

# Developing Social Competence Among Dyslexics

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## Abstract

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*Dyslexia, the most prevailing learning disability, refers to reading difficulties. With so much emphasis on interventions for such children to be competitive in the academic world, we lose sight about what really prepares a child to be happy, confident, and secure in the real world. The dyslexics regularly face many challenges, and require interventions besides numeracy and literacy skills. For such children, social competence is the most important aspect to be taken care of. Because of their consistent academic under achievement, they face peer rejection and ignorance. Exclusion from a normal peer group can deprive rejected children of opportunities to develop adaptive social behaviours. They have higher risks of developing patterns of aggressive behaviour, mental and emotional traumas. The social competence deficits, if left untreated, may increase over time, along with feelings of social anxiety and inadequacy. Therefore, it is of great importance to make such children socially competent. An early intervention and support at key moments can change their world. The present article attempts to give measures of developing social competence among dyslexics to make them feel confident and contributing members of this social world.*

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*"Give a man a fish and feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime". : Lao Tzu*

Ishaan Awasthi is an eight-year-old whose world is filled with wonders that no one else seems to appreciate; colors, fish, dogs and kites are just not important in the world of adults, who are much more interested in things like homework, marks and neatness. And Ishaan just cannot seem to get anything right in class. When he gets into far more trouble

than his parents can handle, he is packed off to a boarding school to 'be disciplined'. Things are no different at his new school, and Ishaan has to contend with the added trauma of separation from his family. One day a new art teacher bursts into the scene, Ram Shankar Nikumbh, who infects the students with joy and optimism. He breaks all the rules

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of 'how things are done' by asking them to think, dream and imagine, and all the children respond with enthusiasm, all except Ishaan. Nikumbh soon realises that Ishaan is very unhappy, and he sets out to discover why. With time, patience and care, he ultimately helps Ishaan find himself. He proves the specialty of that child to the rest of the world, not just to his parents ([www.taarezameenpar.com](http://www.taarezameenpar.com)).

This is the story of actor Aamir Khan's directorial debut **Taare Zameen Par - Every Child is Special**. The movie has brought into spotlight the problem of dyslexia with which Ishaan, the special child in the movie, suffers. Dyslexia is not a rare disability. It has been around for a long time. Experts say it occurs in up to 15 per cent of the general population. An estimated 30 million children are known to be dyslexic in India.

### **What is Dyslexia?**

Etymologically, the term 'dyslexia' is composed of two Greek words-'dys' meaning ill or difficult and 'lexis'- literally means poor reading. It is normally used to refer to people, children and/or adults, who experience difficulties with reading, spelling or writing. Dyslexia may also affect short-term memory, mathematical ability, concentration, personal organisation or sequencing. It can be defined as:

Dyslexia is a neurologically based, often hereditary, disorder that interferes with the acquisition and processing of language. Varying in degrees of severity, it is manifested by difficulties in receptive and expressive language, phonological

processing, reading, writing, spelling, handwriting, and sometimes in arithmetic. Dyslexia is not the result in lack of motivation, sensory impairment, inadequate instructional or environmental opportunities, or other limiting conditions, but may occur together with these conditions. Although dyslexia is life-long, individuals with dyslexia frequently respond successfully to timely and appropriate intervention.

*International Dyslexia Association*

According to the U.S. National Institutes of Health, dyslexia is a learning disability that can hinder a person's ability to read, write, spell, and sometimes speak.

Dyslexia is not due to mental retardation, brain damage, or lack of intelligence. It is a difference in brain organisation that is present at birth and results in a struggle when trying to learn, remember, or express information. It is a learning disability that alters the way the brain processes written material.

### **Characteristics of Dyslexic Children**

1. They speak later than most children.
2. They have pronunciation problems.
3. They have difficulty in rhyming words.
4. They have slow vocabulary growth, often unable to find the right word.
5. They have difficulty in numbers, alphabets, days of the week, colors and shapes.
6. They are mostly restless and easily distracted.
7. They have difficulty in interacting with peers.

