

DYSLEXIA INFORMATION SESSION

[Start of recorded material at 00:00:00]

Dayle: Welcome everyone to tonight's parenting talk where we're going to talk about dyslexia in primary school age children. Before we start, I would just like to give an acknowledgment of country. Wyndham City Council recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first custodians of the land in which Australia was founded. It demonstrates that you, or your organisation, are aware of the past and ongoing connection of Aboriginal people to place and land. We acknowledge the Bunurong and Wadawurrung people as the traditional custodians of the lands on which Wyndham is being built. We pay respect to ancestors and elders who always have and always will care for country and community today, and for future generations. It gives me great pleasure to introduce our guest tonight, Jodi Clements and Kate Finnie from the Australian Dyslexia Association. Welcome, Jodi and Kate.

Jodi Clements: It's a wonderful opportunity to meet the parents who have come together from Wyndham Library, and we'd like to thank Wyndham Library for inviting the Australian Dyslexia Association to speak with you tonight. So thank you, Dayle and Fiona. As president of the Australian Dyslexia Association, I hope that I can answer all of your questions. And of course we have the wonderful Kate Finnie joining us, who – I'm sure between both of us, we'll be able to provide an informative session for you all tonight. I might just pass over to Kate so you can introduce yourself, Kate. And then I guess we will be led by maybe the first question that comes in, but it can come back to me if you think that maybe it's applicable that I start with "what is Dyslexia?" But Kate, would you like to introduce yourself and a little bit about what you do for the Australian Dyslexia Association?

Kate Finnie: Absolutely. Hi, my name's Kate Finnie. I'm the National Advisor for the Australian Dyslexia Association. I've been working with the association now for about eight years, and it's one of the best jobs I've ever had, I've got to say. Helping parents and children is definitely something that makes life worth living. I look after lots of different aspects of what we do but one of my main things is I actually look after parents, and help parents find practitioners and help them when they need some advice or a friendly voice to talk to, to help guide their way when they've just discovered their child has dyslexia or they're struggling to find answers.

Jodi Clements: Thank you, Kate. That's wonderful. I might just lead into our session, and then I'll be guided by Dayle as well who will be presenting some questions. So parents, what we would like to do with this session is – I'll lead in first of all with what dyslexia is, and then what we would like to do is talk with you and get to the bottom line of what your questions are. So rather than us keep bringing up our own topics and talking about those, talking at you, tonight's session is going to be about having that interaction with you and getting to the bottom of your questions. So what I would like to start with tonight is that burning question of "what is dyslexia?" What we tell our

teachers as well as our parents is it's a really good idea to go straight to the word itself. Dys meaning difficulty, lexia meaning words. Difficulty with words, and particularly written language. So acquiring and using written language. Now if we keep that definition narrow and we keep it focused, then we're able to identify dyslexia a lot easier than blurring that landscape.

Now there's a lot more about how we go in and identify dyslexia but I'm going to leave that up to your questions. But I want you to know that any advice that Kate and I give you tonight will be based on what we call the science of reading, and if we come back to dyslexia being bio-neurological, we will then be coming from the research of cognitive science. So our association supports the most updated research which has been collected now over 40 odd years. Some of our research is actually 100 years now but the last 40 years has been vital in our progression of "what is dyslexia?" and "how can we help people with dyslexia?" So I might now go back to you, Dayle, and we can have a look at perhaps some of those questions from our parents and go from there.

Dayle: Jodi, we haven't got any questions yet. It would be good to just continue to hear about –

Jodi Clements: Yes. Hopefully, as I talk, and I have no problem in talking and neither as Kate. Perhaps then some questions will come up. I will go to now – we've looked at "what is dyslexia?" We've kept it very localised right now to written language, acquiring that language and using that language, but what might be some of the strengths of a person with dyslexia? So I'm coming in very early now with what might be some strengths. Although people with dyslexia have that one commonality of difficulty acquiring and using written language, many of them, and I could almost say most of them, have very good listening comprehension. And that is the ability to listen to stories and take in that information, and understand the use or the usage of spoken language. Now there may well be some overlaps for some parents thinking "but my child understands spoken language," but sometimes they have trouble expressing themselves. So we know that there are little pieces of spoken language that may interact with the strength of what we call "listening comprehension." So this then ties in with "how might we be able to identify dyslexia in a young child? Well if we have a look at: has early reading been difficult already?

