

Dyslexia: Not a life sentence

My name is Ela Lourenco and I am a writer, a creative writing leader, and most importantly the mother of a dyslexic child.

My eldest daughter, Larissa, is dyslexic, compounded by auditory processing disorder (some experts believe it is a symptom of dyslexia, others believe it is a learning difficulty in itself). In order to help my child I began researching the subject. The desire to see my child thrive, turned into my passion, which eventually turned into my career, as I went on to earn my diplomas in child psychology and dyslexia with co-occurring difficulties. Additionally, I have written two young adult book series, tailored for those with dyslexia – [The Dragon Born](#) series and [Ascension](#) series.

In my time studying dyslexia, the most astonishing fact has always been the number of individuals affected by this condition. It is estimated that almost four out of every 10 children have some degree of dyslexia and/or another learning difficulty, while it is believed that one in every 10 children have severe learning difficulties.

I am thankful that Larissa's condition is not severe, but in my creative writing workshops, I contend with children whose abilities vary greatly. I've witnessed, and experienced, support required in aiding those with more severe learning disorders. It is these individuals who struggle the most, not only with academic endeavours, but with self-image and confidence. How can reading be enjoyable for a child who struggles to even simply combine the letters to form a word? What can we do to enhance levels of engagement and improve their quality of learning?

Each child is unique, so identifying their individual strengths and difficulties is important in this trial-and-error process. There are a number of tools and methods that can be attempted in order to guide children into reading.

Coloured overlays, larger font style and size, bigger spacing, fewer words per page are all formatting options to consider and modify when attempting to select books for a child with dyslexia (see Barrington Stoke for example, as they specialise in books for dyslexic children).

E-books are even better for the dyslexic child as you can change the format yourself. These are all useful tools and do help many children to enjoy reading, however, there are children with severe conditions that simply cannot be reached. Children for whom letters and words are like hieroglyphics which swim around the page. In these cases what can we do to help?

Sometimes we have to be flexible and work with what we have. Many parents might dislike the use of technology, but it can be a really useful aid for the dyslexic child. Audiobooks and speech-to-text books are a wonderful means for the child to 'read' despite their learning difficulties – this is vital as it opens a new world to them. A world of stories and imagination, a world of fitting in and being able to participate in school.

One individual I have worked with listens to the audiobook whilst actually 'reading' the print copy – by engaging his audio senses as well as his sight he is in fact helping himself to read. A parent could also read the book aloud while the child looks at the words. Practice and repetition do work well as learning methods for dyslexics. Additionally, it is vital to choose books – whether audio or print – which fit their interest and ability level.

Parents and children need to recognize that dyslexia does not imply lack of intelligence. In fact, although dyslexics do have certain academic challenges to face, they also possess many strengths that others do not (I highly recommend *The Dyslexic Advantage* by Brock and Fernette Eide – a truly inspirational book on the many advantages of dyslexia).

Dyslexic children have often had to find their own methods and ways of learning – a talent cultivated much later in life by others. They also tend to possess highly creative and imaginative minds, which is a skill that can be harnessed in the pursuit of education. We need to emphasise these positives and encourage those with learning difficulties. In order for them to thrive, they need to focus not on 'what they can't do' but what they can.

In order to truly help those with severe learning difficulties we need to think outside the box, to be creative and inventive with our methods of teaching, to support and to encourage. Drama, acting out, colours... there are so many tools we can use to bring books to life for these children; we are moving towards a new era of education. Research shows that dyslexic children are typically very innovative and have a talent for seeing things in a way we cannot – why not use those talents and let them shape their own learning methods?

If you are interested in learning more about how to help children with reading and learning disabilities enjoy books, please feel free to contact me at www.facebook.com/elaaysanlourenco/. You can also view my series of articles on learning difficulties and how to help on this site or through my LinkedIn site www.linkedin.com/in/ela-lourenco-71555071/.