

# RESOURCES FOR JUSTICE SECTOR STAFF ON SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES\*

**KIWIs** © 2018

**K** **Key Factors**  
**I** **Impact of the Specific Learning Difficulty \***  
**W** **Ways of Working**  
**I** **Information & Networks**



1. Overview, Prevalence, Terminology and Appropriate Language
2. Attention Deficit Disorder
3. Autism & Asperger Syndrome
4. Dyscalculia
5. Dyslexia
6. Dyspraxia
7. Visual Stress
8. Disability, Accessibility and Further Resources

\*SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES comprise:  
Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dyscalculia, Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder & Asperger Syndrome.  
These should never be confused with **Learning Disabilities** which imply low intelligence and social care support needs.

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Further resources at [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/goodpractice](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/goodpractice)  
ALSO AVAILABLE: KIWIs for Young People & KIWIs for the Virtual Campus

# 1. OVERVIEW, PREVALENCE, TERMINOLOGY & APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

## OVERVIEW

**Specific Learning Difficulties** are a family of overlapping conditions.

Some people show signs of more than one Specific Learning Difficulty (for example Dyspraxia and aspects of Asperger Syndrome).

This resource provides information on each Specific Learning Difficulty.

Each condition is described in the following 'KIWI' format.

**K** Key Factors  
**I** Impact of the Specific Learning Difficulty  
**W** Ways of Working  
**I** Information & Networks



The difficulties associated with Specific Learning Difficulties vary from person to person and range from mild to severe. It will often not be apparent that someone is affected.

Most people have learned to implement coping strategies, but these can be undermined by stress.

Full information provided in the guide **Releasing Potential of Offenders with Dyslexia and Related Conditions** [http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Releasing\\_Potential.pdf](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Releasing_Potential.pdf)

## PREVALENCE of Specific Learning Difficulties

The Learning & Skills Council Project on Offending & SpLDs: *Incidence of Hidden Disabilities in the Prison Population* (2005) concluded that:

**Just under 20% of the offending population have a hidden disability, affecting learning and employment, such as Attention Deficit Disorder.**

In the general population, around 5% are severely affected by Specific Learning Difficulties.

**Many offenders will be unaware that they have Specific Learning Difficulties.  
Where this is established, other agencies should be informed.**

## TERMINOLOGY

Specific Learning Difficulties must never be confused with Learning Disabilities sometimes confusingly referred to as Learning Difficulties. In Learning Disabilities there is a low level of intellectual functioning and severe problems with independent living.

However NOMS conflated Specific Learning Difficulties and Learning Disabilities as **LDD**.

Many people with Specific Learning Difficulties prefer to refer to themselves as having Specific Learning Differences. Some prefer to refer to Neuro-Diversity or Neurodivergence.

Overview available at [www.workingwithdyslexia.com/guides-to-dyslexia/information-sheets/](http://www.workingwithdyslexia.com/guides-to-dyslexia/information-sheets/)

## APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

| UNACCEPTABLE  | ACCEPTABLE  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• mental age</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• competent / lacking competency</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Special Educational Needs (SEN)</li><li>• special needs</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• this relates to children in the context of education.</li></ul> <p>For YPs/adults in training or study: refer to someone 'with (additional) learning needs'</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a dyslexic</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• someone with dyslexia</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a dyspraxia / dyspraxic <b>diagnosis</b></li></ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a dyspraxia assessment</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attention Deficit Disorder <b>symptoms</b></li></ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• characteristics of Attention Deficit Disorder</li></ul>   |

## 2. ATTENTION DEFICIT (HYPERACTIVITY) DISORDER / AD(H)D



### KEY FACTORS

AD(H)D has three major aspects:

1. Inattention / distractibility: difficulty focusing on tasks or listening for a sustained period; becoming easily distracted by external stimuli or one's own thoughts.
2. Impulsivity: a lack of inhibition which could show itself as the need for instant gratification. blurting out inappropriate comments, interrupting excessively or having difficulty awaiting turn. Behaviour is erratic and unpredictable.
3. Hyperactivity: restlessness and excessive activity, both physical and mental.

Common characteristics also include failing to pay attention to detail; poor listening skills; difficulty organising tasks and activities; difficulty starting, switching or finishing tasks; lack of forward planning; frequently losing or forgetting things; fidgeting and moving around incessantly; talking excessively or intruding on others.

In addition, people with AD(H)D may be accident- and addiction-prone and have little awareness of the consequences of their actions. They are generally unable to make effective use of feedback.

