

Sophia,

**So you've just been diagnosed with dyslexia - what comes next....**

I'm writing this letter to you so we have an opportunity to have a chat about what I discovered in our joint quest to figure out how you learn best. And there is a term, dyslexia, that can help you get a handle on things. You've probably heard the term before but you probably don't know much about it. It's not some big mystical thing - dyslexia just means reading problems.

Usually, kids with dyslexia had trouble in the early years in school in learning how to "decode words" - to pronounce them - and had similar problems with spelling. In almost everybody with dyslexia there's a problem in something called phonological processing, which basically means that it is harder for you to process sounds of words and remember sound patterns. Although over the years you may have gotten better at being able to "decode" words, most people with dyslexia have a very slow pace of reading and lack something called "automaticity". All that means is that words don't come to you as quickly and automatically as a person without dyslexia and so it takes you longer to read material for school. This can be a real challenge, especially as you get older, because there is so much that you are given to read in school. Often the amount of reading you have to do is overwhelming because it takes you longer to get through it. You have to put more effort and energy into the reading process than kids without dyslexia. Sometimes kids with dyslexia get so turned off from reading that they try to avoid reading tasks.

Dyslexia has nothing to do with how smart you are. You can be very, very smart and still have dyslexia. There are lots of very successful - and very smart folks who have had dyslexia and have become exceptional leaders, doctors, financial wizards, etc. in just about any occupation. Rather than me giving you their names as examples, why don't you just google "famous people with dyslexia" and see what you find. You may find that it is a relief to know just what is going on and why you've had to struggle some in school. Another thing you need to know is that you are not lazy! You have had to use all your talents and brains to do the best you can in school when there is so much reading involved.

So how do we deal with this? There are really two different approaches we need to use. First, it's important to try to build your reading skills and particularly that automaticity thing that is sometimes referred to as reading fluency. There are people, like reading specialists, that can help you learn better decoding strategies and can help you get more automatic in reading words. Although you may not want to hear this, the more reading you do, the more automatic you can become. So avoiding reading is not the way to go. There are specific exercises that can be done to build reading fluency, but

they require practice. Just like you get better when you practice soccer, baseball, golf or any sport, you get better in reading by consistent practice under the guidance of someone else (like a coach).

The second thing you need to know about is something called "accommodation". What that means is that sometimes we would want to "go around" your reading problem to make sure that everyone knows just how smart you are and how much you have learned about something in school. Sometimes you may not be able to show how much you know if you have to read through a lot of material and then write about it. So there are times when it may be more appropriate for you to "show what you know" by taking an oral test or for big tests like the SAT, being allowed to have extra time to finish the test.

Another kind of "accommodation" that you need to know about is taking advantage of "assistive technology". You probably already know that you can often do better if you listen to something being read to you rather than reading it yourself. Since you have been diagnosed with dyslexia, almost all textbooks and reading materials used in schools are available to you on CD. You order these reading materials sort of like Netflix. You order by computer what you need and the CD is sent to you in the mail or you can just download. This can make it a lot easier for you to follow along with your textbook as you are listening to the material. This is a perfectly legitimate - okay thing for you to do. Schools and colleges are very familiar with the need for this accommodation. There is a great wealth of new technology out there for you to take advantage of. You probably also know that you can talk about things a lot better than you can write your thoughts on paper. There is technology now that allows you to dictate what you want to say and the computer will write it out. In fact, this letter to you was dictated in this way by something called Dragon Naturally Speaking. By doing this you are more likely to use more advanced vocabulary than you would use if you had to write and spell words on paper. So taking advantage of technology and accommodations is a very important part of dealing with dyslexia and being successful.

But there's another very important and necessary thing for you to know in dealing with dyslexia. You have to believe in yourself and you have to become your own advocate. Being your own advocate means that you don't hesitate in telling teachers or later professors in college exactly what you need to show what you know without having your dyslexia get in the way. There will be "approved" accommodations that you are justified to have. Yes, it's hard and a lot of times you may not want to draw any attention to yourself in any way different from anybody else. But by learning what works best for you and taking advantage of what is available to you, you can do well, reach your goals and feel much success in your life.

It has been a special honor for me to work with you.

Dr. Lynda