

Dyslexia and Self Esteem

Dyslexia is a 'learning difference', which means that the brain can approach things in a different way to other people. Dyslexia can affect the way people communicate and it is different for everyone.

About self esteem and anxiety

Everyone experiences low feelings, anxiety and stress at times. It is when this is ongoing and has an impact on someone's ability to do things that it can become a bigger problem.

Anyone who is experiencing low self esteem or high levels of anxiety should visit their GP in the first instance – the GP may be able to refer the person to counselling or prescribe medication if necessary.

Ideas to help self esteem in children and young people

- Talk to them to make sure that they understand properly what dyslexia is. Emphasise that it does not mean that they are stupid and that they will get help.
- Encourage them to focus on something they are good at (such as a sport or another hobby) as well as working on the things they find difficult.
- Use the things they are good at to help with the things they find difficult.
- Praise them for effort and don't always point out mistakes.
- Show them resources such as Dyslexia Scotland's Young People's Hub (www.unwrapped.dyslexiascotland.org.uk)
- Look at Dyslexia Scotland's leaflets (www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/our-leaflets) for ideas about how you can help them with things like organisation, study skills, coping with change (such as moving from primary to secondary school) and what dyslexia is.

Ideas to help self esteem in adults

- Speak to other dyslexic people - Dyslexia Scotland Adult Networks are a good way to do this – go to www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/our-adult-networks to find out more.
- Some people find things like meditation or mindfulness helpful.
- Record your successes and don't just focus on the negatives.

Some people whose dyslexia has not been recognised may have feelings that cause them emotional and physical distress. Feelings that people may recognise are:

Confusion – about their mixture of abilities. They don't fully understand dyslexia and why they experience difficulties. They believe that they are 'stupid'.

Anger – from frustration that they, and others, do not understand dyslexia.

Negativity – they feel their efforts make no difference and it is only luck if they succeed.



Self esteem is low and they always predict the worst. They feel that others judge them negatively and compare themselves less favourably with peers and siblings.

Anxiety – their experience of failure leads them to think they will fail again.

Hopelessness – ‘why should I bother?’ thoughts, possibly leading to giving up.

Depression – anger turns itself inwards. People may feel alone because they are not understood. Some people may isolate themselves because of their low self-esteem and feelings of not being ‘good enough’. Switching off and giving up leads to further negative thinking.

What are the effects of these feelings?

Some may might experience high levels of stress, behavioural problems and poor mental health.

- Children may be bullied or picked on by others.
- Low self-esteem can lead to a lack of courage to try new ways round problems.
- Some may not reach their potential without appropriate support and different ways of working.
- Having to work harder than others do to achieve the same things may lead to becoming overtired.

Dyslexia Scotland works hard to reduce any negative associations and stigma that exist about dyslexia, and to promote the positive skills that many people with dyslexia have.

Adults seeking employment or who are in the workplace may not have told colleagues or management that they have dyslexia and will feel stressed about being ‘found out’.

Some might do more work than others, or attempt to hide the things they find difficult. They may try to compensate for these things by doing more things in other areas in which they are stronger.

There is a range of self-help resources and websites that people might find useful:

- Engaging with books for dyslexic wellbeing
- Self help resources for dyslexic people
- Books for dyslexic adults on common mental health conditions
- Dyslexia-friendly self-help resources

Sources of support

- Dyslexia Scotland Helpline 0344 800 8484 or helpline@dyslexiascotland.org.uk
- Breathing Space Helpline – 0800 83 85 87 www.breathingspace.scot
- Mindroom – www.mindroom.org
- See Me Scotland – www.seemescotland.org
- Enquire – www.enquire.org.uk/information/information-for-young-people



Dyslexia Scotland

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