



EVALUATING EDUCATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

Help your child succeed in school by learning as much as you can about the effectiveness of the instruction he or she is receiving. You can do this by talking with his or her teachers and asking questions. The following guidelines will help you know what to ask as well as to find and evaluate an educational professional independent of the school if you feel that your child is not receiving adequate instructional services from a qualified teacher within the school.

How do I know if a professional is reputable or qualified?

Evaluating the qualifications and track records of service providers is difficult but necessary. Inquire about educational background, previous work experience, and special training in instructional approaches designed to address the needs of students with dyslexia. Use IDA's *Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading* (<http://www.interdys.org/standards.htm>) and IDA's fact sheet "A Parent's Guide to Effective Instruction" (http://www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/EffectiveInstructionGuide_2011-07-19.pdf), to formulate your questions. Request references from professionals, parents, and former students, if appropriate.

What training credentials should education professionals have in specific instructional approaches designed for students with dyslexia?

- Certification by a training course aligned with IDA's Standards
- Certification by an accredited multisensory structured language training course
- Documentation of levels of training completed within the training course
- Year and location of the training course and contact information for references

from the director, institute, academy, or clinic

- Involvement in ongoing, related professional development (attending workshops and conferences, serving on boards or committees, speaking at conferences, conducting workshops, etc.)

How do I know if a particular professional is the right person to work with my child?

Take time to decide if the professional you are considering is a good match for you and your child. Specialized instruction is expensive, and your child will be investing time and faith in the person selected. Regardless of titles, degrees, or credentials presented, you must feel that you can establish rapport and a good working relationship with the professional who will be working with your child. Young professionals working under the supervision of a master teacher or experienced therapist often provide excellent services. The needs of very young children and the needs of adolescents and adults are different, and professionals often prefer to work with a particular age group.

Meet and interview the prospective specialist to determine if he or she has a personal style that is comfortable for you and teaching expertise that is appropriate to your child's learning needs. Students with a language-based learning disability, such as dyslexia, need consistent practice and repetition to master skills and learn to use skills functionally. Every lesson should consist of explicit, systematic instruction and targeted guided practice.

Use the following questions to keep the meeting focused and productive:

- What services do you provide?

- What is the depth of your experience and training, including content knowledge and supervised practicum?
- How do you establish measurable goals for your students?
- What instructional strategies and programs do you use to plan and deliver instruction?
- recommendations for educational accommodations such as extended time, if indicated
- a statement regarding the need for compensatory strategies (i.e., assistive technology, based on level of organizational skills, note-taking ability, and study or memory skills)

Is testing and evaluation necessary to diagnose dyslexia?

Yes. IDA publishes a fact sheet (“Testing and Evaluation,”

<http://www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/TestingandEvaluation.pdf>) that explains this process.

When a student is having problems with reading and spelling, an effective evaluation can identify a student’s individual patterns of learning strengths and weaknesses and can determine whether the profile fits the definition of dyslexia. The purpose of testing and evaluation is to determine why the student is having difficulty and what can be done to help. When a diagnosis indicates that treatment is needed, parents should find an appropriate educational professional as soon as possible.

A diagnosis of dyslexia cannot be determined by any one single test. A diagnosis of dyslexia includes consideration of background information, school history, and comprehensive assessment of both oral language (speaking and listening) and written language (reading and written expression) skills at all levels from the simplest to the most complex. A professional thoroughly familiar with the characteristics of dyslexia at different ages and stages in the continuum of literacy skills must interpret and integrate the information gathered into a comprehensive written report that includes the following information:

- a diagnosis
- recommendations for instructional/remediation approaches that match the student’s profile

The written evaluation report, with other pertinent reports or documents, should be given to the professional who will be working with your child. The professional needs this information to determine if his or her expertise fits the student’s needs. A thorough diagnostic report also helps to inform the planning of appropriate lessons or a preliminary instructional plan for review. A knowledgeable educational professional can help translate and clarify the information in the evaluation report, which can be difficult to decipher.

In addition to the diagnostic evaluation, most professionals will perform additional assessments to determine baseline performance, monitor progress, and inform ongoing planning.

How long does instruction need to continue? How often? What progress can I expect?

How long the student needs special instruction depends on the severity of the problem and the frequency and length of the sessions. At a minimum, one-hour sessions should occur two times per week; optimally, four or even five sessions should be scheduled per week—for up to two hours. Instruction should continue until the student is functioning at a level of independence commensurate with age and cognitive ability. This could take two to three years or more. To master skills and apply them independently, students with a language-based learning disability, including dyslexia, need explicit instruction and consistent practice and repetition with teacher guidance—not only with development of skills but with application of

these skills at higher and higher levels of functional use.

