



All Special Kids

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GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

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Dear Friends,

Welcome to the second issue of the ASK Newsletter. Responding to the feedback we have received from ASK members, we are focusing in this issue on dyslexia, which affects around 4-8 percent of the population, and is perhaps the most prevalent learning difficulty amongst ASK family members.

We've drawn on some of the most informative of the numerous websites on this topic to present a picture of dyslexia and how it can be treated. We've also taken a look at how having dyslexia can affect self-esteem and the likelihood of bullying – including how those problems can be addressed. We hope this last topic will be of interest to all readers, since building self-esteem is a critical issue for all kids, whether they have special needs or not.

From closer to home, we've been fortunate enough to have a number of local families tell us about their experiences of raising a child with dyslexia in the Geneva area.

We've also been unashamedly upbeat in searching for uplifting success stories – did you know that, among others, Winston Churchill, Thomas Alva Edison and Richard Branson all found success despite their dyslexia?

And, looking ahead, we've highlighted the work of Dr Gavin Reid, a renowned specialist in the field of dyslexia research, who will be coming to Geneva on 2 December to speak to, and meet with, ASK members.

We've also included what we intend to become regular sections reviewing recent ASK events and previewing the up-and-coming ones.

ASK Calendar 2006/2007

November

- 2nd November 2006 – Coffee Morning
- 8th November 2006 – Speaker: Catherine Ruckert on “Reversing Academic Failure: Enabling Potential Through the Use of High Technology Interventions”

December

- 2nd December 2006 - Presentation by Dr. Gavin Reid on “Dyslexia: Understanding, Identifying, and Overcoming the Barriers to Learning”

Important Announcement!!!!

Please visit our updated website www.allspecialkids.org (formerly known as Anglophone Special Kids) Please note that some areas of the web site are restricted to members only. Visit the site and see for yourself some of the many benefits to be gained from becoming an ASK member, not the least of which are the heavily discounted rates for our highly popular seminars and workshops!

We hope you enjoy this issue. We'd love to have your comments so that we can gear future offerings to your specific needs.

It's been fascinating and rewarding putting this together. Happy reading!

Jenny Jeffreys and Nigel Edison
Editors

Contact: newsletter@allspecialkids.org

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WHO WE ARE

ASK - All Special Kids, previously known as Anglophone Special Kids, is a Geneva-based network, aiming to support the families of children with special needs and learning difficulties. Our goal is to collect, disseminate information and share experiences relating to special needs issues in the region. Although the group focuses on assisting English-speaking parents, we welcome parents of different nationalities, seeking assistance or information on special needs and learning difficulties issues.

Our motto: ASK - We are here to help...

Dyslexia - A Beginner's Guide



“Dyslexia can occur in children of all abilities.”

What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty affecting a person's ability to deal with text, and often numbers as well. Dyslexia is estimated to occur in about 4-8% of the population. It is a permanent disability which needs continuous support through schooling, but which is often accompanied by strengths in areas such as creative work, physical co-ordination and empathy with other people. Dyslexia can occur in children of all abilities. It is found in all socio-economic groups and in every country in the world. Dyslexia seems to affect more boys than girls (ratio about 3 to 1).

What Are The Symptoms?

Children or students who are dyslexic find it difficult to sort out the sounds within words. This means that they have problems with reading, writing and spelling, while they are normal in their conversation. The majority of dyslexic children have difficulty with text, memory and the sequencing processes of basic mathematics. There are other reasons for children to have difficulties with spelling, writing and maths, of course - they may have missed out on some of their schooling, they may have hearing or vision problems, or they may have experienced poor teaching.

What Causes It?

Dyslexia is brought about either through inherited traits (developmental dyslexia) or by early ear infections such as 'glue ear' which cause hearing loss (acquired dyslexia). Its cause has not been fully established, but the effect is to create lifelong neurological anomalies in the brain. These anomalies bring about varying degrees of difficulty in learning when using words, and sometimes symbols.

Can Dyslexia Be Cured?

Each dyslexic person's difficulties are different and vary from slight to very severe disruption of the learning process. There is no total cure, but the effects of dyslexia can be alleviated by skilled specialist teaching of phonics, sequencing and techniques to raise the person's self-esteem. Each individual needs careful assessment and a personalised programme put in place.

“Dyslexia is estimated to occur in about 4-8% of the population.”

How Does Dyslexia Affect Self-Esteem?

