



Specific Learning Difficulties

Specific Learning Difficulties

This toolkit on Specific Learning Difficulties is a quick introduction into how disability can present in learners and, importantly, how you as a trainer can support them.

This document will cover:



Dyslexia

10%

of the UK population



Dyscalculia

5%

of the UK population



Dyspraxia

10%

of the UK population are affected mildly and 2% are affected severely



Visual Stress

10%

of dyslexics, as well as epileptics, migraine sufferers, people with ME and MS, and others

Further Information

Please visit the Education & Training Foundation's [Communities of Practice \(CoP\) page](#). The CoP are open to anyone working in Education and Skills with an interest in improving experiences for learners with an inclusion need (SEN).

"Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) exist on a continuum from mild to moderate through to severe. There are common patterns of behaviour and ability, but there will be a range of different patterns of effects for each individual."



Tips for Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

For a variety of reasons tutors/trainers are likely to come across learners who have chosen not to notify them about their disabilities or difficulties, learners who may not have a diagnosis or even be aware of their underlying disability.

Therefore, to ensure we are inclusive to all learners, it is vital that the aim is to establish positive relationships with learners and provide an inclusive working environment where all learners can succeed.

The benefits of this will also be that learners with needs will be catered for by usual working methods and will avoid any feelings of being singled out or an inconvenience, and what works well for learners with disabilities will likely work well for all learners.

Planning and Preparation

- Plan to deliver resources in a variety of formats that will be accessible to all learning styles and learning needs to all learners (e.g. if a video has a transcription all learners can benefit from it). Consider colour: board markers (black can be difficult for many learners, red and green not so useful for those with colour blindness)
- Provide all learners with guidelines on organising, dating and filing notes (e.g. colour code) at the start of the learning. Don't assume they have this skill already.
- Build in opportunities to promote awareness of the importance of accepting and celebrating difference and incorporate diversity into everything you do .
- Be proactive in seeking feedback from learners on how included they feel and how the learning environment could be improved.
- If there is flexibility in the learning environment, allow assessment and achievement to be performed in a variety of ways to give all learners the best opportunity to demonstrate their individual skills and knowledge
- Provide activity instructions on a photocopied sheet/electronically so they are separate and clear. Provide glossaries of useful course-specific vocabulary.
- Be aware of and manage the physical environment – accessible spaces, sensory stimulus, and distractions. Be understanding that needing to apply additional efforts in everyday task, being in plain, experiencing high levels of anxiety and applying additional concentration etc can be very tiring.



Inclusive Approaches to Support Learners

- Maximise clarity of instructions to all learners and deliver information in manageable sections. In whole class discussions, repeat any learner questions so that the whole class can hear and benefit from the question and the answer. Revisit and recap prior learning regularly to allow extra opportunities to reinforce learning
- Consider multi-sensory delivery and flexible assessment, such as witness testimonies, video recording – especially where formal accreditation is not necessary.
- Support the use of technology in the learning environment. For example, digital voice recorders allow learners to reflect, revisit content and independently take slower-paced, informed notes after the event. For some work you do of significance (visitors, important concepts being introduced, etc.) consider a single recording made available to all learners.
- Don't assume you know what the implications of a difficulty or disability are; ask the learner what they find challenging and their strengths and goals. The learner is the expert on the effects of the learning difficulty and will be able to support you with what they need.
- Provide materials (meeting plans, documents, PowerPoints, etc.) in advance so that learners can have the opportunity to become familiar with the materials, reduce anxieties about content and therefore make the most of class information (consider the flipped learning approach)
- Use accessible text size 12+ point font for handouts and 28+ for PowerPoints (Arial or similar Sans Serif recommended), left aligned (not capitals) for easy reading. Enlarge photocopies and articles that are to be read by learners. Pictures and diagrams need to be clear and readable.
- Where possible, make learning relevant to the learner using real life situations, current events, and interests to engage them.
- Speak to learner to ensure you are aware of the disclosed needs and any support they require and ask them if they wish to share their support requirements as other staff involved can ensure the class works collaboratively and inclusively. If the apprentice is eligible, ensure access arrangements are arranged in good time, in all relevant scenarios (e.g. mock exams and class assessments) so that that they are the learner's usual way of working and they are familiar when exams come)

Dyslexia



What is my disability?