If no hyperactivity is present, the term **Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)** should be used. People with this condition have particular problems remaining focused so may appear 'dreamy', inattentive and frequently be off task.

### IMPACT OF ADHD

- Inattention, distractibility, interruptions and impulsivity are all part of the condition; these traits can exasperate staff and exacerbate a situation which is already serious.
- Use of alcohol or drugs such as cannabis may well increase impulsivity and hyperactivity, leading to an increase in uninhibited behaviours.
- People with AD(H)D may not be able to take account of feedback or realise the consequences of their actions; this will require special work rather than further sanctions.
- Someone with AD(H)D who has 'switched off' may appear bored or indifferent.
- There is little awareness of the vulnerability of people AD(H)D.

### WAYS OF WORKING

- Try and provide an environment with minimal distractions. Seat the individual away from windows.
- Do not be put off by fidgeting and signs of restlessness. S/he may manage to communicate better if allowed to move around.
- Schedule regular breaks to restore concentration. Ask him/her to let you know when it is no longer possible to pay attention.
- Distractibility might lessen if s/he is allowed to doodle or jot during the session.
- 'Chunking' i.e. breaking information up into smaller sections is helpful during sessions. When speaking, check for understanding by asking him/her to feed back what you have said. Break written tasks down into component parts, ideally providing feedback after each section.
- If the individual is on medication, check they have taken it, especially before a hearing.

### INFORMATION & NETWORKS

ADHD Solutions [www.adhdsolutions.org.uk/](http://www.adhdsolutions.org.uk/)

UK Adult ADHD Network (UKAAN) [www.ukaan.org](http://www.ukaan.org) Network for professionals. SEE

Identification & management of ADHD offenders: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21332994](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21332994)

Attention Deficit Disorder Information Services (ADDISS) [www.addiss.co.uk](http://www.addiss.co.uk)

*The Tipping Points: the impact of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder* P Anderton (2007)

ADDISS

### 3. AUTISM AND ASPERGER SYNDROME



#### KEY FACTORS

Autism is an umbrella term which includes people with a range of diagnoses such as high functioning autism, Asperger Syndrome, semantic pragmatic disorder and pervasive developmental disorder. Numbers of males diagnosed outnumber females.

People with Autism have difficulty in three key areas:

1. Poor communication skills, leading to difficulty understanding instructions or retelling an incident; taking words or phrases literally
2. Impaired social skills: difficulty understanding socially acceptable behaviour and taking account of the needs of others; failure to foresee consequences; inability to 'read' body language
3. Inflexible thinking: difficulty following procedures and coping with change; over-reliance on routines

This is usually accompanied by unusual behaviours and pervasive learning difficulties. Some people with Autism have difficulty with sensory perception which might affect their sense of touch, smell, vision, hearing, balance or body posture. *This resource does not cover Learning Difficulties.*

In **Asperger Syndrome (AS)** the learning disability is not present but aspects of the three areas above are noticeable. Due to the imbalance in skills, it can be regarded as a Specific Learning Difficulty. Despite adequate intelligence, speed of information processing is slow, together with a panic reaction when pushed. An obsessive interest may have got them into trouble.

#### IMPACT

- Most people with AS live with a continual high level of stress and anxiety so reach 'overload' very quickly; their stress reaction may include verbal or physical abuse.
- They are inflexible in their thinking and cannot cope with unplanned change.
- There is a marked difference between their high-level intellectual functioning and poor social and emotional intelligence – this leads to misinterpreting the way others respond and behaviour that could be regarded as harassment or stalking.
- Although they may have learned to partially or largely conceal their problems, social interaction remains challenging. It may be hard to maintain eye contact. Personal space is important.
- When coping with questioning they can quickly become overloaded, especially if the question seems to them to be ambiguous (due to their highly literal approach).
- People with AS may not take account of body language, gestures or tone of voice.

#### WAYS OF WORKING

- Do not make assumptions; when providing information, start at the most basic level.
- Questions must be phrased carefully, avoiding any ambiguity, e.g.: "*Where will you sleep tonight?*" may elicit "*in a bed*" rather than the address.
- Allow processing time – about 5 seconds between question and response.
- Due to the stressful nature of interaction, breaks should be arranged. People with AS will probably need 15 minutes 'time out' to recover every hour.
- Formal interviews would be easier to manage if questions were written and submitted in advance. The person with AS can then consider their answers and write them down.
- Open questions are hard to manage, so ask direct questions, always avoiding abstract concepts. Some people with AS would cope better responding from a multiple choice format.
- There is a better chance of success on licence if people with AS are given a set of rules, which are carefully explained (especially any exceptions) and which they can then follow.
- Always be aware that showing empathy or seeing things from someone else's point of view may not be possible – this has relevance for restorative processes.