As literacy skills are so strongly emphasized during the schooling process, dyslexic children experience a great deal of failure which can easily lower their self-esteem. This is why it is important for dyslexic children to receive as much praise as other children. It is important for a dyslexic child to have art, crafts, physical education and sports during school, as these are the only areas in which they may excel and experience a feeling of satisfaction. Having to learn a foreign language - like French - can be extremely difficult for a dyslexic child: schools need to take account of this.

Career Prospects?

Given proper support, dyslexic students are perfectly able to go on to achieve degrees at university and pursue successful careers. Many dyslexic people find success and fulfilment especially in creative areas, in areas which allow them to use their physical co-ordination skills, and in areas where an ability to empathize with others is at a premium. One famous architect's practice gives preference to employing people who are dyslexic because of their strong spatial awareness and lateral thinking abilities.

What Can Teachers Do?

The most important step is to give extra consideration to a dyslexic child in any areas which involve reading, writing or maths. Learning in a small group or, if at all possible, one-on-one, is essential for a dyslexic pupil to progress. A word-processor can be a real boon to a dyslexic child. Errors can be easily corrected using the spell-checker, and the finished product looks as good as anyone else's. Excellent for raising self-esteem! A dyslexic child has difficulty scanning along a line of text, and should never be asked to read aloud in class. Copying from the board frequently causes great difficulties, and a dyslexic child should be placed at the front of the class with an unobstructed view of the board. It can make things a lot more manageable if writing on the board is not joined but printed clearly by the teacher. Dyslexic children need to use structured multi-sensory methods. This means using as many senses as possible at a time to make learning easier - looking, listening, saying and doing.

How Can A Parent Help?

The most important thing parents can do is to build up the damaged confidence and self-esteem of their child. Make sure s/he knows s/he is loved for himself, and that this love is not dependent on how well s/he does at school. Make it clear that the child's difficulties are not his fault. Be very encouraging and find things he is good at. Praise him for effort - remember how hard he has to try to achieve success in reading, writing and maths. Help with homework from school, or from any special needs lessons. Help him to be organized. Encourage areas in which he can experience success, such as creative areas and activities such as sports which involve physical co-ordination. Encourage hobbies, interests and out of school activities.

The contents of this introduction to dyslexia have been largely drawn from the websites www.dyslexia-parent.com and www.dyslexia-teacher.com



"The effects of dyslexia can be alleviated by specialist teaching of phonics".

Dyslexia - Geneva Viewpoints

So what's it like to raise a child with dyslexia in the Geneva area? We have been extremely fortunate to have two families share their personal experiences.

"My Son is Dyslexic"

"My son, aged 9, is dyslexic. Summer was great... but now here comes school! One week to go and the anxiety and panic attacks begin. School means inadequacy, stupidity and humiliation.

And yet, until now, his teachers see nothing of this. This is the home child. If only I could show the teachers a window on this world, perhaps they would perceive the desperation of our situation.

What they see is a quiet child, withdrawn, somewhat slow, and struggling

academically. They don't see how he is suffering more and more socially as his self-esteem takes a hit. They don't see his outbursts of anger, quite extreme in their intensity, but with no clear cause or provocation, and harmful to none other than himself. They see a child who does as he is told - and disruptive he is not! That's school.

Home is anger at the world, anger at me for bringing him into the world and then 'how dare I' send him to school, which is humiliating, frustrating and without success. A daily persecution as far as he is concerned. And he is right. In his child's way he perceives there is a problem and that the world as a whole (his school-focused world) is unsympathetic. He is becoming a sad, angry, unhappy child and the whole family feels it and is confused.



"The most important thing parents can do is to build up the damaged confidence of their child."

Success Story:



For Richard Branson, founder and chairman of the Virgin Group, school was something of a nightmare. Despite the difficulties and challenges posed by his dyslexia, by focusing on his inner talents, Richard Branson successfully overcame his difficulties.



“I can see his needs and the difficulties the future will hold, but now they are surmountable.”

Dyslexia - Geneva Viewpoints (continued)

So into school we go to seek advice, reassurance - to seek a solution.

He cannot spell, he cannot write, his maths is poor. He is now 9! Surely this is more than a transient ‘he’ll get there’ type problem. Please listen to us the parents. We know our child best, we are not lacking in parental skills. That is not the source of his confusion or frustration, we were a happy family. We expected school to be a fulfilling, rewarding life-enhancing experience, but it is not. So what is the problem and what can we do to fix it?

Nothing! The usual platitudes. “It will be fine. Just focus on his spellings and tables at home.” But he can’t remember them!

