

# Dyslexia Awareness in Perth & Kinross Council

*This resource has been created by PKC Equalities Team. It draws from various sources of information, including the dyslexia organisations, Dyslexia Scotland, British Dyslexia Association, Made by Dyslexia and Dyslexia Bytes.*

*The most enlightening source has been our conversations with colleagues who have lived experience of dyslexia. We are very grateful for their time, insight and suggestions and we include quotes from them to illustrate the different aspects of dyslexia.*

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*“If we view dyslexia not as a definition, but as an experience, then we open ourselves up to listening to others. Instead of imposing definitions on people, we invite their views and accept their voices.” ~ Martin Bloomfield, Dyslexia Bytes*

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## Contents

<b>What is dyslexia?</b> .....	2
<b>One in ten people</b> .....	2
<b>Dyslexia is often not identified</b> .....	2
<b>Everyone with dyslexia is different</b> .....	4
<b>Co-occurring differences: Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia</b> .....	5
<b>Support – understanding, time and patience</b> .....	6
<b>Support – valuing difference</b> .....	7
<b>Support – helpful changes</b> .....	7
<b>If you think you may be dyslexic</b> .....	8
<b>Stigma, hiding and fitting in</b> .....	9
<b>Why dyslexia awareness is important</b> .....	10
<b>Further information, learning and support</b> .....	11
<b>Free online training</b> .....	13
<b>Campaigns</b> .....	13

## What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is most usefully thought of as a cognitive difference. It is a different way of thinking and learning.

*Dyslexic minds see the world differently. They think creatively, laterally, often solving problems others can't. They have the skills of the future. And they've transformed our past, inventing everything from the lightbulb to the iPhone.*

*But 80% are never spotted at school. So, they never truly understand their full potential.*

<https://www.madebydyslexia.org>

## One in ten people

- At least one in ten people (10%) are thought to be dyslexic. This would amount to **600 employees** in Perth & Kinross Council and **15,000 residents** in Perth & Kinross.
- In some research, the figure is thought to be even higher at 1 in 5 people (20%).
- Dyslexia exists across all cultures and backgrounds.

## Dyslexia is often not identified

- Only about 20% of dyslexic people have had the opportunity to be diagnosed at school and to understand why and how they think and learn differently.
- This can lead to low self-esteem, stress, frustration and poor mental health and wellbeing.
- Because Dyslexia often runs in the family, adults sometimes only find out that they are dyslexic when their child is diagnosed.

## Strengths and difficulties associated with dyslexia

**Strengths** commonly associated with dyslexia include:

- Creativity
- Practical tasks
- Visual thinking skills
- Verbal skills and social interaction
- Thinking out of the box
- Seeing the bigger picture
- Identifying solutions
- Making connections

People can experience **difficulties** around reading, writing, memory, time keeping and organisation.

*“You’ve got a lot of positives and a lot of good things you can bring to an organisation. You act differently, you think differently and you can bring stuff together differently”*

### Strengths associated with Dyslexia

Can be very creative and good at practical tasks.

Strong visual thinking skills such as being able to visualise a structure from plans.

Good verbal skills and social interaction.

Good at problem solving, thinking outside the box, seeing ‘the whole picture’.

### Difficulties associated with Dyslexia

Problems with reading, taking notes, remembering numbers, names and details.

Difficulty with time keeping, organising work or managing projects.

Difficulties with spelling and writing.

Short-term memory problems and sequencing difficulties such as following instructions or directions.

Graphic from Dyslexia Scotland [What is Dyslexia?](#) Leaflet

## Everyone with dyslexia is different

- Everyone's experience of dyslexia is different.
- The difficulties people experience are unique to the individual.
- People have different strengths and have developed different strategies that work for them.
- People's experience of dyslexia can differ from day to day and from hour to hour.
- It is important to take time to understand each person's experiences of dyslexia, what they find difficult and what works for them.
- Even then, Dyslexia is difficult to understand for people with no lived experience of it.

