



# Specific Learning Difficulties in the Workplace Including Dyslexia

A Guide for Employers

Published August 2016

Produced in association with Adjust - "Disability Understood"



## Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Facts .....	4
3. The Legislation .....	5
4. Implications of Non-Compliance with Legislation .....	5
5. SpLD Definitions.....	6
5.1 Dyslexia .....	6
5.2 Dyspraxia/Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) .....	6
5.3 ADHD .....	6
6. SpLD Strengths .....	7
7. Reasonable Adjustments.....	8
7.1 Recruitment.....	8
7.1.1 The Job advert.....	9
7.1.2 Interview .....	9
7.1.3 Assessments and selection .....	9
7.1.4 Disclosure.....	9
7.1.5 General Awareness amongst Employees .....	10
7.2 Organisation and Time Management.....	10
7.2.1 Difficulties.....	10
7.2.2 Reasonable Adjustments .....	10
7.3 Memory.....	11
7.3.1 Difficulties.....	11
7.3.2 Reasonable Adjustments.....	11
7.4 Reading and Writing .....	11
7.4.1 Difficulties.....	11
7.4.2 Reasonable Adjustments.....	12
7.5 Social Skills.....	13
7.5.1 Difficulties.....	13
7.5.2 Reasonable Adjustments.....	13
7.6 Concentration, Attention and Hyperactivity .....	13
7.6.1 Difficulties.....	13
7.6.2 Reasonable Adjustments.....	13
7.7 Sense of direction and coordination.....	14
7.7.1 Difficulties.....	14

7.7.2 Reasonable Adjustments.....	14
7.8 Stress and Anxiety.....	15
7.8.1 Difficulties.....	15
7.8.2 Reasonable Adjustments.....	15
8. Six benefits of Reasonable Adjustments.....	15
9. SpLD Friendly Documents.....	15
10. What Else Can an Employer Do?.....	16
11. Sources of Support.....	16
12. Appendix 1 - Myths and Facts.....	18
13. Appendix 2: Case Studies.....	19
13.1 Disclosure Case Study <sup>33</sup> .....	19
13.2 Reasonable Adjustments Case Study 1.....	20
13.3 Reasonable adjustments Case Study 2.....	20
13.4 Employment Tribunal Case Study.....	20

## 1. Introduction

This guide will give you a thorough understanding of dyslexia and other Specific Learning Differences (SpLDs) in an employment context.

At the end of this document there is further information to support you, including case studies and organisations that can offer support, advice and guidance.

SpLD is an umbrella term used to refer to dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADHD, Autism and Asperger’s and Tourette’s syndromes<sup>1</sup>. This guide will focus on dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD. The Employers Forum for Equality and Inclusion (enei) has a separate Employers Guide to Autism Spectrum Disorder in the Workplace.

These SpLDs (dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD) have varying areas of difficulty and strengths associated with them, however their cognitive profiles overlap, which means an individual who is identified as having one particular SpLD frequently displays characteristics, in varying degrees, of another. Experiencing more than one type of SpLD isn’t an exception; it is in fact more common<sup>2</sup>. Each of the SpLDs (dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD) typically includes difficulties with sequencing and working memory<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> David Grant, Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Positive Responses to Specific Learning Differences, David Pollack (ed) (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ross Cooper, ‘Neurodiversity and Dyslexia: Challenging the Social Construction of Specific Learning Difficulties’, 2006 <

There is an overlap in SpLD conditions, strengths, associated difficulties and workplace adjustments, so the following guidelines for the SpLDs are presented collectively.

SpLD is used to describe a group of individuals that display a different way of perceiving the world and of handling information. People with a SpLD may think holistically rather than logically, which can be a difficulty in the workplace but also a valuable skill - the ability to "think outside the box". SpLD employees may encounter difficulty when their way of thinking conflicts with the environment<sup>4</sup>. The most apparent workplace difficulties include poor organisation, general slowness of working, sequencing, structuring, concentration and stress.

All the SpLDs are on a spectrum, ranging from individuals that do not experience any difficulties, to those that experience severe difficulty. Many will require support to reach their full potential. All are classified as a disability and are covered under the Equality Act 2010. This Act requires employers to make changes to help disabled people at work. These are known as "reasonable adjustments".

There is no cure for SpLDs – it is a different way of thinking and seeing the world. This guide aims to help employers understand SpLDs, which is key to a successful workplace experience.

A formal SpLD diagnosis can be made by relevant professionals specialising in adult SpLDs. However it is important to remember that employees are still entitled to receive support and reasonable adjustments without a formal diagnosis.

## 2. Facts

- Dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD are defined as a disability under the Equality Act 2010.
- Approximately 10% of the population are dyslexic<sup>5</sup>.
- About 2 - 5 % of the population are dyspraxic<sup>6</sup>.
- The Adult ADHD population is approximately 3.5%<sup>7</sup>
- It is estimated that 40% of dyspraxic people also experience ADHD<sup>8</sup>.

