# All about reading disabilities: How libraries can support readers with dyslexia and other reading disabilities

Welcome to today's webinar “All about reading disabilities: How libraries can support readers with dyslexia and other reading disabilities”. My name is Faline Bobier. I'm the Training and Outreach Coordinator with CELA Member Services, which is the Centre for Equitable Library Access and I'll be facilitating today’s webinar. We’re extremely happy to welcome Christine Staley, who is the Executive Director of Dyslexia Canada and who will be doing today's webinar.

Dyslexia Canada is a national charity that's dedicated to ensuring equal access to education for children in Canada with dyslexia. First, just a little bit about Christine. She holds a law degree from the University of Ottawa, and practiced law in Toronto, prior to leaving the law to join various nonprofits in senior leadership roles. Christine volunteers with multiple organizations and she's currently also the Chair of Family Services with Peel region. She lives in Mississauga, Ontario with her husband and two amazing girls, and she says a small zoo of animals. Maybe we can get into that later.

So, just a couple of housekeeping things before we start. Christine will be speaking for about 40 to 45 minutes. Her presentation in a recorded version will be available on the CELA website at some point after today's webinar. We’ll try and get the presentation up as quickly as possible on our site.

Because of the relatively large number of participants in today's session we are going to ask that people if you can, just keep your questions or comments until Christine has finished and then you can post questions and comments in the Zoom Chat window.

And one thing to note at the bottom of the chat window. There's a little “to” and there's a drop-down menu. If you choose ‘All panelists and attendees’ it means that everyone in the webinar and not just the presenters, will be able to see your question so it will make communication a bit easier. So, without further ado, I'm going to turn off my camera and turn it over to Christine.

Christine Staley:

Perfect. Thank you very much and thank you everyone for attending. I know there's a very large group here so I am extremely grateful and appreciative that there's this must much interest in learning a little more about reading disabilities, and dyslexia specifically.

Hopefully everyone can see my slides. I'm going to take about 40 to 45 minutes to talk a little bit about reading disabilities. Generally, I’m mostly looking at dyslexia and then taking the time to look at how libraries can actually support parents, families and readers with dyslexia.

I will make sure that I leave some time at the end to answer any questions that come in. I'll also leave my contact information, so if we can't get to some of the questions always feel free to reach out. I'm more than happy to jump on a call on Zoom. Or just send an email if there's other information that you might be looking for.

Here's what I would like to go through in the time we have:

* A bit about what dyslexia is
* Who Dyslexia Canada is
* What as library staff you can be looking for - This presentation is a little different than what we typically tell our parents and teachers, but I tried to make sure that we had some information that was a bit more practical for you in your environment; and then finally
* What are some of the practical things that libraries can do to make sure that their space is as inclusive as it possibly can be for those with dyslexia and other reading disabilities.

## My story

Before we jump in, I just wanted to share my story. I find that it can be really helpful to personalize this. We tend to look at disabilities as someone else’s story, or, you know, it can be a little uncomfortable to talk about.

Sometimes you just don't know what it may all comprise and I think that can be especially true for some of the invisible disabilities.

This is a picture of myself on the right-hand side with my daughter Kate. She is 12 years old, and currently in grade 7. And this picture was taken at the beginning of this year. The woman on the left-hand side was the past or is the past Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

They have now launched a public inquiry into the right to read, so really delving into whether children with dyslexia and other reading disabilities are being provided with fair and equitable access to education.

But this story and this picture is sort of a success story of about four years for us. As Faline said, I am a lawyer by training. I practiced for a number of years before moving over to start my work with Dyslexia Canada. I am an avid reader. I would say that I am actually a very good and fast and fluent reader. I have a 15 year-old in my house, who is also an avid reader. In fact, by Grade 3 she was reading at a Grade 12 level and our house is full of books - every type of book and story you could possibly imagine.

In kindergarten when my younger daughter was struggling to learn her alphabet, did not know many of the sounds, did not know how to spell her name, and her name is Kate, so it's a pretty short, easy name. We expressed some concern to the kindergarten teacher who told us ‘Don't worry about it. All kids learn at their own speed, she'll catch up.’

And then we also heard, ‘Please don't compare her to her older sister, who is a bit of a gifted reader.’

So, then we didn't. We left it. In Grade 1 again we went to her teacher and said we had some concerns. Kate still doesn't know her alphabet, still is struggling with almost all of the sounds connected to the letters and can only spell her name maybe 70% of the time.

