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MODULE 34: Information seminars

One of the biggest obstacles facing the dyslexic community is the lack of awareness throughout the general public. This lack of awareness leads to misunderstanding, mistreatment, and insensitivity to people that struggle with dyslexia. As a Dyslexia Therapist, there are a number of ways that you can bring awareness of dyslexia, and the dyslexia community to the general public. In this module, we will discuss how you can help others understand dyslexia, how you can affect real change in the world, and how to apply your knowledge and sensitivity to practical situations.

What you will learn in this module:

34.1 Helping People Understand Dyslexia

34.2 Discussing Paths to Real Change

34.3 Sensitivity Training

34.4 Case Studies

34.1 Helping People Understand Dyslexia

The first step to building awareness is helping people understand what dyslexia is. Dyslexia is a reading and writing disability that can cause a person a lot of frustration, and may lead to low self-esteem. To help people become more aware of this disability and its effects, we need to understand the misconceptions about dyslexia.

34.1.1 Helping People Understand Dyslexia – Common Misconceptions

- Dyslexia is not a sign of low intelligence. Dyslexia affects a person's reading and writing, not their intelligence. In fact, people suffering with dyslexia are often very smart and verbally articulate. They understand abstract concepts, and can think creatively. They simply have difficulty reading and expressing themselves in written form. Many dyslexic individuals have low self-esteem because of the difficulties that they face. It is important not to add to those difficulties with assumptions that they are not smart.
- Dyslexia is not a form of autism, Asperger's, or any other type of developmental disorder. While dyslexia can cause an individual to struggle in school or at work, the disorder does not come with any specific social interaction problems associated with disorders like



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autism and Asperger's. Dyslexia does not necessarily affect an individual except in his or her reading and writing proficiency (unless the individual feels outcast or ridiculed because of his or her condition).

- All dyslexic individuals deal with the same issues. The severity and nature of dyslexia's effect can vary greatly from person-to-person. Some individuals have mild forms of dyslexia and perhaps mix up only certain letters when they are reading and writing. Other individuals have severe forms of dyslexia, which drastically impair their reading and writing. If you want to help someone with dyslexia, it is important that you know exactly what he or she is struggling with through testing, observations, and interviews.



These common misconceptions lead to a general misunderstanding of dyslexia among the public. It is important to acknowledge these misconceptions so that you can go about informing and educating people on why they are incorrect.

34.1.2 Helping People Understand Dyslexia – Bringing Dyslexia to the Masses (1 of 2)

In order to properly educate people about dyslexia, it is important to do so in a way that the average person would understand. Sometimes, it can be hard to imagine a situation other than your own, but this is an important step to understanding what dyslexic individuals go through. It will help you develop a plan on how best to help them manage their struggles, and find success. Here are some basic ways that you can help people understand what dyslexia is, and how it affects an individual who is struggling with it.

- Dyslexia is a lifelong affliction. Often, people think of dyslexia as a reading or writing problem that is causing the individual to fall behind. People think that an individual can cure his or her dyslexia through hard work. Dyslexia will always be present. If an individual has dyslexia, they are always going to struggle with it. However, there are



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strategies that these individuals can use to manage it, and overcome it more effectively. It will not, however, go away.

- Give the gift of empathy. Help people who are ignorant to dyslexia understand what it is by putting them in the shoes of a dyslexic person. We often take things like the ability to read and write for granted, not realizing the power that comes with reading and writing fluency. These areas will always be a struggle for people with dyslexia. Encourage people to imagine what it would be like if they had difficulty reading, or difficulty expressing themselves in writing. If need be, show them what it feels like by writing messages that express how a person with dyslexia might see a text (reverse letters, jumble words, etc.). If you can help people empathize with dyslexic individuals, then they are much more likely to understand what they are going through.



- Help people understand how frustrating dyslexia can be. This goes hand-in-hand with the previous point. It is frustrating to have the intelligence to understand things, but to struggle with basic reading and writing skills. Dyslexic individuals need to be treated with patience and sensitivity, or else you are feeding into their frustrations, and just making the situation worse.

34.1.2 Helping People Understand Dyslexia – Bringing Dyslexia to the Masses (2 of 2)

- Break dyslexia down into parts. To help people understand how dyslexia affects different people in different ways, let them know what the different forms of dyslexia are.
 - Dysphonetic Dyslexia: People with this type of dyslexia have particular difficulty recognizing the relationship between sounds and syllables.
 - Dyseidetic Dyslexia: This type of dyslexia directly affects an individual's ability to recognize whole words and to spell properly.