---

<https://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar?q=NEURODIVERSITY+AND+DYSLEXIA%3B+CHALLENGING+THE+SOCIAL+CONSTRUCTION+OF+SPECIFIC+LEARNING+DIFFICULTIES> > [13<sup>th</sup> September 2016].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Sylvia Moody, 'Dyslexia and Dyspraxia in Adulthood', Julia Carroll, Kate Saunders, Dominic Llewellyn-Jones (eds) *The Dyslexia Handbook 2014*, Great Britain: Clearway, 2014, p.55.

<sup>6</sup> Dyspraxia Foundation, *Working with Dyspraxia – A Hidden Asset: Dyspraxia Foundation Guide for Employers*, 2012 <accessed[http://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Employer\\_guide\\_to\\_dyspraxia\\_1.0.pdf](http://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Employer_guide_to_dyspraxia_1.0.pdf)> [13<sup>th</sup> September 2016].

<sup>7</sup> Ron De Graaf et al, The prevalence and effects of Adult Attention-Deficit/hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) on the performance of workers: Results from the WHO World Mental Health Survey Initiative, 2008 <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2665789/>> [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016].

<sup>8</sup> Sylvia Moody, *Dyslexia in the Workplace: An Introductory Guide*, 2010, Diana Bartlett, Sylvia Moody with Katherine Kindersley, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell

- Approximately 50% of dyslexic/dyspraxic people have visual stress compared to the general public (40%)<sup>9</sup>.
- 67% of dyslexics request support for stress at work<sup>10</sup>.
- More than 50% of NASA employees are dyslexic<sup>11</sup>.
- Approximately 50% of disabled people of working age, who are able to work, are in work. Compared with 80% of non-disabled individuals of working age<sup>12</sup>.

### 3. The Legislation

Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and ADHD are all classified as a disability and disability is a Protected Characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The main aim of the Equality Act is to remove barriers faced by the disabled person through reasonable adjustments. The duty to make reasonable adjustments arises where a provision, criterion or practice applied by or on behalf of the employer, or any physical feature of premises occupied by the employer, places a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled. Where the duty applies, an employer has to take such steps as it is reasonable for him or her to have to take in all the circumstances to prevent that disadvantage – in other words the employer has to make a “reasonable adjustment”. This duty applies in recruitment and during all stages of employment, including dismissal. The duty relates to all disabled employees of an employer and to any disabled applicant for employment.

enei has a separate [Employers Guide on Disability and Employment](#) and [Employers Guide to Reasonable Adjustments in the Workplace](#).

### 4. Implications of Non-Compliance with Legislation

The Equality Act 2010 stipulates that the employer “must not treat a disabled person less favourably because of something connected with the person’s disability, unless there is a fair and balanced reason”<sup>13</sup>. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is a cornerstone of the Act (Equality Act 2010 Employment Statutory Code of Practice, para 6.2) and requires employers to take positive steps to ensure that disabled people can access and progress in employment.

---

<sup>9</sup> Sylvia Moody, *Dyslexia in the Workplace: An Introductory Guide*, 2010, Diana Bartlett, Sylvia Moody with Katherine Kindersley, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell

<sup>10</sup> BPS’s Enabling Workplace Working Group, quoted in Personnel Today, *How to manage stress caused by dyslexia in the workplace*, [n.d] < <http://www.personneltoday.com/hr/manage-stress-caused-dyslexia-workplace/> > [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016].

<sup>11</sup> Austin Learning Solutions, *Dyslexia Facts and Statistics*, [n.d] < <http://www.austinlearningsolutions.com/blog/38-dyslexia-facts-and-statistics.html> > [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016].

<sup>12</sup> Shaw Trust, quoted in BRAIN HE, *The Social Model of Disability*, [n.d] < <http://www.brainhe.com/TheSocialModelofDisabilityText.html> > [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016].

<sup>13</sup> Equality and Human Rights Commission, *What is the Equality Act?*. [n.d.] < <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/legislation/equality-act-2010/what-equality-act> > [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016].

There are penalties for non-compliance with the Equality Act 2010 at Employment Tribunal. However, more importantly, having a diverse breadth of employees with a broad range of skills is excellent business sense for your organization. As a business you want to get the best out of each and every employee who works for you. Ensuring the welfare of employees should be at the top of your agenda.

In addition, you have legal obligations to ensure not only the health, safety and welfare of all employees is protected but also to make changes, or reasonable adjustments for people who might be disabled by their mental health condition.

You could also be liable to personal injury claims from employees – not just from physical injury but also psychological injury as well as claims for disability discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

## 5. SpLD Definitions

### 5.1 Dyslexia

The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) definition is “Difficulties which affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling and writing. Accompanying weaknesses may be identified in areas of speed of processing, short-term memory, sequencing, auditory and/or visual perception, spoken language and motor skills.<sup>14</sup> ”

### 5.2 Dyspraxia/Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

The Dyspraxia Foundation provides this definition - “An impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement. Associated with this may be problems of language, perception and thought”<sup>15</sup> . Dyspraxia also typically incorporates weaknesses in short-term memory, visual processing and visual tracking. The way the brain sends messages to limbs, mouth or eyes may make the individual slower in tackling tasks. However the quality of what is achieved may be high<sup>16</sup>.

