

## INFORMATION SHEET – THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF DYSLEXIA

A lack of confidence and a low self-esteem are often consequences of learning difficulties. There is a reciprocal relationship between self-esteem and development of skills: as self-esteem improves, academic skills increase and vice versa. Self-esteem equates to self-confidence, self-respect and self-worth.

As children with dyslexia progress through their schooling, they typically experience a widening gap between their own and their peers' so-called 'normal' progress. Dyslexic children come to see themselves as 'abnormal' and 'stupid' and a common reaction is to cease even to try in class since, no matter how much effort they put in, their results always disappoint.

Such daily failure is emotionally damaging and many children with dyslexia adopt strategies of avoidance. This may be by 'playing the fool', avoiding particular tasks, staying away from school and possibly even becoming a school refuser. Children who have learning difficulties tend to have higher rates of emotional frustration.

Lack of motivation, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, bad behaviour and frustration are the emotional responses and reactions to the daily stresses that unsupported dyslexic children feel at school. It is hard for any person to maintain positive feelings about themselves when they constantly experience failure and it is natural for human beings to avoid whatever frightens them. The dyslexic child is no exception.

By contrast, those children who succeed in school develop positive feelings and a belief in themselves and their abilities. However, children who meet failure and become frustrated conclude they are inferior and also that any amount of hard work makes little difference to their performance.

Dyslexia also has a tremendous impact on members of the immediate family who often experience their children's meltdowns at first hand.

Parents of children whom they suspect to be dyslexic often don't know where to turn for either academic or emotional help. To compound the problem, schools vary greatly in their understanding of, and response to, dyslexia. Some may offer extra phonics but many provide little or no support.

Specialist dyslexia tutors can teach children the literacy skills they need. If your school does not provide this type of support there is a list of specialist dyslexia tutors on the PATOSS or British Dyslexia Association websites.

But academic support alone is rarely sufficient to reverse the cycle of decline. It is equally important that a tutor is skilled at restoring a child's self-confidence. The tutor must teach the child to see dyslexia not as a handicap but merely as a different way of learning. Dyslexic children are not suited to the traditional teaching methods of mainstream schooling. But if they can be made to understand that they are no less intelligent (and may well be more creative) than their peers, a dyslexic child can succeed at school, improve in self-confidence and flourish emotionally.