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- Dysphonetic Dyslexia: This type of dyslexia is most severe, and is a combination of the other two. Individuals with this type of dyslexia have difficulty recognizing sounds and syllables, as well as whole words.
- You can still be successful if you have dyslexia. Plenty of people have found success in spite of their dyslexia. It is important for people to know that an individual with dyslexia is looking for patience and understanding, not pity. Dyslexic individuals often have higher than average intelligence, but they struggle with reading and writing. Dyslexic individuals are often highly creative problem solvers.



If you can help people understand this short list of ideas, you will be bringing dyslexia awareness to the people around you. Dyslexia is a difficult condition, but individuals who struggle with it can lead normal lives. They simply need to find management strategies that work for them.

34.1.3 Helping People Understand Dyslexia – Tips for Helping Individuals Struggling With Dyslexia

If you have brought awareness of dyslexia to people who formerly did not understand the disability, then you have accomplished a great task. For people who are in a position to help dyslexic individuals, like teachers, counselors, therapists, and parents/friends of dyslexic individuals, it is important for them to know exactly what dyslexic individuals need. While we discuss these needs in detail in other portions of this module, here are the basics:

- Decoding text
- Making connections between letters and sounds
- Reading fluently
- Understanding text
- Recognizing familiar words
- Blending



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- Pronunciation
- Learning new words
- Rhyming
- Spelling
- Writing long responses



These are many of the basic skills that dyslexic individuals struggle with. It is important to restate that dyslexia is a broad term and it affects everyone differently. Help will come from taking the time to assess and understand how dyslexia affects the individual.

34.2 Discussing Paths to Real Change

You have successfully helped people become more aware of dyslexia and the struggles it can cause. Now, what is the next step for making real change for the millions of people who are trying to manage this disorder across the globe? There are millions of parents and teachers who are trying to help dyslexic children learn to manage their disability while still achieving. It is important to understand that regardless of the severity or type of dyslexia that a person has, he or she needs extra help, extra support, and extra time. Individuals with dyslexia need to work a little harder at reading and writing to achieve what a non-dyslexic learner achieves. This does not mean that people with dyslexia are slow or dumb, but rather that they need to find different paths to learning. There are certainly many strategies that you can use to help a dyslexic individual manage the areas in which he or she struggles.

34.2.1 Discussing Paths to Real Change – Strategies for Success (1 of 3)



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While there are many possible strategies that will help dyslexic individuals learn, here is a list of some proven strategies that may help. Many of these ideas pertain to helping dyslexic individuals inside and outside of the classroom. In the classroom, this is going to require more differentiated instruction. The increasingly inclusive classrooms already require differentiation. Some of these ideas may seem simple, but they can generate enormous results.

- Give the individual multiple avenues for displaying understanding. It is important that dyslexic individuals continue to practice their reading, and not give up because it is hard. Giving them other ways to show that they understand the material can yield great results. Every so often, let students draw, act, or debate in order to show that they understand the material (whether in the classroom or at home). This will boost confidence and show you what the individual is truly capable of.
- Shade every other line on printed text. You can do this manually with a highlighter or digitally with a highlighter function. It will make the lines of text straighter and easier to read for dyslexic students.
- Use visuals, when appropriate. Give struggling readers a break when you can, and use visuals to convey information. You can use video clips, charts, graphs, art, or other visuals that will convey the information in a unique way.

34.2.1 Discussing Paths to Real Change – Strategies for Success (2 of 3)

- Use audio books. It is important that every child practice traditional reading, but audio books can be a great tool for dyslexic children who need to read a large amount in a short period of time. Audio books can be used in several different ways: some active and some passive.
 - In lieu of reading: If a dyslexic child uses audio books instead of reading the actual text, he or she will understand the material and be able to analyze and make inferences. However, this is not reinforcing actual reading strategies, and does not help the individual learn to become a more fluent reader.
 - To reinforce reading: Audio books can be very helpful for dyslexic individuals who struggle with reading. When the class reads a text in class, it can be very beneficial for a dyslexic student to go home and listen to the audio book of the same text. This reinforces the text that he or she has read, and allows the individual the opportunity to focus



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more on analysis than understanding. Understanding may have been a strong focus as he or she read the text.

- In tandem with reading: Audio books can be used strategically as a companion to the written text. Individuals follow along with the written text as they listen to the audio book, which helps reinforce reading strategies. It allows them to focus on analysis of the text. This strategy may take some time, because the audio book may move too quickly for the dyslexic reader, but it is helpful.
- Do not overwhelm with instructions. It can sometimes be difficult for dyslexic individuals to process a lot of information all at once. Give instructions in pieces, or break things down into steps. This can also go with new material, as it is important to break it down into pieces that are easily understandable.
- Group students with purpose. Do not be afraid to group students together for certain tasks and projects. Pairing a strong reader with a dyslexic student while giving them a task that requires both analytical thought and reading, could yield great results. The dyslexic student can rely on the strong reader to help with the reading, while the dyslexic student can focus on, and help the strong reader with the larger ideas.