“Oh well, try harder! BUT - we’ll still expect him to take the weekly test of course, and face anxiety and humiliation, because it wouldn’t be fair to the other children if we differentiated or exempted him. We can’t treat him as different, we must treat all children the same.”

But aren’t all children different! Is being dyslexic fair? Perhaps other children would like to share the experience, we wouldn’t want to exempt them!

So, finally, a professional evaluation is sought, bought by us the parents. An educational psychologist evaluates our son. Identifies him as dyslexic. Identifies him as extremely bright, top 8 out of every 100 children, and with the right educational approach can see nothing but success for his academic and social future. University, the lot. Whatever he wishes! Of course I’ve known this all along. It’s just our family holds the minority opinion.

So I run (metaphorically), around the playground shouting he’s dyslexic, surely you will change the way you teach him now. Surely you will believe in his potential now!

And to summarise to the extreme what happened next, THEY DID!

So now when we get up in the morning to go to school, life is normal. The school is giving back his self-esteem, his happiness, his self belief. He is smiling, he is learning. Our future now feels normal and bright. I can see his needs and the difficulties the future will hold, but now they are surmountable, now we can face them, and as the stress lifts from us all, our family feels balanced again and whole. What frightens me still, if I take a moment to contemplate, is how school has the power and ability to give your child and your family all of these wonderful things, or it can take them away, without any consciousness or responsibility for what it has done.”

*Parents’ Name Supplied **

“A Double-Edged Sword”

To discover that my child was dyslexic was a double-edged sword. I was delighted to start to be able to build an understanding of this child who was seemingly very bright but not performing at school, however, I also had to deal with this label that people who did not understand would use it as an indicator that my child was not very clever. As a result we have abandoned the title dyslexia and tried to look at the basket of issues that are special to our child – poor short term memory and slow verbal processing to name a couple.

The sea of information that we then fell into without knowing much about the subject was overwhelming. Who should we talk to, whose advice of the many different schools of thought for help should we follow, how many assessments should we put our child through and so the list goes on. We have gained information by talking to work colleagues who are dyslexic adults, talked to other parents who have dyslexic children, we have scanned UK sites on dyslexia, we have read a few books and finally followed up on recommendations given by the Educational Psychologist.

** ASK wishes to thank the above two parents for sharing their experiences as parents of dyslexic students.*

Dyslexia - Geneva Viewpoints (continued)

Here are a few of the materials that we found most useful:

- "Dyslexia – A parents' survival guide" by Christine Ostler
- "Plees help" by Ann Tipper
- "The survival guide for kids with learning differences" by Gary Fisher and Rhoda Cummings
- "Maths for the dyslexic- a practical guide" by Anne Henderson
- Good schools guide for special needs schools www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk
- Tapes of songs for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division by www.sara-jordan.com
- Dyslexia Research Institute

*Parents' Name Supplied **

Success Story:



Whoopi Goldberg remembers being called dumb and stupid at school because she had a lot of problems reading. It was clear to her teachers and family that she was neither slow nor dumb. Despite her dyslexia, Whoopi Goldberg has gone on to have a successful film and television career.

Self-Esteem - A Key Foundation For Success

Picture the scenario. You spend your days at school struggling with the things that other kids find easy. Your classmates find it hard to understand the problem. For most children, it does not take long for your self-esteem and confidence to come tumbling. For children with dyslexia, and indeed any learning difficulty, this is an all too common problem. Yet you can only begin to address successfully the obstacles you face when you have the

self-esteem and confidence to propel you.

The good news is that every child has areas of strength upon which you can build. It is up to the adults to help identify and reinforce these areas so that the child can learn to replace any feelings of gloom with a sense of hope and optimism. There are five key strategies which parents might adopt.

Strategy 1: Understanding and Accepting the Child's Learning Problems and De-Mystifying These Problems for Them

A key step here is to assess carefully the child's strengths and weaknesses, to emphasise and encourage the strengths, and to set up support to address the weaknesses. Many children with learning difficulties spend so much time focused on their weaknesses that they are almost wholly ignorant that they also have

strengths! Many dyslexic people have great strengths in the areas of physical co-ordination, creativity and empathy with other people. The child needs to be involved in this assessment process so that they can better understand the issues and develop a sense of responsibility and optimism for what occurs in their life.



"The good news is that every child has areas of strength upon which you can build."

