

# Health Tips for Parents

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## Does my child have dyslexia?

Dyslexia or reading disability is a common but often misunderstood learning disability that makes it difficult for people to understand the sounds that letters make and how they combine to give meaning to words.



Dyslexia is a learning disability caused by a problem in how the brain processes the sounds that letters make.



“It’s not so much visual errors that lead to reversals, but phonic errors,” says Neelkamal Soares, MD, a developmental-behavioral pediatrician at Mattel Children’s Hospital UCLA. “Letters are mixed not because they look alike, but because they sound alike — for instance, mixing up the “buh” sound of a “b” with the “duh” sound of a “d.”

“Multi-sensory learning, which targets all aspects of the brain’s ability to learn new skills, has been shown to be an effective strategy for helping children cope with dyslexia,” Dr. Soares says. Reading disability can co-exist with other

developmental and behavioral conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, and speech-language disorder, which can be assessed by a developmental-behavior pediatrician.

**Children with learning disabilities should** receive testing and treatment from a trained education specialist who works with the family and the school. Public schools usually provide testing and treatment for free; many private schools recommend parents hire a private education specialist to provide the child with a diagnosis and treatment strategy.

“Even though learning disabilities can cause struggles throughout a person’s life, there are innumerable examples of successful professionals who cope with learning disabilities and succeed,” Dr. Soares says.

### Early warning signs

Children under age 5 who have trouble with the following may be at risk for learning disability:

- Rhyming words
- Learning the alphabet
- Quickly naming colors
- Connecting sounds with letters



### Evaluations available for suspected learning disabilities

An estimated one in 10 school-aged children have a learning disability; about two-thirds of these children have dyslexia or reading disability. Other learning disabilities include dyscalculia or math disability and dysgraphia or writing disability. If you suspect your child has a learning disability such as dyslexia, you may want to have him or her evaluated by a developmental-behavioral pediatrician to screen out other conditions.

This information is provided courtesy of the pediatricians at Mattel Children’s Hospital UCLA. UCLA Health pediatricians are conveniently located in your neighborhood. In addition to our Children’s Health Center in Westwood, we have offices in Brentwood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional.