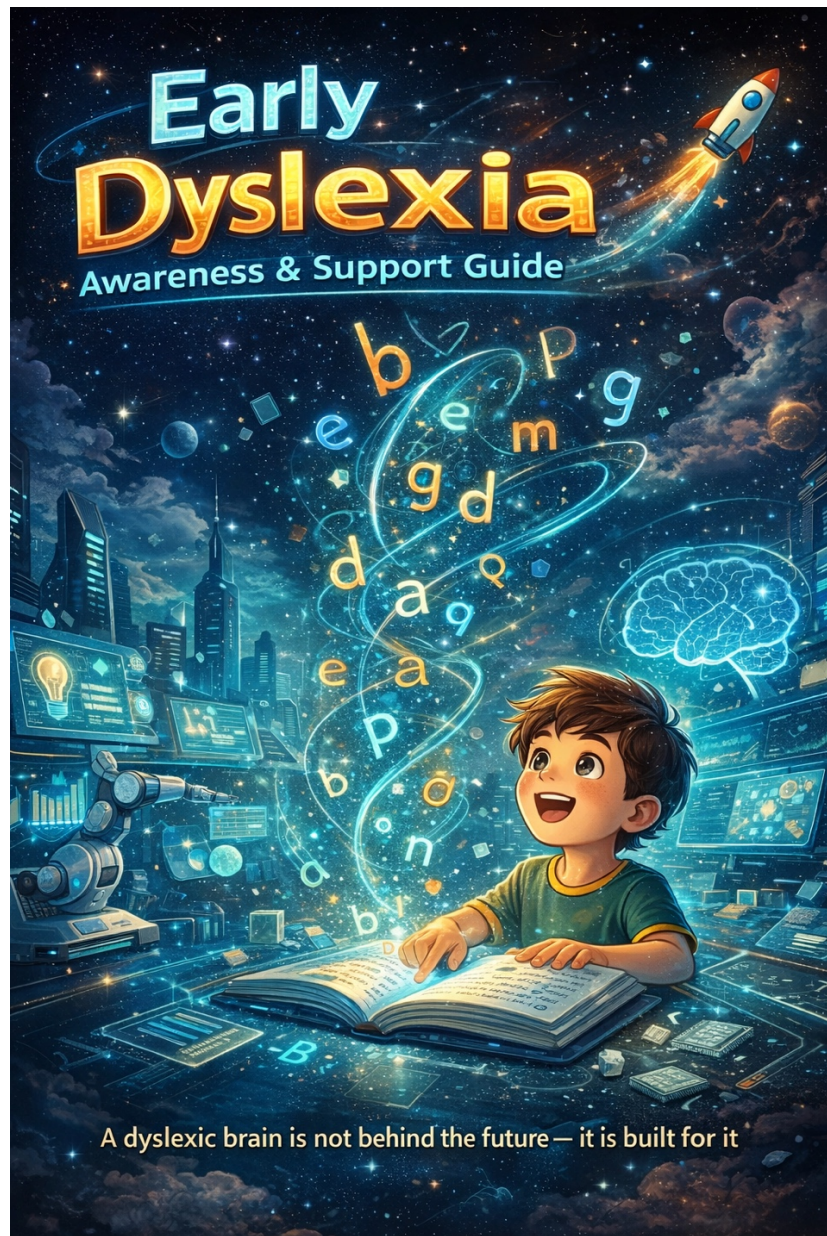


Early Dyslexia Awareness & Support Guide

“A dyslexic brain is not behind the future – it is built for it”



Foreword

It is an interesting experience to reach adulthood before realising that one's brain has been operating on a slightly different operating system all along.

I was formally diagnosed with dyslexia while studying A Level Human Biology at night school, guided by a perceptive and experienced teacher. At the time, I was also studying Chemistry, briefly exploring the possibility of a career in medicine. I achieved an A in both subjects, though that particular ambition was short-lived, and I continued my career at Microsoft.