And what we got back was again, ‘All children learn at their own speed. Maybe she's just a bit of a slower learner. She tends to be unfocused in class. Maybe that's part of her problem.’ and ‘Oh yeah, by the way, you aren't exposing her to enough reading material at home.’

Which obviously got our backs up as a family, a little bit, but that's where we were in Grade 1. In Grade 2, again we expressed our concern and said, ‘Well, Kate knows probably about 90% of her alphabet, but not all of it and she struggles with a lot of sounds still and she knows some sight words, she can sound out some very short words. She definitely is not able to read, or what we would consider reading.’

The teacher took note at this point in Grade 2 and said “Yes, there's something going on. You need to spend more time”. We started working with Kate about an hour and a half every single day after school with drills, flash cards and worksheets that came home. It got to the point where we were doing such intensive work with her at home that she was crying every single night. She was crying herself to sleep. She was crying as soon as she would come home when we pulled out the sheets.

My husband and I were struggling in figuring out how to work with her and how to work with our other daughter at the same time. How to work with each other on this. Kate started throwing tantrums to the point where she would throw herself on to the ground and bang her head on the floor. She was calling herself stupid and telling us that she didn't want to go to school ever again.

And that's where we were in Grade 2.

Then we get to Grade 3 and at the beginning of the year I went to the Open House. Some of Kate's work was sitting up on a bulletin board next to some of the other kids in her class. That was the first time I think that it hit me to say something's not right here.

Because now I could compare her work to everyone else’s in that class, and it wasn't that I was comparing them to my daughter. You're always told, ‘Don’t compare your kids to other kids.’

But I could see that there was a huge difference in what Kate was able to do and what the other kids were able to do. So, we pulled together a meeting with her Grade 3 teacher who agreed there's something not quite right here. In every other respect Kate is a very bright, smart, funny, engaging little girl, but for some reason, she just cannot read and write. We were told ‘OK. Let's start the process. Let's get her tested. Maybe there's a learning disability.’ Unfortunately, about a week later we were told the bad news, which I now know almost every single parent in Canada hears at this point.

Their school board has about a two year wait list for any sort of assessment and even once you get on that wait list it might be another year or two before you actually even get the assessment and get that formal diagnosis.

The teacher took me aside and said, ‘I don't know what your financial situation is, but if you can afford it, I would strongly recommend you go and get your daughter tested for learning disabilities, specifically dyslexia.’

And that's how our story starts. I wanted to share this because you might find when you have parents, grandparents, guardians and children coming to you, they bring all of that with them. It's not just a matter of, ‘They don't like reading’ or ‘They're struggling with reading’ or ‘They’re slow readers’.

But parents have probably now lived a couple of years trying to figure out what's going on. Perhaps feeling very, very guilty that they didn't do more. Perhaps having siblings being a bit resentful that all of this time is being spent with another child. You might have a child that has just had to live through all of that, trying to figure out why are they different.

Are they stupid? Are they dumb? Is there something else wrong with them? Why can everyone else around them do something very easily and they can't?

## What is dyslexia?

So, what is dyslexia? There's a lot of myths and misconceptions about what dyslexia is and isn't. Most people think that dyslexia is simply reversing your ‘b’s and ‘d’s, ‘p’s and ‘q’s, maybe mixing up some letters within a word, but it's actually much more than that.

The general definition is an unexpected difficulty in learning to read, write and spell, despite having an average or above average intelligence.

So, it is considered a learning disability. It is an actual condition. We get told quite a bit that dyslexia isn't real; it's not a real thing, and it definitely is. It's a different wiring in the brain or a difference in how your brain processes symbols, sounds, written words.

It is a life-long condition. It is highly genetic. So, it's typically passed on. If you do have a child that comes in that has dyslexia most likely the parent or grandparent also has dyslexia, whether they know it or not.

It is presented on a spectrum, so you can have some people with dyslexia that doesn't really impact them too much. They might be a little bit of a slower reader, but other than that they're getting along just fine. Or you can be on the far end of the spectrum where even sounding out the very simplest of words is done with extreme difficulty.

Dyslexia cannot be cured or fixed. If you have any books in your library right now that speak to the dyslexia cure, please look at them and think about and consider removing them. It cannot be cured or fixed. However, with proper identification and early instruction, proper evidence-based instruction, children with dyslexia can learn to read. They just learn strategies on how to work with their processing differences.

They can definitely learn how to read. In fact, over 90% of children, whether they have dyslexia or not, can learn to read if taught properly.

