

# NEWSLETTER

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### Pradeep Thangappan - How I Navigated Dyslexia



## Post-School Readiness

A question that confronts children, parents and teachers in the last year of school is: What after school? Fourteen years have passed by and this question has to be urgently answered.

For children with dyslexia and similar conditions, this question poses even more challenges. There are multiple issues to be sorted out - if the option chosen is higher studies, colleges and institutions of higher education have to have a firm policy and intelligent concessions in place, which are both empathetic and respectful. Subjects and access are very important and have to be chosen carefully.

If it is a job, then employers have to be aware of what is involved - it cannot be left to chance, because everybody works best when they know what is expected of them and they are treated with dignity and courtesy and, for their part, young people with dyslexia must also be helped to make informed choices.

This issue of our Newsletter focuses on exactly this, with experts giving us the benefit of their knowledge through experience to help make this choice which has far-reaching consequences.

We hope that you will find this useful in the decision-making process that confronts every young adult at the end of school, so that they can take their rightful place in the world.

The Editors

science student at a university that had no interest in understanding his invisible condition of dyslexia. Despite carrying a formal diagnostic report with him, he was told from day one, not to expect anyone to do anything about it. For Kamal, this was hardly news though. He hadn't received much help in his school years too. At college, he had never been able to complete his work on time, would always ask for extensions, and invariably got grade cuts because of late submissions. He also found it difficult to interact and socialise. On one hand, dyslexia affected his organisation skills and social relationships quite significantly and on the other, it also made him persevere and work with perfection even if that meant studying without sleeping for hours. He graduated with a high average cumulative grade score and is currently pursuing Masters overseas. He's still looking for ways to manage his anxiety around assignment submissions but one thing he has started to prioritize now – expanding his circle of friends.

Students with dyslexia or any other Specific Learning Disability, who may be pursuing their higher education even in well-informed and fairly inclusive universities may have significant difficulty

with executive functioning skills that involves planning, managing time, stay motivated, persevere and complete the task at hand. College years are specifically challenging if, in school years, these students were dependent on their families or educators to organise their day and curriculum.

All of the above puts the spotlight on higher education institutions in India to understand the real challenges students with dyslexia face in everyday academics. They need to ensure necessary provisions that enable these students pursue education seamlessly and chart out their unique path with a very realistic sense of their challenges and their strengths.

To all our Raahis, Mehers and Kamals out there in schools and colleges – you might want to know what Steven Spielberg had once said: "You will have dyslexia for the rest of your life, but you can dart between the raindrops to get where you want to go. It will not hold you back."

I hope to see more students with dyslexia talk about themselves, shine in the field they choose and continue to innovate.

## Navigating the Transition from School to College



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School to college is a big transition in anyone's life. It is important parents engage in lot of discussions to get them ready to face this. In my experience, it is better to start this conversation from the time their ward completes high school. Thus, they have two years for deciding on what would be more suitable based on their interest, ability and scenario of job market. This is even more pertinent if they have difficulty in expression and communication. I would suggest watching videos on admission process, college day functions, sports day, open house or anything that is available on the internet to get an overall view about the colleges they plan to apply. This kind of familiarisation eases the discomfort about unknown and helps them gel with the environment sooner. In this phase, trusting their ward's choices, giving space and helping them cope up with anxiety is a skill that parents should develop, as they will be seen as a role model and a confidante by their children.

Some degree courses have English and language papers too. A parent has to sit with their ward to help them understand the overall structure of curriculum, compulsory papers, core electives, non-major electives, skill development courses along with the time frame of exams. With almost all colleges following the semester pattern and college admission getting delayed for some students, clarity on these will help them cross the first semester smoothly.

Unlike school, curriculum structure and assessment pattern may be intimidating to many students who need assistance. Parents and students can talk to their mentors or class teachers to seek clarity. Those who need extra time or exemption for language/overseeing spelling errors have to approach sooner. Delaying or waiting for teachers to call may worsen the situation. Students may have to approach the office more than once to ensure they get necessary accommodations. For this, the most important step is to submit all the relevant documents in the beginning of the year itself and not wait till the exam dates are announced. This is because colleges need to get special permission for these accommodations from the University they are affiliated to, and this may be time consuming. Being proactive as well as tracking the process will help avoid panicking before the exams.

Parents should also understand that all teachers/institutions may not be aware about the accommodation process. In such cases, students need to be their own advocates, and being connected to support groups will help in smooth sailing. The first semester being a crucial stage of transition, parents should not overstep while hand-holding their wards. Allowing space and time for letting their ward take big steps builds the confidence necessary for their growth.

