

Choosing an Appropriate School

The following list of questions is designed to assist families who are investigating private schools for their children with dyslexia. The questions are intended to serve as a guide to help you decide if a particular school is the kind of environment you are seeking for your child. As you investigate schools, you may find that some of the questions on the list are not relevant to your child's situation, or you may think of additional questions that you want answered. Keep in mind that you know your child better than anyone else and ultimately will need to rely on your own judgment about what is best for your child to determine whether the school is a good fit. Use these questions to help you structure your thinking about your child's needs as you talk to school personnel and observe the school environment.

The primary motivation for seeking out a special school for a child with dyslexia is to identify a learning environment that supplies effective remediation for his or her learning difficulties. The first set of questions is therefore designed to help parents evaluate the particular reading program offered in each school.

Since children frequently have learning challenges in more than one area (e.g. difficulty learning to read along with attentional or speech/language difficulties), you need to make sure the school you are considering has the expertise to deal with these additional learning issues. The second set of questions is intended to help you determine if the school has the additional resources your child may need.

The remaining questions address concerns about the regular educational curriculum, the social atmosphere of the school and other practical issues. These questions are important to think about since you are looking for a school that can offer your child an excellent comprehensive educational experience in addition to remediating his or her reading disability.

You can gain additional valuable information from the following resources for parents:

- Shaywitz, S. (2003). In *Overcoming Dyslexia*, chapter 21, *Choosing a School*, contains useful information about school options
- Hall, S. & Moats, L. (1999). *Straight Talk About Reading: How Parents Can Make a Difference During the Early Years*. Good resource for parents to use to gain understanding of what constitutes effective reading instruction.
- www.readingrockets.org Go to section *For Families*—useful article entitled *Find Good Schools and Good Teachers*.

Questions for Parents to Consider When Choosing a School For a Child with a Language Based Learning Disability

Remediation Program – nature and implementation:

Certification/experience level of teachers:

Are they certified in multi-sensory language instruction?

Did their training include a supervised practicum?

How much experience do they have with the specific program used?

Does the reading program cover all areas considered essential (i.e., phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) and teach them in an integrated matter?

Are objective measures/benchmarks used to measure students' progress in specific goal areas?

How often are children engaged in remediation program(s) and what is the mode of delivery (i.e., small group vs. one-on-one)

Are there Learning Disability Teacher Consultants (LDTCs) on staff to help with implementation of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs)?

Are multisensory language programs integrated with other subjects to as to foster practice and generalization?

How is technology used in the school?

School resources/programming:

Does the school address other issues the child may have (e.g. organization/strategy use, social skills)?

Does the school have the capacity to supply recommended accommodations for my child?

What resources are available at the school (e.g. library, decodable books, books on tape)?

How are writing/penmanship issues handled? Is keyboarding taught at the school?

Are there extra-curricular activities offered?

For secondary/high school options, is the school accredited? (this determines whether graduates receive a diploma or a GED.)

Student body

What proportion of students at the school has the same/similar type of learning disability as my child?

How successful has the school been in remediating this type of disability?

How many years do children typically stay at the school? What is their experience with possible return to public school settings?

What percentage of the students goes on to college?

School Atmosphere

If the opportunity to observe the school is offered:

Do the students seem content, engaged in learning?

Is the faculty respectful to the students?

Are the children kind to each other?

Is the school orderly?

What are the disciplinary guidelines of the school?

In what way can parents be involved in the school and their child's education?

Issues of Practicality

How much homework is generally assigned?

How much travel time would be involved for me/my child? Will there be opportunities for socialization?