It is very common. 15 to 20% of the population is impacted by dyslexia. And just to put that in concrete terms - we typically say 3 to 4 children in every single Canadian classroom are impacted by dyslexia. It's significant. It's something for you to consider as well when you are holding any sort of activity or group work or reading circles – that about 15 to 20% of those children, and adults, are impacted by dyslexia.

## Why it’s important

Reading is much more than just academics. It's more than just being able to curl up on a cold day and enjoy a great story. Reading is a life necessity. We know that if a child has not mastered reading by the end of Grade 3, they will struggle with reading for the rest of their lives. Grade 3 is a bit of a turning point.

Before Grade 3 you are learning to read. After Grade 3 you are reading to learn. So, if you have not mastered reading by Grade 3, that child is now going to struggle with actually taking in content. It happens very, very quickly.

We also know by all of the various research and the standardized tests that are done across the country as well that most children who are struggling to read at Grade 3, if they are not provided with proper interventions at that point, they will also fail the reading test in Grade 6 in those provinces that have mandatory literacy tests and grades. They will also fail the literacy test in Grade 10, for those provinces that have that. It’s extremely important to make sure you provide early intervention.

40% of all children with learning disabilities will experience mental health issues. 60% of adolescents in rehab programs have a learning disability or dyslexia, and 46% higher odds of attempting suicide, five times higher rates of being abused and six times more likely to be unemployed. The outcomes of not learning how to read are actually dire. It's quite drastic.

## Who are we?

Dyslexia Canada is a national charity committed to ensuring that every child in Canada with dyslexia has access to meaningful education.

Our website is there. I would encourage everyone, if you're interested in learning more, to check out our website. We have a lot of information on our website about what dyslexia is, what the signs and symptoms are, what proper instruction looks like, and how you can help.

## Our mandate

Our mandate, very simply, is first and foremost, to increase awareness about dyslexia and to recognize it. In almost every province we hear stories from parents telling us that their school will not let them use the word dyslexia. They’re actually not allowed to say dyslexia.

We're trying to change that. We're trying to reduce the stigma behind that word. We're trying to make sure that people understand what it is, and what it is not, and to have a little bit of sensitivity for those and empathy for those who are trying to learn how to manage dyslexia.

We're also looking for and driving change around compulsory early identification of dyslexia. Again, as I said, 93% of children can learn how to read.

However, if they are not provided with the instruction they need, that drops down to less than 20% by the time they're in Grade 5. Time is of the essence. We are looking to champion mandatory provision of evidence-based instruction and intervention, mandatory training for educators.

We build a lot of resources and support for children and families with dyslexia.

## Our work

Our work really focuses around advocacy, doing research. We do a lot of news and media engagements just to try to get the word out.

You'll see on the right-hand side of the screen there's a picture of me with two of my girls in front of Niagara Falls, Lighting Red. October is International Dyslexia Awareness Month. We just finished it and we have buildings and monuments across Canada light up in red for one day.

On our first year doing this two years ago, or like three years now, we had thirteen monuments. This year we had almost seventy monuments and buildings, so the word is starting to spread, and people are getting involved and engaged.

## What should you look for

I told you a little bit about what dyslexia is and who we are at Dyslexia Canada.

But as library staff, what are you looking for? As I said, it is an invisible disability, but there's definitely some signs or red flags that you could be looking for. If a parent comes to you and says, ‘My child just does not like reading’, that might be something to talk about a little bit. Find out why. Not necessarily that it's dyslexia, but maybe there's something there.

A child doesn't know their alphabet or sounds – so the sounds connected to the individual letters. You might have a parent that comes and their child’s in Grade 3, and they hold up a level 2 reader and say this is too hard for them. If that child is struggling to sound out not only individual letters but blends of letters, that might be a sign. If you have an opportunity to see written work, letters are written backwards. Words are flipped.

Probably one of the biggest things you could ask about if a parent does come to you and says my child is struggling or they don't like reading, ask them if they themselves like reading.

Or, how did they feel about reading as a child? If you think it's appropriate you could ask them if anyone in the family has a learning disability or dyslexia. As I said, it can be hereditary. We find that this is probably one of the biggest warning signs – if a parent says that they always struggled to read or they were slow readers or their parents told them they didn't read their first book until they were in Grade 8. It's something to look out for.

Does that child have difficulty reading out loud? I just want to take a second here – if any of you are holding book groups or reading circles or anything like that. Always consider whether you have kids read out loud or take turns reading out loud. For a child with dyslexia, it's actually even more difficult to read out loud. It takes a different part of the brain. I would strongly recommend not asking any child to read out loud. Ask them to volunteer. If they put their hand up and want to do it, that's fine. But the child with dyslexia will really struggle to read out loud.