So I'm going straight to reading right now. I will backtrack in a moment but I'm going straight to reading. So the onset of school and the start of the instruction, are they having trouble learning those letter sounds? Are they having trouble blending those sounds together? Yet at the same time, is it puzzling that they love stories and they love listening to stories, and at this stage they love speaking about things that they know. If there is a discrepancy there then I would start to think about more intensive instruction in the areas that are needed. So I'm not saying that anybody should be alarmed at this time, but what we want to do is help our parents go "something isn't right." Now most of our parents know this but they're not sure what's going on. So they're thinking "very good speaker, very good

listener,” but having troubles learning to read. Now I’m going to pass it over to Kate who will talk a little bit about the pre-reading skills that we can start to look at before that formal instruction of sounds and letter integration begins. So she’s going to talk about what’s called “phonemic awareness,” and I’m sure she’ll keep it as simple as possible so it doesn’t become too complex, and she’ll talk about two particular skills that are what we call “pre-reading skills,” that our parents who are watching and listening tonight can look out for before that formal instruction even begins. So I’m going to hand it over to you now, Kate.

Kate Finnie: So phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and perceive the distinct sounds in spoken words. Children need to be able to hear that the word “cat,” the bubble of sound “cat,” is broken – it can be broken up into individual sounds “c-a-t.” Children with dyslexia can have trouble hearing those individual sounds in spoken language. Phonemic awareness is a precursor skill to reading, and a lot of children pick it up on their own and are able to hear and perceive the distinct sounds without any support but some children struggle with it. The things that we’re looking at, the beginning – prior to school starting, is children – well the things we want children to be doing is playing with language, spoken language like rhymes, singing nursery rhymes, singing songs, hearing the beginning sounds of words and able to hear that the word “cat,” begins with the same sound as the word “Kate.” Hearing syllables in words and identifying syllables – and it might be as simple as walking up and down the stairs and saying their name “Jo-an-na,” as they walk up the stairs. Little things like that. Is that what you were hoping for, Jodi?

Jodi Clements: Yes. And what I want the parents to understand, that you will start to hear us talking about phonemes, talking about phenology, and you have probably heard the term “phonics.” Now when it comes to the ADA and our teacher training institute, we don’t directly use the word “phonics,” because the word “phonics,” has been passed around and means many different things to many different people. So parents when you start to hear – and it’s very much in the media and has been for some time now but – “your child needs phonics,” – basically what they should be meaning is that your child needs direct and explicit instruction in what is known as phenology. And phenology starts with what Kate was talking about, an awareness that spoken words are made up of individual sounds, and that when we blend those individual sounds such as “c-a-t,” we then are blending to form a spoken word. Now when they use the word “phonics,” they’re saying “right, now what we want you to do is bring those isolated sounds of what you just did then which is blending those phonemes, and attach them now to the letters “C-A-T.”

This is where we find that children with dyslexia have a lot of difficulty with both of those processes. What Kate was talking about at the phonemic awareness level, but even more so, and we’ve got research that says this, even more so at the letter sound integration. So we know that some children escape through who appear to have quite good phonemic awareness. It is actually more important to look at the integration of when the written

symbols come down on the page – because if we go back to our definition of dyslexia, decoding is one of the biggest issues that people with dyslexia have; they have trouble not so much always identifying the symbols, but attaching the sound to the symbol, blending those phonemes across, and realising that “we come back to a spoken word.” When we teach them, we start there with what Kate talked about, and now what I’m talking about with decoding. So why is that? Why aren’t we using a whole word approach? Why aren’t we just saying “C-A-T says ‘cat’”? Look at it, remember it, and “look, there’s a lovely picture of a cat next to it. Because science tells us, and the reading of science tells us, that that approach is ineffective. It’s very ineffective for people with dyslexia, and people who can learn that way may do OK but they’re going to struggle later on with words that – they don’t have any support of somebody saying “this is what that word is,” and they hear it and they hold on to it. So they’re the children that end up saying “Mum, Mum, Dad, Dad, just tell me what this word is.” And Mum and Dad try to say “sound it out.” They don’t have the skills to sound it out. So now we can see that decoding is important for everybody, and that’s what we want to see in the school curriculum.

Now I think what we will talk about now, and excuse my [laughs] little one

Dayle: I might just cut in because we do have some questions coming. Do you want to start answering those? I’ll start with the first question which is from Judith. “How should a school be screening kids for dyslexia?” And this also links in with the next question from Pamela which was “How do schools assist with a child with dyslexia?” and she also asks “How is dyslexia diagnosed?”

Jodi Clements: I think what we’ll do there is go to the first question with – if I’m right, and I’ll have Kate’s support here as well as we go through these particular questions “what should schools be doing to screen for dyslexia?” Is that correct?

Well a school can’t correctly screen for dyslexia unless they’ve had the training in dyslexia. So where we have our poor parents assuming or demanding “you tell me if my child has dyslexia,” the biggest disappointment, parents, is coming to the realisation that the school may not even know what dyslexia is, let alone know how to screen for it. How do we solve this problem? Well we’ve seen this problem – our organisation is around nearly 16 years old now; it’s taking time because there is no training that is compulsory for our Australian schools at the moment to know how to screen for dyslexia. It should not be this way, and we have fought very hard with other organisations to change it, but we’re going to be transparent here and say it depends on the resources and the training that the school has. So if they have good training, they can screen for your child. I guess something else that we see through our organisation that is disappointing is when a school says “yes, we can identify dyslexia, we can screen for dyslexia,” and they go ahead and do it, and the parent sends the screening tool into us because the school wasn’t able to evaluate it, the school wasn’t

able to then make an individual learning plan for the child because the school lacked the training. On the other hand, when our schools are trained to know how to teach people with dyslexia, then you know how to screen for dyslexia.

So you'd need to have the training somewhat before you can actually do the screening, and that's because if you do the screening properly, what are you going to have to do next? You're going to have to know how to teach them. So we need to see both of those things happening together, and parents, we are getting in there and training our schools. It's a long slog. We're not the only ones, there's more people coming on board, but we need more training. Now, what we might do is go over to Kate about the diagnosis question. And Kate will first of all tell us or talk to us about the importance of identification over diagnosis in the schooling system. Kate, so you're fine with that one?

Kate Finnie:

I think so [laughter]. There's two ways of looking at this. Diagnosis can be really important because it enables the child and parents to know what's happening, and we can look at the word "dyslexia," and we can say – we could perceive it as a label, but thinking about what children might call themselves, they then label themselves with the word "stupid." So the word "dyslexia," in comparison is not such a bad thing; in fact, it can be very positive for some kids to be able to understand that they've got a difference, and that's one of the most important things, is that it's a difference and it's just a difference mainly in the way these children need to be taught. And what's been happening in the school is that they haven't been taught the way their brain learns. So with a school diagnosing, diagnosis needs to happen through an education psychologist but diagnosis is a medicalising of something that's just a difference.

The Australian Dyslexia Association actually prefers the idea of profiling because that's normalising dyslexia and not making it a medical issue. But that's not discounting the fact that diagnosis can be really important for families to understand what's happening in their lives and for schools to get good recommendations that are going to support them to make change. Although, not all schools are able to read those recommendations and understand what they're saying, and what the change needs to be, which goes back to what Jodi's saying about – education for schools is one of the most important things we need. When a child is diagnosed for dyslexia, they should be tested for single word decoding, whether or not they've got what's called phoneme into grapheme correspondence, and that's the sort of thing where the child sees a letter and they can instantaneously tell you what the phoneme for that letter would be. So they might see the letter K and the child can go "k," and going on through all the graphemes. There's 44 sounds, and children need to know all 44 sounds, and we sort of expect children to have gained the 44 sounds and quite a lot of the graphemes by the time that they get to year two. And obviously there's the 21 consonants and five vowels; we expect children to have the the 21 consonants and five vowels by the time they finish prep. If they haven't got them by the time they finish prep, we know that there's a problem, and that's when schools could start saying

“we’ve got a problem, we need to do something about it, because this child’s not picking up the phoneme into grapheme correspondences at the same rate. I think I’ve gone a bit off-track there.

Jodi Clements: No, that’s OK, Kate, because I think something else that is a burning issue with our parents is about this wild goose chase that “if I go out and spend 1,000 to 1,500 dollars now on a diagnosis, then I’ve got that right now in my – I’ve got that diagnosis, I’m going to go up to the school now, I’m going to say I’ve spent the money on my diagnosis, my child does have dyslexia, now you come to the party.” And the truth is, we go back to that problem, parents, that some of you would have already been dished out, where the school now takes that report and very little happens. So how is it that the ADA wants that to change? Well every time a principal sends a parent out of their school for help, that principal doesn’t have the training that we want them to have. So when we train our principals, they don’t want their parents going outside of the school. They will talk to you about the importance of identification and then the best time to get your diagnosis.