### 5.3 ADHD

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and there are three subtypes:

- inattentive,
- hyperactive/impulsive,
- and a combination of inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive<sup>17</sup> .

---

<sup>14</sup> Peer (2001) quoted in Peer and Reid, *Dyslexia-Successful Inclusion in the Secondary School*, 2003, Oxon: Fulon Publishers, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> Dyspraxia Foundation, *Dyspraxia in Adulthood*, 2009, <<https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/dyspraxia-adults/living-dyspraxia/>> [accessed 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-IV-TR Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1994, Washington DC: APA

All three types typically include difficulties with sequencing and working memory which can impact an individual's ability to organise themselves in the workplace<sup>18</sup>. ADHD is also associated with working memory weaknesses.

## 6. SpLD Strengths

SpLD employees demonstrate many strengths in the workplace. In a supportive job, with a good understanding of their condition, a person can thrive and bring success to business.

Outlined below are some examples of the unique strengths a person with a SpLD may have:-

- a holistic approach (see the big picture) to dealing with the world<sup>19</sup>. This method of thinking can provide individuals with particular strengths, which can be uniquely valuable to the workplace.
- the ability to provide fast hands-on problem solving or "thinking outside the box". This type of holistic thinking might make them particularly good at working under pressure. If employee's strengths can be unlocked they may have potential to be one of the most creative, innovative thinkers in the organisation.

Dyslexic<sup>20</sup> and dyspraxic strengths<sup>21</sup> can include management, strategic and interpersonal skills (such as sensitivity, sympathy and caring).

Dyspraxic skills can specifically cover<sup>22</sup> attention to detail and intuition<sup>23</sup>.

ADHD strengths include:-

- inventiveness
- adaptability
- creativity<sup>24</sup> and curiosity
- people skills
- training delivery
- practicality

---

<sup>18</sup> Ross Cooper, 'Neurodiversity and Dyslexia: Challenging the Social Construction of Specific Learning Difficulties', 2006

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Diana Bartlett, *Tackling Dyslexia*, in *Dyslexia in the Workplace: An Introductory Guide*, 2010, Diana Bartlett, Sylvia Moody with Katherine Kindersley, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Chichester:Wiley-Blackwell and Diana Bartlett, *Dyslexia Difficulties in the Workplace*, in *Dyslexia and Employment: A Guide for Assessors, Trainers and Managers*, Sylvia Moody (ed), 2009, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

<sup>21</sup> Alison Patrick, *Dyspraxic learner: Strategies for Success*, 2015, London and Philadelphia:Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

<sup>22</sup> Disability Salford, quoted in Alison Patrick, *Dyspraxic learner: Strategies for Success*, 2015, London and Philadelphia:Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

<sup>23</sup> Diana Bartlett, *Dyslexia Difficulties in the Workplace*

<sup>24</sup> Lara Honas-Webb, *The Gift of Adult Add: How to Transform Your Challenges and Build on Your Strengths*, 2008, Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications

- IT skills
- strong visualisation/imagination/artistic
- determination and persistence
- motivation and ambition.

Although an individual with a SpLD might exhibit the ability to think holistically, if their workplace does not expect or cater for this way of viewing the world, associated difficulties can arise<sup>25</sup>. For example, an individual who is thinking holistically (understanding the gist/general meaning) may find an excellent solution to a problem but if asked to write a report detailing the idea, they may have difficulties. The report may be poorly structured, lack coherency or appear unfinished/careless. A preference for thinking holistically can sabotage an individual's implementation of their working memory. Working memory is the mind's ability to retain and focus on the information relevant to the mental task at hand; dictates the amount of information that can be held to complete a task. It is the main underlying weakness that individuals with a SpLD have<sup>26</sup>.

However, employers need to be careful and not assume particular associated strengths. To unlock a SpLD individual's full potential, it is advisable to understand their specific strengths and weaknesses.

## 7. Reasonable Adjustments

Many individuals with a SpLD will be highly skilled, qualified and extremely employable. These employees may be able to bring a unique set of skills that are currently lacking in the organisation. However, you may miss out on these skills if you fail to make reasonable adjustments. This guide provides practical guidance on how reasonable adjustments can be made that unlock the employee's full potential.

enei has a separate [Employer Guide on Reasonable Adjustments in the Workplace](#).

### 7.1 Recruitment

Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and ADHD are "hidden disabilities" and are often difficult to identify during the recruitment process. On the application form or during the recruitment process, organisations should include a section on disabilities and the support on offer, encouraging candidates to confidently apply for roles.