8. They have difficulty in following directions.
9. Their fine motor skills develop slowly.
10. They are slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds.
11. They make consistent reading and spelling errors including letter reversals (b/d, p/q), inversions (u/n, m/w), transpositions/inversions (felt/left, from/form) and substitutions (house/home).
12. They are slow in remembering facts.
13. They usually have unstable pencil grip.
14. They continue to spell incorrectly, frequently spell the same word differently in a single piece of writing.
15. They avoid reading and writing tasks.
16. They face trouble in summarising the large concepts.
17. They have trouble with open-ended questions in tests/exams.
18. They usually have difficulty in adjusting to new settings.
19. They have poor grasp of abstract concepts.
20. They either pay too little attention to details or focus on them too much.

#### **Famous Dyslexic Personalities**

History gives the evidence of the greatest personalities in different fields of politics, science as well as arts who were dyslexic. The most famous worth quoting are:

- George Washington - the first president of the United States.
- Sir Winston Churchill - The British Prime Minister, who helped lead England and its Allies to victory during World War II.
- Albert Einstein-the scientist with the label of genius among genius.

- Alexander Graham Bell - the inventor of the telephone who paved the way for the incredible communication and information superhighway that exists today.

#### **Importance of Social Competence in Dyslexics**

Quite clear from the examples of famous persons with dyslexia that dyslexics do possess the potential to live and work in the community. But, very often their special needs are not met; their energies are channelised in wrong directions. This can cause havoc in a child's life on a daily basis. Dyslexia affects the language functioning. Since it is concerned with reading aspect which is an essential tool for learning a large part of the subject matter taught at school, dyslexic children suffers a lot of anguish and trauma when they feel mentally abused by their peers. Since social development is inextricably linked to a student's school success, this disability puts them at a disadvantage in the social scene anywhere. This social incompetence leads to anxiety and frustration. Social scientists have frequently observed that anxiety and frustration produce anger. The results of a research revealed that in 45.15 per cent of dyslexic people, there is a lack of behaviour adjustment or unfavorable family conditions. They are confused in social circles and have negative feelings towards their own values. Their self image and self esteem is lowered. Just because of being socially incompetent, they feel powerless. They tend to view the world negatively. They are less likely to enjoy the positive experiences in life. They not only experience great pain in

present experiences, but also foresee a life of continuing failure.

A child doesn't need to be the most popular in their classes but they do need good social skills. Being sociable, it helps in becoming confident and a cheerful personality. It helps in becoming successful and contributing part of larger social world. Social skills are the foundation for getting well along with others. So it becomes important to inculcate social competence among dyslexics. Social competence, in fact, is essential to the mental and physical well beings, no matter their age. This is of utmost importance for dyslexics to get it fit in their social world in spite of having disability that interferes with their academic achievement. A socially competent child has the ability to establish and maintain high quality and mutually satisfying relationships and to avoid negative treatment or victimisation from others. It helps to achieve personal goals in social interaction while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations. It helps in equipping the children with all the cultural components like roles, responsibilities, values, norm and beliefs.

### **Measures for Developing Social Competence among Dyslexics**

#### **1. Knowledge of the problem**

Firstly, the teachers need to have an understanding of the nature of the problem that a dyslexic child may have. It must be their duty to let the parents of the concerned children informed about the same problem. Only then they can be in the direction of right treatment.

#### **2. Patience**

The teachers need to be extra patient. They must realise that the process of learning a new skill takes all children some time, and can children longer than others. Their child needs some extra.

#### **3. Peer Training**

It is equally important to teach peer group members how to maintain social interactions with disabled children. They may need to show how to initiate contact, how to make the child join in an activity, how to help the child with particular school assignments, etc.