So rather than run straight out cold and grab your diagnosis, what you want to do is learn about the type of teaching that they need, get that teaching – and we’re going to talk about where you can get that teaching if you cannot get it in your school – because they need a response to the best teaching first to find out if they actually have troubles that reflect dyslexia. And this is what we call a very common sense approach, but for some reason we’ve got that wild goose chase going on where nobody in some schools wants to deal with it, and it’s handed all over to the psychologist. And not every psychologist knows what they’re doing when it comes to the assessment of dyslexia. There are some that do know what they’re doing but we need to have an understanding of how to teach these people because that’s the primary wish that they have. “I can get my diagnosis, but then what?” So some parents will say “I was told that I couldn’t have my child assessed till eight and a half,” well if we look at the research from Yale University, that’s untrue; that might be some people again putting limits on what their diagnostic manual of diagnosing is saying. But you can identify children as young as five and a half by looking at their phonemic awareness first, and then some of their ability to identify the alphabet letters and how quickly they can name them as well as how many sounds they already know. So there are some very early indicators that we can look for if you’re concerned that dyslexia runs in your family. So Dayle, I hope that might help draw some questions because we’re quite happy to get into areas of controversy here as well.

Dayle: Yes. We’ve got plenty of questions coming through. I’ll go to the next one. This is Sarah. Their child has autism and ADHD, and they’re questioning if they are also dyslexic. Is there a connection here?

Jodi Clements: Well first of all, what I would like to reflect on here is making sure that we go to the neurology and the cognitive science that surrounds ourselves with dyslexia and with learning differences. One of my favourite is to go to Dr Anne Castles from Macquarie University where they have a look at where

these particular differences – and I know some people call them disorders, but the ADA likes to keep neurodiversity in the mix here – autism, when we look at our work of teaching written language tends to come more from the right hemisphere of the brain. So people that do a lot of research in autism, it will be tied back to the right hemisphere. And there will not be lesions there but there'll be differences that give you a child with autism, and also there can be different studies of genes and chromosomes and so forth that I won't get into tonight. ADHD we know is another difference. And it's about keeping those differences tied to the areas of the brain that they affect because that's how those specialists diagnose those differences. Now dyslexia is no different, parents.

When we have a look at the difficulty in phonemic awareness and the difficulty in single word decoding – attaching that sound to that letter and integrating the symbol to sound – that's tied back to the brain as well but this time it's on the left hemisphere, and it happens to be lower left, just behind the ear in the phonological region. Now we can see, could this child potentially have all three? Well the way that research has gone when we look at dyslexia as an inclusive difference, absolutely yes. But many years ago, they used to have an exclusionary approach where they would say “oh no, you can't have dyslexia if you have a low IQ,” or “you can't have dyslexia if you have something else going on. So that's gone now. So to get straight to the answer now, is that yes, children can have autism, they can have ADHD, and if they have trouble in phonemic awareness, single word decoding, and we keep the definition there of a difficulty to lead to the right instruction, then the bottom line may be a diagnosis might be complicated, it might be hard to find somebody that will do it, but I would get straight on with the teaching which that child needs and see how they respond. That would be my best advice. Because when children become complex, assessment becomes complex. Kate, did you want to add?

Kate Finnie: I'd just like to add, my favourite saying is, if a child can't read, what are you going to do? Teach them. So I think what – and that's Jodi's saying is that when you have a child that is struggling to read or spell, then we need to go back to what that child needs, and the overarching thing that the child needs is the correct teaching.

Jodi Clements: Yes. So we can go to the next question, Dayle, if there's quite a few to move through.

Dayle: Yes. This one's from Pamela again. “What happens when your child is writing backwards or flipping their letters and not recognising it's flipped?”

Jodi Clements: Yes. So far in our talk tonight, we've talked about phonemic awareness and decoding. When we look at written language, reading is written language and so is writing and so is spelling, and that's the orthography or one part of our orthography is that ability to be able to take our thoughts down to the page and transcribe them. Some children early on when they go to learn how to transcribe down to the page using our alphabet have trouble with a couple of their systems. So when we're looking at the multi-sensory systems that

we use in our instruction of MSL, we take into account that the eyes are the servant, the ears are the servant, and then the motor system of being able to write is important as well. Why is it important to then look at these samples that Pamela has brought up about these reversals? And I'm going to writing first. So they go to write a B, and down comes a D, and that's a reversal. Or a B to a P which is an inversion. We tend to know again that the motor system's got some differences in there. The visual system needs to work together of course but it tends to be more of the motor system that's got some glitches in it when it comes to the formation of the letters.

So Pamela, we use techniques in MSL to correct the motor system because it's motor sensory, and we do practice, but of course we bring in two to three senses at the same time, and that helps correct them. Where a child visually sees a P as a B, an inversion or a reversal, then perhaps the eyes have some glitches there when it comes to reading them. So the bottom line is a multi-sensory approach that engages those three senses starts to align them and strengthen them where we focus on the letters at hand. So we're not using any snake oil here with lots of glitter and lots of shaving cream; we're going to take those three senses which is multi-model which we're hearing more about and we're going to realign those systems the best way we can and see how they again respond which is what Kate and I have both been talking about, you've got to get in and teach these systems to see, is there just a little glitch or is there a big glitch?

Kate Finnie: And something else that's important is that children will flip and inverse letters up to about age seven and that's OK. You'd expect them to stop doing that after age seven. So if they're doing it over age seven, now you need to look at other possibilities such as dysgraphia. But it's quite normal for a little prep to flip letters; they're actually going through a process in their brains where they're organising things in space and it's quite normal, but it's at about age seven that that's the point that you start worrying if it keeps going.

Jodi Clements: Yes, and I was just going to add on there, Kate, and our parents and Dayle, that it's important to not just look for that particular symptom and think that that is dyslexia, because it's not actually in the definition of dyslexia that the science talks about, but it is something to look out for, particularly if it's the motor system, and the child goes on to have what's called dysgraphia which Kate mentioned which is difficulty with symbols now. So difficulty getting those symbols down on the page, difficulty spelling, difficulty getting thoughts to paper, but wonderful ideas. And it's possible that some people have dyslexia and dysgraphia as well.

Dayle: Thanks. I'll ask the next question which is from Adrian, and they've asked "Do children with dyslexia have heightened skill set in other areas? As I've heard they may have photographic memory or are more creative, many high achievers e.g. Richard Branson or Steve Jobs have dyslexia. Are there any positives to having dyslexia?"

Jodi Clements: Well I'd like to take this one first and then Kate may add. In my lived

experience of coming from a family of dyslexics and dysgraphics, and the people that I have met throughout 22 years now in assessment, and talking to them, I have found that many people with dyslexic have other talents and have other strengths, and some amazing abilities, similar to people who may not have dyslexia. But what I like about people with dyslexic is when their social and emotional components are looked after early on, they have an equal chance like everybody else to find that passion and practise that passion, and when they do – so when their strengths are cultivated and their difficulties are minimised, their self-esteem stays in a better place and there's a higher chance, like everybody else without dyslexia, that they will have a fair go at finding their passion. Again, my lived experience of people with dyslexia is that sometimes you will come across people who just happen to have the most amazing ideas.

And I think, like Richard Branson, I've met many that have amazing business talents where they come up with ideas of how to run a business, and as young as six years old. Because I've come across one myself who I used to teach, and he said "I've just saved up 80 dollars in a couple of days," and I said "wow, how did you do that in a few days?" and he said "don't tell anyone," and parents, this was a long time ago so I can tell you now, he said "don't tell anyone and it's all coins." And I said "what have you been doing?" and he said "I have a couple of bike locks, and I lock some bikes up and it costs two dollars to have me undo them." And he was doing this for a while, and I was "OK, well I think I'll keep this confidential, I'm not sure I want to get too involved there," but what I'm saying here is, maybe that's not the right thing to do but the street smarts with some of them are definitely there. I met another little one who was selling his drawings at school for ten cents.

So some of them can have this very entrepreneurial relationship with the world early on, and they can also – many of them, they could sell ice to the eskimos. Because I've taught many of them where 20 minutes has gone by and I said "we're supposed to be doing our lesson," because they were so charismatic that they pulled me in with all this wonderful information. So that's my lived experience, but when we go to research, there are some schools of thought that are still quite on the bandwagon that there is no evidence that people with dyslexia have particular talents. But if we use a common-sense approach, I think we all should have an equal ability to find our talents, practise those talents and become very talented. Kate, did you want to add anything about the talents? Because you work with people with dyslexia too.

Kate Finnie:

Yes. I just saw the most beautiful message from a parent on one of the dyslexia sites and I've had two students that reflected this message so beautifully that I think it's a good one. I always like to joke about how children with dyslexia can flip letters, so we've spoken about that, it's actually more likely dysgraphia at the point that I'm seeing it and they're doing it. But they're able to take a P and turn it into a Q, and a D, and a – turn that figure around. And if I held up my chair and turned it around, I'd be able to say to you "OK, what is it now?" and flip it over, and what is it

now? And it's always a chair. And that's basically what these kids are doing in their mind's eye, they're rotating objects in their mind's eye. So they've got a really strong ability with geometry which lends itself to woodwork. And this message that was in the dyslexia site was this mum saying "my 18 year old has just finished his carpentry apprenticeship," so he started his apprenticeship when he was young, his mum – left his school and going to TAFE because she could see that that was something that he was passionate about, and school was just hurting way too much. And he blossomed after he left school and went into the apprenticeship. He now runs a building site in Balmain which is a fairly expensive suburb in Sydney. He's running a multi-million dollar building site for his boss, and the mum had these most beautiful photographs of this young man building her a Federation staircase in her house. And she was just full of pride at what he'd achieved and where he'd come from and what he was now.

And I've seen that in two other students. I've got a student who is now in his third year of carpentry apprenticeship and he was actually a child that – when I was seeing him, he was really suffering from his mental health because of what he'd experienced at school not being able to learn to read, and he was getting so depressed about it that he was having some suicide ideation and he was just desperate to leave school. Finally, his mum relented and let him leave at the end of year 11, and you should see that boy now, he is glowing, he is so confident. He's got the gift of the gab, that is definitely a strength I see with a lot of these children is that they're able to talk at very sophisticated levels to adults, all sorts of people. They're people people. They respond so beautifully. And I'm watching him and the confidence he's growing in his new career, and I'm seeing a boy that one day will wear a suit and manage a whole lot of other people on building sites because he's just got the knack, a beautiful knack.

And I've got another boy who's still at high school, hasn't got to that point yet but he's pushing that way. When he first came to me he was in year three and there was a building site just down the road and he asked me to take him to look at the building site, and he noticed the zig-zag structures under the floorboards. And I said "do you know why there might be zig-zags there? And he worked it out. He knew that it was a structural – the triangles were structurally important. So he's a problem solver. He was already working things out and using visual reference and understanding of how things work to develop his own understanding of the world. He's also going to go into an apprenticeship, and I can't wait to see how he blossoms. They've all got similar strengths but there's lots of kids with other strengths. There's children who are very strong sports people, I've known some children that were amazing musicians, acting – some of my kids are great at giving speeches; I suspect a couple of them may become politicians [Laughter].

Jodi Clements: But also, I think for our parents who are worrying about their children that may have dyslexia with low self-esteem, why they haven't found their place yet, and I think this is another really transparent area that deserves a little bit of time – not too much because I know we've got more questions – but I think those children who tend to not be identified early, not assisted at

school, not really have a lot of support at home to find what that passion is because it takes time to drive to sports, it takes time to take art lessons, these are also the children that the ADA want to locate through our schools and find them, and have programs at school that help cultivate their confidence and find out what they really want. Now most of them want to read, most of them want to read so we know that if we teach them to read, they have a burning desire to read, then their self-concept starts to lift and they can start to think about other areas and being successful in other areas. So we don't want to paint such a rosy picture that everybody's going to be the next Richard Branson but certainly with the right support at school – and very sadly, my adults are telling me “I only had one teacher that believed in me,” but at least they had fun, but we want that support all the way through and we still think schools have a responsibility there because they do have them every day of the week.

So I just wanted to add that there's an upside and there's also a downside, and we've got to be able to reach every single child, including the children who are quite vulnerable. So we could move to our next question now.

Dayle: We've got one from Pamela, and they've asked “Is there a list of schools that have the resources to accommodate dyslexic children?”

Jodi Clements: Yes. Kate is responsible for the ADA's resource and she will talk to our parents about the schools that we train and how to find those schools. Kate.

Kate Finnie: Yes. So we train lots of teachers, and of those teachers, they've become accredited with the ADA, and then their schools become dyslexia-aware schools. On our Australian Dyslexia Association website, there's a list of the schools that currently have dyslexia-aware accreditation. That's just a burgeoning group. We've got more coming up, so if anyone is interested in finding out about more of the schools in Victoria that offer an understanding of dyslexia and are able to support children, then if you could contact me at the Australian Dyslexia Association I'd be more than happy to forward you a list of schools that we've got. One thing that's important to remember with the lists that we've got is that, except for the ones on the website, the other lists are determined by the teachers that are there, and we can't determine where teachers go, so we may have a trained teacher or teachers in a school but we may not know if those teachers leave the school. So it's always important to ask questions and to ensure that the school that you're looking at is going to be able to support your student, so you need to ask questions like “do you have a MSL, will my child have access to a teacher who has MSL training?” things like that, that's really, really important.

