

# Understanding Dyslexia: 5 Ways to End the Homework Struggle

Feb 9, 2016 by [Joanne Gouaux](#) on [www.scilearn.com](http://www.scilearn.com)

Many parents find themselves feeling exhausted and frustrated with the role of homework enforcer and personal tutor. Homework support for a child with dyslexia adds another item to the ever expanding to-do list of family responsibilities. Our children spend the greater part of their lives at school, and homework time often determines how much family time remains at the end of each day. If your child struggles to learn independently, it's easy to fall prey to the pressure of the ticking clock. Whether or not time efficiency is a reasonable expectation, the pressure to perform can quickly become a power struggle between parent and child, resulting in angst and tension. The family dynamic surrounding homework can dramatically affect our relationship with our child, and likewise how our child views their relationship with us, along with how they feel about their own abilities.

"All kids want to do well. All kids are trying," said Sarah Entine, director of the documentary film *Read Me Differently*. *Read Me Differently* explores how undiagnosed dyslexia and ADHD have impacted three generations in Entine's family, and portrays the confusion at home surrounding missed connections between parent and child, along with general misunderstandings within families. While working on her Masters Degree in Social Work, Entine realized how being dyslexic shapes her communication style, despite having 'overcome it' as a reader and writer in elementary school. Through a broader understanding of dyslexia, she discovered that the identification is not limited to a mere difficulty with reading, writing or speech. She recognized communication patterns in her family relationships that spanned well beyond the school years, bridging from one generation to the next. By sharing her family's story, Entine unravels some of the communication mysteries that are common in households with members who identify as ADHD or dyslexic.

## Communication and coping mechanisms

"You want to be like your friends. You want to be like everyone else," says Entine. Communication conflicts bring to light coping mechanisms that some dyslexics adopt in hopes of securing parent approval: pushing themselves to the point of exhaustion, participating in activities they don't enjoy so as to appear productive or smart, struggling to prove their capability and worthiness over and over again. She recommends teaching children self-compassion as a method to alleviate some of the anxiety and stress that children encounter while trying to perform at school, or while doing homework with their parents. There are also some other strategies parents can use to create a cooperative and healthy homework relationship with their child at homework time.

## Strategies to help end the homework struggle:

- **Practice empathy.** Put yourself in their shoes. Homework, when coupled with overcoming dyslexia, is no small task for either child or parent. Play anthropologist for an hour and pretend you're simply at the homework table to observe and witness a marvel of human invention, homework.
- **Welcome mistakes as teachable moments.** Trying something and failing gives us valuable information. Mistakes are often how we learn. It helps develop resilience, something successful dyslexics have mastered.
- **Customize techniques for your child.** Listening and asking questions about your child's experience will provide valuable insight into their behaviors and interests which can help you develop appropriate incentives based on knowing your child's motivations.
- **Do your homework, too.** Prepare for the homework session by checking in ahead of time on the subject matter. This especially helpful for math assignments. YouTube is a wonderful resource for a three minute refresher or intro to the latest curriculum.
- **Develop multi-sensory strategies.** Help boost your child's homework stamina by bringing in other sensory outlets. For example, offering your child a piece of gum to chew, the option to sit on a yoga ball, or to stand rather than sitting in a chair. Invite your child to pace around the room while brainstorming aloud for a writing assignment, or provide a rubber band they can fidget with to facilitate an outlet for their need to move. Do some silly stretches, think calisthenics, with an emphasis on crossing midline to help bilateral integration, which means using both sides of the body at the same time. For children distracted by noise, offer a quiet place, or allow them to put on some noise canceling headphones.

Above all, avoid power struggles. It takes two for tug-o-war, so beware of picking up your end of the rope. If your child is showing signs of overstimulation such as: decreased focus, yawning, or you notice their gaze drifting off, ask them what they need to do to get back on track. Offer a snack, or bathroom break. Sometimes they'll tell you they need a break. Set a timer for five to ten minutes and provide a "brain break." Keep your cool, and don't mimic negative behavior.

"It's not just a learning difference," says Entine. "Our brains are wired differently. It's a mistake to blanket lack of effort as the cause of a dyslexic child's struggle with reading and writing."

As parents, we naturally observe certain qualities in our children that evoke feelings of closeness, or inspire a warm nostalgia about our own childhood. Seeing these qualities is rewarding. We feel close and connected, understood. What about the opposite? What happens when our children, through no fault of their own, struggle with something that triggers feelings of anxiety, shame, or helplessness – all three as relevant to our present as they maybe from our past? Entine's advice, "Put on your own oxygen mask before you try to help someone else."

## Strategies for parents:

- **Give yourself permission to ask for help.** Whether from another parent, a teacher, a tutor, a friend, or even an online dyslexia support group, sometimes you need help as well.
- **Stay flexible, and observe your child's responses rather than reacting.** Use I statements, "I'm noticing you're yawning," and follow up with engaging questions such as "what do you need to do right now to move forward?"
- **Do something nice for yourself.** You're doing a great job with your child, you also need to stay motivated.
- **Start the homework sessions with a hug.** Reassure your child that they're loved and valuable as a person.

Utilizing some of these strategies with your child can help foster better communication and family relationships, not just during homework but throughout the day.