and ‘saw’
  - difficulties in saying multi-syllabic words
  - difficulty in understanding what is read.

Primary school children may:

- have specific difficulty in understanding what is read.
- have difficulty remembering maths tables and formulae;
- need to have instructions repeated;
- get ‘bed up’ using long words, such as ‘preliminary’ or ‘philosophical’;
- have difficulty planning and writing essays;
- forget which books to bring to class;
- have difficulty organising life around a timetable;
- misunderstand complex instructions;
- have problems trying to write down notes at speed, and completing work on time.

A young person at secondary school may:

- continue to experience the same problems as in primary school. In addition he/she may suffer poor confidence and low self-esteem. The student may:
  - still read inaccurately;
  - still have problems spelling;
  - confuse places, times and dates;
  - have difficulty remembering maths tables and formulae;
  - need to have instructions repeated;
  - get ‘bed up’ using long words, such as ‘preliminary’ or ‘philosophical’;
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What is dyspraxia?

Dyspraxia refers to difficulties with coordination and the organisation of movements. It is a problem with getting our bodies to do what we want when we want them to do it. Students with dyspraxia are often described as ‘clumsy’ or ‘awkward’. They have particular difficulties with complex tasks that require a high level of coordination e.g. writing, playing ball games, riding a bicycle, tying shoelaces ...

Strategies to support students with specific learning difficulties

- Use prompting questions so that the student remembers the next instruction of the next action, rather than just telling him/her what to do.
- Ask the student to repeat the instruction so that you know he/she has understood the task.
- Ensure student is well positioned to see and hear the teacher.
- Provide real teaching aids to support the oral and mental starter, e.g. a number line, counters, number square, multiplication square etc.
- Use multi-sensory methods for short periods, several times a day, e.g. learning how to spell high frequency words by using the Look, Read, Spell, Write and Check strategy.
- For a student with dyslexia it is easier to read a picture than to read a page in a book.
- Encourage students to use alternatives to writing where appropriate, e.g. diagrams, mind maps, writing frames, etc.
- Give lots of positive reinforcements to students when they are practising or learning tasks.
- Some students find it more comfortable to read from pastel coloured paper or may benefit from using coloured lenses or filters.
- If there is a persistent difficulty with writing, students may need to use an angle board which is made of wood or plastic. This raises the writing surface to an angle of 15-25 degrees like an old fashioned school desk.
- Students may need a soft shaped grip therefore appropriate pen/pencil grip with fingers. Foam grips of fatter pens and pencils are helpful for pupils who have a weak grip.
- A peaceful and quiet environment helps students concentrate.
- Whenever possible use ready-made handouts and limit copying from the whiteboard.
- Give opportunities for students to work with a friend.
- It is essential that teachers understand that having dyslexia means work takes longer to do because these students struggle with it more than other students.

What is dyscalculia?

This is a dysfunction in the ability to organize and manipulate symbols as needed for mathematical processes. In particular the recording and computation of digits are unreliable. This is not because of weak concept development, but rather the result of directional and sequencing difficulties.

Useful websites and other references:

- www.bbc.co.uk/parenting
- www.bdadyslexia.org.uk
- www.adult.dyslexia.org
- www.dyslexics.org.uk
- www.abilitynet.org.uk
- www.difflearn.com
- www.bbcdyslexia.org
- www.starfall.com
- www.earlyintervention.gozo.gov.mt
- www.literacycentre.gov.mt
- www.bbcdyslexia.org
- www.adult.dyslexia.org

Literacy Centre Gozo College
Tel/Fax: 21564642

As a result of the strain, the student may be extremely nervous and adopt avoidance techniques whenever possible. It is easy to see how motivation and self-esteem drop rapidly. For some, these manifest themselves as challenging behaviour.

Concern that a learner may be dyslexic should trigger an assessment from a specialist. A good understanding of the nature of the learner's difficulties and strengths, should bring extra help for the student. If learner continues to fall behind he/she should be 'fast-tracked' to more specialist assessment and support.

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Early Intervention Better Future

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