But in the meantime we've got some lists of awesome schools in – Melbourne has just got quite a few awesome schools.

Dayle: I'll just jump in just to say that we will be emailing these resources to anyone who has been booked in tonight, so we'll get that to everyone.

Kate Finnie: Thanks Dayle. Everyone can go on the website and click on the button for

dyslexia-aware schools in the directory, and a whole lot will come up. So if you're keen to have a little peek tonight, hop on the website and have a peek tonight.

Dayle: The next question which I think might have been answered earlier is from Adrian and it is "Is dyslexia inherited from parents?"

Kate Finnie: Well what we do know, Adrian, about dyslexia is that it's neurobiological and it is genetic. It can skip a generation, and this has happened again through diagnostic involvement with parents where both parents have been very, very literate; one may be a journalist, one may be a dentist who – they could still have dyslexia but I've found that they've said "no, we never had trouble reading." So there's a chance in some families that it can skip a generation but it is genetic. Thanks Dayle.

Dayle: Thank you. We'll go to the next one which is from Camilla, "What as a parent should we be doing? Our daughter was diagnosed four years ago but she hides it well so her school said she didn't need intervention. Her writing and spelling are very poor. Her new school are keen on using technology apps to help with reading and writing, but it isn't going to help her to learn the skills."

Jodi Clements: Do you want me to help? I can help [Laughs].

Kate Finnie: Things about that one were triggering me and I went down a bunny hole in my head, so sorry.

Jodi Clements: I think that happens sometimes when you get a question that's fully loaded, there's quite a lot in there. But if we go to "why is it that some girls escape through the net in the classroom?" and we go to the research about girls – first of all, I'd just like our parents to know that it's about equivalent when it comes to dyslexia between girls and boys. So many years ago, they thought that it affected boys more, and why was that, because this is leading me back to the answer to that question. It was because boys went to secondary effects of misbehaviour, class clown, and drawing attention to themselves. Girls on the other hand, when boys were being identified and mainly for mucking up in the classroom, the girls tend to become more introverted, more quiet, trying to hide their troubles with reading. Maybe their reading's not too bad and they just slip through, and we see this with some people with dyslexia that – dyslexia can occur from mild to moderate, so you can still have dyslexia and be mild and appear to be reading, and a lot of them can actually pretend to read early on as well, particularly with those PM type readers that we're not too fussed on; they can learn those off by heart.

So girls learn to do these types of things to go under the radar, and I think the next part of that question is, when the parent knows this is going on, what can they do about this? I think one, it depends on the age before we start thinking about assisted technology because there's a period of time when the children still – the child still developmentally needs to be taught

how to read, and then it goes to read to learn. So when should assistive technology come in? Well at the moment it's coming in way too early because most skills are not being taught in Australian schools, they're not following the science of reading. So we do see it's coming in way too early. Not saying that's harmful but what we're saying what is harmful is that the teachers haven't been able to follow the science of reading early enough to minimise the use of assistive technology.

So what happens when nothing's been done for your daughter and they're still struggling? Then we're going to have to go to assistive technology. So even in a school that's not trained in the science of reading, I'm surprised how many are ready to give assistive technology. And I guess that's why. Because when they're not trained in the science of reading, they're going to have that – step up and say “well we're going to take them to a scanning pen now, we're going to take them to a word processor now.” Technically, what we want to do is early on get the good reading skills in, and assistive technology can perhaps come in as an accommodation around that year four, five and six, getting ready for high school. So I hope that answers the question but I know it was heavily loaded so I know why Kate, you got frozen there, but I hope that has helped. And if there is any aspect where people need more help, you will have some channels in the resources that Dayle will send you.

Kate Finnie: Yes. I think it's important that parents know that schools can use assistive technology as an excuse. They say “oh yes, but we're teaching them how to use technology which will support them,” and in doing that what the school's not doing is teaching your child to learn to read and write, and that should be the first thing that's being done, learning to read and write. And then the technology comes in. It's a tool and it should only be used as a tool. It shouldn't be the excuse for not learning to read and write.

Jodi Clements: Yes. And I might add another that I receive from a lot of parents, is how – I just lost my train of thought, sorry, it's gone [laughs].