During what I had assumed would be a straightforward career transition, it became clear – somewhere between cellular respiration and complex Latin terminology – that my challenges with text were not due to effort or ability, but processing style.

That understanding was not limiting. It was clarifying.

Today, I am the CEO of an AI cloud business and speak publicly about the implications of artificial intelligence for the creative and media industries, often addressing audiences of over a thousand people. In those discussions, I frequently explain that the dyslexic brain can be demanding in environments that prioritise speed, spelling and linear processing. However, it can also offer distinct strengths – strategic thinking, systems awareness and cross-disciplinary pattern recognition – capabilities that are increasingly valuable in an AI-driven world.

Dyslexia is not a deficit of intelligence. It is a difference in cognitive architecture. With appropriate strategies and structured support, I went on to complete a Postgraduate Diploma at the University of Cambridge Judge Business School. Dyslexia did not prevent achievement; it required understanding and informed adaptation.

This guide is written from that perspective – not to promote a label, but to encourage early awareness. When dyslexia is recognised early, confidence is protected. When teaching is structured and inclusive, outcomes improve – for the individual learner and often for the wider classroom.

My aim is simple: to support constructive collaboration between parents and schools, reduce unnecessary anxiety, and ensure that difference is approached with clarity rather than concern.

A dyslexic brain is not behind the future. With the right support, it is well equipped to contribute to it. – Justin James (Excuse the typo's)

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PART 1: Understanding Dyslexia in Young Children (Ages 4–7)

What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a neurodevelopmental difference that primarily affects phonological processing – the ability to identify, manipulate and map sounds to letters.

It is not related to intelligence, effort, laziness or parenting.

Dyslexia affects:

- Sound–letter mapping
- Phonological awareness
- Rapid automatic naming
- Working memory (sometimes)
- Processing speed (sometimes)

It does NOT primarily affect:

- Vision
- Handedness
- Motivation
- General intelligence

Is Dyslexia Linked to Left-Handedness or Ambidexterity?

- Around 10–12% of the general population is left-handed.
- Slightly higher percentages (15–20%) are observed in dyslexic groups.

- This is an association, NOT a cause.

Hand switching before age 6–7 is developmentally normal.

Mixed handedness alone is not a diagnostic indicator.

Can You Diagnose Dyslexia at 4–5 Years Old?

Formal diagnosis typically occurs at age 6–7 once reading instruction has begun.

Before that age, professionals look for risk markers rather than making a definitive diagnosis.

PART 2: Early Risk Indicators (Ages 4–6)

The strongest early predictor of dyslexia is difficulty with phonological awareness.

Key Risk Signs:

1. Phonological Awareness Difficulties

- Trouble rhyming words
- Difficulty identifying first sounds in words
- Struggles blending sounds (c-a-t → cat)

- Difficulty clapping syllables

2. Letter–Sound Mapping Issues

- Slow to remember letter names
- Difficulty recalling letter sounds
- Persistent confusion beyond typical developmental range

3. Word Retrieval Issues

- Frequent use of “that thing” instead of object names
- Word substitutions
- Slow naming speed