During the application process employers should show an open positive attitude to diversity and ask candidates if they require any reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ross Cooper, 'Neurodiversity and Dyslexia: Challenging the Social Construction of Specific Learning Difficulties', 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

### 7.1.1 The Job advert

This should be written using short, clear and concise sentences. Try to use pronouns like “we” and “you”. Sentences should use the active voice eg “our administration team supports the smooth running of the organisation”. Avoid passive sentences “the smooth running of the organisation is supported by the administration team”. Avoid ambiguity eg state if require good verbal or written communication skills, rather than just asking for good communication skills. In the application pack explain reasonable adjustments for the interview and offer the ability to arrange additional adjustments.

### 7.1.2 Interview

The interview process may not be the best way to assess the ability of a candidate with a SpLD due to short-term (working) memory and sequencing weaknesses, difficulties with organisation, listening and speed of response to questions. Differences in speech may be noticeable eg Pronunciation/speech disorder (impediment). There may be problems speaking succinctly, they may participate less, interrupt the interviewer or find maintaining eye contact difficult.

- Be aware of these difficulties and if possible avoid using them as criteria for the advertised post
- Where possible consider a work trial instead of an interview
- Interview questions can be adapted eg. base questions on experience rather than hypothetical situations
- Be patient and allow extra time to process and respond to questions
- Limit questions to those that relate to the actual job the candidate will be doing
- Invite candidate to bring own notes for reference to the interview

### 7.1.3 Assessments and selection

If possible avoid written tests and use role-based assessments.

Additional arrangements may be different for each individual - possible adjustments include 25% extra time, a reader, scribe, use of a computer to write test answers, use of assistive technology (text to speech software), test breaks and a separate room.

### 7.1.4 Disclosure

It is important that your employees feel able to, and comfortable with, disclosing information about their SpLD. Disclosure encourages a discussion about employee’s strengths and difficulties; it allows employees to talk about any strategies they currently use and any areas where help is needed. It begins the process of accessing funding and IT support. It can alleviate workplace related anxiety and can help raise general awareness about SpLDs.

enei has a separate [Employer Guide on Equality Monitoring](#).

### 7.1.5 General Awareness amongst Employees

A lack of awareness among managers, supervisors and colleagues can cause problems in the workplace<sup>27</sup>. An employee may feel they work hard, but that their hard work is not paying off. To managers they may appear lazy or incompetent. Colleagues might think they are uncooperative/disagreeable or withdrawn and aggressive<sup>28</sup>. Improved awareness through training and individual support can help alleviate these problems. The BDA has introduced a dyslexia quality mark for organisations, which examines the dyslexia friendly nature of an organisation, verifies dyslexia friendly quality and makes recommendations. Organisations such as Adjust can provide tailored awareness training to your organisation.

## **7.2 Organisation and Time Management**

### 7.2.1 Difficulties

Due to difficulties in auditory short-term memory and sequencing weaknesses, employees may miss appointments, mix up times/place of meeting, miss deadlines, fail to prioritise, inefficient working methods, appear chaotic and disorganised, have a messy desk, lose things, bring wrong documents to meetings and may have problems dealing with a varied workload.

### 7.2.2 Reasonable Adjustments

- Provide storage solutions – eg. desk trays/boxes for certain papers, pots to keep stationery organised and tidy
- Arrange access to a one-to-one specialist SpLD workplace coach
- Regular one-to-one meetings with line manager to plan workload
- Help to set mini deadlines, prioritise, order or list tasks
- Provide schedules of work in advance, highlight deadlines and encourage use of visual weekly/yearly planners and daily/weekly/yearly routines.
- Use/issue SMART phones to synchronize documents/calendar etc.
- Support use of online calendar (Google/Outlook) utilising reminder alerts or timers (time to move on to next task).
- Provide tools to help organise paper work, such as subject dividers or tickler files (a tickler file is a date organised filing system). Colour coding can be done with highlighters or coloured folders.
- Suggest colour coding for in-trays and out-trays.
- Offer technology to organise electronic documents eg. One note
- Encourage planning with SMART Objectives

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Margaret Malpas, *Employment Matters*, in *Dyslexia and Dyspraxia in Adulthood*, in Julia Carroll, Kate Saunders, Dominic Llewellyn-Jones (eds), *The Dyslexia Handbook*, Great Britain: Clearway, 2014. Pp. 65-76.

## **7.3 Memory**

### 7.3.1 Difficulties

This can impact daily activities such as forgetting telephone numbers, messages, instructions or directions. Also problems filing, using a directory, carrying out instructions or following work protocol in the correct order/logical way. This requires repetition of instructions.

There may be problems with recalling what is said in meetings, minute taking, multi-tasking - listening and reply/formulation and speaking succinctly. They may participate less or interrupt and may miss certain nuances in conversation.

