A Parent's Guide

Working Memory and Dyslexia

How it affects your child, and how you can help

Inside this guide

- Signs parents and teachers might notice
- How parents can help, from early years to college
- Final thoughts

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Assess · Understand · Support

Signs to look out for

Signs Parents and Teachers Might Notice

Working memory difficulties aren't always obvious, and many children find ways to hide them or work round them. There are, though, some patterns that parents and teachers often notice at home and at school. They don't mean a child is lazy or not paying attention. They happen because the child's brain is working harder to hold on to information and use it. Knowing what to look for means you can spot difficulties sooner and get support in place early.

At Home

- **Instructions with more than one step.**
  Your child may do the first thing and forget the rest. You ask them to go upstairs, brush their teeth, put their pyjamas on and bring down their reading book. They come back with the book, but they haven't brushed their teeth.
- **Routines.**
  They may need reminding again and again to get dressed, pack their school bag or tidy their room.
- **Recent conversations.**
  You tell them the plan for the afternoon, and ten minutes later they ask, “What are we doing?”
- **Losing things.**
  Homework, shoes or PE kit regularly go missing or get left behind.

At Home (continued)

- **Games and play.**
  They may struggle to remember the rules of a board game or the order of the words and actions in a song.

At School

- Doing the first of several steps a teacher gives and missing the rest
- Finding it hard to listen and write at the same time
- Losing track of earlier steps in a maths problem with several stages
- Losing the thread of a story or forgetting earlier details in a text

Emotional and Behavioural Signs

- **Frustration.**
  Work takes them longer, and they may start to see themselves as “slow” compared with their classmates.
- **Avoidance.**
  They may put off homework, reading or anything that relies heavily on memory.
- **Anxiety.**
  They may worry about reading aloud or being asked to remember something in front of others.

Emotional and Behavioural Signs (continued)

- **Low self-esteem.**
  They may say things like “I can’t do it” or “I’m rubbish at this.”
- **Meltdowns.**
  Too many demands at once can end in tears or anger.

Summary

Working memory difficulties can show up across a child's day, from forgetting part of a routine at home to losing track during reading or writing at school. For some children the clearest signs are emotional, such as frustration, avoidance or low confidence. Every child is different, and the pattern often becomes clearer over time. Noticing it helps you understand where your child needs support, can make life at home a little easier, and gives you something specific to talk through with their teachers. The earlier support is in place, the better it is for your child's confidence.

Support at home

How Parents Can Help

Helping a child with dyslexia and working memory difficulties can feel like a lot, but there's plenty you can do at home without any specialist training. Most of it comes down to breaking tasks into smaller steps, keeping routines steady and using tools that make things easier. What works will change as your child gets older, so the suggestions below are grouped by age.

Early Years (ages 3–5, Nursery and Reception)

- Keep instructions very short, one step at a time.
- Use picture charts and real objects to support routines.
- Play memory games like “Simon Says” and sing action songs.
- Retell favourite stories with props or toys.
- Turn repeating instructions back to you into a game.

Key Stage 1 (ages 5–7, Years 1–2)

- Give no more than two instructions at a time.
- Use stickers, charts or a whiteboard as visual reminders.
- Help with early reading by following the words with a finger and playing phonics games.
- Play simple card and matching games.
- Allow extra time for getting ready and organised.

How Parents Can Help (continued)

Key Stage 2 (ages 7–11, Years 3–6)

- Break homework into small chunks.
- Use colour-coded folders and checklists.
- Encourage them to jot things down on sticky notes or in a notebook.
- Practise little and often.
- Keep number lines, times-table grids and bookmarks to hand.

Secondary (ages 11–16, Years 7–11)

- Help them get into the habit of using a planner or homework diary.
- Encourage them to ask teachers to repeat things or give reminders.
- Try audiobooks and dictation tools.
- Link learning to their hobbies and everyday life where you can.
- Help with revision using mind maps, flow charts and a study timetable.

How Parents Can Help (continued)

Post-16 (Sixth Form or College)

- Encourage them to manage their own time with a digital planner or calendar.
- Help them find study methods that work for them, such as revision timetables and memory aids.
- Encourage them to use assistive technology for reading and writing.
- Support them in asking for the arrangements they need in exams and coursework.
- Link their studies to their career plans or interests to keep them motivated.

Extra Tips for All Ages

- Keep routines predictable so there's less to remember.
- Let them see you using lists and reminders yourself.
- Use more than one sense when learning: seeing, hearing and doing.
- Make sure they get enough sleep, exercise and breaks.
- Notice and praise what they do well.

To finish

Final Thoughts

Working memory difficulties are common in dyslexia, but they don't decide who your child is or what they can achieve. With the right support, children learn to manage the difficulties and find out what they're good at. Progress usually comes slowly, in small steps. Each time you break a task down, put up a visual reminder or notice something they've done well, you're taking some pressure off their working memory and building their confidence.

There will be times when it feels hard going. Being patient and consistent, and keeping up the encouragement, helps your child feel safe and supported. Working with their teachers, using technology where it helps and talking openly with your child all make a real difference. Their difficulties are only one part of who they are, and their creativity, problem-solving and own ways of thinking matter just as much.

Thank you for reading.

Every child is different. At Tajua, our specialist assessors carry out full dyslexia assessments online for children aged 10 and over, with clear recommendations so you know how best to support your child.

Get in touch

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