

Dyslexia: The Hidden Disability

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..."Mommy, be honest with me, right I'm stupid?" These painful words were uttered by Avi* to his mother as he sat down to do his homework.

..."Imma, do I have to go to school today? I have a headache *and* a stomachache". "...Today I missed my *entire* recess because I had to finish copying from the blackboard. Everyone else was done so much faster than me. I hate copying from the blackboard. Why does my teacher make us do it anyway?"

..."Today, the teacher called on me to read in front of the entire class. I hate it when she does that. I really tried my best, but everyone was laughing at me. I hate my class and I hate my teacher."

Avi and the rest of these children have dyslexia and like many other students struggling with a learning disability, school is a difficult place to be if the curriculum and teaching methods are not geared to the child's specific learning needs.

Dyslexia is a neurobiological, language-based reading disorder that affects one's ability to acquire reading skills due to auditory and/or visual processing deficits. Children with dyslexia are bright and possess average to very superior intelligence. But when placed in an academic setting that relies heavily on language, reading, and writing skills, which are these children's areas of weakness, these children often find themselves feeling inadequate, overwhelmed, and hopeless as they struggle to stay afloat amongst their peers.

Research findings confirm that the "wiring" for dyslexia occurs during fetal development, as the neural pathways in the brain are formed. The neural pathways of a child with dyslexia connect in a different way than a child without dyslexia, causing the connections that are involved in reading and writing to be weaker. Studies consistently show that the brains of individuals with dyslexia are healthy – just the layout is different and therefore they need to be taught in a different way.

In addition to being taught utilizing specific techniques, classroom accommodations and modifications need to be implemented. Some examples are: books on tape, computer assisted technology, extra time on tests, and shortened homework assignments. These accommodations and modifications enable children with dyslexia to be successful in the academic arena.

Studies have shown through the use of fMRI technology that when dyslexia is caught early, either in preschool or beginning of elementary school, and addressed utilizing research based methods, it is possible to not only compensate but actually **correct** for the weakness in the brain. These findings have lifelong implications for the future of this population.

Dyslexia affects 1 in 5 children. It is the most researched specific learning disability and the most *misdiagnosed* because children with dyslexia are bright and often quite talented in nonverbal areas such as art, music, sports, technological and intuitive ability. Their difficulty in acquiring reading skills comes as a surprise considering all of their other strengths and general exposure to language and reading. For this reason, dyslexia is often referred to as a "hidden disability".

Dyslexia also has secondary effects including decreased ability to comprehend written material, reduced reading experience and reduced general background knowledge due to the laborious effort put forth to decode the written word.

Children with dyslexia and other learning disabilities such as dysgraphia, dyscalculia, receptive-expressive language disorder and/or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder are the ones that fall between the cracks in the educational system as it currently stands. The needs of children with learning disabilities are not adequately met in the mainstream or special education system. In the mainstream system, emphasis is placed on language, reading and writing skills which are the major areas of weakness for a learning disabled child. Furthermore, the special education program, in accordance with Israeli law, not only consists of children with learning disabilities, but also a variety of behavioral and emotional issues, thereby making teaching and addressing the specific needs of the learning disabled population very difficult. **Research studies show that the learning disabled children in regular special education classes do not advance significantly. However, when the learning disabled children are taught using research based methods that have proven efficacy for this population, the children not only advance, but there is a significant jump in their academic performance.**

The need to develop an educational environment and resource network that addresses the specific educational needs of the learning disabled child is acute. It is in response to this pressing need that **Kol Koreh**, a non-profit organization founded by parents and professionals, was established. Our mission is to empower these children by providing them with the precise educational framework necessary to suit their individual needs and the opportunity to achieve their potential and live happy and fulfilling lives.

**name changed to maintain anonymity*

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**For Children with
Dyslexia and Other Learning Disabilities**

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