

# Visual Encoding

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## *Is your child not remembering sight words?*

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Is your child:

- Having trouble spelling?
- Not passing the grade level sight word list?
- Not reading fluently?
- Trying to decode common words, like ‘where,’ ‘were’ and ‘school?’
- Seeing the same word in a book but sounding it out each time?
- Forgetting frequently used words like “the,” “as,” “if,” “mother” or “and?”
- Reading a passage but leaving out and adding endings like “ed” and “ly?”
- Taking one step forward in reading and then after a short break from school, taking ten steps back?

## **LET’S TALK ABOUT IT**

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If your child is really struggling with reading, he or she may be having difficulty with sight word recall. Reading may be slow and laborious.

**The same simple book, read over and over, may take forever each time.**

Maybe you’ve seen the word ‘mother’ appear fifteen times in “Are you my mother?” Sometimes it is even repeated on the same page. Your child may still need to sound out ‘mother’ each time it appears in the text. This challenge is indicative of a problem with

sight word recall. Children who struggle with sight word recall are not encoding and remembering what they see on the page. These children may really dislike reading. Reading takes a long time, and the pace is so slow that it is hard to remember the content. Homework may be a challenge because it takes forever and does not feel fun. Your child may say, “I’m stupid” or “I can’t read” or start to use a baby voice, reverting to a younger age during homework time. The child may ‘hit a wall,’ have meltdowns, yell and refuse. Visual memory and encoding challenges may go hand in hand with phonological memory challenges, meaning that it is hard to remember how words look visually (visual encoding) and how words sound (phonological memory). Your child may try to avoid reading all together, or he or she may insist on being read to instead of reading independently. The classroom teacher may talk about special reading groups or about enrolling your child in tutoring for reading. Reading is crucial to success in school so this problem represents a significant challenge.

## CLINICAL DESCRIPTION

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Difficulty with visual encoding of information could be related to visual memory. It may be that your child cannot recall the visual image of the word ‘mother.’ Difficulties could be related to trouble recognizing letters, letter blends and sounds.

Possible deficits include a phonological processing deficit, a phonemic awareness deficit, a phonological memory deficit or challenges with encoding and decoding. Often, these challenges indicate that a *learning disability* is present. A learning disability is a weakness in a certain academic subject, like reading or writing, while often other academic areas are not impacted. Academic performance below age and grade level in school may indicate a learning disability. Sometimes, an attention deficit may account for challenges learning to read.

**Learning Disabilities:** A number of processing challenges may contribute to a learning disability in reading or dyslexia.

When a child is unable to remember a word from sentence to sentence, challenges with *encoding* (putting sounds together to make a word) and *decoding* (breaking the word down into component sounds) are very likely to be the underlying processing problems.

Many children have challenges with recognizing sight words and with remembering the rules of reading. Challenges may hold true for spelling and writing as well. It will be important to look at learning processes and strengths and weaknesses to determine whether a *learning disability* is present.

**Phonological Processing** refers to auditory processing of sounds used to create words in our spoken language. It also involves associating sounds with letters. *Phonological memory* is the ability to hear and remember sounds. *Phonemic awareness* refers to being able to break a word into each individual phoneme, the smallest unit of sound. A child must also be able to take those phonemes and blend them into longer

and more complex words. When a child cannot visually encode information, it is much harder to recognize words and break them into small units of sound. The brain has to be able to capture a visual picture of that word to be able to read fluently and to spell words when writing [2]. When reading does not come automatically and is instead confusing and laborious, every aspect of school becomes a challenge. Therefore, it is important to identify a *reading disability* early and to seek treatment for your child to strengthen skills that include visual encoding and decoding. These authors recommend reading intervention programs that use multi-sensory approaches [1-6].

**Attention problems** may impact reading because a child must pay attention to the words on the page in order to use phonological or phonemic skills. A reading disability could be made worse by an untreated attention deficit. Sometimes children who have a learning disability, like dyslexia, also have challenges with attention (ADHD). Approximately 60% of children with ADHD also have a learning disability, so this co-occurrence is not uncommon [7].

## **WHAT TO DO IF YOUR CHILD DOES NOT REMEMBER SIGHT WORDS**

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**Practice rhyming.** It would be good to see whether your child can recognize and produce rhyming words. For example, you could ask, “what rhymes with car?”

