“If they don’t learn the way we teach, we must teach them the way they learn.”

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What is Dyslexia?

The National Institute of Health defines dyslexia as characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition, and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. Dyslexia is a learning disability that is neurological in origin and often runs in the family. Children with dyslexia experience trouble reading when taught through traditional instruction. Though the symptoms of dyslexia manifest themselves in different ways depending on the age of the child, some common symptoms for a kindergartener through fourth grader are:

- Difficulty reading single words that are not surrounded by other words.
- Slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds.
- Confusion around small words such as “at” and “to” or “dores” and “goes.”
- Consistent reading and spelling errors, including:
  - Letter reversals such as “d” for “b.”
  - Word reversals such as “top” for “pot.”
  - Inversions such as “m” and “w” and “u” and “n.”
  - Transpositions such as “tild” and “left.”
- Substitutions such as “house” and “home.”

Children with dyslexia are often well-adjusted and happy preschoolers. However, research shows that they begin to experience emotional problems during early reading instruction. Over the years, their frustration mounts as classmates surpass them in reading skills. Often, these children feel that they fail to meet other people’s expectations. Teachers and parents see a bright child who is failing to learn to read and write and assume that he is simply “not trying hard enough.” This can cause dyslexic children to feel inadequate and inept.

In addition, children with dyslexia frequently have problems in social relationships. Often, this is because they have difficulty reading social cues or because dyslexia affects social language functioning. As both non-verbal and verbal language are essential for forming and maintaining relationships, children who struggle with reading are at a disadvantage socially as well. Additionally, without proper intervention, these children will fall further and further behind peers on their own age.

Therefore, helping dyslexic children gain confidence and skill in their reading not only improves their test scores, but perhaps more importantly, builds their self-esteem. This increase in self-esteem can work wonders on the playground and in the home, promoting positive social interactions and explorations.

Remediation for Dyslexia

What if my child has dyslexia? It is important to stress that if you suspect your child is dyslexic, it’s never too early to do something about it. Talk to your child’s teacher and educate yourself about the laws that govern special education. The earlier you intervene, the better your child’s chances of becoming a fluent reader (and a more confident member of his peer group!).

Get Tested: Your child’s school may have specially trained staff members who can evaluate your child. But if the school lacks the resources or you disagree with its assessment, find an outside evaluator. Sometimes, working with someone outside of the school will be better able to objectively diagnose the problem. In addition, the benefit of an outside evaluator means that your child’s school will have only the documentation you choose to share with them.

Create a Plan of Action: If your child is found eligible for special education and the school can provide it, the next step is to draw up an individualized educational plan. Created with a learning specialist, these individualized educational plans should set specific goals for progress over the school year and offer guidelines on how parents and teachers can work together to help the child attain those goals.

Monitor Progress: If the IEP goals aren’t being met within the framework of the school day, it may be advisable to seek private instruction or tutoring for your child. Keep close tabs on your child’s progress.

Boost Strengths: Don’t let your child become defined by his or her dyslexia. These children need to be encouraged to find other outlets, activities and hobbies in which they can excel and win praise for their accomplishments.

Educate Yourself: You need information to be your child’s chief advocate and to understand what he or she is up against. Good books to get you started, recommended by education experts, are Overcoming Dyslexia by Dr. Sally Shaywitz and Parenting a Struggling Reader by Susan Hall and Louisa Moats.

Reading and Social Skills

As children enter elementary school, and reading becomes an integral part of the curriculum, children with learning disorders begin to struggle academically. Whereas before, they might have been able to get along based on their innate intellect, children with dyslexia, ADHD, or visual processing disorder start to show signs of struggles when reading instruction begins in earnest.

Often, these children go undiagnosed and their struggles with reading are attributed to a lack of trying or apathy. In reality, these children are working hard, but need different methods of instruction. Without these accommodations, children with learning disabilities often become frustrated and dejected. This can lead to low self-esteem and decreased self-worth.

So, are reading and social skills linked? Definitely. When children develop low self-esteem, they are less likely to attempt to make friends. They believe that no one would be interested in being their friends and therefore think that they will be rejected by their peers. This often leads children with dis-abilities to isolate themselves in order to avoid risk-taking in social situations.