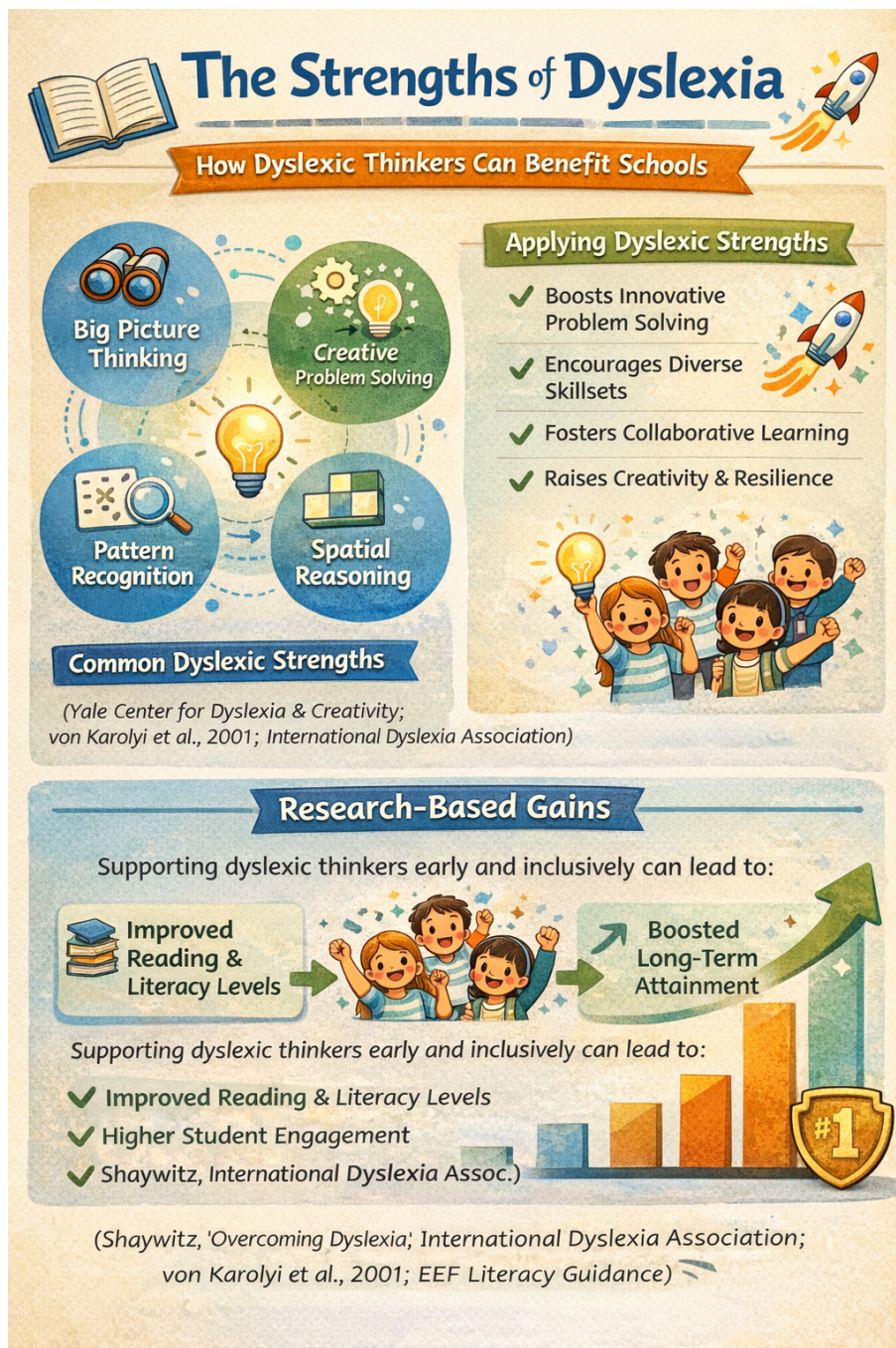
4. Memory & Sequencing Challenges

- Difficulty remembering multi-step instructions
- Trouble recalling nursery rhymes
- Difficulty remembering days of the week

5. Emotional Markers

- Avoidance of literacy tasks
- Frustration disproportionate to difficulty
- Statements like “I’m not good at this”

PART 3: Teacher’s Handbook – Classroom Support Strategies



1. Early Screening

Use phonological awareness screening tools in Reception/FS2.

Look at sound blending and segmentation rather than letter writing alone.

Recommended screening tools:

- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) phonics assessments
- Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)

2. Multi-Sensory Instruction (Essential)

Teach using:

- Sand writing
- Air writing (large motor movement)
- Magnetic letters
- Tactile tracing
- Colour-coded phonics

Multi-sensory teaching benefits all learners, not only dyslexic children.