Dyslexia is a learning difficulty that mostly affects the skills involved in accurate and confident word reading and spelling. Dyslexia can also occur alongside other learning difficulties. It's estimated that up to 1 in every 10 to 20 people in the UK has some degree of Dyslexia.

People with Dyslexia are usually of average or above average intelligence, but tend to have specific learning difficulties with reading, spelling, and writing. Maths and musical notation may also be affected.

A person with Dyslexia may have a range of underlying difficulties, not immediately associated with reading and writing, including perceptual problems such as:

- Spatial orientation (knowing left from right, working out how a map relates to a picture)
- Sequencing and other organisational skills (how to put an assignment together logically and organise study time effectively)
- Fine motor control and co-ordination (legibility of handwriting)

How may it affect the learner?

Memory and processing

- Difficulties with remembering more than one thing at a time
- Slower speed of information processing (needs longer to think what to say, difficulty with 'word retrieval')
- Slower reading speed, especially if sensitive to light – may benefit from using a coloured overlay and changing screen background
- Difficulties with concentration

How can you help?

Memory and processing

- Give learners time to read things properly and check that they have understood
- Idea generation, followed by organisation of the proposed ideas will aid preparation for a written piece of work
- Help learners to make clear notes, that can be used for revision, and support the use of voice recorders or laptops as needed

How may it affect the learner?

(Continued)

Language

- Difficulties with blending sounds to read, say and spell words
- Reading things wrongly and then not fully understanding
- Difficulties constructing written sentences
- Difficulties finding words when talking to someone

Organisation and time management

- Difficulties with time management and organisation, including completing activities

Emotional symptoms

- Frustration at own difficulties which do not reflect their ability
- Anxiety because they may anticipate failure; entering new situations can become extremely provoking

How can you help?

(Continued)

Language

- Offer reading support if needed, including technology if they prefer this support
- Provide words and their definitions for each new topic, to learn in advance
- Provide pictures, diagrams, audio and images where possible, to support learning of key points
- Separate marking of spelling, punctuation and written expression from marking of content, so that the learner's knowledge and understanding is acknowledged
- Provide handouts for discussions, so that the learners have time to read through these at their leisure; if reading is problematic, provide handouts electronically and encourage the use of Text Help
- Provide instruction for activities on separate sheet or electronically, so they are clear and separate from the activity

Organisation and time management

- Give guidelines on organising, dating and filing notes (eg colour code) at the start of the learning
- Ensure access arrangements are sorted out in good time, if the learner is eligible

Emotional symptoms

- Listening to a learner's feelings is critical. While anxiety and frustration may be daily companions for learners with dyslexia, it may be difficult for them to express their emotions. We must help them to learn to talk about what they are feeling

Dyscalculia



What is my disability?

Dyscalculia is often associated with dyslexia and other learning difficulties. It is identified as a specific difficulty with learning and retaining basic maths skills and manipulating numbers or completing mathematical tasks. Because maths is developmental, basic maths skills need to be regularly reinforced.

A person with dyscalculia may have a range of underlying difficulties such as:

- Spatial orientation (knowing left from right, working out how a map relates to a picture)
- Sequencing and other organisational skills (how to put an assignment together logically and organise study time effectively)
- Fine motor control and coordination (legibility of handwriting)

How may it affect the learner?

Spatial recognition

- Difficulties with navigation and orientation

Time Management

- Difficulties with telling the time and time management

How can you help?

Spatial recognition

- Visual learning: employ visual cues, for example designing signs that are easy to remember for instructions

Time Management

- Allow access to digital alternatives for telling the time.

How may it affect the learner?