### 7.3.2 Reasonable Adjustments

- Demonstrate new tasks (multisensory, hands-on learning and repetition), tell them, show them, then ask them to do task, also provide task written down for reference
- Break tasks into smaller more manageable chunks
- Try to provide laminated instructions to help with memory (keep near office equipment)
- Give both verbal and written instructions
- Provide an alphabet flash card (filing/directory)
- Consider preferred method of communication
- A reminder note book (own bullet points/diagrams/checklist on how to do particular activities)
- Provide templates for taking telephone messages
- Meetings/Training/Conferences
- Issue a digital recorder (minute taking/note-taking)
- Allow meetings, where possible, to be recorded
- Open meetings with an overview and at the end provide a summary of key/main points
- Provide written documents prior to meetings/training and encourage familiarisation before session
- If you are presenting to employees with a SpLD consider offering your own notes for their reference

## **7.4 Reading and Writing**

### 7.4.1 Difficulties

Reading/spelling/speaking - auditory processing (working memory) difficulties can cause problems with reading and spelling and speaking; poor letter/sound knowledge, and ability to blend, separate and sequence sounds within words - eg. spelling words with a missing syllable such as "emidetly" for "immediately" or confusing the word "pacific" with "specific". Difficulties can occur following fast flowing conversations. Adults may have overcome more basic reading difficulties, but reading accuracy and comprehension can be effected; reading large reports combines basic difficulties of sequencing and working memory, which reduces reading efficiency, making it difficult to extract specific meaning.

Employees may also have difficulty with reading due to visual distress - text may appear distorted or to move around the page, words or numbers may be misread, keeping place can

be difficult, white "rivers" between the words can distract and white backgrounds can cause glare for the reader. This type of stress can cause headaches or heavy uncomfortable eyes. Harsh florescent lighting can make these problems worse. Difficulty obtaining correct data from graphs and charts, cash register, ruler or tape measure and inputting data into computer database. Spelling and punctuation errors include forgetting what a word should look like.

Spoken language difficulties can mean problems pronouncing words, word finding difficulties, problems structuring ideas verbally. May provide listeners with long-winded repetitive speeches.

#### 7.4.2 Reasonable Adjustments

- Encourage your employees to plan written work
- Mind mapping software eg. Mind Manager/Inspiration Idea Organiser software, can help organise/plan ideas
- Encourage construction of ideas using spider diagrams, mind-maps, and lists, talking it through and obtaining an overview
- Provide a list of appropriate, acronyms, abbreviations and subject specific vocabulary/key words
- Provide templates for emails, letters and reports
- Suggest use of mnemonics for regular activities eg. taking phone message use **P**erson calling, **E**xplanation for call and **T**elephone number - **PET**
- Support different methods of written documents; mind maps, flow charts, pictures and diagrams
- Voice recognition software to convert speech into text (eg. Dragon Naturally Speaking)
- Text to speech software (eg. Claro Reed) to help identify grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors
- Access to one to one software trainer to raise confidence in using technology
- Ensure using spell checker and provide grammar reference book
- Provide employee with notebook to create own dictionary of regularly spelled words
- Avoid asking employee to write on white board or flip chart without prior agreement.
- Provide text to speech software to read documents (eg. Claro Reed)
- Provide a scanner for documents to use with text to speech software
- Provide extra time to read and process large documents
- Avoid requesting your employee to read aloud without prior agreement
- Be patient and allow extra time to process and respond to questions
- Avoid asking your employee to present in front of colleagues without preparation
- Provide training in PowerPoint for presentations
- Encourage planning and preparation using mind mapping software or Inspiration Idea Organiser
- Ensure appropriate lighting (avoid florescent strip lighting and glare from window)
- Provide coloured overlays (available from Cerium Visual Technologies) for reading documents (encourage Mears-Iren syndrome testing test). Screen overlays and rulers can be issued.

- Suggest background colour change on computers
- Encourage employees, when reading, to track words with a pen or reading ruler.
- Reading aloud to self may help some people
- Offer regular breaks

## **7.5 Social Skills**

### 7.5.1 Difficulties

Difficulties include problems organising behaviour and own space (sitting too close or talking too loudly, not taking turns in conversation). They may feel anxious in groups or unfamiliar surroundings<sup>29</sup> Some may also experience difficulties with understanding humour and sarcasm. Others may have poor listening skills, may miss non-verbal cues and consequently appear rude or tactless. Finally, an individual might sometimes have difficulties controlling their emotions.

### 7.5.2 Reasonable Adjustments

- Attend a social skills/teamwork workshop
- If appropriate practice role play with your employee
- Use cues – eg the employee could have some standard statements/questions to ask in workplace conversations eg. let me know your opinion on this<sup>30</sup>.
- Consider workspace location
- Presentation practice (provide examples/templates)
- Self-awareness and employee awareness (training)

## **7.6 Concentration, Attention and Hyperactivity**

### 7.6.1 Difficulties

Employees may have a difficulty in maintaining focus on task or during conversation/meeting. They could be easily distracted by their environment (people chatting, desk near to equipment; photocopier, fax machine). They may lose train of thought (writing or speaking) when making a point or ideas might go off on a tangent, or excessive talking or interruption of others. Confusion may occur between different tasks. Impulsive/risk-taking: great ideas, but difficulty following tasks through to the end. Difficulty concentrating for verbal instructions and appearing not to listen when spoken too. Losing things required for a task.