*"Not everyone with dyslexia is the same. Everybody's different."*

*"It's hard to explain to someone what it's like because you need to have it to know what it's like."*

*"It can be something so simple that anybody can do but it might be harder for me to do."*

*"One day, I can look at two words. One is correct. One has a mistake. But I will not be able to see the difference. Maybe the next day, I'll be able to see the difference. That is how our brains work."*

*"I get lost in my words sometimes. I have the words in my head but I can't get them out of my mouth."*

*"I often can't give you information instantly – even if I know the subject very well."*

## Co-occurring differences: Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia

Dyscalculia and dyspraxia are two of the differences that often co-occur with dyslexia.

People with **dyscalculia** have difficulties with numbers which can cause adults to struggle with everyday activities where maths are involved.

These could include:

- Using money, working out change and tips.
- Understanding information on a graph.
- Finding their way to someplace.
- Estimating speed, distance and total costs.
- Measuring and adjusting measures for a recipe.

**Dyspraxia** affects the fine and/or gross motor coordination. This can make some everyday activities such as writing, typing and driving a car more difficult.

Please see the British Dyslexia Association more information on [neurodiversity and co-occurring differences.](#)

## Support – understanding, time and patience

It is important to create an environment where people are encouraged to talk about any difficulties in the workplace and for them to know that they are supported.

*“Sit and have a chat about it. Try to understand better rather than just marking the words wrong.”*

*“Proper understanding and support allowed me to relax and do my job better. I don’t feel like I’m always hiding now.”*

Allowing time for people to understand aspects of their job and to accomplish tasks that they find more difficult is important.

*“Some of my emails have been embarrassing. But you’re often forced into getting something done quickly and the spell check brings up something completely different!”*

*“Patience is a big thing. Taking the time to understand and to explain things.”*

*“It can take me longer to understand something but once I’ve got it, I can see connections and better ways to do things”*

*“It’s not because I’m lazy or I can’t be bothered. I need to understand something before I do it. I want to know what the point is.”*

Often, very small changes, like identifying a colleague to check over important emails, can make a big difference.

## Support – valuing difference

It is also very important that there is space for people to work to their strengths. It can be frustrating to have to perform tasks just because ‘that’s how things are done around here’.

*“It’s like I’m going through someone else’s mud. I say ‘why don’t you just use the path?’ But they’re not interested in the path because that’s not the way we do things. So I have to keep going through the mud. I can see the solution but they’re not willing to listen.”*

*“We often have ideas to solve problems, but these ideas usually have to be put in a report. It’s really frustrating! It prevents you from sharing the idea or doing the work.”*

*“We can read over reports and improve them because we are often good at coming up with better words but trying to write a report yourself takes forever...and it’s still never right!”*

*“I love a good brainstorm of ideas and aim to get a project done. So support to achieve goals, rather than say “do a report” or be frustrated by the report is more productive for all’*

## Support – helpful changes

Bearing in mind that a lot of people in our organisation and our communities will be dyslexic, some of these suggestions for changes from dyslexia organisations and people with dyslexia will be good practice for any internal or external communication.

- Use plain English in communications.

- Avoid using abbreviations and jargon in meetings.
- Bullet points and bigger spaces between lines make reading easier.
- Use clear fonts at size 12 or above.
- Don't justify text. This makes it more difficult to read.
- Identify IT solutions to help with reading and writing.
- Mind maps and sticky notes can be useful tools to organise thoughts.
- Identify colleagues who can be available to read over reports and important emails.
- Break information into smaller chunks.
- Provide step-by-step guides using images and flow charts.
- Demonstrations of tasks and opportunities for hands-on learning can be helpful.
- Easy read formats can be useful for communicating the most important information.
- Think about what needs to be communicated and why. For example, is a written report necessary before an idea can be shared?

*“Using abbreviations is a huge barrier! If you use an abbreviation in meetings, you’ve totally lost me. I spend the rest of the time trying to figure out what it means.”*

### **If you think you may be dyslexic**

If you think you may be dyslexic, please speak to your line manager who can seek support for you. Managers can direct enquiries to [Disabilitysupport@tohealthltd.co.uk](mailto:Disabilitysupport@tohealthltd.co.uk). Paige Cooke, Senior Client Services Coordinator, Neurodiversity & Specialist Workplace Assessments is the PKC contact.



## Stigma, hiding and fitting in

Better understanding and small changes can make a big difference to people's experience, their wellbeing and their ability to work to their potential.

We have heard from our dyslexic colleagues that a lot of energy is spent trying to fit in to structures that do not suit people's different ways of thinking and processing information.