3. Reduce Cognitive Load

- Give one instruction at a time
- Use visual schedules
- Repeat key instructions calmly
- Allow extra processing time

4. Emotional Safety in Learning

- Avoid public reading pressure
- Praise effort, not speed

- Separate behaviour from literacy ability
-

5. Structured Literacy Approach

Use systematic synthetic phonics.

Examples:

- Read Write Inc
- Jolly Phonics
- Sounds-Write

Structured literacy is evidence-based and recommended by the British Dyslexia Association.

PART 4: Parents’ “Dyslexia for Dummies” Guide

First – Don’t Panic

If you are dyslexic as a parent, your child has increased likelihood, but early support changes outcomes dramatically.

Dyslexia is a processing style, not a limitation.

What Matters Most at 4–5 Years Old

Focus on sound play, not academic pressure.

Daily 5-Minute Sound Games:

- “I spy something that starts with B”
 - Silly rhyming competitions
 - Clap syllables in names
 - Change first sounds: cat → hat → bat
-

Multi-Sensory at Home

- Write letters in sand
- Trace letters on backs
- Use fridge magnets

- Use large arm movements

Movement strengthens neural pathways.

What Is Normal at This Age

- Letter reversals
- Writing backwards
- Short attention span
- Switching hands

These are common and not diagnostic.

When to Seek Professional Assessment

Consider evaluation if by age 5½–6:

- Letter-sound mapping remains unreliable
- Persistent phonological weakness
- Strong emotional distress around reading

Start with:

- School SENCO
 - Speech & Language Therapist
 - Educational Psychologist
-

Monty – Early Literacy Support & Observation Plan

Prepared for: Parents & Teachers

Language: English (UK)

SECTION 1: Context

Monty is:

- 4½ years old
- One of the youngest in his year group
- Male (boys often develop literacy later than girls)
- Has a family history of dyslexia (increased genetic likelihood)

At this age, formal dyslexia diagnosis is not appropriate.

The focus should be:

Observe → Support → Measure → Review

Holding a child back a year should only be considered if there are broad developmental delays, not literacy differences alone.

SECTION 2: Decision on Holding Back a Year

Current Recommendation

Do NOT hold back at this stage.

Reasons:

- Boys frequently show later literacy maturation.
- The youngest in the year often appear temporarily behind.
- Dyslexia requires structured support, not delayed schooling.
- Social development should weigh heavily in the decision.

Consider Holding Back ONLY if:

- Significant emotional immaturity across settings
- Persistent social struggle with peers
- Broad developmental delay (not just literacy)
- Recommended by educational professionals

Review point: Age 5½–6 years.

SECTION 3: 6-Month Early Literacy Support Plan

Goal

To isolate whether difficulties are developmental variation or persistent phonological processing weakness.

Duration: 6 months

Daily time required: 5 minutes

Format: Play-based, no worksheets

Month 1: Establish Baseline (Playfully)

Assess without pressure:

Can Monty:

1. Rhyme simple words? (cat/hat)
2. Identify first sounds? (“What sound does dog start with?”)
3. Blend 3 sounds? (c-a-t → cat)
4. Clap syllables? (Mon-ty = 2)

Record observations.

Months 1–6: Weekly Structure

Monday – First sound identification

Tuesday – Rhyming games

Wednesday – Sound blending

Thursday – Syllable clapping

Friday – Mixed fun challenge

Stop before frustration begins.

Multi-Sensory Reinforcement

If letter recall is weak:

- Sand writing
- Air writing (large arm movements)
- Magnetic letters
- Tracing letters on back
- Jumping on chalk letters outdoors

Movement strengthens neural pathways.

Emotional Monitoring

Green Indicators:

- Engages willingly
- Laughs at mistakes
- Gradual improvement

Amber Indicators:

- Avoidance of literacy tasks
- High frustration
- “I’m bad at this”

Red Indicators:

- Persistent distress
- Refusal
- Marked difference from peers by 6

SECTION 4: 6-Month Review Checklist

At review, assess:

- ☐ Blending improving
- ☐ Sound recognition faster
- ☐ Letter-sound links strengthening
- ☐ Confidence stable

If YES → Likely developmental variation.

