

4 Remarkable Strengths of Dyslexic Children and How to Nurture Them

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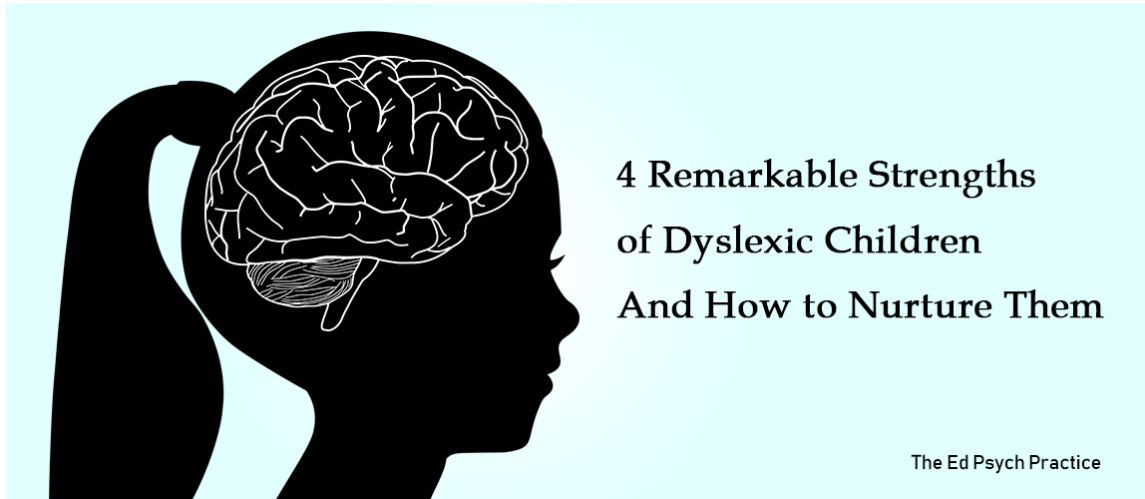


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Takeaway: Dyslexia is a difference in learning, not a disability. And with this difference comes so much potential.

You might notice your child is talented at :

- (1) Spatial reasoning,
- (2) Spotting connections between ideas and concepts,
- (3) Storytelling,
- (4) Pattern recognition.

And you can develop these skills by using tools and techniques that encourage hands-on, multisensory teaching.

Your child is so much more than a label

The good news is that your child's dyslexia has been spotted. This means that you can help her deal with the frustration she might feel about struggling with reading and writing at school. And this struggle could have led to her losing confidence or a sense of self-worth. But dyslexia is still just a label, and your

Dyslexia is a difference, not a disability

We commonly assume that a dyslexic child's brain is flawed. That it's trying to work the same as other children's brains, but can't. This is just not true. It's not that your child's brain can't process information. It can and does. All that's happening is that it's developing differently. The problem is that our education system isn't currently set up to nurture this difference. It expects your child to do something she's not ready to do yet (e.g., spelling), instead of focusing on her strengths (e.g., innovating). This is why it's useful to **consult with a trained Educational Psychologist** who understands your child's learning needs. « [En Ontario, les neuropsychologues utilisent des outils de dépistages plus pointus, donc ils peuvent mieux cibler la cause des troubles d'apprentissage spécifiques et neurodéveloppementaux. Leurs recommandations servent à dresser la liste des forces et besoins lors du CIPR et les PEI de l'enfant](#) » [S. Bonneville, 2022](#)

So, what are your child's strengths?

Each child experiences dyslexia in their own way, but four strengths pop up regularly. Neurolearning experts Brock and Fernet Eide exhaustively studied research into dyslexia (dating back to 1896), interviewed many adult dyslexics, and published their findings in the acclaimed book, **The Dyslexic Advantage**. Here are some of the strengths they've identified. If you've noticed any of these aptitudes in your child, do try and nurture them. We'll discuss how in a bit.

1. Well-developed spatial reasoning, which is a valuable type of intelligence

Spatial reasoning is the ability to reason about the 3-dimensional properties of physical objects.

- Properties like their shape, size, motion, position, and how they interact with other objects. It's a valuable kind of intelligence, distinct from other types like verbal ability or memory skills.
- It shows up in everyday life
 - for example, your child might easily guess if a pile of clothes would fit in a particular suitcase (or even how best to pack that suitcase).
- But it translates to advanced processes too
 - for example, in a land developer who can see a finished apartment complex where there's currently only vacant land. He'll know where it'll fit (along with its manicured garden) and how it'll all look. It's the same aptitude that the suitcase-assessing child used.
- **Spatial reasoning is essential for careers in design, art, engineering, and architecture.**

[Incidentally, Lloyd's building was designed by Richard Rogers — a dyslexic architect.]