Dayle: That's all right. We're getting close to the end. I am just going to choose one because we are getting to the end, that might cover some of the others. This one's from Laura, “How can you support a dyslexic child during individual reading time?” and they've asked “at school,” but I am putting this in myself – just in general, if you're with a parent assisting them on one-on-one reading time, how can you help your child during that time?

Kate Finnie: I saw the question and I'm trying to toggle between the question that I saw and then how it's changed a little bit. Parents, when you're reading with your children, if – so me not knowing what you know in your background knowledge, I would – your first aim should be that your children learn to love reading, and so reading lots of texts to them, lots of lovely rich language to build up their vocabulary because vocabulary is really, really important for children to start picking up. And children who aren't reading, they're not going to be picking up vocabulary at the same rate as their peers, so that is definitely one thing that you can be doing. If you're reading PM readers, if

the school has PM readers and they're sending them home, I would be encouraging your child to read the words you know that they can decode, and giving the words that they can't. If you understand how words can be broken up into their individual syllables and then sounds, you could be assisting your child to see the structure of words within words or the structure of syllables within words, so that you can start helping them that way. Yes, parents reading at home I think it's really important that you help your child enjoy it.

Jodi Clements: Yes. Kate, I was just going to interject there and say that it's a really – parents really should be in a role where you're able to cuddle your child on the beanbag or on the bed and read a story to them for the purpose of reading that story. I think it's a really sad situation that we find ourselves in when our parents are asking how to teach their own child to read, when that's why we send them to school. So my number one question would be “is my child actually being taught the skills, the beginning skills, of how to read that book in reading time in the class?” and if they aren't, then I need to know how reading is being taught, because if they're just being given a PM, and “drop everything and read,” time, that's not good enough. We know that you don't teach reading through reading. The reading of science tells us that you need to teach reading via single words because connected text is made up of single words. So parents, I find that, like you, that it's very disappointing that you may be put in a position and it's your only choice that you now have to teach your child to read. So yes, we can definitely help you out, and Kate had some wonderful ideas that you can do there. But please advocate for the science of reading and the reading pledge in your schools, please.

Dayle: Thanks for that. We do have two minutes [laughter].

Jodi Clements: Can I just say something else about the – because I've just read that question again, and this is why I got thrown out, “how can you support a dyslexic child during individual reading time at school?” I had a student that got very upset about “drop everything and read,” because he wasn't allowed to choose the book that he wanted to at the library for “drop everything and read.” Now the book he wanted to choose was a book that was a nonfiction book and it was out of his reading ability but he could get a lot out of the pictures and that's what he wanted to do, and the school tried to prevent him, they tried to make him get a baby book. And he was in year five at the time and he did not want to sit in front of his peers with a baby book.

So I think if schools could have “drop everything and read,” I would be enforcing that the child is allowed to read the book they choose, and no-one is allowed to choose the book for them. And I love graphic novels, I think graphic novels are awesome. Children can get a lot of comprehension out of graphic novels. The graphic novels I'm thinking about are just illustrations, and there are some very sophisticated ones. If you go to a niche bookshop, you should be able to find some of them. They're brilliant, and I think children who are struggling to read should be allowed to read books like that in “drop everything and read.” Personally, I don't think that schools should have “drop everything and read,” it's a waste of instructional time and it's

not fair to the children that can't read. But if there is "drop everything and read," then insist that the child is allowed to choose the book they want to read, and if it's a book about model making and what they're doing is looking at the diagrams and things, you can bet your bottom dollar that they're getting a lot out of that. Sorry, I just had to say that.

Dayle: I agree. I really like that. And we do have a large collection at our libraries with graphic novels, junior nonfiction, anything, so we also try and encourage children to borrow what they like because if you're reading and you're not interested, you're not going to continue to do it and want to do it. So reading should be a fun thing that you get something out of. Well we've just come to the end of our session tonight. I hope that everyone was able to get something out of it and get their questions asked. I'm sorry if we weren't able to get to your question but hopefully – if the question was asked; we just got some feedback from Hannah that says "Thank you so very much, this has been very helpful. As a parent with a very high-functioning child who can't read and write but is so smart, it's very hard to navigate not only their emotional being and their eagerness to learn." So that's some good feedback to hear. I have posted the link to the ADA's website in the chat but we will be sending out some of the resources that we talked about tonight, to everyone tomorrow. Thank you all for coming. And thank you to Jodi and Kate.

Jodi Clements: Thank you very much, Dayle and Wyndham Library and the parents that joined us tonight. Thank you.

[End of recorded material at 00:58:57]