

“Susan”

Susan is in 2nd grade, and her teachers notice that she is having difficulties learning to read, using a pencil is difficult, and she often looks inattentive. She periodically gets chatty, silly and distracts other students around her. As the day goes on Susan, who is usually a sweet tempered kid, can become non-cooperative. On the home front: Susan, with some frequency, has angry melt downs particularly when there is homework. She can have physical complaints on the evenings, or mornings before school. She wants to stay home, or run away from home. Susan sometimes feels she’s stupid, or blames her teacher or other students for her problems.

Learning to read is such a powerful experience for early elementary age students; it unlocks the world for them. I found Susan was very bright but has many of the typical problems found in students who are dyslexic learners, e.g., problems linking sounds with the letters used to represent those sounds. When reading I noticed Susan might see a word like, “forest,” correctly sound it out, but when the word re-occurred a few sentences later it was as if she never saw it before. When reading Susan also inserted words that weren’t on the page based on what she was predicting should come next. She might also misread a word, confusing /black/ for /back/ and not notice that it changed the meaning of the sentence.

Elsewhere I found that Susan had difficulties on tests which measure the cognitive processes related to reading, e.g., rapid, accurate visual processing; linking picture stimuli with the words represented; problems remembering sequences (letters of the alphabet, days of the weeks, months, and seasons); poor letter and number formation; and excellent comprehension for reading passages when I read them aloud to her. On the WISC, IV there was a large discrepancy between her high reasoning abilities, and low average working memory and speed of processing. Based on parent and teacher feedback, plus observing Susan working with me, I concluded that her attention difficulties were more likely due to challenges related to dyslexia than AD/HD, but should be followed. Did the attention problems decrease as remediation was instituted?

I met with Susan and explained just how very smart she is, and that she had a learning difference, just like her Dad, which made learning to read more difficult. The difference is called “dyslexia,” and there are many smart people who are dyslexic learners. I explained the difficulties people with dyslexia experience using examples from our work together, and interspersing my comments, with lots of praise for her intellect, memory, and willingness to try things that could be hard for her.

I told Susan that her parents were going to have her work with a tutor who knows how to teach dyslexic people to become good readers. Also, her teachers now understood why some parts of the class day were so hard for her. So, if they saw Susan become chatty when it was time to work they could think: “I bet writing this paragraph is hard for Susan. I’ll help her out.” Other recommendations included: 1, listening and reading along using books in audible format; 2, using a calculator because number formation and automatic math facts were hard; 3, being able to dictate written work to her parents; and 4, considering some modifications in the amount of homework assigned. Susan also is going to start using a computer based software program to help her learn to keyboard.

Please note: This fictional case study is based on characteristics typical of many students I’ve assessed. This case study is NOT based on a particular child. [Neuropsychological Assessment](#)