

Dyslexia

Implications in the workplace

It is becoming increasingly apparent that dyslexia in its various forms is a common condition, few employees are aware that it is covered under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It is therefore possible that you may be approached by an employee who has realised that he or she is dyslexic or have an employee for whom you have concerns, particularly with regards to competence and capability issues, where you wish to explore the possibility of a diagnosis of dyslexia and the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Dyslexia is a syndrome rather than a specific diagnosis. The term covers a range of conditions and levels of disability from extremely mild forms to particularly severe and debilitating forms. Many individuals who were originally thought to be dim or of low intelligence have subsequently been found to be dyslexic. Many people with dyslexia succeed spectacularly, for example Albert Einstein, but in doing so they have to work even harder than other individuals.

Dyslexic individuals are often extremely creative and artistic and it has been implied that creativity is one of the positive effects of dyslexia. The difficulties experienced by a dyslexic involve their ability to handle and process both the written word and speech, classically; dyslexic individuals have difficulties with spelling and maths. They often have difficulties in organising their thoughts on paper and in more severe cases there are problems with the sequencing and order of ideas, an individual's ability to organise their work programme and written work and difficulties with time management. It is helpful to think of dyslexia not as a specific defect or illness, but as a range of individual differences in an individual's ability to think and process information.

There is a continuing misconception in all levels of society that children and young people will grow out of their dyslexia and therefore have to be assessed at regular intervals. If an individual, this includes an employee, has been assessed by an approved organisation which has indicated that they suffer from a form of dyslexia; unfortunately this is a permanent position.

It is helpful to think of dyslexia in three areas, visual issues, auditory (hearing) and motor function (coordination) and the ability to learn specific skills.

Dyslexia at work

Dyslexia has implications within the workplace, particularly with regards to an employee's performance and their ability to maintain high levels of accuracy, neatness, their ability to plan their work correctly and achieve the goals set out for them. There are also safety specific issues surrounding the concept of 'accident proneness'. Some employees with severe dyslexia have difficulties when attempting to interpret both visual signs and auditory and written instructions.

Dyslexia should never be a bar to employment but there may be duty of care issues and health and safety implications in some roles. It is established that, for some people with dyslexia, they can be easily distracted and find difficulty in focusing on one particular task at a time. Others have difficulty processing a range of information from different sources, for example auditory information and visual information, all at the same time.

Dyslexia does bring with it a number of advantages. Dyslexics are often artistic, creative, three- dimensional thinkers and good problem solvers.

Some authorities indicate that up to 20% of the population may suffer from some degree of dyslexia, but in a small number of individuals, thought to be approximately 4% of the population, the symptoms can be quite significant.

Occupational health services such as Preventative Healthcare are able to provide advice with regards to the implications of a diagnosis of dyslexia, particularly with regards to the Disability Discrimination Act and an individual's capabilities in safety specific roles.

Further useful websites on the subject of dyslexia are, The Dyslexia Institute: www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk , the British Dyslexia Association: www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk

If you require further information on the implications of occupational health and dyslexia please do not hesitate to contact Jane PUNCHER on: 01622 775285 or email: j.puncher@phcohealth.co.uk or for more general information with regards to any of Preventative Healthcare's services email us at:

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