

Dyslexia Advice to Employers



Dyslexia is a complex condition that in actual fact covers a spectrum from mild to severe. Dyslexia is often accompanied by other learning difficulties, conditions such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/ Attention Deficit Disorder and Dyscalculia, a condition where someone has difficulties with arithmetic operations.

We have provided the following guide to help employers give support to employees who suffer from mild Dyslexia. We have attached a screening tool, which will help you to identify those employees who suffer from Dyslexia. This tool is not diagnostic, but is a good starting point to decide if someone has Dyslexia or probably does not have Dyslexia. Generally we would advise that employees who have been identified as likely to suffer from Dyslexia are to undergo an online assessment (Lucid Research Limited) which is a relatively cost-effective solution (the cost is somewhere between £30-£50). Whether your employee should pay for this or you wish to fund the online assessment is entirely a management decision and this would be best approached from a 'what is reasonable in terms of adjustments' perspective.

Possible Practical Adjustments

The following is a list of adjustments for those employees suffering from suspected mild Dyslexia whereas those employees suffering from moderate to severe Dyslexia are best assessed by an Occupational Health professional and should also undergo the suggested online assessment. Regrettably there is currently no NHS support for Dyslexia in terms of establishing diagnosis and providing support.

Another important point to consider are the limits imposed by the working environment. Some of the following adjustments for example may not be practical in a shop environment where someone has to serve on a till or in an office where the screen layouts cannot be changed significantly. It is therefore best if you treat the following recommendations merely as suggestions and then compares these suggestions with the options realistically available in your workplace.

In general terms, Dyslexics tend to have difficulties with processing and understanding written information. It can be helpful to provide verbal instructions in addition to written instructions. It can also be helpful to highlight salient points and documents by using colours. There are also gadgets that can be used. One of these gadgets is a reading pen which is a device that can scan words and then reads them out aloud. However this may be awkward in a busy customer facing environment. This tool is better suited for background office duties or in times where the work place is relatively quiet.

Dyslexics tend to have difficulties with reading black text on white background and therefore a coloured background for printed documents, but also on computer screens, can be helpful. People suffering from Dyslexia tend to take longer to read and process written information. Therefore it may be necessary to provide additional time to read text or complete a task that requires the processing of written information, speech to text software or other assisted text software. Where there is a need to use office computers, standard spellcheckers are extremely helpful.



Clear Instructions

Working in a shop/catering environment relies a lot on communication. It is advisable that all instructions are provided in a clear way and that enough time is given to the recipient of the message to absorb the information. Important information should be written down. Tasks and projects may require additional levels of demonstration and supervision. The recipient of information should be encouraged to take notes and to check and cross check with the person providing this information to ensure the information has been correctly recorded.

It also helps to ask the recipient to repeat back the instructions to confirm that they have been well understood and it helps to provide a memo outlining an action plan. It may be appropriate for someone suffering from Dyslexia to use a smart phone to record instructions given at work which can then be played back at a later point.

The use of diagrams and pictures may be helpful to explain instructions or a specific workflow. Information should be given in an unambiguous, concise and direct way. Hinting at things may not be well understood by an individual suffering from Dyslexia.

Employees suffering from Dyslexia are easier to distract and find it harder to work in noisy environments. It may be helpful to provide instructions at a workplace location where there is less background noise.



Specific Tasks

Employees suffering from Dyslexia also find it harder to deal with multitasking and it helps to have a more linear workflow if this is possible. Wherever possible it is advisable for dyslexic employees to complete one task before starting another task. People suffering from Dyslexia may require more reminders of important deadlines in terms of them choosing the right priorities and organising their work tasks. A wall planner that visually highlights daily and monthly tasks, deadlines and projects can be very useful. Likewise the use of personal digital organisers or smart phones with organiser apps can be considered. In addition to the use of a wall planner, higher levels of supervision with regards to task prioritisation can be useful and employing to-do lists and again a smart phone can be used for this.

Helping Memory

People affected by Dyslexia may also have short-term memory problems. The use of mnemonic devices and acronyms should be encouraged. Again the use of diagrams, flowcharts and wall planners can help to organise information. There may be a need to check back the understanding of the employee to ensure that they are aware of instructions and task priority and the need to organise their activities in a certain way. It is important that this is done in a sensitive and understanding way so as not to give the impression of singling out the specific employee. These are supportive measures and it should be understood by employer and employee that they are there to help.

Other Associated Challenges

Employees suffering from that Dyslexia may also be affected by Dyscalculia which is a condition where they have difficulties recognising and working with numbers and Dyspraxia which is a condition where there are difficulties physically organising tasks. These conditions can be the very challenging in a workplace where an accurate awareness of figures is important and where a till difference can make a huge impact to the smooth running of business operations.



Summary

It is important that an emphasis is put on the strengths of the employee rather than their weaknesses. Some people might find it easier to undertake certain specific tasks whereas other people may feel more at home in other work environments and there can be inter-individual differences. We appreciate that it may be difficult for employers to allow people to work only in certain sections of the business and restrict them from others and that the general expectation is for all employees to be multi-skilled and multi-operational, but this can be a lot more difficult for people suffering from Dyslexia.