**Teach beginning sounds and blends.** Can your child notice beginning blends, such as how “black” and “blue” start with the same sound blend?

**Try to break words up.** Can your child visually segment words by sound and notice the difference? Bl-ue/ Bl-a-ck. See if they can delete sounds by, for example, asking them to “say “play” without the “l” sound,” “pay.”

These tasks are phonological processing tasks, similar to those found in assessments like the C-TOPP.

**Consider tutoring.** If your child has challenges with these exercises, you may wish to pursue specialized tutoring. The multisensory methodology that underlies the Orton Gillingham and Lindamood-Bell methods is proven to work for children who have dyslexia [2-7].

**Sometimes it is best to have a specialist or private tutor work with your child because treating these challenges early leads to better reading outcomes.**

**Try paired reading.** Your child will need a lot of reading practice with or without extra tutoring. Instead of letting him or her struggle, try paired reading. In paired reading, the parent and child read the passage together. When the child pauses, the parent waits just a couple of seconds before providing the word.

This strategy can improve reading fluency and can make reading more fun. Another method is called 'neurological impress' where the child and parent read the passage at the same time so that the child can grow in fluency and can work on voice-inflection. This strategy is a good one for a kid who sounds like a robot.

**Try the 'popcorn' read.** Another reading strategy is the 'popcorn read,' which involves alternating page by page with your child. Use books with lots of rhyming and similar word structure like the *Bob Books* to help build your child's confidence.

**Try computer programs.** Consider programs like *Star Fall* that read the text to a child while highlighting the words. Your child can listen to a story while reading along.

Some reputable computer programs include:

- Starfall: <http://www.starfall.com/>
- Mobymax: <http://www.mobymax.com/curriculum/reading-skills-informational>
- IXL: <https://www.ixl.com/ela/grade-1>
- Waterford: <https://www.waterford.org/>
- Raz-Kids: <https://www.raz-kids.com/>

## SIMILAR SYMPTOMS

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*If your child is struggling with a similar problem, not directly addressed in this section, see the list below for links to information about other related symptom areas.*

- [Phonological processing/ phonemic awareness \(Educationally Identified Disabilities\)](#): processes highly associated with word reading that relate to breaking a word into parts and understanding how to blend sounds to form words
- [Selective, shifting or sustaining attention \(Focusing\)](#): difficulty with attention will often lead to challenges remembering things or paying attention to details
- [Processing speed](#): It is important to consider fluency in cognitive processing. A child may not encode information quickly enough and may be overwhelmed with text on a page
- Global/general memory deficits ([Remembering](#)): consider whether your child has experienced an injury. This concern would be more relevant if memory deficits have a more global feel (meaning that the child struggles with memory across subjects and situations)

## POTENTIAL DISABILITIES

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*Children who have significant problems in this area may have any of the following potential disabilities. \*Note, this information does not serve as a diagnosis in any way. See the 'Where to Go for Help' section for professionals who can diagnose or provide a referral.*

- [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder \(ADHD\)](#): challenges sustaining attention; distractibility; impulsivity; difficulties with sustained attention, shifting attention, focusing attention, these challenges could all impact attention to learning, and thus reading may not come easily. But if attention is the only problem, no underlying deficits in phonemic awareness or phonological processing will be present. Sometimes, ADHD Inattentive type and learning disabilities occur together.
- [Educationally Identified Disabilities](#): challenges with processing and then subsequent performance in reading is the most likely diagnostic consideration if you are noticing that your child is struggling to read. Learning disabilities in writing (dysgraphia), reading (dyslexia), or math (dyscalculia) may be the result of poor visual encoding.
- Traumatic Brain Injury: challenges processing may be due to a head injury. Does your child play extreme sports, or has he or she recently been injured? TBI may result in unexpected memory loss as well as emotional changes, headaches, and challenges with attention. Reading may worsen the headaches.

## WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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*If your child is struggling with this symptom to the point that it is getting in the way of his learning, relationships, or happiness, the following professionals could help; they may offer diagnosis, treatment, or both.*

- [CLEAR Child Psychology](#): to obtain a *customized profile* of concerns for your child, or *consult 'live'* with a psychologist
- [School Psychologist](#): to determine learning needs based on the child's neuropsychological profile; perhaps an IEP, 504 plan or RTI is warranted to help your child. Tutoring may be recommended; your school psychologist can help you locate resources
- Orton-Gillingham or Lindamood-Bell Certified Tutor ([Tutors & Coaches](#)): to teach the rules of reading to children in a multisensory format. Children with verbal or working memory strengths may do particularly well with this tutoring. Memorization and visual cues and strategies can help children learn to read even while it doesn't come easily. Additionally, programs like Lindamood-Bell learning processes and the Wilson Reading Program that many educators use may help your child
- [Psychologist or Neuropsychologist](#): to consider a full assessment and to consider possible symptoms within an overall mental health and cognitive processing context. This assessment can help determine the modality that you use to remediate reading. For example, testing may help determine that your child is a visual learner, and then visual strategies can be implemented in tutoring

*These professionals may recommend the following tests for this symptom:*

- [NEPSY, RAVLT, CVLT](#): assessment of memory, attention and processing strengths and weaknesses in children. The NEPSY provides a number of batteries looking at attention, motor, memory, phonological processing and phonemic awareness (Neuropsychological or psychological evaluation)
- [WISC-V](#): assessment of intellectual abilities, which can help us understand cognitive processing and determine what interventions may work best. The cognitive assessment is important because it will provide an idea of the child's cognitive strengths and weaknesses. For example, the assessment may contrast visual working memory from auditory working memory, look at visual-spatial processing versus verbal comprehension or fluid reasoning, and assess processing speed, which can certainly have an impact on learning in the long-term. (Psychological or School Psychological evaluation)
- [WIAT-III, WJ-IV, GORT-5, C-TOPP](#): academic assessments in subjects like reading, writing, math, and oral language can help us understand learning processes and see the impact of any executive functioning, processing speed or attention deficits on learning. Also, additional processing measures like the C-TOPP look at phonological processing and fluency. (Neuropsychological, Psychological, or School Psychological evaluation)
- [TOL-2, CTMT, WCST, TOVA](#): executive function assessment may help to determine the skills and resources a child has, such as the ability to plan, organize, and attend (Neuropsychological evaluation)
- [BASC-3, Clinical Interview, Brief Projective Measures](#): emotional assessment is helpful because learning disabilities can lead to feelings of anxiety or depression. It is important to cover all of these bases and to work to strengthen your child's self-esteem in other areas if academics are tough. (Neuropsychological or psychological evaluation)

## LEARN MORE

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[1] Shaywitz, Sally (2005). *Overcoming dyslexia: A new and complete science-based program for reading problems at any level.*

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Overcoming-Dyslexia-Complete-Science-Based-Problems/dp/0679781595/>

[2] Bell, Nanci (2013). *Seeing stars: Symbol imagery for phonological and orthographic processing in reading and spelling.*

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Seeing-Stars-Phonological-Orthographic-Processing/dp/1935596012/>

[3] Bell, Nanci (2007). *Visualizing and verbalizing: For language comprehension and thinking.*

Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Visualizing-Verbalizing-Language-Comprehension-Thinking/dp/0945856644/>

[4] Lindamood, Patricia (2011). *LiPS: The Lindamood phoneme sequencing program for reading, spelling, and speech — 4th edition, complete kit (LIPS, 4th)*. Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/LiPS-Lindamood-Sequencing-Spelling-Complete/dp/B004XIHYFY/>

[5] Orlassino, Cheryl (2012). *Blast off to reading!: 50 Orton-Gillingham based lessons for struggling readers and those with dyslexia*. Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Blast-Off-Reading-Orton-Gillingham-Struggling/dp/0983199639/>

[6] Orlassino, Cheryl (2014). *A workbook for dyslexics, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Workbook-Dyslexics-3rd-Cheryl-Orlassino/dp/0983199663/>

[7] Zeigler Dendy, Chris A. (2003). *Teaching teens with ADD and ADHD: A quick reference guide for teachers and parents*. Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/Teaching-Teens-ADD-ADHD-Reference/dp/1890627208/>

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How-to-help-your-child-with-spelling

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