

Understanding dyslexia

Charlotte Pearson talks to a mother hoping to shed some light on dyslexia.

Dyslexia is still a subject which is surrounded by confusion and controversy. First thought as a 'word blindness' meant people were wrongly labelled as slow or lazy.

But one Haywards Heath mother is hoping to shed a little light on the condition by producing a useful booklet as a resource for parents.

Emma Seymour found out her son Elliott had dyslexia two years ago when he was seven.

"We noticed at the time that he was not only struggling with his reading and writing but was also having difficulties with maths,

remembering instructions and spelling," she explains. "He was reversing letters when reading and writing and was experiencing visual disturbances when trying to read."

After Elliott, now nine, was diagnosed the family were completely overwhelmed by the whole experience.

"We felt isolated, stressed and in need of reliable information, resources and support," she recalls. "We did our best to answer Elliott's questions but looking back we would have loved to have a short booklet which we could have shared together as a family."

It was through this that Emma realised there were probably other parents going through the

same emotions and issues.

So with the help of Elliott, they created the 'Understanding Dyslexia' booklet, which was commissioned by the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust as a resource that could be used by parents.

"I wanted to write a guide for parents and carers to offer something positive and practical that they could share with their children to help them understand dyslexia, to talk about their experiences and to point families towards resources that are available," she says.

Dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty that affects auditory memory and processing speed which impacts on literacy development, mathematics, memory, organisation and





Elliott and Emma

Picture by Emma Seymour

To find out more about Emma's workshops email emma-seymour@hotmail.co.uk, the booklet can be found here - www.parentchampions.org.uk/resources/understanding-dyslexia-booklet For more information you can visit: dyslexiaaction.org.uk www.parentchampions.org.uk www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk

sequencing skills to varying degrees.

It can occur at any level of intellectual development, is biological in origin and often runs in families. It affects up to ten per cent of the UK population at some level and can affect anyone of any age and background.

And as Emma tells me there are many misunderstandings with the condition.

"The main misconception about dyslexia seems to be that if you have it then you are not clever or able to learn well," she explains. "In truth people who have dyslexia just learn in a different way and like everyone else have their own strengths and weaknesses.

"Identifying and recognising your own

learning style, being supported with multi-sensory teaching and dyslexia-friendly strategies to help support learning can all make a huge difference which can hopefully create a much more positive experience of learning."

She adds that dyslexia can affect different parts of the learning process including the ability to process information quickly, memory and organisation as well as difficulty in writing, maths and telling the time.

So far the response to the booklet has been positive, and it is now available in 25 Dyslexia Action Centres in the UK as well as online at the Parent Champions website and from all the major dyslexia organisations in the UK.

"The 'Understanding Dyslexia' booklet has been very popular; with both parents and practitioners expressing how useful it is to have such a resource available," Sarah Hanna, from The Dyslexia-SpLD Trust, explains.

Emma is also a volunteer with the Parent Champions project – a national project supported by all the major dyslexia organisations which provides a support network for parents and carers of children with dyslexia and specific learning difficulties.

As part of this role Emma has set up a monthly support group in Haywards Heath for parents and carers.

She hopes in 2014 during the spring and summer she will host workshops, which will be run by dyslexia specialists and will hopefully cover a range of different topics.

"Each experience of dyslexia is unique and what one person may struggle with maybe different to the challenges faced by another person," she smiles.



What is Dyslexia?

"Dyslexia is a learning difference: a combination of strengths and weaknesses which affects the learning process." This means that children who have dyslexia learn in ways that are different from other children.

Having dyslexia can mean that certain aspects of learning may be more difficult than others. It can also mean that certain parts of learning may be easier.

"My friends help me when we are playing computer games and I say how do you spell something and they help me. I am learning to type with all my fingers and I'm better than they are."
Olivia 10 years

* British Dyslexia Association booklet for Dyslexia Friendly Schools

Some children with dyslexia struggle with:

- Reading
- Writing
- Maths
- Telling the time
- Hearing certain sounds
- Spelling
- Handwriting
- Speech
- Remembering
- Organising
- Getting things done
- Processing language

These can be difficult for you but you can help your child by:

- What
- What



It is important to understand that children who have dyslexia may or may not have difficulties in all areas of learning. Dyslexia is best understood as a whole picture. There are areas of learning you might find challenging but also those that you might find very easy.

We all learn and remember information using our senses. Some people learn best by using a particular sense or a mixture of two or three. It might be different when you are learning different things. For example, you might be able to visualise events but not remember the spellings.

Parent Champions
Empowering Parents and Carers

Understanding Dyslexia
A Guide for Families