In summary, the above recommendations should be helpful for most people suffering from mild forms of Dyslexia. Clear, unambiguous instructions which may have to be repeated and giving enough time to

employees to absorb new information and to allow them to work in a more sequential way rather than jumping from one task to another are all measures that can be very helpful.

Employees suffering from Dyslexia will require a higher level of supervision, but it is important to take a supportive approach as it can be very stressful for an employee if they feel they are being singled out or feel they are being treated differently. A good and effective manager will be able to strike this balance and provide the required support to their staff and perhaps raise awareness of the condition with the affected employee's consent.



When It Is Not Dyslexia

It is also important to highlight that not everyone who believes that he is suffering from Dyslexia is necessarily suffering from Dyslexia and this is why we strongly recommend the use of the screening tool and if possible, particularly in cases which are not just presumed mild, to use the online diagnostic tool provided by Lucid Research Limited. Poor schooling can also affect performance at work, but this is obviously not a medical condition whereas Dyslexia is a medical condition as it is a specific form of learning difficulty/disability.

Please find attached the adult checklist.

Employee Adult Checklist

A checklist for dyslexic adults will not provide enough information for a diagnostic assessment, but it can be very useful in promoting a better self-understanding and a pointer towards future assessment needs. Below are the questions that were found to be more predictive of Dyslexia.

We have also provided a scoring chart so managers can score the checklist and interpret the scores.

For each question, tick the box which is closest to your response.

		Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the time	Score
1	Do you confuse visually similar words such as cat and cot?					
2	Do you lose your place or miss out lines when reading?					
3	Do you confuse the names of objects, for example table for chair?					
4	Do you have trouble telling left from right?					
5	Is map reading or finding your way to a strange place confusing?					
6	Do you re-read paragraphs to understand them?					
7	Do you get confused when given several instructions at once?					
8	Do you make mistakes when taking down telephone messages?					
9	Do you find it difficult to find the right word to say?					
10	How often do you think of creative solutions to problems?					
		Easy	Challenging	Difficult	Very Difficult	Score
11	How easy do you find it to sound out words such as e-lephant?					
12	When writing, do you find it difficult to organise thoughts on paper?					
13	Did you learn your multiplication tables easily?					
14	How easy do you find it to recite the alphabet?					
15	How hard do you find it to read aloud?					

Employee Adult Checklist Scoring Chart

		Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Most of the time
1	Do you confuse visually similar words such as cat and cot?	3	6	9	12
2	Do you lose your place or miss out lines when reading?	2	4	6	8
3	Do you confuse the names of objects, for example table for chair?	1	2	3	4
4	Do you have trouble telling left from right?	1	2	3	4
5	Is map reading or finding your way to a strange place confusing?	1	2	3	4
6	Do you re-read paragraphs to understand them?	1	2	3	4
7	Do you get confused when given several instructions at once?	1	2	3	4
8	Do you make mistakes when taking down telephone messages?	1	2	3	4
9	Do you find it difficult to find the right word to say?	1	2	3	4
10	How often do you think of creative solutions to problems?	1	2	3	4
		Easy	Challenging	Difficult	Very Difficult
11	How easy do you find it to sound out words such as e-le-phant?	3	6	9	12
12	When writing, do you find it difficult to organise thoughts on paper?	2	4	6	8
13	Did you learn your multiplication tables easily?	2	4	6	8
14	How easy do you find it to recite the alphabet?	1	2	3	4
15	How hard do you find it to read aloud?	1	2	3	4

Results from the Adults Test - what it all means.

The research and development of the checklist has provided a valuable insight into the diversity of difficulties and is a clear reminder that every individual is different and should be treated and assessed as such. However, it is also interesting to note that a number of questions, the answers to which are said to be characteristics of dyslexic adults, are commonly found in the answers of non-dyslexics.

It is important to remember that this test does not constitute an assessment of one's difficulties. It is just an indication of some of the areas in which you or the person you are assessing may have difficulties. However this questionnaire may provide a better awareness of the nature of an individual's difficulties and may indicate that further professional assessment would be helpful.

Whilst we do stress that this is not a diagnostic tool, research suggests the following:

Score less than 45 - probably non-dyslexic.

Research results: no individual who was diagnosed as dyslexic through a full assessment was found to have scored less than 45 and therefore it is unlikely that if you score under 45 you will be dyslexic.

Score 45 to 60 - showing signs consistent with mild Dyslexia.

Research results: most of those who were in this category showed signs of being at least moderately dyslexic. However, a number of persons not previously diagnosed as dyslexic (though they could just be unrecognised and undiagnosed) fell into this category.

Score Greater than 60 - signs consistent with moderate or severe Dyslexia.

Research results: all those who recorded scores of more than 60 were diagnosed as moderately or severely dyslexic. Therefore we would suggest that a score greater than 60 suggests moderate or severe Dyslexia. Please note that this should not be regarded as an assessment of one's difficulties. But if you feel that a Dyslexia-type problem may exist, further advice should be sought.