If NO → Request structured screening via school SENCO.

SECTION 5: Teacher Observation Chart

To be completed monthly.

Student: _____

Month: _____

Area	Emerging	Developing	Secure	Notes
Identifies first sounds in words	☐	☐	☐	
Recognises rhyming words	☐	☐	☐	
Blends 3 phonemes (c-a-t)	☐	☐	☐	
Segments simple words	☐	☐	☐	
Remembers taught letter sounds	☐	☐	☐	
Rapid naming (common objects)	☐	☐	☐	
Follows 2-step instructions	☐	☐	☐	
Maintains attention in phonics	☐	☐	☐	
Emotional response to literacy tasks	☐	☐	☐	
Confidence compared to peers	☐	☐	☐	

Teacher Comment Section

Strengths Observed:

Areas for Development:

Emotional Observations:

Recommendations:

SECTION 6: Escalation Pathway

If concerns persist by age 5½–6:

1. Discuss with SENCO.
 2. Request phonological screening.
 3. Consider Speech & Language Therapist if sound processing issues present.
 4. Consider Educational Psychologist assessment once formal reading instruction begins.
-

SECTION 7: Key Principle

Early awareness protects confidence.

The greatest risk factor is not dyslexia.

It is late identification combined with damaged self-belief.

With structured support, children with dyslexia frequently demonstrate strengths in:

- Creativity
 - Big-picture thinking
 - Strategic reasoning
 - Problem solving
-

In the age of AI, dyslexia can be a powerful advantage rather than a limitation. While traditional education rewards speed, spelling and linear processing, the AI-driven world increasingly values big-picture thinking, creativity, systems design and cross-domain pattern recognition – strengths often

associated with dyslexic cognition. As AI handles detail, memory and text-heavy execution, individuals who think conceptually, strategically and non-linearly are positioned to lead, design and innovate. With the right support, a dyslexic brain is not behind the future – it is built for it.



Dyslexia-Friendly
Reading Template

Make Reading Easier & More Fun!

Cream Pale Blue Mint Green

Reader-Friendly Text

- ✓ Large Font: 18~22pt
- ✓ Line Spacing: 1.5~2.0
- ✓ Left Aligned Text
- ✓ Short Sentences

Clear & Calm Design

- Wide Margins
- Extra Spacing
- NO** No italics or ALL CAPS
- Soft Colours

The Lost Hat

Tom had a red hat.
The hat fell off his head.
The wind blew the hat away.
Tom ran after the hat.
He found it by a tree.
Tom laughed.

Sound Practice

Focus Sound: **H**

- hat
- head
- he
- his

Tips for Monty

Read Together Use a Pointer Keep it Fun!

: Credible Reference Resources

British Dyslexia Association (UK)

<https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk>

NHS – Dyslexia Overview

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/dyslexia/>

Dyslexia Action (UK)

<https://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk>

International Dyslexia Association (IDA)

<https://dyslexiaida.org>

Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity

<https://dyslexia.yale.edu>

Understood.org (Parent resource, evidence-informed)

<https://www.understood.org>

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) – Literacy Guidance

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>

- Shaywitz, S. (2003). Overcoming Dyslexia. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Snowling, M. (2000). Dyslexia. Blackwell.
- Vellutino, F. R., et al. (2004). Specific reading disability (dyslexia): What have we learned? Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 45(1), 2–40.
- International Dyslexia Association (2019). Structured Literacy.
- Education Endowment Foundation (2021). Improving Literacy Guidance Reports.

Final Message to Parents & Teachers

Early awareness is protective.

Children with dyslexia who receive structured, supportive early instruction typically thrive academically and creatively.

The biggest risk factor is not dyslexia.

It is late identification and damaged confidence.

With early support, dyslexia becomes a strength profile, not a barrier.