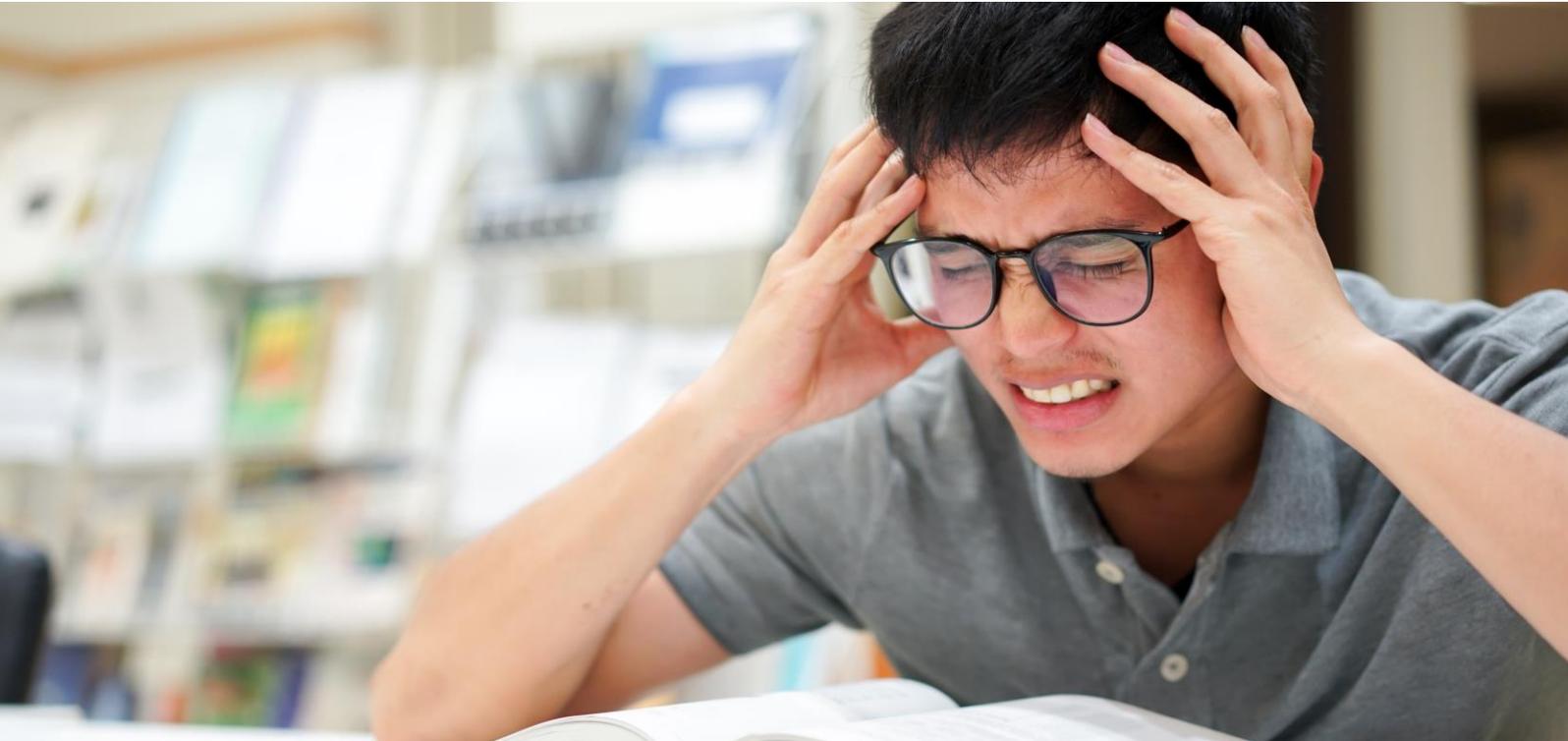


The psychological impact of growing up with dyslexia



In practice, many dyslexics live much of their life under a cloud of believing they were rather thick and stupid. Following a diagnosis of dyslexia, it can be alarming to discover things could have been very different. This realisation creates an emotional soup where the person is no more equipped to deal with additional learning, i.e. software and skills training as an adult, than they were when their problems initially became apparent – usually in their early school years.

Pennie Aston, Director, GroOops Dyslexia Aware Counselling, said at the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs on 24 April 2019:

“In the 12 years we have been operating we have identified a core matrix of presenting problems that are common to all our clients. They are not exclusive to neurodiversity but the frequency, intensity and energy required to cope with them, is. Our investigations have also looked at the origins of the presenting problems which we find firmly embedded in early years experiences.”

It is not that dyslexia means people are less able to cope with complex emotions than their neurotypical cousins but that they are having to cope with far more unresolved problems from the past where the focus had been on deficit. Also, few understood the presentations of dyslexia other than a difficulty with reading and writing. The result is that dealing with the emotional repercussions of dyslexia is dealing with trauma.

In psychology, trauma is defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. Symptoms of psychological trauma are shock, confusion, anger, irritability, mood swings, anxiety and fear, guilt, shame, self-blame, withdrawing from others, feeling sad or hopeless, and feeling disconnected or numb. During the APPG for Dyslexia and other SpLDs on 24 April 2019, Pennie explained that all these symptoms are commonly present in GroOops Dyslexia Aware Counselling clients. Add to this an ignorance of how dyslexia can present itself, and at the extreme end you have someone convinced they are good for nothing and at risk of becoming disconnected with normal humanity.

Pennie shared stories of clients GroOops Dyslexia Aware Counselling have worked with that are reflective of the common psychological impact resulting from growing up with dyslexia. These clients shared that they were dependent on an understanding partner who supported their dyslexic needs allowing them to focus on strengths. However, all struggled throughout school having received no interventions. Many developed strategies to cope but have ended up with a fractured relationship with parents who it was felt tortured them by sending their child back into school where they were bullied, shamed and humiliated by teachers and students.

One person's breakdown came when they watched their gentle natured seven-year-old son turning into a raging, distressed monster going through the same experiences as their parent – with a 25-year gap. This parent is unable to drop their child off at school or attend parents' evenings without experiencing flashbacks and panic attacks leaving them vomiting with distress.

Others relayed that, despite their success, they had never told anyone about their dyslexia because they felt it was a badge of shame – something that was inexplicably wrong no matter how much effort was put in. Many have split their lives into two parts. The first, school and family where nothing could be done right and failure was dismal and inevitable. The second, where an escape to a creative environment allowed latent talents to be focused on by perceptive mentors who recognised dyslexia.

Many left school with no qualifications, have now achieved PhDs and work in high level positions in The City, the pharmaceutical industry, architecture and engineering. Unfortunately, the early years damage caused kept telling them they weren't good enough, not able enough and constantly on guard as to being found out, resulting in fragmented personal and professional relationships. Deep depression has impacted on their ability to enjoy successes. The legacy of their early years.

What the evidence provided by Pennie Aston of GoOops Dyslexia Aware Counselling shows us is that commonly childhood experiences of growing up with dyslexia result in psychological trauma, which degrades a person's life experience substantially. Pennie's evidence also shows that no amount of success in later life or professional psychological support fully repairs the damage done in childhood.

Childhood matters and the only solution to ending psychological trauma resulting from growing up with dyslexia is to ensure the education system and society does not cause it in the first place.

*Sourced from: The Human Cost of Dyslexia - April 2019
Modified for a global audience by: Get into Neurodiversity*