#### INFORMATION & NETWORKS

The National Autistic Society trains mentors to assist with communication: [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk)  
*Autism: A Guide for Criminal Justice Professionals* (rev 2011) National Autistic Society

## 4. DYSCALCULIA



### KEY FACTORS

Aspects of Dyslexia and Dyspraxia commonly affect the acquisition of numeracy skills. However, if the difficulties appear intractable, the term Dyscalculia may be used.

Dyscalculia is described as the inability to understand simple number concepts and to gain basic number skills. Those affected will use their fingers, even for the simplest calculations.

Three key challenges have been identified:

- difficulty in processing numerical / mathematical information
- an inability to internalise mathematical concepts
- no grasp of the relative size and value of numbers.

### IMPACT

Dyscalculia affects many areas of everyday life, these include:

- time telling
- handling money, budgeting, dealing with finances
- using pin numbers and dialling phone numbers
- remembering personal information (such as date of birth, addresses and post codes)
- recalling personal numbers such as phone numbers, postal codes
- travel - mistakes with bus, platform or road numbers
- making sense of timetables
- following a recipe, weighing and measuring, DIY
- writing down appointment times and dates correctly
- number aspects of vocational training, employment preparation courses etc.
- any activities (such as games) involving dice or counting.

### WAYS OF WORKING

- Do not make assumptions in numeracy areas, start at the most basic level
- Associate the name of the number with the symbol
- Count with adult 'tools' e.g. dominoes and objects (whatever is to hand)
- Work with concrete materials before tackling paper-based tasks
- Develop 'numerosity' by simple number sequencing activities, e.g. identifying the fifth item on a till receipt
- Link coins with numbers by looking at the number written on the coin, then sequence them according to value
- Use real life situations as much as possible to aid understanding of concepts.
- Clarify the language of maths e.g. *plus*, *add*, *more than* all mean a number getting bigger.
- Provide a card with numbers listed up to 20, then 20, 30, 40 etc. up to 100.



Advice from a specialist:

*Working with dyscalculic learners entails looking at the confidence and self-esteem of the learner before any teaching can take place. Work needs to be structured to begin at a level where learners can succeed and then move, step by step, into new or previously unsuccessful areas.*

### INFORMATION & NETWORKS

<http://www1.ipsonline.com/uploads/DyscalculiaChecklist.pdf>

<http://dyscalculia-screener.co.uk/> on-line screener costing £30, discounts for multiple screening

[www.aboutdyscalculia.org](http://www.aboutdyscalculia.org)

*Practical Solutions Series: J Proustie (2000) Next Generation UK series includes:*

*Mathematics Solutions: An intro to Dyscalculia / Planning & Organising Solutions / Life Skills*



## 5. DYSLEXIA



### KEY FACTORS

Dyslexia is associated with unexplained difficulties with reading, writing and spelling. Even where literacy skills have been mastered, problems remain with skimming or scanning over text and retaining what has been read. Spelling is likely to remain erratic.

However the core challenges are the rapid processing of language-based information and weaknesses in the short-term and working memory. *Short term memory refers to remembering; working memory relates to retaining and accessing information whilst engaged in a task.*

Associated problem areas include organisation, time management, sequencing and structuring written / spoken communication, word retrieval and attention span.

People with dyslexia may also suffer from Visual Stress when reading [see Section 7] and experience some of the following symptoms: 'glare' from the page or screen, headaches, eye strain, blurring or apparent moving of text, repeatedly losing their place.

Further information on visual stress: [www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/visualstress](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/visualstress)

By adulthood most people with dyslexia have evolved coping strategies, which require energy and effort to sustain. These coping skills break down in stressful situations, accentuating areas of weakness and making them very vulnerable.

### IMPACT

- Dyslexia can cause secondary problems such as low self-esteem, anxiety, frustration and behavioural problems. Negative experiences at school may have led to truancy, and lead to reluctance to engage with training opportunities later on.
- Disorganisation and poor time management may result in missed appointments and breaches (rather than deliberate non-compliance).
- During questioning, difficulties will probably arise estimating the passage of time, distinguishing left from right and remembering the order in which things happened.
- Dyslexia is also linked to a range of skills including innovative thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity, an intuitive understanding of how things work and good visual-spatial abilities.

