

# Can Executive Function Coaching Help a Child With Dyslexia?

The Answer May Surprise You

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The short answer is, YES!

Reading is a complex thinking process. It is so much more than just looking at a text and being able to say the words you see. Reading requires the execution of many cognitive skills all at the same time, such as working memory, decoding, auditory and visual processing, attention and focus, constructing meaning and many others. All of these skills are also part of a child's **executive function**, a set of mental processes that help humans execute or perform tasks.

Imagine being asked to complete a task, such as baking a cake, but not being given a recipe to follow or any of the proper tools needed to complete this task. Impossible, right? Much in the same way, executive function skills are an essential part of learning, because without them, we wouldn't be able to learn! Therefore, there is a strong connection between reading ability and executive function.

## But what happens when a child has a learning disability such as dyslexia?

Having dyslexia comes with its own set of challenges. Let's take a moment to define **dyslexia**. According to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA), dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, including reading, spelling, writing and pronouncing words. About 15-20% of the population as a whole have some symptoms of dyslexia. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment, and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations or extra support services.

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Early identification and treatment is the key to helping individuals with dyslexia achieve in school and in life. Most people with dyslexia need help from a teacher, tutor or therapist specially trained in using a multisensory, structured language approach. Many individuals with dyslexia need one-on-one help so that they can move forward at their own pace.

## So, what is the connection between executive function and dyslexia?

To put it simply, executive function and reading go hand-in-hand. Without the mental processes required to read, children will have a very difficult time with learning because they won't understand how to learn. Most children with dyslexia often have deficits in executive function



skills, making learning and reading extremely challenging and frustrating. For example, if a child does not have good working memory or undeveloped flexible thinking, how can they be expected to decode text properly or remember and comprehend what they read?

## How can executive function coaching help a child with dyslexia?

An executive function coach is the ideal professional to help support a student with dyslexia. By helping the student

develop and strengthen their executive function skills through the explicit instruction of useful strategies and tools, the coach is simultaneously helping with the development of their reading skills, including phonics, phonemic awareness and reading comprehension. They will work with the student to identify what their specific challenges are and set clear and specific goals as well as actionable steps. With consistent support, close progress monitoring, and the implementation of research-based strategies, the executive function coach can help the student overcome their learning challenges and gain the confidence they need to be a successful learner. 📖



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Sean McCormick, M. Ed. is an executive function coach and school consultant. He founded Executive Function Specialists, an education business that helps youth, adults and institutions experience the joy and power of a personalised organisation system.

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### Stephanie Bayona

Stephanie Bayona, MS Ed. is an educational therapist and executive function specialist. Through her remote, solution-focused approach, she is able to support students with varied learning disabilities, including ADHD and dyslexia. She provides coaching and consulting for students, adults and school teams to support learners and professionals with executive function and reading challenges.

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