Do they switch words in sentences? Do they guess at words? Do they look at pictures and guess at the word because they're just connecting it to the picture? These are some things to look for with reading and spelling.

I put in an example here of written work. This is from a Grade 4 student and you can see. You can kind of translate what they were trying to say. It makes perfect sense when you look at it – some of the words. But you can see a few common things that you might see - spelling things phonetically, even in the first word ‘feel’, spelled FEOL.

Switching some letters – so when they switched the ‘n’ and the ‘e’. Hungry – putting an ‘e’ at the end, instead of a ‘y’ because they're just spelling it the way they're hearing it or how it sounds. These are some very common things that you see when you look at written work.

Outside of reading and spelling, there are a few other signs and symptoms or impacts of dyslexia that most people don't actually know about.

Getting directions mixed up – not knowing your left from your right. Many people with dyslexia confuse the two. I hear from adults with dyslexia all the time that they still don’t get their left and right very easily. They have to think about it.

Understanding concepts of time can be a problem. Sometimes getting confused with minutes and hours within a day, but sometimes even getting mixed up between breakfast, lunch and dinner and when those meals are.

Performing a couple of tasks at once, such as listening and taking notes is going to be very, very difficult.

Being able to comprehend a multi-step list might be hard. Distracted and unfocused behavior is another sign. It may not be that they're actually unfocused and disrupted. it might be that if you're asked to do something that you find extremely difficult and tiring, you just don’t want to be there and do it.

Having kids do silent reading, for instance, for that child with dyslexia can be hard. It's very difficult to sit there and just stare at letters when everyone else seems to get it and you don't.

You might also find that if you tell a kid with dyslexia where to find a book they come back half a dozen times, saying, ‘Oh, I looked in the B section but I can't find it.’ Maybe there is something going on there. Maybe they actually are struggling with finding alphabetized material.

Just a couple of things to look out for that you can maybe dig into a bit more, rather than just assuming that child's a slow reader. The one that we hear quite a bit is about boys – that they take longer. Don’t just assume that. Maybe dig into that a bit more.

What can libraries do? I'll talk about each one of these things. First, to create a dyslexia-friendly environment, offer accessible and relatable content, provide informational resources for parents and community workers, and increase staff awareness and sensitivity.

## Dyslexia-friendly environment: space

I took this graphic from the International Federation of Library Associations. I've provided the link here. I think it's absolutely fantastic and provides a really great representation of some easy things you can do to your space.

First, use infographics or pictograms rather than text-based signs around your library. Consider changing the text to graphics.

Have a nice and inviting easy to read area. Things like where you put your chairs, have the audio books close by, have some beautiful picture books and graphic novels there. Make it really easy for those who might have lower literacy levels or be struggling with a reading disability.

In terms of your public material (posters, signs) keep them clear and clean as possible. Try to minimize the use of italics, bolds and underlines. Lots of white space.

We get asked quite a bit about dyslexic-friendly fonts or the dyslexie font. There are some people who say they prefer the dyslexie font or the dyslexia font. That said, there's actually no scientific evidence that backs up the claim that dyslexics can read that font easier, so there's no need to use a dyslexia font. You can use Times New Roman or Arial and they are just as good.

Inclusive collection organization - Be aware of where you're placing books and how they're labeled. For example, on the sign, watch where you put stickers. Try not to cover up the letters in the title for someone with dyslexia. They will really struggle to fill in that gap.

If one of the letters is blocked out, they won't be able to, or many of them won't be able to, actually figure out what that word is.

Consider having a lot of the covers of the books facing out to make it easier to read the title. Normally, how you would read is much easier than trying to read it up and down. The other thing for young children (an example that I give, which might be a little more difficult in the library environment) but something to think about, is where you place the early readers.

In a classroom we will always tell teachers, ‘Please don't put the baby books or the easier to read books at the very bottom or in a whole other section’. It just makes those children feel absolutely horrible that they are the ones reading the baby books or they have to read the special books.

So just consider where you put books.

And then, finally, be as tech-enabled as possible. Make sure that you've got audio books on hand, that the computers are equipped with speech to text and text to speech and that there's someone there that knows how to use this technology.

## Dyslexia Friendly Environment: Inclusive Programs

In addition to the space, you can also make sure that your programs are as inclusive as possible for children and for adults who, quite frankly, might also have a reading disability. But for here I'll focus on kids.