### WAYS OF WORKING

- When giving information, follow up with questions that check important points have been noted such as "So what do you need to bring?" NOT "Do you understand?"
- Documentation should conform to good practice in minimising Visual Stress (Section 8).
- Provide reminders in spoken and written form.
- Work with the individual to set up a basic form of organisation at his/her level of technology.
- During interviews, stick to chronological order rather than jumping around in time. Ask single questions rather than compound ones.
- Beware that inconsistency in supplying routine information or details relating to the offence may be due to dyslexia. Sequencing and references to left/right may be inaccurate.
- When engaging with learning, many people with dyslexia would fare better if they could represent their work as diagrams, images and spidergrams or mindmaps. This is in line with their visual-spatial approach.
- In general terms, they find it helpful to be presented with an overview, before going into details.

### INFORMATION & NETWORKS

*Dyslexia Information Pack* (2000) Project for Greater Manchester Probation Service:

[www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/GMPS\\_information\\_sheets.doc](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/GMPS_information_sheets.doc)

*Supporting learners with dyslexia in work-place learning* (2008) NIACE Lifelines series

British Dyslexia Organisation [www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexic](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/dyslexic)

<https://www.dyslexia.uk.net/adults-with-dyslexia/>

## 6. DYSPRAXIA / DEVELOPMENTAL CO-ORDINATION DISORDER (DCD)



### KEY FACTORS

People with dyspraxia may appear slow and hesitant, with poor posture, co-ordination and balance. Muscle tone is poor and they are often clumsy. They may trip or bump into things. Some people come across as rude or abrupt. They have often experienced bullying.

People with dyspraxia are generally anxious in unfamiliar situations and often have difficulty judging how to behave. Their organisation is poor and approach to paperwork is chaotic.

Finding their way around is challenging. There are difficulties coping with maps and directions.

### IMPACT

In addition to the above, people with dyspraxia often have difficulties in the following areas:

- Speech and language: speech may be unclear, due to poor control of mouth muscles. Pace and volume of speech may also be affected, so they sound loud or aggressive.
- Poor social skills: difficulties include judging socially acceptable behaviour, understanding others' needs, a tendency to take things literally.
- Weak short term & working memory: weaknesses in these areas affect organisational ability, decision making, and the ability to retrieve information 'on the spot'.
- Inability to work at speed and process information rapidly. Slow word processing skills.
- Poor time management: poor understanding of time or the urgency of situations.
- Difficulty managing change and new routines: people with dyspraxia may lack the flexibility and the ability to re-organise and re-schedule tasks.
- Poor visual-spatial skills (in contrast to dyslexia); this includes difficulty extracting information from charts, timetables etc.

### WAYS OF WORKING

- Whereas reading is less likely to be a problem, many of the WAYS OF WORKING for dyslexia apply – in particular relating to organisation and interviews.
- Check if they would prefer to dictate information for forms, due to awkward handwriting.
- Some people with dyspraxia find it hard to look after themselves and appear scruffy and shambolic. They may need guidance on appropriate clothing for court appearances and job interviews.
- Check if special arrangements need to be made about lighting or other sensory issues.
- Try and minimise distractions during study sessions. Suggest they take breaks.
- Take account of great difficulty with navigation. Information about venues should contain landmarks as well as directions. It may help to talk through the route.

### INFORMATION & NETWORKS

Dyspraxia Foundation <https://dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/dyspraxia-adults/>

Dyspraxia UK [www.dyspraxiauk.com](http://www.dyspraxiauk.com)

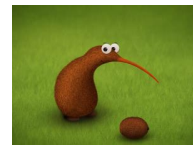
The Discovery Centre [www.discovery.info/](http://www.discovery.info/)

*Living with Dyspraxia: A guide for adults* M Colley (2006) Jessica Kingsley

*Transition: Employability for Young people with Dyspraxia*, (no date given) A Kirby & S Drew, Discovery Centre

*Working with Dyspraxia – a Hidden Asset: Dyspraxia Foundation Guide for Employers* (2012)

## 7. VISUAL STRESS



Visual Stress can make reading extremely uncomfortable for some people.

This condition is linked with dyslexia, dyspraxia, migraines and epilepsy. It may be due to undiagnosed or unresolved eye problems.

Solutions can include spectacles, eye exercises, a coloured overlay or tinted spectacle lenses. Where options are limited, a good quality coloured overlay may be helpful (see NOTE 3 below).

