



SPRINGER
Learning Center

THE EMPOWERED
Learner Conference
The Power of Executive Function

February 13, 2026

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**Dyslexia and ADHD:
What if it's both?**

The Empowered Learner Conference
February 13, 2026

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Chasing a Child's Potential

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Slidebooks

Check out the digital information in these slidebooks about your child's learning and executive functioning.

EXCUSES
ATTENTION DEFICIT
HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER
TREATMENTS FOR ADHD

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Introduction

- Dyslexia and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are separate conditions which often occur together in the same person.
- Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability characterized by difficulties with accurate and fluent word recognition, spelling, and reading decoding.
- ADHD is characterized by inattention, distractibility, hyperactivity and impulsivity.
- 30% of individuals with dyslexia also have ADHD.**
- Up to 50% of individuals with ADHD have a learning disorder**, most commonly dyslexia.
- Although the two share some common traits, they are distinctly different.

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What is Dyslexia?

"Ohio's dyslexia support laws (ORC 3323.25) define dyslexia as "a specific learning disorder that is neurological in origin and that is characterized by unexpected difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities not consistent with the person's intelligence, motivation, and sensory capabilities, which difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language."

[Ohio's Dyslexia Guidebook](#) page 8

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.....deficit in the phonological component of language

Phoneme - any of the perceptually distinct units of sound in a specified language that distinguish one word from another. (Different from letters.)

Bat and Hat \rightarrow B and H
paN and paT \rightarrow N and T

English has 44 phonemes (vowels, letter blends)

At Cheryl's


So, what is ADHD?

- ADHD stands for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.
- A complex brain disorder; a developmental impairment of the brain's executive functions (conductor of the brain).
- People with ADHD have trouble with impulse-control, focusing, and organization.
- ADHD is a developmental impairment of the brain's self-management system. Both adults and children can be diagnosed with ADHD.

(From ADDitude)



Diagnostic and Statistical manual of Mental Disorders – 5th edition (DMS-5)
© 2013

1) Six or more (5 if 17+) of the following have persisted for at least 6 months to a degree that is inconsistent with developmental level and negatively impacts functioning:

- a. Fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes.
- b. Has difficulty sustaining attention.
- c. Does not appear to listen.
- d. Struggles to follow through on instructions.
- e. Has difficulty with organization.
- f. Avoids or dislikes tasks requiring a lot of thinking.
- g. Loses things.
- h. Is easily distracted.
- i. Is forgetful in daily activities.

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2) Six or more (5 if 17+) of the following have persisted for at least 6 months to a degree that is inconsistent with developmental level and negatively impacts functioning:

- a. Fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in chair.
- b. Has difficulty remaining seated.
- c. Runs about or climbs excessively in children; extreme restlessness in adults.
- d. Difficulty engaging in activities quietly.
- e. Acts as if driven by a motor; adults will often feel inside like they were driven by a motor.
- f. Talks excessively.
- g. Blurs out answers before questions have been completed.
- h. Difficulty waiting or taking turns.
- i. Interrupts or intrudes upon others.

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- B. Several symptoms present before age 12 years
- C. Several symptoms present in two or more settings
- D. Clear evidence that symptoms interfere with functioning.
- E. Not better explained by another condition (e.g., anxiety disorder, autism)

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 **Three presentations**

Predominantly inattentive presentation

Predominantly hyperactive/impulsive presentation

Combined presentation

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 **Three presentations**

1) Both run in families (1/2 to 1/3 – genetics plays a part), and they can co-occur often, so people don't exactly know which symptoms are due to which condition (e.g., my dad has dyslexia so that must be what I have).

2) Both conditions misunderstood. For example, "a child struggling in school" is sometimes globally called dyslexic. Only recently did the field develop a universal definition. (or stigma)

3) Impulsive/inattentive children can be hard to test! So, the evaluator stops, or doesn't know how to really interpret the scores because of behavioral observations made during testing. (same of teacher or parent)

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 **Three presentations**

4) Both may underachieve in school.

5) Both can show difficulty paying attention. ADHD more global. Dyslexia more when language/reading demands are high. First, reading is hard, and they fatigue. Second, if a child can't do a worksheet or silent reading, he will look "off task."

6) Both can guess at words – ADHD more impulsivity, dyslexia can't unlock the code.

7) Both can struggle with reading – but different aspects. Those with ADHD can sound out words accurately but may skip small words or punctuation, lose their place, etc. Dyslexia – inaccurate and misread small and large words.

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8) Both might struggle with comprehension – ADHD due to skipping punctuation, not having the mental counter space (working memory) to hold all elements in mind while reading. Dyslexia due to inability to unlock the code.

9) Both may avoid reading because it is hard and requires sustained mental effort.

10) Both may struggle with writing, but different aspects. Both may show problems with organization, proofreading. But dyslexia also brings with it problems with spelling.

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How They Look Similar in the Classroom

- Slow, effortful reading
- Skipping lines or losing place
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Poor comprehension
- Avoidance of reading tasks
- Difficulty following multi-step directions
- Weak spelling and written output

• **Key point:** The behaviors look similar, but the reasons differ — making differential diagnosis essential.