Kids don’t want to feel different. They want to be just like their friends. It can be very hard for a child with dyslexia when they see all of their friends reading whatever the latest Y/A novel is, to not be able to read it and to have to ask for that audio book. Really try to normalize technology. Audio books and graphic novels are not just for kids who are slower readers, struggling readers or those with reading disabilities.

Anyone can use them. Anyone can enjoy audio books and graphic novels, so really try to normalize the different types of content.

If you put together reading clubs, again make sure you're including audio or different types of content.

Consider reading clubs for older kids that have read aloud portions. You're never too old to have a story read to you. Don’t just assume that because now they're teenagers they don't want to hear a good story. Think about that and make sure books that you feature have children with all sorts of different learning abilities. Make sure those books come in multiple formats.

Consider featuring children with different abilities in your newsletters.

And then finally, be aware of activities that you do in a group setting. A word search or crossword puzzle might not be the most inclusive activity that you can do. I can tell you a child with a reading disability like dyslexia will really, really struggle with a word search type of activity.

I put a quote here because I wanted to personify what inclusivity can actually mean. Dyslexia Canada launched a podcast a few months ago, where we have kids with dyslexia giving book reviews on books that they just read.

Here's a quote from Amelie, age 13 from Saskatoon. She says “*Wings of Fire* is my absolute favourite. I have read two of the novels, all of the graphic novels and I have listened to the whole of the audio books.”

What she says before that is telling. Basically, she tells a story of how she went to her classroom. Her best friend was reading the seventh book in the series and she thought it looked amazing. Every time her friend told her about it, she wanted to read it. But she knew she couldn't. She takes much longer than every other child of her age to read any books. She desperately wanted to read the same thing as her best friend, so her Mom found her the audio book.

She listened to the first audio book and was hooked immediately. Now you see this, where she has just thrown herself into an amazing story and an amazing collection of stories to the point, again on the podcast. You can just visualize her beaming on the other end. She says, “I actually read a book that was 309 pages long in two weeks. That was the first book I ever read that was that long.”

There are ways to draw these kids into stories, to have them be included with any program that you're doing or any of the new hot books. You just might have to be a little more creative.

## Content

Make sure that you have a lot of appropriate and accessible content. A few of these I'll talk about a bit further.

* Wordless Books or Picture Books – There are some amazingly beautiful picture books out there. Use those. Talk about those. Engage kids with those books.
* Decodable or Phonics Books – I’ll talk about those in a second.
* Hi-lo Books – So, high interest, low reading ability. Make sure you have a lot of those on hand for kids as they get a bit older. They don't want to be reading the baby books. But they might not be ready to actually graduate yet to some bigger, more complicated books.
* Graphic Novels - Encourage them as much as possible. If that's what it takes to get a child to read, to practice, to sit down and to enjoy a book, we encourage all of our kids to read graphic novels.
* Audiobooks – I’ll talk about those in a second.
* Ebooks - And then finally ebooks. It might be a lot easier for some kids with dyslexia to read in a digital format simply because they can increase the size, they can increase spacing. Sometimes just changing the contrast can help. Make sure that you have easily accessible technology and digital copies available.

## Decodable versus Leveled Readers

If there is anything that I could ask for all of you to take away today it would be to take a look at your early readers section and what sort of books you have. What most parents know of when they go into the library and what they're looking for are those leveled readers.

They are not ideal – not ideal for beginner readers of any type, but definitely they do not work for a child with a reading disability. Decodable books are what you should be recommending to all parents, regardless of whether their child has a reading disability or not. That's really getting back to those books that many of you remember when you went to school – the old phonics books.

The example I've got on the screen here is from bobbooks. If you don’t have bobbooks, I would highly recommend that you get a staple of bobbooks in your library. They are those quintessential phonics books, so ‘The rat met a cat.’ ‘Run, cat.’ That’s what they look like.

Basically, decodable books contain words and letter patterns that children have specifically already been taught or are practicing. They are very limited on sight words. They only have those sounds that the child has been taught or that you can work on. They don't go beyond that, and they really allow a child to practice their decoding skills.

A lot of these books, bobbooks included, will actually say on the front or back cover what those sounds are that are being practiced, or what those letters are that are being practiced. They're not just beginner readers. You can find decodable books, and it's the second example I have there. I pulled this one from simplewords.com.

There are chapter books that are written as decodable, so they have shorter words. They don't have a lot of different blends in them or exceptions. They're all books where the words can be sounded out.

