

Dyslexia Screening

Dyslexia is a brain-based learning disability that specifically impairs a person's ability to develop word reading and spelling skills. These individuals typically read and spell at levels significantly lower than expected despite having normal intelligence.⁵



Screening for dyslexia is the act of gauging the long-term risk for poor outcomes of word reading and spelling skills that are considered to significantly impede literacy development in children.

Screening is not diagnosis. Screening for dyslexia risk is very different than the purpose of diagnosing dyslexia. Just as a hearing screening quickly tests to see how well you hear different sounds and determines if more testing is required, a dyslexia screener might identify risks that warrant further examination.

Actions after screening. Those identified at high risk for developing dyslexia are entitled to evidence-informed instruction shown to positively influence word reading and spelling skills in developing readers at-risk for developing dyslexia without the need for a formal diagnosis of dyslexia within the context of multitier systems of support.⁴

What should be included in a screen for dyslexia? The most effective dyslexia screeners can be administered in a single sitting and contain multiple measures representing various constructs of early print knowledge (letter knowledge), language (phonological awareness and RAN), decoding and word reading skills with the relative importance of each changing based on the age of the child.

Is early intervention more effective? Evidence indicates the effects of treatment increase the earlier they are implemented.¹ Identifying children who are at risk for dyslexia and providing targeted treatment at school entry is considered the state of the art, suggesting the need for timely action rather than waiting for diagnosis.⁶

Can screening measures be applied universally? Screening measures and cut-points may vary based on the overall risk of the population (e.g., poverty level of the school/district) and proportion of language minor learners (e.g., Spanish speaking EIs).

How does screening fit within IDEA? Dyslexia is a condition that could qualify a child as having a specific learning disability under the Individual with the Disabilities in Education Act.³ There is nothing in the IDEA that would prohibit the use of the term dyslexia in IDEA evaluation, eligibility determinations, or IEP documents.

When can we start screening for dyslexia? Screening for dyslexia does not reach an acceptable clinical level until close to school entry when letter knowledge, phonological awareness, RAN, and basic decoding skills together provide good sensitivity and specificity as a screening battery.² Thus, early screening for dyslexia should be conducted at school entry to identify children who are at risk of difficulties in learning to read.

Who can help with screening? There is a need for shared responsibility for early identification of risk for developmental dyslexia among families, health care providers, and school personnel.

What's the take home message? Early identification of children at risk of dyslexia followed by the implementation of intervention is a realistic aim for practitioners and policy-makers.



References

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