34.2.1 Discussing Paths to Real Change – Strategies for Success (3 of 3)

- Most strategies for dyslexic individuals will benefit anyone. Anyone can benefit from the strategies listed above, not just individuals with dyslexia. This should make it much easier for you to implement them into the classroom or your home lessons. Helping dyslexic individuals does not mean that you ignore everyone who is not struggling with the disability. You can help the dyslexic child or student while helping others at the same time.

The learning strategies above can be used both in the classroom and in the home to encourage learning. The fact that they will especially help your dyslexic child or student is just a bonus. By using these strategies, you can help the dyslexic individual in your life without making him or her feel different. What is better than boosting self-esteem while you are encouraging learning?



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34.3 Sensitivity Training

Sensitivity training is a process that is meant to ensure that people act with a modicum of sensitivity to the people around them. In relation to dyslexia, it is about understanding the struggles that dyslexic individuals go through (as we have discussed previously), but also about how people treat individuals with dyslexia. Some of these ideas have already been expressed, and will be repeated (with further explanation) here, while some others have more to do with the legal protections that dyslexic individuals are given in most areas.

34.3.1 Sensitivity Training – Being Aware of Your Actions and Words

- Individuals with dyslexia are not unintelligent. They have a learning disability that causes them difficulty with reading and writing.
- If an individual with dyslexia is struggling with reading or writing, it is not a reflection of their lack of work ethic or their commitment to working. Dyslexia is frustrating enough without people constantly criticizing them for not “working hard enough.” Though a dyslexic individual’s reading fluency may be lower than average, he or she may be working extremely hard to achieve results.
- The disparity between a dyslexic individual’s intelligence and his or her achievement is proof of his or her disability, not proof that he or she is lazy or unmotivated.
- Remove the stigma from poor reading and writing. Use various grouping methods to ensure that your dyslexic student does not feel singled out or victimized because of his or her disability.



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- Dyslexia is not curable, but it is treatable. Find someone who works with dyslexic individuals rather than giving up on him or her.



- Do what you can to create an environment that is conducive to learning for dyslexic individuals or students. It is in your power, as a Dyslexia Therapist to make learning easier, to improve their understanding, and process information more proficiently.

34.3.2 Sensitivity Training – Legal Protection (1 of 2)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) protects dyslexia as a “specific learning disability.” This means individuals who are proven to be affected by dyslexia are entitled to certain accommodations. In order to qualify for such accommodations, a student must display a drastic incongruence between academic success and intellectual ability. A dyslexic individual is protected by law if he or she displays a contrast between reading and writing skills associated with dyslexia, and his or her overall intelligence. The idea behind this is to justify accommodations by ensuring that the individual is struggling because of his or her disability, and not because of other factors.



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In the school environment, there are two ways that these legally protected accommodations can manifest themselves: an Individual Education Program (IEP) or a 504.

Individual Education Program (IEP), is a collaborative plan to help students with disabilities perform better in the classroom. When students qualify for special education, an IEP meeting is held, comprised of the student's parents/guardians, the student, special education teachers, classroom teachers, and social workers (if applicable). The goal of this meeting is to use test scores, classroom anecdotes, and parent feedback to come up with a plan that will help the student be successful. The plan devised by the group is a legally binding document that the teachers and administration are required to uphold. The IEP is revisited every year (with an IEP meeting), whereby the group decides if the plan is working, and what changes, if any, need to be made.

34.3.2 Sensitivity Training – Legal Protections (2 of 2)

Section 504: Section 504 is meant to protect those who do not technically qualify for special education services, but who need extra help. 504 plans are not as legally binding as IEP's, so parents and administrators have a little more freedom when creating them. 504 plans are helpful for individuals with mild dyslexia who may need some extra help, but generally succeed in school without services. They can also be beneficial for individuals who are struggling because of more than their dyslexia (behavior, motivation, etc.).

While the type of recommended accommodations vary on an individual basis, some of the typical accommodations that may be detailed in an IEP or a 504 include:

- Extra time on classroom assignments and long-term assignments.
- Modified tests and quizzes.



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- Adaptive texts and audio books.
- No credit taken away for spelling, grammar, and/or punctuation errors.
- Preferential seating.
- Use of computer/tablet for written work.
- Oral instructions.
- Being given outline of lesson before class.
- Use of a dictionary or program with spellcheck.
- Can work in a different environment (quieter/smaller).
- Can take frequent breaks.

34.4 Case Studies

Let us take a look at some examples of individuals who are struggling with dyslexia, and discuss what needs to be done to help them succeed and flourish.