I want to show you the leveled readers and really show you what I'm talking about. Hopefully everyone can see this. This is a level two Scholastic Reader. It says for level two – vocabulary and sentence length for beginner readers. [The title of the book is *Two crazy pigs*.]

But this is not a beginner reader book and especially for someone with dyslexia. First of all, even in the in the title itself ‘two’ is not something that you can sound out. There is no way to decode that.

‘Crazy’ – as you saw when I showed you the example of the handwriting, you've got the ‘y’ in there. Kids who are learning to decode aren't going to get to that concept of the sounds that a ‘y’ makes until way down the road. That word ‘crazy’ is going to be extremely difficult for any child to sound out.

And then you've got ‘pigs’. We’re already on plurals. Beginner readers are still not there. We’re not at the plural stage yet.

Then you go in and it gets worse. But you would never know that just by looking at the size of the text or the number of words. It looks like it should be quite a simple book but it's not. There are at least twenty different skills that a child needs to know and be able to decode before they could even get to this.

It's a difficult book and it's supposed to be for beginner readers and it's a level two. I pulled a level one and this is one that I think a lot of kids would gravitate to. It’s National Geographic. They are lovely readers.

Beautiful pictures and a lot of great information, but this is a level one. The other one was a two. There are more words, more sentences so it's actually more difficult, just on the face of it.

You probably can't see everything here. But even the words that are being asked for a child to read are even more difficult. You've got, “I’m white”. First of all, ‘I’m’, which is going to be very difficult for a child that hasn't gotten there yet.

But ‘white’. The ‘wh’ is a blend that comes a lot later in the stage of decoding. The word ‘sea’ – ‘ea’ is not a pattern or a word group that children are going to see until quite later on down the road. It's a very difficult book to read. You can imagine as a parent or a child that picks up level one and they're struggling, how disheartening that can be and how frustrating that can be.

Rather than focusing on the number or the level, I would highly recommend you look at the decodable books that you have in your library and see if you can push parents and children to those. If a child picks this up and is struggling, this is a great book. Parents and kids can sit down and read this together.

I've put a website here: Readingrockets.org. It's a great website, if you haven't already found it. This article has a list of probably about 30 different decodable books and series, starting from pre-reader to advanced reader.

## Benefits of audio

We highly recommend the use of audio books. I tell every single parent that calls me to get a subscription to CELA. Go to their public library. Find audio books that are there. Get as many audio books as you can. Audio books are a fantastic way to ensure that children have access to the same content as their peers.

They should not be trying to understand that level of content at the same time that they're still trying to learn how to decode those words. There is absolutely no way that the child can take in and comprehend everything that's coming at them when they're still at the level of trying to decode the individual letters.

As you can see here, a child can comprehend at least two grade levels above what their reading level is. I would argue that a child with dyslexia might be reading well below just two grade levels.

Combining print and audio increases recall. It improves comprehension. Decoding is just one part of literacy and reading. In addition to decoding and being able to sound out, you do have comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. Audio books help with that.

This picture here is my daughter. This was the very first book that she ever read front to back. It was *The Magic Misfits*. We tried and tried and tried to get her to read anything, even with us sitting with her. She was always very self-conscious.

But as soon as we got her an audio book, she could now be an independent reader. She has the book in front of her and is listening to it. She's in Grade 7 now. This is still how she reads all of her books, all of her novels.

## Information for parents

In addition to having accessible content, make sure that you've got information for parents.

We at Dyslexia Canada believe that libraries could actually be just as important as schools and classroom teachers in ensuring that parents have this information. We know it's not necessarily happening in the schools right now. Teachers don't have the information to help parents figure out if it's dyslexia or not, and what to do about it, if it is.

We think libraries could provide a vital role in us trying to get supports for parents and kids. Most parents are not going to know what dyslexia is. They're not going to know what to look for. We would recommend as staff there not to even broach that yet. Simply ask, “Is your child struggling to read? Do they like to read and why?” Just go from there.

We would also encourage all of you to have a reading list ready. I have provided CELA with a reading list that will be provided with this presentation. Make sure the books that you have in your library and on the shelves about dyslexia, specifically, are evidence-based. There are some horrible books out there.

If books say that this is the cure for dyslexia – there is no cure. They're just providing bad information for parents. We have provided a list of high quality, evidence-based books that you might be interested in stocking and having in your library.

Identification - Early intervention is key. You do not need to have a formal diagnosis of dyslexia to start intervention. Basically, go down to phonics. If that's the only thing that a parent can do in that moment, a great phonics program is at least a start.