To encourage this ability, give your child hands-on projects to work on.

For example, you could teach maths by using objects like apples or chocolates to demonstrate division. This taps into spatial reasoning in a way that a long set of written instructions can't.

2. Seeing the connections between things

- Dyslexic children often find it easy to spot connections between objects, concepts, or points of view.

- This could show up in simple word-association games.
- Give your child the word 'cat' for example, and she might think of tigers and lions, or a mama cat with her kittens, or a catwalk ... and so on. She'll likely find more connections, instantly, than you would.
 - Your child might also like looking at an event from different points of view, which is an important skill for innovation and decision making.
 - **Careers** : Seeing novel connections is essential with multidisciplinary work like cutting-edge scientific research. It also encourages creativity, which is especially valuable in an age of artificial intelligence and automation.
 - **To encourage this ability**, give your child creative projects. For example, lateral-thinking expert Edward de Bono challenges children to invent gadgets — say, a device to pick apples in an orchard. So, how should it work? Does it pull the apples off the branches? Or push them down somehow? Or shake the tree?

3. Storytelling and creating vivid, elaborate images

- Children with dyslexia prefer to translate facts into experiences or stories, rather than keeping them as abstract concepts. They also tend to use stories to remember the past, describe the present, and imagine the future. This tendency to think in stories is called 'episodic' memory (in contrast to 'rote' memory which many school tasks rely on).
 - Your child might love creating vivid and elaborate imagery. And this could translate into great art.
 - For example, celebrated filmmaker Tim Burton used his childhood drawings as the inspiration for his iconic character 'Edward Scissorhands'.
 - And then there's Pablo Picasso, who used canvas to masterfully capture the workings of his mind. He would paint subjects as he saw them — sometimes out of order, backwards or upside down.
- **Careers** : Storytelling skills are valued in artists, salespeople, counsellors, lawyers, and teachers.

4. Spotting patterns and making predictions

- Spotting patterns quickly is **linked to intuition**

- Dyslexic children are often talented at noticing patterns and using them to predict the future or explain the past. They are also skilled at dealing with constantly changing environments — where you don't usually have all the facts but have to act anyway.
- It's useful anytime you need to notice trends and innovate accordingly.
- **Careers :** Pattern recognition is essential in fields like science and maths. For example, dyslexic scientist Christopher Tonkin talks of how he instantly spots things that are out of place. Things like inconspicuous weeds in a flower garden. This gives context to a study which found that dyslexic astrophysicists outperformed their colleagues at spotting simulated black holes concealed in a lot of visual 'noise'.

Remember that 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' mean something only in a given context.

- For example, take the task of reading. A 'strength' here would be the ability to focus on details. You look at a word and then rapidly shift focus to the next word and so on till you finish the sentence. So, it's a 'weakness' if you can't quickly and accurately follow that sequence. **Now, let's switch tasks.** This time you need to find a logical flaw in a complex figure, quickly. Here, you need the opposite skill. Focussing on details is a 'weakness.' You'll waste too much time if you examine each piece of the figure in turn. Instead, you need to zoom out and take in everything at once.
 - So, find things that reward your child's strengths.

We tend to spend time helping children cope with the things they struggle with. That's very important. But every child — dyslexic or not — has strengths and weaknesses. What matters is spotting and celebrating a child's strengths.

How to help children discover and celebrate their strengths

You could start by helping her to list things she loves doing, or recall a time she felt proud of an accomplishment. She could even draw the moment first and then talk about it. You both could then figure out what specifically she

loved about those activities. For example, if she ‘loves basketball’, you could look at what aspects excite her the most. Is it exercise? Or visual reasoning? (I.e., taking in where the other players are and judging distances quickly.) If she loves talking to people, it could be that she likes emotional reasoning, empathy, or verbal communication. Exercises like these are great for building your child’s confidence building. [Note: If you need help assessing your child’s learning needs, it’s often helpful to consult aEducational Psychologist.]

You could also find useful tools and tactics

For example, you could encourage your child to talk before writing — to help organize his thoughts. If writing is hard, he could use mind maps and **spider diagrams** instead. Where possible, he could use a computer to touch-type instead of write, and make use of tools like predictive text, speech-to-text, and spellcheck. To memorize facts, he could use mnemonics or create vivid stories using things like the **Roman Room technique**. The trick is to use visualization and multisensory teaching, where possible.

Dyslexia is an opportunity and possibility to learn differently

Richard Branson famously said, “Being dyslexic can actually help in the outside world. I see some things clearer than other people do because I have to simplify things to help me, and that has helped others.” Dyslexia may bring some challenges, but it also gives your child a chance to see the world through new eyes. And so much comes from that.