### 7.6.2 Reasonable Adjustments

- Consider workspace – i.e. away from distractions such as photocopier, office traffic, and clutter. Consider their preference for music/quiet
- Allow flexible hours (they may wish to be in the office at quieter times)
- If possible set one task at a time and break tasks down into chunks

---

<sup>29</sup> Sylvia Moody, *Dyslexia in the Workplace: An Introductory Guide*, 2010, Diana Bartlett, Sylvia Moody with Katherine Kindersley, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, p37.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Howard, *Dyspraxia Problems and Solutions*, in *Dyslexia and Employment: A Guide for Assessors, Trainers and Managers*, Sylvia Moody (ed), 2009, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, p 85.

- Encourage writing bullet points summarising points to cover during telephone call or in a meeting.
- Allow reasonable breaks if needed
- Provide noise cancelling headphones
- Provide screening with furniture around workspace
- Encourage use of “do not disturb” sign
- Suggest meditation techniques; return focus to task

## **7.7 Sense of direction and coordination**

### 7.7.1 Difficulties

Employees may have a difficulty with sense of direction, time and map reading they may find it difficult to orientate self in large (particularly unfamiliar) offices, or get lost on the way to new office/meeting place. They may misjudge spatial distances eg. distance from a delivery truck. They are often found to be late for work, meetings or appointments or may misjudge time taken to complete task. May appear untidy or rumpled personal presentation/poor posture.

Difficulties occur with handling body's movement in relation to surroundings and itself. Gross motor difficulties might include general clumsiness, poor balance, bumping into objects and people, cooking, riding a bike and driving. Fine motor problems might be poor/slow handwriting, poor note taking, and difficulty using office equipment such as keyboard, mouse, stapler, calculator or telephone.

### 7.7.2 Reasonable Adjustments

- Encourage use of google maps (provides verbal and visual destination instructions on smart phones)
- Please see organisation and time management reasonable adjustments
- Time spent in an empty office getting used to the geography of the building
- Encourage use of computer for recording/taking notes, or photocopy your presentation/meeting notes for individual
- Use angle board to work on to help with posture and position
- Offer computerised form completion
- Consider area for completing a coordination task, may be more successful if sitting or leaning
- Tape can be used to build up handles on tools/equipment
- Ensure workspace is free from trip hazards
- Ensure seating is appropriate
- Issue ergonomic keyboard, large screen and wireless mouse
- Encourage use of keyboard shortcuts
- Offer the use of the telephone rather than writing.

## 7.8 Stress and Anxiety

### 7.8.1 Difficulties

Individuals often need to put in extra time and effort to reach the levels of colleagues, which can cause great stress and anxiety. Many employees may have compensated well for their difficulties and may not appear to have any issues until they become under particular strain or illness<sup>31</sup>. By levelling out the playing field and offering reasonable adjustments, employers can help to reduce levels of stress and anxiety. Other feelings employees may report include confusion, lack of confidence, frustration and depression. All of these can be addressed with support from employers. Organisations could provide wellbeing workshops – eg yoga or mindfulness. Google provide this type of support for their employees.

### 7.8.2 Reasonable Adjustments

The reasonable adjustments mentioned here are extensive. The adjustments you will make for your employee will depend on their individual needs. Ensure that adjustments put in place and check that they are working. Don't try to make all adjustments at once - they can be built up gradually. You may wish to reference the Employer Guide to Reasonable Adjustments.

## 8. Six benefits of Reasonable Adjustments

- Help unlock the strengths of your workforce
- Improve efficiency and the service you offer to customers and clients
- Encourages employees to access training
- Increase motivation and maintain loyalty of employees
- Reduce stress, employee turnover and sick leave.
- Adjustments made for some employees will often benefit all employees.

## 9. SpLD Friendly Documents

This could be used by all employers and would ensure consistency within the organisation:-

### Presentation

- Large (12-14) Sans Serif (without flicks or kicks) font, such as Arial.
- No underlining, italics or block capitals.
- Line spacing – at least 1.5.
- Avoid the use of a white background - off white/pastel is better.