Fortunately, there is a lot that you can do to help improve your child’s reading and thereby improve her self-esteem. Depending on the source of your child’s struggles with reading, alternative reading strategies can be employed. With a customized plan in place, your child could be on her way towards success in reading. Then, with each small gain in reading, your child’s self-esteem will grow – she will no longer be the child who is scared to be called on in class. Who knows? That newfound confidence might allow her to believe in herself enough to take some risks and make some new friends.
Tight, awkward pencil grip and body areas below, additional help may be if your child has trouble in any of the shape of the letter? are constantly learning how to make the concentrate on what you have to say if you dysgraphia inhibits coherent expression of the system. It also helps explain why of writing for children as they go through time each time they write them. If you think about kindergarteners struggling input and feedback from the eye. Dysgraphia can manifest itself as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting, and trouble putting thoughts on paper. However, children who suffer from dysgraphia often have skills that are on par with other children their age. Dysgraphia is not just a motor problem, but also involves information processing skills (transferring thoughts from the mind through the hand onto the paper). Dysgraphia is a biological disorder with genetic and neural bases. In fact, dysgraphia deals with a working memory problem. Working memory refers to the system in your brain that processes temporary pieces of information that you are in the midst of manipulating. In dysgraphia, people fail to develop connections between brain regions need for writing. Therefore, they have trouble automatically remembering and completing the sequence of physical movements needed to write letters or numbers. Dysgraphia also involves a disconnect between the finger movement input and feedback from the eye. In other words, those with dysgraphia feel that they are writing letters for the first time each time they write them. If you think about kindergarteners struggling to write each individual letter, you can realize how difficult and challenging this task of writing for children as they go through the system. It also helps explain why dysgraphia inhibits coherent expression of thoughts in writing. After all, how can you concentrate on what you have to say if you are constantly learning how to make the shape of the letter? If your child has trouble in any of the areas below, additional help may be beneficial:

- Tight, awkward pencil grip and body position
- Illegible handwriting
- Avoiding writing and drawing tasks
- Tiring quickly while writing
- Misses words out loud while writing
- Unfinished or omitted words in sentences

In teenagers and adults, dysgraphia manifests:

- Difficulty organizing thoughts on paper
- Trouble keeping track of thoughts in body written down
- Difficulty with syntax structure and grammar
- Large gap between written ideas and speech

Depending on your child’s age, there are different strategies that are effective. For young children who are just learning how to write, here are some suggestions:

- Play with clay in order to strengthen hand muscles.
- Use paper with raised lines so that children can feel the lines on the paper, allowing them to stay on track.
- Experiment with different pens and pencils.
- Practice writing letters with exaggerated arm movements. This will help improve the motor memory without the pressure of the paper.
- Consider introducing a word processor (through a computer) earlier than with other children, but do not eliminate writing on paper.
- Encourage proper grip, posture, and paper positioning. If you aren’t sure how to help your child with this – don’t push it too long! The latter you correct these concerns, the harder it is to unlearn the bad habits.

For children in elementary school, consider these modifications:

- Alternate the focus of writing assignments.
- For some assignments, put the emphasis on neatness and spelling and for others put the emphasis on grammar and style.
- Encourage the use of print or cursives, which ever is more comfortable for your child.
- Help make a checklist for editing written work based on: spelling, neatness, grammar, syntax, clear progression of ideas, and organization.
- Encourage writing through low-stress opportunities for writing such as letters, journals, and making shopping lists.
- Create a step-by-step plan that breaks large tasks into small tasks.

For high school student, the following modification can be helpful:

- Provide a tape recorder or smart board notepad, to facilitate note taking.
- Create a set by step plan that breaks writing assignments into small tasks. For instance, (a) come up with an argument or thesis; (b) create an outline with major points; (c) write the introduction; (d) use quotes to support the body paragraphs; (e) put it together in the conclusion; (f) edit paper for grammar and spelling; (g) edit paper for content and analysis.

Perhaps the most important things to remember are dealing with children who suffer from dysgraphia is that they are not “lazy” or “sloppy”. In reality, they are struggling mightily to do what most other children can do with little effort. Therefore, recognizing that they are suffering from a learning disability and then taking steps to mitigate their issues is the most beneficial way to address this problem.

Long Vowel to Learn
Children tire easily when tasked with work that has become rote and monotonous. Recall the long-sustaining effect your child’s face, the sagging shoulders and half-closed eyes that signify profound exhaustion when he is faced with rows of spelling words to copy or information to memorize.

Kriah teachers continually search for ways to combat tiredness and monotony in reading practice. Most of us have found that when we make learning to read enjoyable and stimulating, children approach the subject eagerly.

In essence, we “lure” our young students into doing the necessary brainwork by loading the lesson with incentive and pleasure. Through stories, games, songs and skits, charts, audiovisual aids, black-board activities, posters and charts, we engage their hearts and minds.

Navigating Nekudos
Here is the campaign to engage more interesting than in the teaching of any one the early milestones of kriah instruction that pose difficulty for many children.

Unlike English vowels that “say their own names,” a Hebrew vowel comes with a name and a sound that bear no obvious correlation to each other. How does pauch correspond with ab? What does segol have to do with ehol child mind, there is no apparent rhyme or reason here.

In addition, Hebrew nekudos largely consists of identical-looking dots. Children are asked to master these confusing arrangement of dots, learn both their names and sound, and remember to use only the sound, not the name, when learning to read.

In addition, to the trained ear, uh, ah, eh and ih may be easy to distinguish, but to many five-year-olds, these nekudos sound hopelessly alike. Is it any wonder that it takes some children many weeks, if not months, to master the differences between kahat, pas, segol and shevul.

Vowel-iquity is so vital for reading success that kriah experts advise against “learning the page” and moving on until every single child has attained complete mastery. Most kriah teachers continually warn of the built-in power to generate the confidence to tackle ever more daunting challenges, leading to even greater success.