#### **4. Discover Areas of Strengths and Interests**

Such children must be helped in discovering their strengths and interests. Do not just throw the load of flying words on them. Let them find their areas of opportunities. Maximum exposure should be given to such students in the areas of their interest.

#### **5. Assign leadership**

Engage more and more students in the activities of their (dyslexics') interest. Give chance to dyslexic students to be the group leaders. Let them give instructions to rest of the group. This will give the way even to the reluctant and shy dyslexics, and, many relationships will develop naturally when they see themselves as leaders.

#### **6. Practice Activities Popular at School**

Aside from spending time on skills such as reading, counting etc, some time must be given to learn and practice games and

activities popular at school. The child will be more confident and enjoy his/her interaction with others if he/she knows how to play.

### **7. Select Activity according to Comfort**

If the child is not comfortable in the group of athletic type of children during play, provide him alternative activities and form his group there. For example, reading groups, craft activities, coloring or anything of his interest. Be available to supervise and help as needed.

### **8. Neighborhood play - a Routine**

The parents must be told to make a routine for the child to play with children in the neighborhood. Make it sure that the child is not bullied or made to feel inferior. Let him invite his friends at home and also allow him to go. Do not make his world limited to the four walls of his house.

### **9. Small and Easy Steps of Friendship**

Help them developing friendship in small and easy ways. For example, teach the child to smile and greet one new child every day. Teach him/her share of his/her lunch and other belongings like stationery material with his/her friends.

### **10. Basic Etiquettes**

Make him/her learn basic etiquettes like how to eat, how to dress, how to sit, keeping things in order and at proper place, saying 'thank you', 'sorry', etc. so that the child is not embarrassed when in group.

### **11. Proper Eye Contact**

The child must be taught to maintain

proper eye contact. Otherwise, they are often looked upon as mentally retarded.

### **12. Engage in Simple Small Conversations**

Try to engage the child in simple small conversations time to time. Keep on questioning so as to make her answer in a word or two that is easy to say.

### **13. Role plays**

Create role play situations to teach social situations. Encourage the child how to learn and deliver the dialogues. Then reverse the role and ask the child to perform without or little assistance.

### **14. Regular Visits**

Arrange for them regular visits to temples, parks, movies, any relative's house or community function.

### **15. Be Friendly**

Be friendly with the child. Make him/her feel free to share feelings.

### **16. Praise Often**

Praise the child often to keep on going in his/her efforts.

### **17. Spend Quality Time**

The teachers must advise the parents to spend a quality time with their child having a friendly chat about his day.

### **18. Never Ask for Loud Reading in Class**

Under no circumstances should the dyslexic child ever be called on to read out loud in class. Ensure this to save him/her from embarrassment.

### **19. Assessment Alternatives**

The teachers must have different assessment patterns for reading disabled students so that the effects of

dyslexia on performance are minimised. Avoid using the measures that place his/her disability in the spotlight. Oral questioning, drawing projects etc can be the suitable assessment tools. This will help building their confidence in classroom among with "peer group.

### **20. Awareness and Attitude**

Awareness and attitude of the society regarding special children is very important. Very often, the difficulties are multiplied by attitude malformations in care givers rather than due to the impairment itself. Media is a powerful means for this. The movie 'Taare Zameen Par' is one of the finest examples. So, here comes the significant role of teachers to make use of appropriate media at appropriate time with appropriate people.

### **Conclusion**

Helping dyslexics feel better and deal effectively in the society is definitely a complex task. But it must be kept in mind that these are the children of our future and they have a right to get help and support before they develop the dreadful sense of failure which is not good for them as well as the society. So the greatest responsibility is on the shoulders of the teachers of the dyslexic children to get involved not just in making the child to learn the reading skills but also in shaping the life by imbibing the essential social competence. This social competence will itself help the child in directing the child in the right direction. The teachers must take it as a part of their duty to spread the necessary awareness among concerned parents as well as society about the problem.

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