(Continued)

Numeracy

- Difficulties with learning and retaining basic maths methods
- A reliance on counting and defaulting to addition when presented with a sum or calculation
- Difficulties with estimating, counting backwards and sequencing numbers
- Difficulties with money and budgeting

Emotional symptoms

- High levels of anxiety associated with maths and numbers

How can you help?

(Continued)

Numeracy

- Use shapes, colours, objects, etc, when teaching to help learners to remember the stages of a process
- Break complex calculations and instructions down into clear step-by-step stages
- Focus on functional maths
- Allow the use of a calculator, where appropriate, and allow additional time to complete maths tasks
- Encourage the learner to visualise the mathematical problems
- Help the learner to systematically learn maths terms and symbols, eg personal maths dictionary

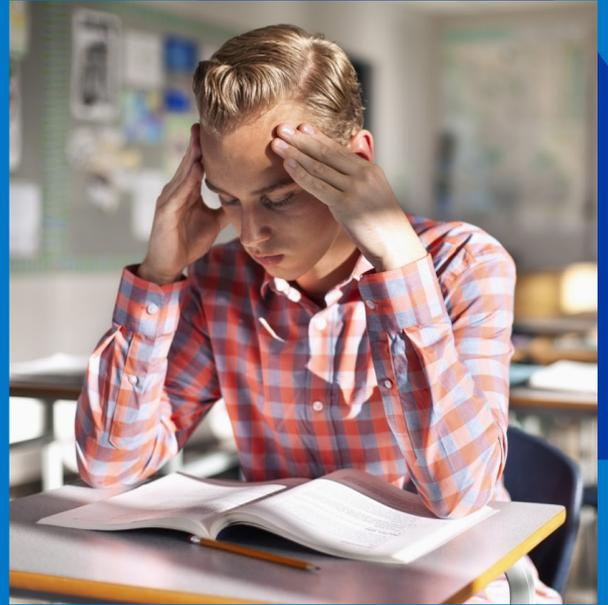
Emotional symptoms

- Listening to a learner's feelings is critical. While anxiety and frustration may be daily companions for learners with dyscalculia, it may be difficult for them to express their emotions. We must help them to learn to talk about what they are feeling

Top Tip

It is vital to establish positive relationships with learners so they feel equally valued and comfortable asking for help when they need it.

Dyspraxia



What is my disability?

Dyspraxia is a development coordination disorder (DCD) which affects movement and coordination. It affects the way the brain processes information and the way messages in the brain are transmitted.

Emotional problems, immaturity and/or obsessive behaviour are also associated with dyspraxia. associated with dyspraxia.

How may it affect the learner?

Coordination

- Difficulties with gross and fine motor skills, eg climbing stairs, catching or kicking balls, handwriting, using scissors, doing up buttons, etc
- Appearing clumsy or difficulties with coordination
- Multitasking, such as listening and taking notes at the same time
- Difficulty in planning and organising thoughts and ideas
- Appearing disorientated in the physical environment

How can you help?

Coordination

- Prompt them to stay on track, as they may lose concentration easily
- Teach organisation skills, diary management and folder management

How may it affect the learner?

(Continued)

Memory and processing

- Difficulties with memory function, eg remembering where
- they left their keys, recalling or retaining information they left their keys, recalling or retaining information
- Difficulties with learning and retaining motor skills Difficulties with learning and retaining motor skills
- Difficulties with attention and concentration Difficulties with attention and concentration
- Impaired or delayed speech Impaired or delayed speech

Reading and writing

- Inaccuracy when copying words and/or numbers, listening to or reading instructions, understanding or making sense of information, decoding maps and charts, spelling, cohesion when writing assignments

Emotional and sensory

- Phobias and/or sensitivity to external stimulation, eg different levels of light, sound and heat

How can you help?

(Continued)

Memory and processing

- Allow extra time for the learner to process information and complete tasks
- Ensure that, where required, assistance is given to the learner to find their way around; they may forget where they are supposed to be

Reading and writing

- Get to know the individual support needs of learners.
- Allow access to word processors/laptops, voice recorders, etc.
- Consider that learners may need adaptations to equipment or their working environment, eg pen grips, use of technology or different seating arrangements

Emotional and sensory

- Give learners praise and don't compare them with others.
- Listening to a learner's feelings is critical. While anxiety and frustration may be daily companions for learners with dyspraxia, it may be difficult for them to express their emotions. We must help them to learn to talk about what they are feeling

Visual Stress



What is my disability?