Teaching reading and other written language skills to students with dyslexia and related disorders is not a quick fix. It is hard work, and sometimes students complain about how difficult it is. At the same time, however, the students themselves are the best judges of the effectiveness of the program. Students quickly become aware that the systematic strategies they are learning allow them to identify or spell words they could not previously read or spell. They recognize their newly-learned ability to “figure out” what they could only guess previously. Although progress is often slow at the beginning, it will give them hope and motivate them to do their best and to keep trying. Significant progress becomes evident when appropriate instruction is delivered with fidelity, meaning with close adherence to the instructional guidelines of a particular program, and when the instruction occurs with the necessary intensity (length and frequency of sessions; individual and small group instruction) and duration (how long instruction occurs over the months and years to come). Appropriate instruction for students with dyslexia and related language disorders is a process, not a product. For the student with dyslexia, it can be an important initial step toward a lifetime of learning.

What are reasonable expectations for communication among school staff, independent educational professionals, and family?

- Will the educational professional meet with parents to discuss progress and planning?

Most educational professionals schedule routine periodic conferences to discuss student progress, to share student work samples and test results, and to plan for future instruction.

- Is the specialist willing to attend school conferences to consult with teachers and any other professionals?

The school and the classroom teacher should be kept informed about the outside program of instruction. It is useful for the school to have access to the written evaluation report that includes the diagnosis of the language-based learning disability, the child’s patterns of learning strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for remediation, accommodations, and use of compensatory strategies. Sometimes, with parent permission, the specialist will be invited to attend parent-teacher conferences or Student Study Team (SST) meetings to discuss the best options for teaching and supporting the child in the classroom.

What policies, fees, and scheduling considerations are typical for working with an independent educational professional?

- Are the times available for working with your child compatible with the needs of your child and your family’s schedule?

For instruction to be effective, it must occur when the student is alert. Each family needs to make decisions based on the individual student and the availability of the educational professional. Some professionals schedule students early in the morning before school; others schedule sessions after school. Sometimes it is possible to schedule sessions during the school day.

- Where will instruction occur?

Most specialists conduct their sessions at their office or clinic. Some individuals may travel to the home of the student; there is often an extra fee for this. Sometimes, schools will provide a consistent and appropriate setting for

teaching sessions to occur during the school day at school.

- What fees and payment policies are typical for independent educational professionals?

Fees of individual professionals vary from state to state and depend upon the qualifications and expertise of the professional. Ask to discuss fees—if the professional has not provided this information. *It is your responsibility to ask about policies and fees in advance of hiring a professional.*

- What is the policy for missed sessions?
Some professionals charge for all missed sessions. Some offer times for scheduling make-up sessions. Some charge for cancellations with less than 24 hours notice. Inquire about these policies before instruction begins.
- Are instructional materials included in the session fee?
Sometimes professionals charge an additional fee for instructional materials. Many do not, but it is best to ask.
- What is the fee for phone calls and conferences at school or with you?
You will need to ask each individual professional about fees for meetings and phone calls. Some charge for phone calls

and some do not. Most charge a fee for school meetings and conferences in addition to scheduled sessions with the child.

- When is payment required and how often?
Some professionals require monthly payments in advance. Others request payment at each session. Ask for more information on fees and policies if the professional has not provided this information.

Does insurance cover the costs of testing or fees for specialized instruction?

Depending on the state in which you live, the referral source, and your family's insurance coverage, evaluations and/or remediation are *sometimes* covered or partially covered. Depending on many factors, some services may be tax deductible. Each family will need to check with insurance representatives and tax advisors for details.

The information in this fact sheet should help you choose the right professional to work with your child. You may also find it helpful to become familiar with the terminology used by professionals in the field. Please refer to the IDA fact sheet "Helpful Terminology" to learn about professionals working in this field of instruction and the support they offer for students with dyslexia and other related learning challenges.

References

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The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) thanks Nancy Cushen White, Ed.D., for her assistance in the preparation of this fact sheet. IDA would also like to acknowledge the contributions of IDA's Research to Practice Publications Committee Chair, Karen Dakin; the other members of the Committee: Suzanne Carreker, Sandi Soper, Nancy Cushen White, Pam Hook, and Barbara Wilson; and IDA Editor, Denise Douce.

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