A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS

My Kid Has Dyslexia or a Learning Disorder… Now What?

A Sanity-Saving, Confidence-Building, Reality-Accepting Guide for Real Parents in Real Homes

Welcome to the club that feels lonely, but shouldn’t be

Your child has been diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, or another learning disorder. Maybe you’ve seen the signs for a while: reading struggles, tears over math homework, or “I’m dumb” meltdowns. Now you have a name for it.

> **What now, at home, where reading out loud leads to panic, spelling is a battlefield, and school is making your capable kid feel small?**

This guide focuses on how to make home a supportive place. School services and accommodations matter, too. Home strategies should work alongside targeted instruction, not replace it.

Learning disorders 101

Learning disorders affect the development of specific academic skills. Dyslexia affects word reading and spelling; dyscalculia affects math learning; dysgraphia is a term often used for difficulties with handwriting or written production. An evaluation helps clarify the particular skills your child needs help building.

A learning disorder is not a measure of intelligence or proof of laziness. ADHD, anxiety, and other challenges may also be present. “Just try harder” does not teach a missing skill.

> **Your child needs both access to learning now and instruction that builds skills over time.**

Letter reversals alone do not establish dyslexia, and children with dyslexia do not necessarily reverse letters. Look at the full pattern of reading and spelling skills.

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When the worksheet starts a war

01 Reading avoidance or meltdowns

You might hear: “I hate reading!” Or see a child refuse to pick up a book.

• Audiobooks and reading aloud to your child give them access to stories, vocabulary, and ideas. Listening is valuable; it does not replace instruction in decoding printed words.

• Keep reading practice brief and matched to the skills being taught. Ask the reading specialist which texts and prompts to use at home.

• Notice a specific skill or strategy: “You used the sounds to work out that word.” Avoid turning every page into a speed test.

> **A child can enjoy a complex story while practicing reading with much simpler text. Both belong in their day.**

02 Homework battles

You might see: Tears, shutdowns, avoidance, and a sudden urgent need to sharpen every pencil.

• Break tasks into tiny steps: one sentence, one problem, one place to begin.

• Use a simple checklist and planned breaks. Agree on a manageable work period before frustration takes over.

• Support the process without doing the thinking for them. Ask: “Which part is getting in the way?”

• If homework regularly takes far longer than expected or ends in distress, tell the teacher. Ask about the workload, needed instruction, and agreed supports.

03 “I’m dumb” moments

• Start with the hurt: “That felt really discouraging.” Then separate the struggle from their identity: “Reading is hard right now. It doesn’t tell us how smart you are.”

• Name strengths you actually see, such as curiosity, kindness, building, storytelling, or persistence. No child needs a hidden superpower to deserve support.

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Directions, writing, and math

04 Trouble remembering instructions

You might hear: “Wait, what was I supposed to do again?” Two seconds after you said it.

• Give one or two steps at a time. Ask your child to tell you the first step so you can check understanding.

• Use pictures, a whiteboard, or a short checklist. Repeat calmly and help them begin.

Memory and organization difficulties are not part of every learning disorder. If they’re persistent, ask the evaluator or care team what else may be contributing.

05 Difficulty organizing thoughts

You might see: Scattered writing, lots of ideas, or resistance to open-ended tasks.

• Let them brainstorm aloud. Help capture key ideas in a graphic organizer before drafting.

• Offer a sentence starter, then work on one part at a time. Separate getting ideas down from editing spelling and punctuation.

• Typing or speech-to-text may help when handwriting is the barrier. Coordinate schoolwork supports with the teacher, especially when a particular skill is being assessed.

> **If the goal is explaining science, handwriting shouldn’t have to do all the work. If the goal is handwriting practice, keep that practice focused.**

06 Math feels like a foreign language

You might see: Confusion about quantity, forgotten steps, or panic when a page fills with numbers.

• Use concrete examples, drawings, or number lines that match the strategy their teacher is teaching. Model one step, then practice it together.

• Allow a calculator or reference sheet when appropriate for the task. Ask which skills need direct practice and which supports allow access to the lesson.