34.4.1 Case Studies – Case Study One (1 of 2)

Evidence

Billy has been diagnosed with dyslexia, but his teachers are worried that he is not putting forth much effort. In class, he seems to be distracted, often stares out of the window, and daydreams throughout the day. When the teachers call on him to answer a question, he seems lost. He often becomes combative. The teacher thinks that Billy needs to be placed in a remedial class with fewer students so that he can focus more.





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You call Billy into your office to talk to him about his performance in class. You start off the conversation by asking Billy what he thinks he does well, to which Billy replies, “nothing.” You decide to give him a few quick assessments to gauge the severity of his dyslexia, and as the questions begin to get harder, Billy’s frustration visibly rises. By the end of the tests, Billy is no longer trying to get answers correct, and his attitude has changed. You take this opportunity to ask Billy about his daydreaming and combative attitude in class. He replies that he often “gets lost,” and will “stop paying attention when [he] doesn’t understand what is going on.”

Looking over Billy’s answers, you notice that he has a lot of trouble decoding and recognizing familiar words in a short, timed testing situation. However, when you asked him questions about what he read and he had time to answer verbally, he seemed to grasp the content very well. How should you help Billy do better in class?

34.4.1 Case Studies – Case Study One (2 of 2)

Recommendation

Billy’s lack of attention and combative attitude both seem to stem from his frustration over his dyslexia. He was a very pleasant boy until he started to get frustrated with the assessments. First and foremost, Billy should not be sent down to a remedial class. He has the intelligence to perform in a high level class, but he is letting his dyslexia affect more than just his reading and writing. You ask Billy to meet with you once a week so you can work on reading and writing strategies that he can use everyday in class. You report back to the teachers and let them know what you recommend they do to accommodate him:

- More time on tests/timed activities
- Sit Billy in the front of class
- Provide visual stimuli to the class (charts, graphic organizers, art, etc.)

Billy is struggling a lot with his own self-esteem, and he often ends up taking out his frustrations on his teachers. In your weekly meetings with Billy, discuss how he can channel that frustration into useful reading and writing strategies. Encourage Billy’s teachers to be open to Billy’s ideas, and to praise him for his successes. Billy is a smart student, and could do very well in class if he focuses himself, and feels like he is valued and appreciated.



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34.4.2 Case Studies – Case Study Two (1 of 2)

Evidence

Ariana has been diagnosed with dyslexia, and she is struggling in a few of her classes. You take a look at her current report card, and it is as follows:

English:	60	Painting:	98
Fashion Marketing:	95	Social Studies:	68
Biology:	75	Algebra:	70
Cartooning:	93		

You contact Ariana’s teachers to find out what is happening in each of her classes. Her Social Studies teacher tells you that Ariana is not trying hard enough. He reports that she often does not turn in her weekly reading assignments, which require her to read chapters from the textbook, and answer study guide questions. However, she does really well when she applies herself, like when she had to create a collage that showed the culture of the 1950’s.

Ariana’s English teacher reported similar comments. Ariana is not keeping up with her reading, but does very well when she puts in effort, like when she was asked to illustrate a symbol from the novel the class is reading.



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Ariana's Biology teacher said that she is very impressed with Ariana's participation in class and that she clearly understands the material, but she does not study for tests and quizzes, and those are bringing down her grade.

Ariana's Fashion Marketing, Cartooning, and Painting teachers all gush over Ariana's creativity, her dedication, and her work ethic. Ariana is a model student in their classes, and they all wish every student were like her.

You decide to bring Ariana in to your office and ask her what is going on. She says she is trying really hard in all of her classes, but she does not know how to do well in her major classes. Her art classes are where she feels the most comfortable. She is having a hard time, but is not going to give up on the classes in which she is struggling.

34.4.2 Case Studies – Case Study Two (2 of 2)

Recommendation

It is clear that Ariana is a gifted, dedicated, and intelligent student. What the teachers are identifying, as a lack of interest and/or a lack of effort, is more an indication of the struggles that she is having with her dyslexia. Ariana claims to work very hard on her reading assignments and studying for tests, and you believe her. It is clear that her dyslexia is disrupting her learning. Whenever she is able to show her understanding in a more visual way, she excels and gets a good grade.

You decide that Ariana should meet with her special education teacher between 3 and 5 times per week. She can get help with the reading assignments with which she is struggling, and get more instruction in reading and writing strategies. You meet with each of her teachers to discuss what you have identified as the cause of her struggles, and ask the teachers to make a few modifications for her:

- More varied assessments, allowing Ariana to show knowledge in different ways.
- Extended time on tests.
- Shorter reading assignments with more focused questions.

These accommodations will help Ariana improve her reading and writing fluency, while also giving her the chance to display her artistic ability and creative thinking skills.



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