### Format

- Boxes can help separate sections
- Colour coding
- Space out sections

---

<sup>31</sup> Diana Bartlett, *Dyslexia in the Workplace: An Introductory Guide*, 2010, Diana Bartlett, Sylvia Moody with Katherine Kindersley, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Chichester:Wiley-Blackwell, p.195

- Use of bullet points or numbering instead of blocks of text

#### Style

- Avoid long dense paragraphs
- Include only one point per sentence
- Break up long numbers into twos or threes
- Use visual aids in documents or presentations
- Try less linear presentation of text eg table or Mind maps (“Mind Manager” or Inspiration Idea Organiser)

#### Tables/Graphs

- Use colours to divide contents
- Include sharp colour coded lines (table columns/rows; graphs: horizontal/vertical)
- Highlight headings

## 10. What Else Can an Employer Do?

The Government Access to Work Scheme provides advice and information to individuals and employers and also may fund specialist assistance and equipment. It is open to those, with a disability, in work or applying for a job. Applications need to be made by the individuals concerned via the DirectGov website or by phone call. A workplace needs assessment considers how SpLD are affecting performance in a specific job. Along with training needs, it will identify ways in which an employer can give help and support. A workplace needs assessment can be obtained free of charge via the government’s Access to Work (ATW) scheme or paid for privately. The private assessments are often viewed as better, as they include recommendations about reasonable adjustments, training programmes for a specialist coach and a list IT recommendations<sup>32</sup>. When arranging an assessment ensure the assessor has the correct experience of working in the workplace with SpLDs not just dyslexia, but also others such as, ADHD, dyspraxia and Autism.

Once the assessment has been arranged, prepare for the assessment by noting down the difficulties the individual is experiencing at work.

## 11. Sources of Support

There are many organisations which help with recruitment, ongoing support and advice if you have, or are thinking of recruiting an employees with a SpLD. Some of the most common forms of support include a workplace assessment, consultancy, job coaching and awareness training.

---

<sup>32</sup> Diana Bartlett, *Dyslexia in the Workplace: An Introductory Guide*, 2010, Diana Bartlett, Sylvia Moody with Katherine Kindersley, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Chichester:Wiley-Blackwell,

Funding for part of these aspects of support or all aspects of this support can be given by Access to Work. Access to Work is the government's funding department for reasonable adjustments.

The information below lists organisations which can provide you with further advice and support.

### **Access to Work**

<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work> 0345 268 8489

Access to Work provide employment grants to pay for practical support if you have a disability, health or mental

### **ADHD Foundation**

<http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/>

### **Adjust**

<http://www.adjustservices.co.uk/>

Adjust provides awareness and understanding to Employers on Autism, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia and ADHD through training, consultancy and Advice.

### **British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)**

<http://base-uk.org/>

01204 880733

BASE is the national trade association for the supported employment sector.

### **British Dyslexia Association**

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

0333 405 4555

UK national organization, offering a wide range of information for parents, dyslexic adults and teachers

### **Clear Kit**

<http://www.clearkit.co.uk/>

0845 293 0963

Clear Kit is an online resource for the complete advice package on recruitment and disability.

### **Disability Action Alliance**

<http://disabilityactionalliance.org.uk/>

The Disability Action Alliance is a cross sector network of organisations committed to making a difference to the lives of disabled people.

### **Do-It Profiler**

<http://doitprofiler.com/>

020 33 22 55 36

Do-IT Profiler is a computerised modular assessment system for understanding and identifying SpLD (specific learning difficulties).

### **Dyslexia Action**

[www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk)

0207- 391- 2030

Dyslexia Action provide support, assessments and tuition through their national Learning Centres, and through online distance learning and in schools across the UK

### **Dyspraxia Foundation**

[dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk](http://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk)

01223 967897

Dyspraxia Foundation is a registered charity that supports individuals and families affected by developmental Dyspraxia. They have a public Help line and provide advice to individuals, teachers and professionals.

### **Hidden Impairment National Group: The Uncovering Hidden Impairment Toolkit**

<http://hing.org.uk/resources/uncovering-hidden-impairment-toolkit/>

0114 384 0284

The Hidden Impairment Group consists of a wide range of organisations that have a shared interest in raising awareness of Hidden Impairments and helping public and private sector organisations better understand how to effectively support this group of individuals.

### **Mental Health Foundation**

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

020 7803 1100

The Mental Health Foundation promote good mental health for all and provide mental health awareness training for the workplace.

### **Remploy**

<http://www.remploy.co.uk>

Remploy have been the UK's leading provider of disability employment since 1946 and have helped over 2,500 businesses employ disabled people.

## **12. Appendix 1 - Myths and Facts**

Myth: dyslexic people have a low level of intelligence.

Fact: dyslexic individuals tend to have an average or above average intelligence.

Myth: dyslexic people read backwards.

Fact: some, not all dyslexic people flip/miss letters/numbers/punctuation/words. Although binocular instability/visual stress (unstable co-ordination of the two eyes) is associated with dyslexia

Myth: Dyslexia means difficulty with reading.

Fact: A dyslexic person can also have difficulties with writing, spelling, speaking, organisation, sequencing, concentration and social skills.

Myth: Individuals with a SpLD have a poor quality of life

Fact: SpLD people are just like those who are non-SpLD and aim for a high degree of quality of life. It is society that disables people not the disability.

Myth: There is a cure for SpLDs.