Visual stress (also known as visual perception dysfunction, Mearles Irlen Syndrome or Irlen Syndrome) is a very specific problem associated with the photoreceptors of the eye (cells in the retina) and how wavelengths of light are absorbed and processed by the brain.

It is important to seek advice from a qualified medical practitioner to exclude any medical conditions that might be causing the above symptoms and make sure that an up-to-date eyesight check with a fully qualified optician/optometrist has been completed before screening for Visual stress.

A person diagnosed with Visual stress will likely be advised to use tinted filters worn as glasses, to reduce or eliminate perception difficulties and light sensitivity. Overlays and specific coloured paper may also support in the short term but are not ideal, as they don't provide support when looking at a white board or when writing on anything other than the coloured pad.

How may it affect the learner?

Attention and depth perception

- Difficulties with attention and concentration
- Inability to accurately judge distance or spatial relationships; may be unsure of have difficulty with such things such as escalators, stairs, ball sports driving

How can you help?

Attention and depth perception

- Attention, concentration, focus and memory problems in some are actually caused by lighting. Consult with the learner to find a more suitable level of lighting
- Provide or allow the use of coloured overlay filters or tinted lenses

How may it affect the learner?

(Continued)

Reading and writing

- Reading accuracy and comprehension
- Processing written text
- Poor handwriting

Sensory and physical

- Light sensitivity and distortion/blurring of text
- Physical effects, such as headache, eye strain, dizziness and nausea
- Strain or fatigue: feeling strain, tension, fatigue, sleepy or headaches with reading and other perceptual activities

Emotional symptoms

- Stress, anxiety and depression, fatigue and demotivation, due to frustration around challenges to focus or maintain reading without an inordinate amount of energy and effort

How can you help?

(Continued)

Reading and writing

- Overlays and specific coloured paper may provide support in the short term but are not ideal, as they don't provide support when looking at a white board or when writing on anything other than the coloured pad
- Font and layout can make a difference
- Provide or allow the learner to use a magnifying bar
- Allow access to word processors/laptops, voice recorders, etc.
- Consider that learners may need adaptations to equipment or to their working environment

Sensory and physical

- Get to know the individual support needs of learners.
- Allow the use of tinted filters worn as glasses, to reduce or eliminate perception difficulties and light sensitivity
- Avoid fluorescent lighting

Emotional symptoms

- Put the right visual support in place as that can be trans-formative. Additionally, listening to a learner's feelings is critical. While anxiety and frustration may be daily companions for learners with visual stress, it may be difficult for them to express their emotions. We must help them to learn to talk about what they are feeling

About City & Guilds

Since 1878 we have worked with people, organisations and economies to help them identify and develop the skills they need to thrive. We understand the life changing link between skills development, social mobility, prosperity and success. Everything we do is focused on developing and delivering high-quality training, qualifications, assessments and credentials that lead to jobs and meet the changing needs of industry.

We work with governments, organisations and industry stakeholders to help shape future skills needs across industries. We are known for setting industry-wide standards for technical, behavioural and commercial skills to improve performance and productivity. We train teams, assure learning, assess cohorts and certify with digital credentials. Our solutions help to build skilled and compliant workforces.

Contact us

Giltspur House
5-6 Giltspur Street
London EC1A 9DE

customersupport@cityandguilds.com

01924 930 801

www.cityandguilds.com

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this publication is true and correct at time of going to press. However, City & Guilds' products and services are subject to continuous development and improvement and the right is reserved to change products and services from time to time. City & Guilds cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage arising from the use of information in this publication.

©2023 The City & Guilds of London Institute. All rights reserved. City & Guilds is a trademark of the City & Guilds of London Institute, a charity registered in England & Wales (312832) and Scotland (SC039576).