

Dyslexia and Memory

What is memory?

Problems with memory form part of dyslexia. Memory is often divided into **working memory** - the part we use when we are told a phone number and keep it in our heads before writing it down or making a short list without paper and pen and **long-term memory**. This is facts we have learned and tucked away for future use such as the capital of France, how to make a cup of tea, the name of our neighbour's dog. Sometimes we have problems retrieving things from long-term memory - 'it's on the tip of my tongue'.

How can you tell if there is a problem?

Dyslexics often have problems with working memory and it is this that makes learning so difficult. Working memory can be auditory and visual. Dyslexics are often good at one form and poor at the other. For example, some dyslexics listen to a set of instructions, set off to perform the task and are back 30 seconds later saying 'what did you want me to do?' However, shown a picture of something for a minute or so and they will be able to describe it in rich detail later on. Other dyslexics are the opposite - they might have a detailed conversation with someone and be able to recount it almost word-for-word later, but be completely unable to describe what the other person was wearing or any other visual details of the meeting.

How might this affect learning?

Dyslexics with poor auditory working memory will find teachers who spend a lot of time talking and discussing their subject without the support of written notes difficult to learn from. Dyslexics with poor visual memory may find learning from the written word and text books very difficult.

What can be done?

Many specialist teachers believe it is possible to improve poor working memory and will incorporate activities to develop memory skills in their lessons. Many of these activities can also be done at home or in the car.

Poor auditory memory

Pupils with poor auditory memory benefit from regular practice in using their memory to recall increasing strings of information. This could be a simple word game such as **I went to market**, where two people take turns to build a shopping list: I went to market and bought some string, *I went to market and bought some string and two apples*, I went to market and bought some string, two apples and a parrot, etc. Other



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ideas include arranging a selection of items on a table, reading out a list of, say, three and then asking the child to select them and put them in the order you gave them. Try a couple more examples, before moving on to four items. This technique can be used with many items - pictures of things, coloured counters, small figures, coins etc. Another idea involves writing a list of, say, ten instructions of equal length for the child to follow one-at-a-time. You might include things like 'draw a red fish, pick up a pen, scratch your head once' (all four units of sound in length). Longer (and hence trickier) instructions could include 'clap your hands and blink your eyes, draw a pink pig in a box, look at the door and say boo' (all seven units of sound in length). Children who love pop music might enjoy learning the lyrics to their favourite songs as a way of exercising their auditory memory skills.

Poor visual memory

The principles are the same for pupils with poor visual memory. They need to receive the stimulus through the eyes - no verbal description or labelling allowed - and then say what they saw. An example is Kim's Game - arrange, say, five items on a tray, show it to the child, cover it and ask them to list what they saw. Increase the number of items to make it harder. Other ideas include showing a sequence of items and then mixing them in with a number of others before asking the child to select the ones they saw and arrange them in the order they were originally shown in. For example, show a red, blue and purple gel pen, remove them and add them to a selection of gel pens on a tray. Show the tray to the child and ask them to pick out the ones they just saw. Another idea is to cut a colour picture out of a magazine, say an advert, and ask the child to look at it carefully for one minute. Then remove it and ask them questions about it - 'what colour was the women's hat, what was in front of the dog, what was on the plate next to the chips?'. Pairs, where pairs of matching cards are shuffled and arranged face-down for the players to pick up two at a time and try to match, is another good game for developing visual memory.

You can build these memory games into mealtimes, car journeys, waits for the doctor, etc. Memory is like a muscle - the more we practice using it the stronger it gets.

Sources of further information

It is worth having a look at some of the practical guides written for parents about dyslexia for more information on memory. **The Happy Puzzle Company** supplies many brilliant games which develop memory skills and are great fun.

Call 0870 873 8988 to receive a catalogue.