



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Understanding Dyslexia and Supporting Your Child

by Ellen B. Braaten, PhD



"A child with dyslexia gains confidence in herself... Appropriately, said text is set in a readable, sans-serif type to support dyslexic readers who might encounter her story... Affirming and helpful." says Kirkus Reviews about *Brilliant Bea* by Shaina Rudolph and Mary Vukadinovich.

This adapted excerpt from the Reader's Note by Ellen B. Braaten, PhD, explores dyslexia, its diagnosis, and treatment.

You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#). Enter code **MPKIDS20** at checkout.

Brilliant Bea provides readers with an insightful glimpse into the emotional journey and experiences of a young, creative, and yes, *brilliant* young reader named Bea, with dyslexia. Bea helps the reader understand the typical challenges experienced at school...She describes reading as a mix of slow motion and fast-forward and says that the words "jump around on the page."

What is dyslexia?

Children with dyslexia have difficulty accurately and fluently reading words. A few decades of research have shown that *phonological processing* is the specific problem that underlies dyslexia. Phonological processing is another way of saying phonics skills—the skills involved in understanding the rules by which sounds go with letters and letter groupings...Children with dyslexia have difficulty perceiving the individual sounds in words, and therefore have trouble with the task of breaking words down to sound them out for reading or spelling.

What might symptoms of dyslexia look like in young children?

Children with dyslexia do not have an event in their past, like an accident, that caused dyslexia and for the most part, their early development is normal. However, some children show problems pronouncing words or have speech delays in early childhood. By first or second grade they typically show problems learning to read. In fact, the problem might be evident as early as kindergarten in that they may have difficulty learning the alphabet or letter sounds. Dyslexia has a strong genetic component and tends to run in families.

WWW.APA.ORG/PUBS/MAGINATION/BRILLIANT-BEA

How can I find out if my child has dyslexia?

An evaluation for dyslexia is typically provided by a psychologist, who completes a test battery tailored to a child's age and level of education. The evaluation needs to establish that there is a reading problem by evaluating reading decoding, phonetic processing, spelling, and comprehension skills. A comprehensive evaluation will also typically include a measure of intellectual or problem-solving abilities, measures of general language functioning, and other academic areas. It is important to note that no single test can provide a diagnosis of dyslexia. The diagnosis can only be made after a comprehensive battery of tests have been completed. It is the overall pattern that is important, which can look very different depending on the child.

What are the treatments for dyslexia?

Two areas are important in treating dyslexia: *remediation* and *accommodation*.

Remediation is about helping kids get the skills they need to be competent readers. There are fortunately a number of proven reading methods for teaching children how to read, and they all have a few things in common.

- They are *multisensory* in the approach (using many senses, such as visual cues, touch, visual skills).
- They are sequential in that each skill builds on another one.
- And they are *phonologically* based (they use phonics to teach reading).

Accommodations are supports that are used to help children while they are learning to read and spell. They are also used for older learners. Using voice recognition software, listening to books on tape, and having extra time on tests are some of the most helpful accommodations.

If you are concerned about your child's reading skills, a good first step is to talk with your child's teacher. If more information is needed, child psychologists can provide support and additional testing. With appropriate remediation and accommodations, most children with dyslexia can learn to read quite well and become successful adults—even writing their own books, just like Bea.

If you are looking for a psychologist, the American Psychological Association has a [psychologist locator](#) to help you find a psychologist near you.

This Article's Author

Ellen B. Braaten, PhD, is an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School, the director of the Child Psychology Internship Training Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, and the director of the Learning and Emotional Assessment Program at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. Dr. Braaten is a licensed child psychologist who specializes in pediatric neuropsychology and psychological testing. She has authored numerous scientific articles and chapters on children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, depression, anxiety, learning disabilities, and parenting. She is the coauthor of *Straight Talk About Psychological Testing for Kids* and the author of *The Child Clinician's Report-Writing Handbook*.