

# Dyslexia help that 'changed my life'

*by Susan Elkin*

DYSLEXIA results, according to some experts, from abnormal brain structure. In a dyslexic's brain the language area is often unusually symmetrical and there might also be tiny differences in the layout of neurons (nerve cells) and the way they connect, too.

The result is that most dyslexics have difficulty, considering their general ability, learning to read and write. Problems with numbers and reading music are very common, as are a poor sense of direction, weak time management and a lack of personal organisation.

A dyslexic child, who might be bright but regarded as dim, is quite likely to arrive at school minus pencil case or homework and to be baffled by most of what goes on in a mainstream classroom. That's very hard for a busy teacher to cope with, and it's all too easy to mistake a dyslexic child for a naughty or stupid one.

As Harriet Woollam, ten, who attends Brenchley and Matfield Church of England (Aided) Primary School in Kent, says: 'When I was in Year Four, I was really struggling, but my teacher had no idea.' No one knows how many people are affected by dyslexia.

Robert Field, author of *The Secret Life Of The Dyslexic Child* (Rodale 2002), says: 'Experts claim that dyslexia affects 10 per cent of any given population, 4 per cent being severely affected and the rest affected to a mild to moderate degree. I suspect that numbers are slightly higher because some children remain undiagnosed.'

Although 'dyslexia' may occasionally be used by parents of low ability children as a face-saving excuse, it must be taken seriously because in so many cases it's genuine. EastEnders actress Louise Jameson (who played Rosa di Marco) has a dyslexic son, Tom, 20. She believes the teacher in a Kent secondary school who told her 'I don't believe in dyslexia' was talking nonsense. So what can be done about it? Most schools try, although a severely dyslexic child needs trained, one-to-one help. That means a full statement of special needs and an assigned adult to sit with the child during lessons. It's costly and does not happen as often as it should.

Most independent schools have trained staff to help dyslexic pupils and arrangements for help. And there are books which parents and teachers can read and organisations offering advice and support such as the Dyslexia Institute ([www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk](http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk)) and the British Dyslexia Association ([www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)).

Or you can stop thinking of dyslexia as a defect and regard it as a gift which allows you to see the world differently, as the Davis Dyslexia Association does.

Ronald Davis is an American dyslexic who has devised a weeklong programme for children and adults. Pupils are shown how to clear up confusions regarding letters, numbers, words and language symbols by using three dimensional shapes. His method is used by 35 practitioners in Britain, 150 in the U.S. and 350 worldwide. Tom Jameson underwent the Davis programme last year. 'It's been life-changing,' he said, adding that for the first time ever he has read 'a few books'.

For years teachers and tutors had been trying to help him find a way around his dyslexia. 'But there was no specialist expertise and nothing worked,' he said. His mother Louise added: 'What's so outstanding is that everything in the programme is so positive. I sat with Tom for a week while he did this and the tutor, Richard Whitehead, never used a negative put-down word such as "wrong".'

Harriet Woollam also did the Davis programme recently. When I met her, she was in the process of taking the (optional) Kent 11-plus exam. 'It seems to be going well, and we think she will probably pass,' said her father Charles Woollam. 'Before she had this help with her dyslexia, she wouldn't have had the confidence to attempt it.'

Some well-known people have excelled despite — or perhaps even because of — dyslexia, including Albert Einstein, Richard Branson, architect Richard Rogers and poet Benjamin Zephaniah. The Davis Dyslexia programme costs £1,300 for a full assessment and 30 hours of individual, tuition and follow-ups. The cost means that it is beyond the reach of many families and, at present, there's no facility for getting help with fees.

'We are considering fundraising to set up scholarships,' said Richard Whitehead, who runs Dyslexia Kent.

[www.daviddyslexia.com](http://www.daviddyslexia.com)

Copyright  
Daily Mail 31<sup>st</sup> February 2005