Fact: SpLDs are not an illness it is a different way of viewing the world. An environment can be adjusted to suit an individual with a SpLDs ways of thinking. Individuals can also learn strategies for living in a non-SpLDs world.

Myth: Children grow out of ADHD

Fact: ADHD does not go away, it is a different way of thinking. Some adults may not experience hyperactivity. Sometimes ADHD isn't identified until adulthood.

Myth: Dyspraxic people are just clumsy

Fact: Not all dyspraxic people are clumsy. Dyspraxic individuals move though and perceive space differently to others, but can also often perceive and move through time (no concept of time) and thought (appears illogical) in a different way to others.

## **13. Appendix 2: Case Studies**

### 13.1 Disclosure Case Study<sup>33</sup>

Kim was a final year trainee nurse on practice experience in a clinical placement. She had low self-esteem and was very sensitive to criticism. She was ambitious but ashamed of her difficulties - putting ideas into writing, spelling, test performance, anxiety. She was good with patients.

When Kim's mentor highlighted her difficulties, she felt useless and became withdrawn, consequently, her once supportive colleagues, became impatient with Kim.

Finally communication with her mentor ended and her work did not improve. Eventually Kim disclosed her dyslexia. Working with a dyslexia specialist, Kim discussed with her supervisor and colleagues her difficulties, improving her relationships with them. Managers were given advice on how to support Kim. This helped Kim practically and emotionally. The problems occurred due to a lack of dyslexia general and self-awareness. If Kim had felt able to disclose her dyslexia earlier, support could have been put in place, avoiding many of the associated issues.

### 13.2 Reasonable Adjustments Case Study 1<sup>34</sup>

Krishnan was clerical assistant with relatively simple tasks, in a large company. He had difficulties with organising himself in an efficient manner. He would jump from one task to another and forget what he had been working on. He would leave urgent tasks and instead work on less pressing jobs. This made him feel anxious, stressed, like he had forgotten something, and he would panic when he was given new piece of work. Krishnan's manager was able to support him by helping him to set up a daily working routine: a list was created of all the daily/weekly activities and together they decided the order and times/days of each task. This allowed for Krishnan to follow a daily work routine, which helps him to focus in the task at hand; stopped him from wandering from one task to another and reduced anxiety and stress.

<sup>33</sup> Pauline Sumner, *Dyslexia on the Front Line*, in *Dyslexia and Employment: A Guide for Assessors, Trainers and Managers*, Sylvia Moody (ed), 2009, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, pp. 61-63

<sup>34</sup> Sylvia Moody, *Dyslexia: How to Survive and Succeed at Work*, (London: Vermilion, 2006)

### 13.3 Reasonable adjustments Case Study 2<sup>35</sup>

At work Annette was experiencing difficulties with concentration, focus, and organisation and time management. Rather than making efficient and focused phone calls Annette spent too long chatting on calls. During the working day Annette was easily distracted from her work and often interrupted colleagues. When she was hyper-focused on a task she produced reasonable results, but she lacked sufficient time. She was reluctant to join group activities, such as training, and she was concerned she would not perform.

Several reasonable adjustments and strategies for working were implemented, including a clock on her desk and a timetabled daily routine. She became able to remain on task for set periods of time. Adjustments led to improved output and a promotion.

### 13.4 Employment Tribunal Case Study<sup>36</sup>

Meseret worked at Starbucks as a supervisor. She had always made it known to her employer that she was dyslexic. No support was given to Meseret for her dyslexia. She was responsible for taking the temperature of fridges and water at specific times and entering the results in a duty roster. After mistakenly entering wrong information she was accused of falsifying the documents.

Consequently, she was given lesser duties at her branch and told to re-train, which left her feeling suicidal. The Tribunal found Starbucks had failed to make reasonable adjustments for Meseret's disability and had discriminated against her because of the effects of her dyslexia. This could have all been avoided with simple reasonable adjustments such as:-

- Providing more time for Meseret to fully understand and familiarize self with task
- Providing and repeating on the job practical training with Meseret
- Offering a template for recording temperature
- Providing a voice recorder to record temperatures
- Offering a system for setting an alert to remind Meseret when to take temperatures
- Delegating another employee to check work for errors

<sup>35</sup> Dyspraxia Foundation, Working with Dyspraxia – A Hidden Asset: Dyspraxia Foundation Guide for Employers, 2012 <accessed[http://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Employer\\_guide\\_to\\_dyspraxia\\_1.0.pdf](http://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Employer_guide_to_dyspraxia_1.0.pdf)> [13th September 2016].

<sup>36</sup> Clive Collman, 'Starbucks Employee Wins Dyslexia Discrimination Case', BBC, 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35521061> [accessed 14th September 2016]



Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion (enei)  
32-36 Loman Street, London SE1 0EH  
t: 020 7922 7790

e: [info@enei.org.uk](mailto:info@enei.org.uk) [www.enei.org.uk](http://www.enei.org.uk)

© Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion 2016