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Overlapping Behavior	ADHD Explanation	Dyslexia Explanation
Slow reading	Inattention, poor sustained effort	Weak decoding/phonology
Poor comprehension	Didn't attend	Decoded inaccurately
Inconsistent performance	Executive function variability	Word-level instability

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ADHD + Dyslexia: Research Summary

- **Co-Occurrence Is Common, Not Rare**
- Large-scale studies show **significant overlap** between ADHD and dyslexia.
- **30% of individuals with dyslexia also have ADHD.**
- **Up to 50% of individuals with ADHD have a learning disorder**, most commonly dyslexia.
- Genetic research demonstrates **shared heritability** and overlapping neurodevelopmental pathways.



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Why They Overlap

- Both conditions involve:
 - **Working memory weaknesses**
 - **Processing speed challenges**
 - **Executive function variability**
 - **Inconsistent performance across tasks**
- These shared features lead to **misinterpretation** and **under-identification** unless both pathways are considered.



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So, first things first...

- Get a thorough evaluation from someone who knows and understands both conditions. Let them know your concerns about both conditions ahead of time and perhaps suggest breaking testing up over a couple days.
 - Be sure it includes testing of phonological processing and rapid naming.



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- If a child is diagnosed with one but you still suspect "more is going on," don't wait (not matter what anyone tells you). Keep asking questions. Again, find an evaluator versed in both. Remember – it is not rare to have both!!
- A child with both conditions will have both symptom clusters.
 - Inattention/impulsivity AND problems with phonemic awareness

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What are key things to know if a child is diagnosed with both?

- Addressing only one will not make the other go away.
 - Medication to address ADHD does not make the child now able to unlock the code of reading. *brains with dyslexia need to be taught to read differently*
 - Multisensory structured literacy does not make the attention and executive weaknesses go away.
 - May see SOME improvements but not 100%

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- Addressing only one can result in the interventions/strategies for the other condition being less effective.
 - A child who cannot read independently won't be able to benefit from use of the lists, templates, planners, or software/apps we suggest for those with ADHD, for example.
 - A child who cannot manage impulses may struggle with the intensive, fatiguing tutoring sessions needed to teach a child with dyslexia to read, or to follow-along with audiobooks or learn a new assistive tech.

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- ADHD is associated with cognitive difficulties (such as working memory deficits), so the therapies for dyslexia may progress slower and take longer to "take root." Be sure the academic language therapist is experienced in working with children with both conditions. The process may need "tweaking."

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- Once the basics of reading are taught to the point of fluency, there may still be lingering reading issues related to comprehension. SO, BE ON THE LOOKOUT for ongoing reading issues!!!

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- Tools/strategies to address ADHD will need to be less reading-heavy. For example, use picture lists or visual planners rather than word-lists and traditional planners. And check what the students write in their planners for accuracy!!
- They may still struggle with writing even once the spelling improves. They will likely need help with punctuation, organization, and proof-reading.

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Why Both Must Be Addressed

- Treating dyslexia alone does **not** resolve attention, working memory, or task-sustaining challenges.
- Treating ADHD alone does **not** improve decoding, phonology, or reading fluency.
- When both are addressed:
 - Reading gains accelerate
 - Frustration decreases
 - Instruction becomes more efficient
 - Students experience more success and confidence



Instructional Implications

- Students with both conditions benefit from:
 - **Structured literacy** (explicit, systematic, multisensory)
 - **Executive function scaffolds** (shorter segments, predictable routines; visual cues)
 - **Movement-based transitions**
 - **Micro-goals and immediate feedback**
 - **Assistive technology** (TTS, STT, audiobooks)



Key Takeaway

A student with both ADHD and dyslexia is not just a harder dyslexia case — they are a student with two legitimate neurodevelopmental conditions.

When we support both pathways, they can do well.

Structured literacy
Pair visual + verbal
Collaboration



But be optimistic....

- With appropriate supports and accommodations, folks with both conditions can go on to be very successful.
- It is never too late to diagnose these disorders and receive help.
- It is possible to learn and develop strengths and go on to lead happy, productive lives.



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Additional Resources

- International Dyslexia Association website – particularly the fact sheets.
- Managing ADHD In School: The best evidence-based methods for teachers* by Russell Barkley (2016).
- Overcoming Dyslexia - Second Edition* by Sally Shaywitz (2020).
- Executive Skills and Reading Comprehension: A guide for educators* by Kelly B. Cartwright (2015)
- My website – ChasingYourPotential.com



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The image contains two logos. On the left is the Springer School and Center logo, which features a stylized 'S' composed of blue and purple geometric shapes, with the text 'SPINGER School and Center' in blue. On the right is the 'The Empowered Learner Conference' logo, which features a stylized four-pointed star or flower shape in blue, purple, and green, with the text 'THE EMPOWERED Learner Conference' in blue and 'The Power of Executive Function' in green.