Do it now. Even if a child doesn't have dyslexia, an evidence-based program kind of grounded in structured literacy, that solid phonics base is better than probably what they're getting in school. So just start any sort of program like that, or intervention like that.

Support - Be able to tell parents where they can get more information and support. You can go to our website. We have lists of tutors who are specifically qualified to teach kids with dyslexia. We also have information about the signs and red flags.

There are some screeners that parents can use. They’re not diagnostic tools at all, but they can give a little more information around what the parents are seeing.

We also have a list of organisations that parents can go to. There are a lot of provincially-based parent groups out there that are a great resource for parents who are just starting this journey.

### Parent groups

Consider having parent groups to talk about early literacy and what they might be seeing. You can have people who specialize and are knowledgeable on dyslexia come to speak to those parents at the groups.

Leaflets – We have some handouts on our website. You're more than welcome to print them off and have them ready or you can just direct people to our website for more information.

## Training for staff and volunteers

Finally, consider training for staff and for volunteers. Everyone, all staff and volunteers, should at least have a bit of an awareness of what dyslexia is, what it isn’t, what are some of the signs, where to point people for help.

And then how prevalent it is. I think that's one of the really important things to take away as well. It is prevalent. 15 to 20% of the people coming to the library are probably impacted by dyslexia, so just keep that in mind.

Consider having someone who is an expert or has a bit more information. The reason why we say this is that you do have to tackle this subject with a bit of sensitivity. There is a lot of stigma around low literacy levels. We are judged by our education levels, by our ability to read.

There is a lot of stigma still. Couple that with the fact that we don't use the word dyslexia in most circles in Canada. There's a lot of stigma around that label of ‘dyslexic’ or having dyslexia.

Also, you need to be quite sensitive that that parent or grandparent, who’s coming to you, might have dyslexia themselves. They may have lived their entire lives thinking that they were stupid or that they just weren't academically inclined. They were streamed to special education or streamed a different way. Now, because their child has been identified as having dyslexia, they are realizing that that’s them too. And there can be a lot of anger and frustration that comes along with that.

Also, you do need to be sensitive to the fact that children with dyslexia, as I described in my own personal story, are coming with their own internal struggles. They can suffer from anxiety and low self-esteem. Be aware of that.

Lastly have a tech expert, someone that understands audio books and why they should be used. Someone who understands speech to text and text to speech and can help someone at the computer navigate that. Be ready to help a parent, grandparent or a child get a CELA subscription.

Understand how to download audio books or digital formats of books and to register or apply for Bookshare. Have someone who is knowledgeable about that as well.

I do have a lot of parents who call and say the whole tech arena is extremely overwhelming. There's just so much out there. They just wish someone would sit down with them and show them just one or two applications or one or two platforms that would be helpful. So, I would ask you to consider having someone that has a bit of experience in that and can walk parents and kids through that.

Those are some very high-level thoughts, ideas and considerations we had for library staff and volunteers. We do have more information about all of the things that I went through on our website. Again, I'm always happy to take calls or emails if you're looking for more information.

We also have parent volunteers right across the country that are always willing to talk to anyone really who is willing to listen. We also have experts in education, literacy and dyslexia, if you were interested in holding a workshop that got a little more in depth into what dyslexia is and how to remediate and the science of reading. We also have those people who are part of our organization and I'm always happy to connect.

## info@dyslexiacanada.org

Finally, again my name is Christine Staley. I can be reached here at info@dyslexiacanada.org and our website is dyslexiacanada.org.

That's all I had right now. I do see that there are a few questions. There was a question here about recommending slowing the speed of audiobooks.

It all depends. You can slow it down. If the goal is to practice decoding and practice reading, then I would recommend to slow it down a little bit so they can start to follow along.

The one nice thing about following along with your finger as you're listening is that you're not going to get stumped by some of those harder words or harder to sound out words.

But obviously if it's too fast it will be too fast for them, too fast for them to follow along.

However, one of the things you do want to make sure you're getting out of an audio book is the comprehension piece. If it's too slow and they’re focused too much on the decoding and the reading part, they might start to lose the actual context of what they're hearing. But you can always speed up the audio as the children become a bit more fluent.

Question: There’s another question about whether Noto Sans is a good font for people with reading disabilities or dyslexia.

Christine: I don't know about Noto Sans, but most of the Sans family are accessible. So I'm assuming that that one is as well.