• Keep practice manageable. Speed drills are not a substitute for understanding or individualized instruction.

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Good intentions. Difficult afternoons.

You may push too hard

Because you know they’re capable, and you want to help. But capability does not make every academic task equally easy.

> **“We’re both getting frustrated. Let’s pause, then work out the next step.”**

A break is not giving up. If you keep reaching the same wall, ask whether the task needs different instruction or support.

You may say, “It’s not that hard”

Because it doesn’t feel hard to you. Unfortunately, that is not the brain currently doing the assignment.

> **“That came out wrong. I can see this is hard for you. Let’s figure out which part needs help.”**

You may feel grief you didn’t expect

You imagined school would be easier for them. Make room for that feeling with another adult or a professional, so your child doesn’t have to comfort you about their diagnosis.

Your child is not broken. They have real learning needs, and those needs deserve effective support. You can acknowledge the difficulty without making it their whole story.

Parent the child you have

• **Celebrate progress, not comparisons.** Use school benchmarks to guide support, not to judge your child’s worth.

• **Let them shine elsewhere.** Make time for interests that do not come with a red pen.

• **Be their advocate and their safe place.** They need adults who address the learning problem and adults who enjoy being with them.

> **“You don’t have to earn my pride by getting every answer right.”**

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Support is smart. So is a plan.

Schoolwork: access and instruction

For dyslexia, ask about explicit, systematic reading instruction that teaches sound–letter relationships, decoding, spelling, and related literacy skills. Structured literacy is a term used for this approach. Practice at home should reinforce the plan, not turn you into a second full-time teacher.

For writing or math difficulties, ask which specific skills need teaching and how progress will be measured. Different learning needs require different supports.

• Text-to-speech, audiobooks, typing, and dictation can reduce barriers. Use them purposefully and teach your child how to use them.

• Coordinate oral responses or other assignment changes with the teacher. Keep the learning goal clear.

Colored overlays and special lenses are not established treatments for dyslexia. A reading ruler may help a child keep their place, but it does not teach decoding. Report visual discomfort to an appropriate health professional.

Chores & home routines

• Keep directions simple and visible. Try: “First shoes, then we go.”

• Model the sequence, practice together, and gradually reduce help as the skill becomes more reliable.

Emotions

• Practice scripts: “I feel overwhelmed,” “Can we take a break?” or “Can you show me the first step?”

• Try a brief check-in or feeling scale. Let them vent before offering solutions: “That sounds frustrating. Want help or just to talk?”

Persistent anxiety, school refusal, bullying, or harsh self-talk deserves attention from your child’s care team. Emotional support belongs in the plan alongside academic help.

> **Using support isn’t cheating. The important questions are what the task is teaching and what your child needs to participate.**

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YOUR NEXT STEP

Your child is more than the worksheet

You're not ruining your child by using audiobooks or breaking a task into smaller steps. You're showing them that asking for help is a useful skill. The next step is making sure that support is paired with effective instruction.

Start with one conversation

Ask your child's teacher, evaluator, or intervention provider:
What skill are we targeting?
What instruction and supports are in place?
How will we know whether they're working?
What should home practice look like, and how much is reasonable?

A note to the parent who is trying

This may be a harder and more emotional path than you pictured. You don't have to pretend the struggle is a gift to see your child's strengths. You can name what's difficult, insist on meaningful help, and keep home from becoming one long spelling test.

> **"This is hard, and you don't have to figure it out alone. We'll keep finding the tools and teaching that help."**

Further reading

NICHD / National Institutes of Health
Learning Disabilities
nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/learningdisabilities

International Dyslexia Association
Structured Literacy: Effective Instruction
dyslexiaida.org • Structured Literacy
Accommodations for Students with Dyslexia
dyslexiaida.org/accommodations-for-students-with-dyslexia/

University of Michigan / DyslexiaHelp
Debunking the Myths about Dyslexia
DyslexiaHelp • Debunking Common Myths
DyslexiaHelp • Evidence on Vision Therapy and Colored Overlays

This guide offers general education. Recommendations should be individualized to your child's evaluation, age, skills, and school plan. Home support complements specialized instruction and professional care.

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