

Recognising and Supporting Dyslexic Youth



Identifying Dyslexia in Youth

Key Signs and Traits	You See
Disinterest in school: May say “it’s boring” or “I’m no good at learning”.	Reluctance or disinterest in being at school.
Covering up struggles: May hide challenges with reading or spelling using “masking” behaviours.	Reluctance to fill in forms, difficulty retaining information.
Short term memory issues: Often forgets verbal instructions, struggles with group discussions, or need constant reminders.	Needing frequent reminders, difficulty understanding instructions.
Masking behaviours: Behaviours, like being overly helpful, joking, disruptive behaviour, perfectionism, avoiding school, being quiet or copying others are used to divert attention from their struggles.	Disengagement, signs of anxiety or low self-esteem.
Struggles to process instructions: Needs extra time to process directions or may ask peers for clarification.	Distraction, frustration or disengagement especially with detail heavy instructions.

Tip:

- Look for patterns of frustration or avoidance behaviours around literacy tasks.
- Masking behaviours are well established by this age, making it harder for teens to recognise them.
- While these are deficit-based indicators, they can be key to identifying dyslexia, especially for teens in crisis.

Additional Support or Referral



www.dyslexiasouth.org.nz

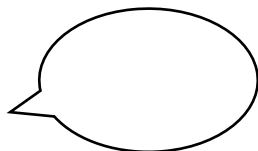
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Key Questions to Ask



To Better Understand the Youth's Experiences

- How does your brain find reading and spelling? Do these tasks take more time?
- What's most frustrating about school or learning? How do you prefer instructions in the classroom, what works best?
- What do you find most enjoyable about school? Why?
- What worries you most about learning?

Tip: Framing questions from a "brain" perspective helps them see that their brain works differently, not that there is something wrong with them.



Identifying Anxiety Linked to Dyslexia

Common Signs to Look For

- **Masking behaviours:** Hiding difficulties through variety of behaviours
- **Task avoidance:** Reluctance to attend school or certain subject classes.
- **Anxiety symptoms:** Fight, flight or freeze responses when facing challenging tasks for dyslexics.
- **Perfectionism or Overworking:** Spending significantly more time and effort, compared to peers, on school tasks just to keep up.

Note: Anxiety can often be the first noticeable indicator of unrecognised or unsupported dyslexia.

How to Provide Support

Simple Strategies for Professionals



- **Increase Awareness:** Understand dyslexia's wide-reaching whole-of-life impact.
- **Use Strength-Based language:** Reinforce the individual's unique skills and normalise dyslexic thinking.
- **Provide Resources:** Guide them to more dyslexia specific information or to dyslexia support agencies.