Strategy 2: Teaching Children How to Solve Problems and Make Decisions

A basic feature of high self-esteem and resilience is the belief that one has a measure of control over one's life. If we wish our children to develop this sense of control, it is imperative we provide them with opportunities from an early age to learn and apply problem-solving and decision-

making skills. Rushing in to solve a child's problems may be counter-productive - rather engage the child in the process of thinking about two or three possible solutions, consider what solution might work best, and then attempt that solution.

Self-Esteem - A Key Foundation for Success (continued)

Strategy 3: Reinforcing Responsibility by Having Children Contribute

Self-esteem and resilience are nurtured when children are asked to contribute to their world and to the well-being of others. One of the most effective ways of boosting self-worth and motivation is to communicate that "You have something of value to offer; your presence makes a positive difference in the lives of others." The basic message from parents to their children should be "We need your help." Specific

activities can include having certain household responsibilities or involving our children in helping us with charitable work. These contributory activities serve to strengthen a child's self-worth and dignity and provide the encouragement and motivation to attempt tasks that have proved problematic in the past.



"Probably every dyslexic child suffers from bullying at some stage in their schooling."

Strategy 4: Learning from, Rather than Feeling Defeated by, Mistakes

If we are to raise resilient children, it is essential to help them develop a more positive attitude towards mistakes. So, don't curse and scream when mistakes are made, rather keep the tone light and discuss how things can be done better

the next time. One of the most important things we can do to promote high self-esteem and resilience in our children is to help them deal comfortably with obstacles, mistakes, and setbacks.

Strategy 5: Making the Child Feel Special

Self-esteem and hope are nurtured when we show children we care. Children will feel loved when we create special, interruption-free times alone with them each day or week. There are opportunities for this both inside and outside the home, for

example a regular trip to watch football or ice hockey together.

This article has been adapted from an article by Dr Robert Brooks at www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=400.

Five Tips to Outsmart Bullies

Probably every dyslexic child suffers from bullying at some stage in their schooling. Combined with the difficulties they experience with spelling, writing and reading, being bullied can have a devastating effect on their self-confidence and achievement. Bullying need not necessarily take the form

of physical attacks, but may be verbal. It may include such things as being called an unpleasant nickname by other children, being not spoken to by other children, being told that they smell nasty, and so forth. Here are five tips which may help outsmart the bullies.

1. Appearance Matters

Personal appearance has been found to play a crucial role in avoiding bullying. Make eye contact, stand up straight with your head high, speak in a strong voice, stay clean, and do not wear clothes that make you appear ashamed of your body.

2. Bullies want attention

If ignoring them is not possible, try ignoring what they say and talking about something else. For example, the bully says: 'Why are you so stupid?' The victim looks wretched and says nothing. The copier replies: 'Where did you get those great shoes?'

Five Tips to Outsmart Bullies (continued)

3. Find good things about the bully 4. Be careful with humour

The way you feel about them affects your body language too. Don't, for example, say: 'They are mean and horrible and I hate them.' Instead, acknowledge that they are good at sports.

Laughing at the bully will escalate the trouble, not diffuse it. Try a joke at your own expense instead. For example, the bully says: 'Why are you so stupid?' The victim says: 'Look who's talking?' The copier says: 'No idea - must be all the burgers I eat!'

5. Bullies may be a lot like you

They are coping with what life has thrown at them. The way you respond could show them other positive ways of coping.

This article has been adapted from www.dyslexia-parent.com/bullying.html.

Dyslexia on the Web and in Print

One of the best places to look for information on dyslexia is undoubtedly the internet. However, you will find yourself faced with over 21 million possible sites to visit via Google search!

To save you time, we've found three sites as good starting points in your quest for information.

www.dyslexia_teacher.com provides a wealth of advice for anyone trying to help a dyslexic child; whether you are a special needs tutor looking for new teaching resources, or a parent just trying to get yourself up-to-speed on the subject. The site recommends books, software, phonics programmes, courses, schools, assessments, support groups and discussion forums.

Clicking on www.dys-add.com brings you to the web site of Bright Solutions for Dyslexia, LLC, an information and resource centre whose mission is to increase awareness of dyslexia and ADD/ADHD by providing research-based information to parents, teachers, and other professionals.

www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk is the web site

for the national charity, Dyslexia Action, which claims to be the UK's leading provider of services and support for people with dyslexia and literacy difficulties.