Arial – we use Arial in most of our material. As long as it is clean and clear it's a good font. There is a fantastic resource that the British Dyslexia Association put out. I do believe it's on our website. It's a style guide or a branding guide that they provide to corporations. I'll make sure that I send that link as well because it does provide a lot of information about fonts and text sizes and things like that.

There's a question from Jen Moffat, who asks “Any advice for adults with dyslexia who were never diagnosed?”

Christine:

It is harder to learn to read once you're an adult. But, definitely, that does not mean that you can't learn to read. If adults are interested in that, yes, 100%, let them know that there are tutors out there who specifically work with adults who have dyslexia.

But also, introduce them to audio books. Introduce them to ebooks, because that might make it a little easier to read. We hear that a lot of adults didn't realize they had dyslexia until their child or grandchild was diagnosed and then they can see the signs in themselves.

There is a lot of anger, a lot of frustration. Sometimes it's just being that listening ear, saying ‘I understand’ and ‘we can help you’. ‘There are supports here for you.’

Christina (librarian) asks, “We have a reading buddies program at our library, which is run through volunteers who are usually older student tutors. How would we provide training for those volunteers, so they can also recognize the red flags?

Christine Staley:

If the volunteers are high school students, you can explain to them that reading disabilities or dyslexia is very common. So, if there is a child who is a bit older and who is struggling to read, don't assume that they're not paying attention. Don't assume that they are slow or not bright. Just take the time. Sit down and show that child. Use your finger to follow along and help them sound things out, but don't put too much pressure on trying to sound out. For someone with dyslexia, the real issue is the inability to sound out.

If the reading buddy is finding the child is pronouncing an ‘f’ like an ‘h’, or every time they hit a word that has an ‘st’ blend, it stumps them, you can let one of the staff know. Maybe a staff person can come in and just sit down and listen to that child read or help them a little bit.

One of the other things, I would say, about the reading buddies program is the kids that are volunteers. I'm only saying this again because my daughter is in middle school in Grade 7. She was put in the reading buddies program to be the reading buddy of a kindergarten child, which I didn't find out until after so I couldn't stop it until after.

The kindergarten child was actually reading at a level above my daughter. Be very aware of that as well. The older kids might not want to tell you they're struggling to read. It can be a little disheartening to have a younger child read better than you, so just be aware of that as well.

Q. And there's a question from Marcella. How do you deal with it when the parents are in denial about their child having a reading disability?

Christine Staley:

I think it's very difficult for you as a library to do much. You can give them the information. You can provide flyers, maybe show them where the books about dyslexia are. Recommend, without talking about a reading disability at all, the decodable books.

You can tell them all kids can benefit from decodable books or phonics books, if they're more comfortable with that word phonics. All kids, regardless of whether they have a reading disability or not, that is really how they should be learning to read, if you can push them in that direction a little bit. But there's probably not much more that you can do about that.

Sometimes it helps some parents to understand that it has nothing to do with intelligence. To be diagnosed with a learning disability you have to have average or above average intelligence. It has absolutely nothing to do with that. It's just a different processing.

There's a lot of very successful people with dyslexia, for example: Richard Branson, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs. NASA supposedly actively recruits people with dyslexia. MIT actively recruits people with dyslexia. That might help in some situations, but it can be very difficult to hear that your child has a reading disability and may never read like other kids. In some cultures, there is even more stigma behind struggling with literacy and reading.

CELA: It's 2:00 o'clock or almost 2:00 o'clock now Eastern Time. We probably have time for a couple more comments or questions, if anyone else has a question they'd like to ask.

I also just want to really thank Christine again because I think this information has been invaluable.

Christine Staley:

Yes, it's my email address and also our website if you want more information.

CELA: Lindsey has written in the Chat window that this was a superb presentation. Thank you and I would agree with that! As we've said, the presentation and the slides will be available on the CELA website, as well as some of the other resources that Christine has mentioned. We're hoping if Christine has time that we can offer this same webinar again in the New Year. We definitely had a lot of interest by some people who weren't able to sign up for this particular time slot.

Christine Staley:

Well, thank you so much for inviting me. Again, I look forward to working with CELA and working with many libraries out there. I really do think that libraries can play an extremely important, an almost vital role in providing this information and getting supports to parents and children. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

CELA:

I just wanted to read the last comment in the Chat window for some people who can't see it. This is from Christina, a librarian, who writes “Thank you very much for these suggestions. Christine, I had my son identified for his learning disability in Grade 1. He went to a provincial school, which saved him, so like you, I'm very passionate about helping others. I'd like to learn more to be able to help others, so any resource would be most welcome.”