*"I know there was a lot of spelling and grammar mistakes and I felt very self-conscious."*

*"It's like a kind of shame."*

*"I know that some people haven't told their team members. I think there are a lot of people hiding it"*

*"Your reputation suffers because of spelling mistakes."*

*"You spend so many years trying to fit into the system and you do your best to get around things."*

*"People see dyslexia as a cop-out. They think you're trying to get out of work. They think you're being lazy or that you're not paying attention. But I have to work a lot harder to do what comes easily to others."*

## Why dyslexia awareness is important

In addition to creating a supportive work environment, a better understanding of dyslexia is important in improving people's life chances and wellbeing in general.

For instance, research shows strong links between dyslexia, mental health and suicide and also between dyslexia and being in prison. A survey of young prisoners in Scotland showed that half of them were dyslexic. An article on Dyslexia Bytes brings together research findings around dyslexia and poor mental health.

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*"We can see that dyslexia isn't just an issue of education, it's a societal issue, and without a change in society's attitude towards dyslexia, we are at risk of an ever increasing epidemic of mental health problems, self-harm, and even suicide." Martin Bloomfield, [Dyslexia and Mental Health](#)*

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**The following pages link to sources of further information, opportunities to learn more and sources of support.**

## Further information, learning and support

### Dyslexia Scotland

The Dyslexia Scotland website has a wide range of information and useful leaflets. These include:

- [What is dyslexia?](#)
- [Dyslexia Checklist and Indicators](#)
- [Dyslexia and Self Esteem](#)
- [Dyslexia - a guide for employees](#)
- [Dyslexia – a guide for employers](#)
- [Dyslexia-friendly formats](#)
- [Dyslexia friendly tips for speakers](#)
- [What is Dyscalculia?](#)

Dyslexia Scotland also have a [confidential helpline](#) offering advice and guidance for anyone who wants to find out about dyslexia.

Their [adult networks](#) are a support group for people over 18 who have

### Dyslexia: into adulthood (The BBC Documentary Podcast)

Stella Sabin, who has dyslexia herself, looks at the impact of the condition in adult life, and asks what difference does it make to know the name of what you are experiencing? Dyslexic people are disproportionately represented in low paying jobs and in the US and the UK 50% of the prison population are dyslexic. She visits the intelligence and security organisation GCHQ who are positively recruiting dyslexic thinkers, who are able to find unusual and imaginative solutions to complex problems...like cracking codes.

## Made by Dyslexia

Made by Dyslexia is a global charity. Their purpose is to help people understand, value and support dyslexia.

As part of this work they have published several reports including the following about the value of dyslexia at work.

- [The value of dyslexia: dyslexic strengths and the changing world of work](#)
- [The value of dyslexia: dyslexic capability and organisations of the future](#)

## British Dyslexia Association

The British Dyslexia Association is a membership organisation working to achieve a dyslexia-friendly society for all. They provide information about [how to support dyslexic employees](#). They stress that,

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*Effective changes don't have to be expensive or time-consuming, often small organisational changes can help to get the very best from your employee.*

*It's worth keeping in mind that any changes you make to your way of working can benefit all employees, not just those with dyslexia, and may also benefit your dyslexic customers and clients.*

[British Dyslexia Association](#)

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## Free online training

### [Dyslexia Awareness: Made by Dyslexia and Microsoft](#)

“In every classroom, in every school, around the world, there are 1 in 5 kids with exactly the thinking skills needed for the future of work. They are Made By Dyslexia.

“But less than 20% are spotted at school. This two-part course created by Made By Dyslexia will change that – for good. It will give you easy to use strategies, used in the world’s leading specialist dyslexia schools, to help you spot, support and empower every dyslexic learner.”

### [Online Dyslexia Awareness CPD from Dyslexia Scotland](#)

- introductory online modules for Community Learning and Development practitioners and teachers.
- Udemy course for Career and Employability Coaches

## Campaigns

[Made by Dyslexia Pledge](#) for businesses, educators and governments to commit to value and support dyslexic thinking.

[Dyslexia Awareness Week in Scotland](#) (November) and [British Dyslexia Association Dyslexia Week](#) (October) are annual events to raise awareness of dyslexia.