**This CHECKLIST will flag up difficulties associated with Visual Stress.  
The completed checklist should become the property of the individual.**

Name:

1. Have you ever been prescribed glasses? [If YES, why?]
2. Do you often lose your place when reading?
3. Do you use a marker / your finger to keep the place?
4. Do you ever read numbers / words back to front?
5. Do you get headaches when you read?
6. Do your eyes become sore or water?
7. Do you screw your eyes up when reading?
8. Do you rub or close one eye when reading?
9. Do you read close to the page?
10. Do you push the page away?
11. Do you prefer dim light to bright light for reading?
12. Does white paper seem to glare?
13. Does print become distorted as you read? (how?)
14. Do your difficulties increase the longer you read?
15. Do you have difficulties reading from a computer screen?

| Yes | No | Some times | Don't Know |
|-----|----|------------|------------|
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**Further Comments**

### NOTES

1. Check out whether the individual is simply in need of a standard eye test or reading glasses.
2. Overlays may be available in Education departments. By experimenting with a selection of good quality coloured overlays the reader can select the most 'comfortable' shade. These are better supplied cut in half, A5 size, to fit in books or over handouts.
3. If problems have been identified, OPTOMETRISTS specialising in Visual Stress can be located on release via [www.ceriumvistech.com](http://www.ceriumvistech.com) or at [www.s4clp.org](http://www.s4clp.org)
4. Those who find that a screen 'glares' will need to dim the brightness and should be helped to customise the background colour on their monitor / screen to a shade that is easier to read from.
5. Visual stress is exacerbated by certain features of text. **Accessibility** issues are shown in the chart on page 8.



## 8. DISABILITY – ACCESSIBILITY – FURTHER RESOURCES

### DISABILITY

#### Disability definition

'A person has a disability if s/he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities.'

*Equality Act 2010.*

People with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) are covered by disability provisions if it can be shown that their everyday activities are adversely affected.

Under the **Equality Act, 2010**, there is a duty to make **reasonable adjustments** to remove barriers for disabled people. This applies in situations where a disabled person would otherwise be placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' compared with people who are not disabled.

Some may have been on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Register or had an SEN statement at school. (This system has now been replaced with a disability wider remit, under which those with SpLDs rarely receive official support.)

### ACCESSIBILITY of LEARNING MATERIALS & COMMUNICATIONS

Always take these considerations into account, to assist readers who have Visual Stress

| Incorporate the features below:  | Avoid the following:  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• adequate spacing</li></ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• small fonts (below size 12)</li></ul>                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• left justification + a ragged right margin</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• cramped text with poor spacing</li></ul>              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• selective use of bold and bullet points</li></ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• printing whole words or phrases in capitals</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• diagrams and charts</li></ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'fancy' or unusual fonts</li></ul>                    |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• consistency of style</li></ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• text in either red or green</li></ul>                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• pictograms and graphics</li></ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• distracting or irrelevant graphics</li></ul>          |
| <b>Aim for a clear uncluttered appearance</b>  | <b>Avoid a busy, over-crowded page/screen</b>   |

### FURTHER RESOURCES

#### Touch Type Read & Spell [www.readandspell.com](http://www.readandspell.com)

This program follows a phonic multi-sensory approach. Learners see words on-screen, hear them via headphones, spell them on the keyboard, and speak them during the session.

#### Units of Sound [www.unitsofsound.net](http://www.unitsofsound.net)

Units of Sound is a 'second chance' phonics-based Reading and Spelling program, for all ages.

#### Shannon Trust Reading Plan [www.shannontrust.org.uk](http://www.shannontrust.org.uk)

This is a peer mentoring activity, in which literate prisoners become reading mentors, following a carefully structured programme. Shannon Trust volunteers work with prison staff to support.

#### The Communication Trust [www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk) & [www.sentencetrouble.info/](http://www.sentencetrouble.info/)

Materials on communication issues, including *Sentence Trouble* (2009) relating to young people.

**The Prison Reform Trust:** *No One Knows: Learning Difficulties and Learning Disabilities in Prisons*. One of a series of key reports on people with LDS / SpLDs in the criminal justice system. [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Publications/Publicationcategories/Learningdisabilities](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Publications/Publicationcategories/Learningdisabilities)

**Releasing the Potential of Offenders with Dyslexia & Related Conditions** M Jameson (2014) [http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Releasing\\_Potential.pdf](http://www.dyslexia-malvern.co.uk/docs/justice/Releasing_Potential.pdf)

A practical manual for staff working with offenders, including good practice from across Europe.