

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a learning disability that affects writing abilities. It can manifest itself as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting and trouble putting thoughts on paper. Because writing requires a complex set of motor and information processing skills, saying a student has dysgraphia is not sufficient. A student with disorders in written expression will benefit from specific accommodations in the learning environment, as well as additional practice learning the skills required to be an accomplished writer.

Learning to write words and sentences clearly and correctly is a key focus of a child's elementary school years. All young kids have some difficulty when it comes to writing or perfecting penmanship. But if your child's handwriting is consistently distorted or unclear, that may be caused by a learning disability called dysgraphia.

This is a nervous system problem that affects the fine motor skills needed to write. It makes it hard for a child to do handwriting tasks and assignments.

Health insurers and most doctors call this condition "impairment in written expression."

Early Writers

Below are some examples of how to teach individuals with dysgraphia to overcome some of their difficulties with written expression.

- Use paper with raised lines for a sensory guide to staying within the lines.
- Try different pens and pencils to find one that's most comfortable.
- Practice writing letters and numbers in the air with big arm movements to improve motor memory of these important shapes. Also practice letters and numbers with smaller hand or finger motions.
- Encourage proper grip, posture and paper positioning for writing. It's important to reinforce this early as it's difficult for students to unlearn bad habits later on.
- Use multi-sensory techniques for learning letters, shapes and numbers. For example, speaking through motor sequences, such as "b" is "big stick down, circle away from my body."

- Introduce a word processor on a computer early; however do not eliminate handwriting for the child. While typing can make it easier to write by alleviating the frustration of forming letters, handwriting is a vital part of a person's ability to function in the world.
- Be patient and positive, encourage practice and praise effort - becoming a good writer takes time and practice.

Causes

Scientists aren't sure why dysgraphia happens in children. In adults, it's sometimes related to a brain injury. In kids, this learning disorder usually occurs along with other learning disabilities such as ADHD and dyslexia.

Symptoms

Kids with dysgraphia have unclear, irregular, or inconsistent handwriting, often with different slants, shapes, upper- and lower-case letters, and cursive and print styles. They also tend to write or copy things slowly.

Parents or teachers may notice symptoms when the child first begins writing assignments in school. Other signs of dysgraphia to watch for include:

Cramped grip, which may lead to a sore hand

Difficulty spacing things out on paper or within margins (poor spatial planning)

Frequent erasing

Inconsistency in letter and word spacing

Poor spelling, including unfinished words or missing words or letters

Unusual wrist, body, or paper position while writing

This learning disability also makes it hard to write and think at the same time. Creative writing tasks are often especially hard.

Diagnosis

The first step is for your child's pediatrician to rule out any other diseases or conditions that could cause writing difficulties.

A licensed psychologist trained in learning disorders can diagnose dysgraphia. This could be your child's school psychologist. The specialist will give your child academic and writing tests that measure his ability to put thoughts into words and his fine motor skills. For instance, he may be asked to tap his fingers or turn his wrist a certain way.

Your child also may be asked to write sentences or copy words and letters. The specialist will look at his:

- Finished work
- Hand and body position
- Pencil grip
- Posture
- Writing process

References:

<https://www.webmd.com/add-adhd/childhood-adhd/dysgraphia-facts#1>

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/12770/>