

# Signs of Dyslexia in Children by Age: A Parent's Guide

Identifying potential signs of dyslexia at every stage of development. This guide is based on evidence-based research in dyslexia and the science of reading.

**This guide helps you recognize patterns, not diagnose. It outlines common signs of dyslexia in children at different ages and helps parents understand when to seek support. Every child learns differently, and if something feels off, your instinct matters. You are not alone in this.**

**Struggling to read vs. dyslexia:** Many children find reading difficult at first and that's normal. Dyslexia is different. It is a lifelong neurological pattern that affects how the brain processes language sounds. It does not reflect intelligence. In fact, many dyslexic thinkers are highly creative and capable in ways that standardised reading tests don't always capture.

Ages 3–5

## Preschool & Early Years

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- **Trouble rhyming** — doesn't enjoy or understand nursery rhymes; can't find a word that rhymes with 'cat'
- **Difficulty learning letter names and sounds** — struggles to connect the letter 'B' with the sound /b/
- **Mispronouncing familiar words** — says 'pasghetti' for spaghetti well past the age when most children self-correct
- **Trouble following multi-step directions** — needs simple 2–3 step instructions repeated often
- **Late talker or slow vocabulary growth** — fewer words than peers, difficulty finding the right word
- **Avoiding books and storytime** — seems uninterested in being read to, unlike siblings or peers

### THE BRIGHT SIDE

- Remarkable storytelling and imaginative play — vivid, complex narratives spoken aloud

- Strong spatial and building skills — puzzle mastery, Lego creations, exceptional spatial awareness
- Exceptional memory for experiences — can recall conversations and events in striking detail

#### NEXT STEPS

1. Mention your observations at the next pediatric visit. Use specific examples ('she still can't rhyme') rather than general concerns.
2. Ask your preschool teacher if they have noticed similar patterns. Teachers see many children and learn to identify early signs of learning disabilities. Their perspective is very valuable.
3. Contact the Structured Literacy Center for a free informational call. Early intervention — before school age — makes an enormous difference.

#### Grades K–2 (Ages 5–8)

### Early Elementary

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- **Difficulty 'sounding out' words** — guessing based on the first letter or picture clues rather than decoding
- **Letter and number reversals that persist** — confusing b/d, p/q, or writing letters mirrored past age 7
- **Slow, laboured handwriting** — effort far exceeds what peers seem to need
- **Difficulty remembering high-frequency words** — learns 'the' on Monday, seems to have forgotten it by Friday
- **Messy, inconsistent spelling** — spells the same word differently within one paragraph
- **Reluctance to read aloud** — avoids, delays, or becomes upset when asked to read in front of others

#### THE BRIGHT SIDE

- **Big-picture thinking** — can retell the entire plot of a book heard aloud, with insightful analysis
- **Creative problem-solving** — finds unconventional solutions that surprise adults
- **Verbal eloquence** — speaking vocabulary and ideas often far exceed grade-level expectations

### NEXT STEPS

1. Request a meeting with the classroom teacher and the reading specialist (if on staff). Put it in writing — this creates a record.
2. Ask the school to conduct a psychoeducational evaluation. Public schools are required to evaluate if you request it in writing, at no cost to you.
3. Contact Structured Literacy Center to book a comprehensive dyslexia evaluation, or bring an existing evaluation for expert guidance. We'll help you understand the results and plan the next steps to support your child's reading progress.

Grade 3 and above (Ages 8+)

## Upper Elementary & Beyond

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- **Reading is slow and exhausting** — finishes far less than classmates in the same time; says reading gives them a headache
- **Strong listening comprehension, weak reading comprehension** — thrives when material is read aloud but struggles on the page
- **Actively avoiding reading** — chooses anything over reading, including just sitting quietly
- **High anxiety around schoolwork** — stomach aches on test days, meltdowns over homework, low self-esteem about school
- **Significant gap between verbal ability and written output** — brilliant ideas verbally but written work does not reflect that intelligence
- **Trouble with foreign language learning** — a new struggle when other subjects feel manageable

### THE BRIGHT SIDE

- Systems and pattern thinking — naturally spots connections others miss; often drawn to engineering, design, or technology
- Empathy and emotional intelligence — frequently exceptionally attuned to others' feelings
- Entrepreneurial drive — a striking number of successful entrepreneurs and innovators are dyslexic thinkers

### NEXT STEPS

1. Request a SEN, 504 Plan, or IEP meeting from your school. These provide legal accommodations: extended time, text-to-speech tools, spelling assistance, and modified assignments.
2. A formal evaluation from an educational psychologist gives you a detailed picture — and documentation that follows your child through their school career.

3. Contact the Structured Literacy Center for evidence-based therapy. Structured Literacy (Orton-Gillingham methods) is the gold standard for dyslexia support and is effective at any age.

### Ready to take the next step?

The Structured Literacy Center offers dyslexia evaluations, structured literacy therapy, and specialist SEN consultations. We support children, adolescents, and adults at every stage — from early concerns to formal identification and ongoing support.

[Contact us today](#) to schedule a consultation or learn more.

### Sources & References

This guide is informed by research and best practices in the science of reading and dyslexia, including:

- International Dyslexia Association (IDA)
- The Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity
- The Simple View of Reading
- Scarborough's Reading Rope
- Evidence-based structured literacy approaches, including Orton-Gillingham