What kind of motivation induces children to make headway in a subject that demands more mental energy and concentration than they may be ready to give? Variations of some all-time children’s favorites such as treasure hunts, musical chairs and bingo prompt children to harness the full range of their cognitive abilities. All of these activities can be adapted to incorporate reading drill within the context of the game. Even better, all have the key advantage of all-leving multiple winners!

Infect Drama and Suspense
Other kinds of motivation involve injecting drama and suspense in the lesson that make children snap to attention. A typical example suitable for the early stages of reading:

One child, given a make-believe name only she knows, is picked to “fall asleep” behind a “tree” late in the afternoon. Soon it will be dark. The little girl’s family doesn’t realize she is not in the house, so they are not looking for her. Rows of two-syllable names written on the board. The children take turns reading the names, and guessing which one is the name of the sleeping child. Is it Drus? Reva? Rudi? Chani? Avi? Shani? Yoni? Build?

The teacher heightens the suspense by drawing a setting sun. Stars begin to appear. The children are drawn into the drama of decoding the names on the board and taking turns calling them out in an effort to “wake up” the sleeping child before night falls. When the name is finally called, the child “opens her eyes” and the story ends on a happy note.

Countless variations of this device, employing story-telling laced with suspense, keep the children en-gaged, absorbed in the reading process and determined to get to the “punch line.”

Dysgraphia

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Dyslexia

When a child has fully mastered phonemic awareness, they are ready to begin to learn to read. This is where the real debate comes in: do you teach through sight reading or through phonics? There are proponents of both sides of the debate. Here are some of the issues:

SIGHT READING: Through this method, children learn to read through memorizing the appearance of multiple words. Children learn these words from books with limited, repetitive vocabulary such as Dr. Seuss’s The Cat in the Hat. Other methods include slides or cards with a picture next to a word, teaching children to associate the whole word with its meaning.

PHONICS: This instructional reading method involves the relationship between sounds and their spellings. The goal of phonics instruction is to teach students the most common sound-spelling relationships so that they can decode, or sound out, words. Students who have grasped basic phonics rules can be able to read and write new vocabulary much more easily, and perhaps more importantly, will be able to go at reading and writing unfamiliar words.

The chart below succinctly lays out the benefits and disadvantages of both systems:

**SIGHT READING VS. PHONICS: The Reading Wars**

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**PROS**

1. **Children are engaged and read books.**
2. Comprehension is built into the reading process.
3. The reading process is a process of exploration.
4. Children learn to supply all the words in the language. Children learn to spell and associate words.

**CONS**

1. There is limited amount of words that people can remember.
2. There is “tell” that children make – They simply learn to memorize.
3. It’s not a “think” – They simply learn to memorize.
4. Children are not engaged and do not read books. They simply read for information.

**WHAT WORKS?** As I have discovered over the last three decades of work in reading instruction and remediation, there is no one perfect reading instruction method. At first, sight reading is a positive way to allow children to feel empowered and able to read without the frustration of sounding out each and every word in a book. When first learning to read, children feel pride in being able to read to their parents and peers – and sight reading provides them with that satisfaction. Without the skills acquired through phonics, children taught solely through sight reading will quickly fall behind. Therefore, phonics in an essential part of reading instruction and integrally important for life-long reading.

**Reading & ADHD**

According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2001, fourth-grade girls in all of the 39 participating countries scored higher in reading literacy than fourth-grade boys by a statistically significant amount. In addition, According to a recent report from the Center on Education Policy, substantially more girls than boys score below the proficiency level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test.

Boys and Reading

**WHY is there such a large gap between girls and boys in reading?**

There are several theories that explain why boys tend to have lower reading scores than girls. Studies have shown that...
Social Skills Training:
General language and communication skills: children, adolescents and adults.
Includes: explosive and isolated children, bullying issues, phobias, nonverbal communication issues.

Shidduch Coaching:
Private sessions for life-preparedness for young adults of shidduch age. Issues include: inability to maintain a conversation, poor body language, anger problems, poor self-esteem, and difficulty making commitments.
Get your Bochur & Kallah Maidel ready for a Bishow!

Dynamic Workshops:
Interactive workshops for mechanchim, mechanchos, parents, teachers, seminary students.
Kriyah, English reading, and social skills training.
Also offering workshops on the two must read books, “My Friend The Bully” and “My Friend The Troublemaker” focusing on Bullying and ADHD.

Evaluation & Remediation:
All grade levels Kriyah, English and Math.
Help for bochurim and girls to pass GEDs, Regents, CLEP, NYS exams.
Evaluations, and advocate for proper school placement.

FOLLOW PINNY as he innocently reacts to a “friend” who belittles and intimidates him. With the help of parents and educators, Pinny’s life takes a turn for the better. In the second book in the series, we are introduced to another of Pinny’s friends, Nochum the troublemaker. Pinny watches Nochum transform from troublemaker to focused friend and student.