To handle classes, extracurricular activities, sports/games/arts, preparing for PG entrance exams, skill building for employment, time management skill is the key. A plan to complete short term and long term assignments is necessary. College websites usually provide information on overall timeline of activities, exam dates, the criteria necessary to appear for the exam. In case a student feels shy or hesitant to ask the teacher, the parents can help them find these details. Digital calendar and apps for alerting help

them meet deadlines for submission and to handle various activities. Once they handle this process in the beginning, they get enough confidence to handle most of the things by themselves.

Students can become part of special needs equal opportunity cell/diversity cell because peer support groups help them apply for accommodations/special scholarships, take part in activities designed especially for them and know the bigger world. Accepting their challenges, trying to find others with similar challenges helps handling the challenges successfully. This builds their morale and boosts confidence.

Most of the teachers are understanding once the students explain their challenges. Students can be given assignment and assessments in the form of PPT, word files, making a video instead of a written exam. However, it is better they develop necessary skills during the internal assessment by opting for pen-paper method, if the student plans to take exams in that format. They can avail accommodations during internal assessments also. Changing the background colour while teachers use digital screen in the class or requesting the notes in soft form and taking special permission for using assistive technologies are possible. One needs to develop and evolve notes making skills - bullets, pictures, tables, infographics. Sharing and using a classmate's notes can save time. Taking part in competitions and cultural activities, be it theatre, short film making, poster making, dance or sports helps the student stand apart in the class. This will help them get positive attention when they have challenges in scoring marks through conventional exams. These activities can also be considered by colleges for the internal assessment.

Planning, prioritising and organising their homework, assignments, exam dates and personal outings is a big task for them. Having a calendar, marking deadlines, setting alarms for every deadline are very important. Time alerts before every weekend, say on Thursday itself, helps to get an idea on activities piled up for the weekend and the week ahead. Eventually, this will help them prioritise. Using colour codes - say, red for urgent, green for completed ones, brown for missed submissions and so on, this way a student can understand their learning and procrastination pattern.

Based on the academic capability and with the guidance from teachers, parents can help their ward choose the right kind of textbook that suits their needs, ability and aspirations. In the school system, the textbook is everything; but once a student enters a college, the prescribed syllabus becomes important. This shift makes many things convenient if planned smartly. List of textbooks, reference books, web links, online resource materials are usually given in the syllabus. There are a lot of audio/video lessons/short term online courses available for every topic these days. Neurodiversity can no more be an impediment, once they start learning by themselves using these tools. A slow learner can repeatedly use these digital resources to learn/test themselves or a dyslexic can watch videos till they master it. Trying different fonts, colours, size to suit their needs helps them to become aware and turn them into self-learners.

Volunteering, internships in inclusive environments, taking part in competitions, being a part of NSS/NCC/ Enviro club or other clubs helps them get a bigger picture, socialise and develop communication skills at their pace. Despite academics being a challenge, every student with SLD should be a part of these activities. Eventually, these activities help them overcome their inner fears and give them strength to survive.

Every student enters college with the prime aim of securing a degree. Exam strategies do help. For writing semester exams, one also needs physical stamina, core muscle strength and dexterity, which may require occupational therapy or other suitable activities. Most importantly, for those with learning difficulties, they should be aware of the question paper pattern, number of questions in each section, so they do not overlook a few pages/sections inadvertently. From the beginning, they need guidance and practice to categorise questions - if it is an objective yes/no type or short answer or an essay. Sometimes comprehending a question itself poses as a challenge for students with learning challenges. Peer group discussions and helping them with what is expected out of them gives clarity. They need to understand where they have to stop, not to spend long time on the answer they are familiar with, learn to prioritise the questions, not to fumble on the number of words or lines they have to use. They learn these through trial and error by trying many times.

With encouragement, support and the right strategies, every learner can navigate their college life as a successful graduate!

## Employing Individuals with Dyslexia: An Employer's Perspective



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This paper explores the employer's viewpoint on hiring individuals with dyslexia, highlighting the importance of striking a balance between empathy, inclusivity, and maintaining quality standards. It delves into considerations for accommodating individuals with dyslexia in the workplace, addressing modifications, sensitisation, and the current landscape of dyslexia employment in India.

Here are some common challenges that employers might face when hiring individuals with dyslexia:

1. **Communication Challenges:** Dyslexia can affect reading, writing, and spelling abilities, leading to difficulties in written communication. This might impact tasks that involve writing emails, reports, or other written documents. Clarity of communication could be compromised.