

September 15, 2016

To Whom May Concern:

It has come to our attention that there may be a misunderstanding about who is able to diagnose and treat literacy disabilities such as dyslexia. This letter is to educate and inform that **it is within the scope of practice of licensed and certified speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to screen and evaluate children (and adults) for dyslexia, diagnose them if appropriate, and provide therapy.**

Dyslexia Defined as a Language-based Learning Disorder

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development defines dyslexia as “A specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These **difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language** that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”¹

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability, and as such, is formally diagnosed after an SLP evaluates the child’s spoken and written language and consults with the child’s parents/caregivers and educational professionals.

The Oral Language/Literacy Connection

The connections between spoken and written language are well established. Spoken language serves as the foundation for the development of reading and writing. Spoken and written language have a reciprocal relationship. Furthermore, children with spoken language problems frequently have difficulty learning to read and write. Finally, instruction in spoken language can result in growth in written language, and vice versa.

SLPs are trained in the following areas that affect learning to read, spell, and write²:

- Oral language comprehension and use (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics)
- Phonological processing, including phonemic awareness
- Articulation (speech sound production)
- Letter/sound knowledge
- Word-finding difficulties

¹ NINDS, 2015

² Kamhi & Catts, 1989; Wallach & Butler, 1994

- Emergent metalinguistic awareness
- Narrative discourse
- Short-term memory

Position of the National Professional, Scientific, and Credentialing Associations for SLPs

It is the position of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) that SLPs have a role and responsibility to (a) prevent written language problems by fostering language acquisition and emergent literacy; (b) **identify children at risk** for reading and writing problems; (c) **assess reading and writing**; (d) **provide intervention** and document outcomes for reading and writing; and (e) assume other roles, such as providing assistance to general education teachers, parents, and students; advocate for effective literacy practices; and advance the knowledge base.³ To summarize, ASHA supports SLPs in identification, assessment, and intervention with dyslexia.

Position of the State Board for SLPs

The Michigan Board of Speech-Language Pathology was formed with the enactment of Public Act 524 of 2008. It includes in the practice of speech-language pathology “**identifying by history or nonmedical physical examination, assessing, treating with therapy, rehabilitating, and preventing disorders of speech, voice, and language**”. Because dyslexia is a language disorder, this definition indicates that SLPs are able to identify, assess, and treat dyslexia.

Summary

In summary, dyslexia is a language-based learning disorder. SLPs are qualified to evaluate and child’s oral and written language. This information, coupled with parental and educational reports, provides the SLP with the information necessary to make an informed diagnostic decision. An SLP’s diagnostic report should serve as evidence for a child to receive support services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2008).

For more information about the role of SLPs and dyslexia, please refer to the Roles and Responsibilities of Speech-language Pathologists with Respect to Reading and Writing in Children and Adolescents [Technical Report]. Available from www.asha.org/policy.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Board for the Michigan Speech, Language, and Hearing Association

³ ASHA, 2001