

How to Respond to Common Comments about Dyslexia

Every day I head to my office or my email and I mistakenly think that I have heard it all. I think to myself that with all the information about dyslexia available there can't be anymore misunderstanding about it. Boy, am I wrong, on a weekly, if not daily, basis. Whether it is a comment made at a school meeting (SST, IEP), in an IEP document, or supporting documents, I am surprised all the time. Below I have listed some comments that I think to myself, "Did they really just say that" and include an explanation behind the misguided comment.

We just have to wait for the phonics fairies to come and then he will be fine.

I can't make this stuff up folks. Just last night, I read this in some documents filed by the parent. The teacher actually uttered this sentence from the nearest I can tell, with a straight face. In the same packet of documents, this parent found a document where a teacher asked for some 'magic' to help the child learn to read. Yep, you heard it here; this really happened.

The misconception here is that if we wait, they will read. Well, we all know this is not true and is actually a detriment to a child with dyslexia. The other underlying cause of this absurd statement is teacher training. I do place a lot of responsibility on higher education institutions that do not include any training about struggling readers in credential programs. I know the teacher really wishes she had the tools to help the child, not the magic. It is a euphemism, I know.

You can get dyslexia from a bump on the head.

Administrators seem to be the biggest offenders of absurd comments about dyslexia, and this was no exception. I was standing next to the parent when the principal said this to a very upset mother about her 3rd grade son who was reading at the 1st grade level. I remember being at a loss for words, but I quickly found them and you will find them below.

This is the misconception is an insinuation that dyslexia either does not exist, is environmental, or the result of a physical injury. Can you have trouble reading after a head injury, sure, but that is alexia, not dyslexia. Is dyslexia real? Do I really have to answer that? Is dyslexia environmental? There are students who struggle to read due to a lack of opportunity and instruction, but that is not developmental dyslexia. So, when you hear an absurdity like this, be armed with just the facts.

Oral reading fluency is only important if you want to be a newscaster

I was joining an IEP by phone from a hotel room in Chicago when I heard this one, so I could not see facial expressions or body language; but if they could have seen mine, they might have been offended. At the end of this sentence (spoken by a principal) everyone (including the parent I was representing) laughed and agreed. They were serious.

The misconception is that we no longer need to hear kids read out loud, or that kids don't need to learn the skills to read out loud. While I agree that we no longer school like the pilgrims did,

focusing on long oral readings, it is still of paramount importance to evaluate a student's reading ability by listening to them read - cold. We need to hear what they struggle with, how they are compensating, what they do when they get stuck and how fluent they are. This is not important? Also, what if this student did want to be a newscaster?

I am confident that I will keep hearing these comments and I will keep writing them down so I can figure out the underlying meaning. It is important to resist the temptation to retaliate with a sarcastic comment or comment made in frustration and take the opportunity to teach the offender why it is a mistaken belief. School is in full swing again and I am sure I look forward to adding to this list.