We've also had a good report from one of our readers for **"The Gift of Dyslexia: Why Some of the Brightest People Can't Read and How They Can Learn"** by Ronald D. Davis and Eldon M. Braun. She writes "Reading this book has enabled me to understand more fully why my son reacts the way he does in certain circumstances, and the frustrations he will face. It also talks very positively and relates to it as a 'gift'. Now I can understand why he has difficulties with some things and is brilliant at others. It also gives detailed advice about how to eradicate a lot of the difficulties a person with dyslexia faces – although I haven't checked out the credibility of these ideas. There have been a number of articles about the methods used in this book in the UK, and recently one in The Independent entitled 'I can see clearly now'. It gives a good synopsis of the Davis methods, and was on their website last time I checked. This book was a very interesting and enlightening read."



Oak Hill School is Open!

A dyslexic specialist school has opened its doors on 2nd October 2006 in Nyon.

We at ASK, would like to congratulate Oak Hill School for this exciting new venture and wish them all the best for a happy and successful future.

*For information please visit:
www.oakhill.ch
Tel: +41 (0)22 354 0140,
email: education@oakhill.ch*



"If you type 'dyslexia' into the Google search engine you will find yourself faced with over 21 million possible sites to visit!"

ASK News and Updates

*“Language Learning Techniques”
by Dr Leo Barblan, 19 October at
Webster University.*



Dr Barblan’s presentation to ASK members, aimed at helping children reach their communication potential, was both fascinating and inspiring. Margaret Benyon, Head of Learning Support from CDL commented that “Dr. Barblan was, as usual, well worth coming to hear. He really does answer people’s questions in a down to earth way, which is unusual for such an eminent specialist, I must say!” So, at least we have another satisfied ASK member!

ASK wishes to thank Dr. Barblan for stepping in at the last minute and giving us parents such a captivating lecture on speech development of children from birth to school age. ASK also wishes a speedy recovery to Dr. Diane Frazer, who had to cancel her presentation for health reasons.

*“Reversing Academic Failure” by
Catherine Ruckert, 8th November
at Webster University.*



We are all looking forward to the seminar by Mrs. Ruckert, a neurofeedback therapist and speech and language pathologist. Her presentation will highlight the different approaches towards enabling your child’s academic potential through the use of high technology interventions. These will include “Neurofeedback”, a technique for helping children with add/adhd, autism and anxiety disorder. “Fast ForWord”, a computer based intervention program used for dyslexia, central auditory processing disorder (CAPD) and specific language disorders. “Heart Math” for stress reduction and examination anxiety.

Program information

*Dr Gavin Reid’s Dyslexia half day
workshop, 2 December*



This newsletter has only been able to scrape the surface of dyslexia. If you wish to hear from, and question, an expert in the field, then come along to ASK’s half-day workshop with Dr Gavin Reid, a dyslexia specialist from the University of Edinburgh. The workshop will take place at Webster University on 2 December and we highly recommend early registration as places are filling up quite rapidly.

In addition, Dr Reid will be returning in April 2007 to assess individual children. For more information on assessment with Dr. Reid, please contact info@allspeicalkids.org. Furthermore, you can read articles written by Dr. Reid’s on our website’s **program**

Christmas is Coming!

With Christmas closing in on us day by day, we looked at some of the websites offering gifts specifically aimed at children with learning disabilities and other special needs.

www.specialneedstoys.com

The company name says it all! Wide range of products with separate websites for the UK, USA and France.

www.fledglings.org.uk

Brilliant site run by a voluntary group which helps you source, as they put it, ‘simple, affordable solutions to practical problems’.

www.toysrus.richfx.com/catalog_toysrus/diffabled_06_t/diffabled_06_t.html

Part of the massive Toys’R’Us chain. This on-line catalogue includes many of the company’s standard toys, but they have been carefully assessed for their play and educational value for kids with special needs.

www.anythinglefthanded.co.uk

A well-established company offering over 250 products for left-handers, from pencil sharpeners to specially-designed computer hardware.



ASK Small Ads and Message Board

This is the place to search out products and services, seek or share information, or perhaps sell some specialized equipment you no longer need. Make the most it!

Babysitters Wanted: A number of people have enquired about babysitters for children with autistic spectrum disorders, both for evenings and for daytimes during holiday periods. Any information in the first instance, please, to edison.mather@bluewin.ch

Seeking Information: If anybody has tried one of the many alternative clinics emerging throughout Europe for helping children with learning difficulties, please email me. We are particularly interested in the *Tinsley House Clinic*, the *Institute for Neuro-Physiological Psychology INPP*, and the *Dore Achievement Centres*, but if you know of any others which have proved helpful to your child, please let me know. Contact: jenny.jeffreys@libertysurf.fr

Please consider Volunteering for ASK!

We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.

MOTHER THERESA