Podcast 26

Title: Dyslexia Accommodations Checklist: No More Second-Guessing (Part 2)

Description: Stop second-guessing possible **dyslexia accommodations**. Get the **dyslexia accommodations checklist** and be prepared for the 504 meeting. Discover how to level the playing field for your child while fostering independence and self-advocacy.

In this episode (part 2), Tracy continues the conversation on dyslexia accommodations, shifting the focus to the critical transition into middle and high school. Your child's 504 accommodations are not a "favor" or a "loophole"; they are essential tools that allow students to demonstrate understanding of the material without changing academic expectations.

Over time the goal of dyslexia accommodations shifts toward **independence and self-advocacy**. Learn how to move away from constant adult intervention, toward a model where your teen knows exactly what tools they need to succeed in higher education and beyond. Listen for details on where to download the Dyslexia Accommodations Checklist.

Hello and welcome to *The Literacy Keys* podcast! I'm Tracy, your host, and today's episode continues our conversation about **dyslexia accommodations.** Last week I started discussing dyslexia accommodations in elementary school. When I first decided to talk about the topic I planned on talking about the dyslexia accommodations for elementary, middle and high school students. When I started recording the episode it was way too much information, so I made the executive decision to break the information into two episodes. If you haven't listened to the first part, I encourage you to check it out. Head over to episode 25. Also, there's a **checklist** of common dyslexia 504 accommodations that you can download and I'll provide details for that resource a little later.

I'm not going to go into as much background as I did in the last episode, but there are a few elements that are worth discussing.

Let's start with **what dyslexia accommodations** are**.** In a nutshell, accommodations are adjustments to **how** a student learns or demonstrates learning, without changing **what** they're expected to learn. The International Dyslexia Association defines accommodations as changes in the way students access information. They do not change academic expectations. I like to think of accommodations as removing **barriers** for students with dyslexia so they can demonstrate their true understanding of the material. The purpose of these supports are to level the playing field and ensure kids with dyslexia have equal access to learning and can shine academically. Let's also go on the record as saying that dyslexia accommodations do not provide the student with

an unfair advantage. I mention this because unfortunately, too many folks still have this mindset that accommodations are unfair if a student isn't severely dyslexic.

I know that I came up against this mindset when requesting timing accommodations for my daughter. They pointed to the fact that she was passing her NYS exams and couldn't possibly need more time. Administrators really believed that granting her extra time would be creating an unfair advantage. They ignored the data about her processing speed, and the fact that her performance deteriorated faster than average over time. They rationalized that all students get tired when taking an exam. And you wonder why I became passionate about helping other parents? Hmmm

Ok, so I've set the stage to talk about dyslexia accommodations as students transition from elementary grades into middle and high school. You are going to want to evaluate the accommodations according to need and independence. I say this because independence is the goal. Ideally, you want to reach the point in which the student independently knows what they need to access the information and demonstrate their knowledge. You are not always going to be there for them. Teachers and aides will not always be there. The goal is for you child to know what they need, and how to ensure that they get it.

So let's dive into middle school where the academic demands really start to increase.

Middle School (Grades 6–8) – Accommodations for Changing Needs

Everything begins to change in middle school. Students go from a nurturing environment of one classroom teacher to a bustling schedule of multiple teachers, more homework, and higher expectations for independence. For kids with dyslexia, this transition can be challenging. Add raging preteen hormones to the mix and it's a bumpy ride for everyone in the family. Having the right dyslexia accommodations in place, will help them successfully navigate this academic landmine.

Dyslexia doesn't magically disappear in sixth grade, so things like **extra time, audiobooks, and notetaking assistance** remain very important. However, as coursework becomes more complex, new accommodations often are needed:

- **Assistive technology and tools:** Middle school is a great time to introduce tools that foster independence. For reading, many students use **text-to-speech software** or apps to read textbooks and novels aloud. Chrome has a text-to-speech extension that can downloaded and installed in the browser. Schools often have access to libraries like Learning Ally or Bookshare, which provide audiobooks of textbooks and literature for students with dyslexia. I believe Learning Ally is free if your child has an IEP or a 504. Check with their website for the specifics. These accommodations ensure your child is accessing grade-level content with oral comprehension. It also prevents a student from

shutting down because the amount of text is overwhelming. My own daughter would get overwhelmed just seeing a 200-page novel that she had to read for a class. This brings us to assisted technology for writing. Does your child need dictation software? It's commonly called **speech-to-text,** and it can be a powerful accommodation in middle school if typing or handwriting is extraordinarily difficult. Having this dyslexia accommodation allows a student to dictate their thoughts and have the computer convert it to text. Google Docs has voice to text feature under the tools tab, but you want a specific accommodation listed on your child's 504 plan to ensure they can use this feature at school and on their school computer. Consider Word Prediction software and spell-check. The algorithm suggests words as a student types. All of these technologies help the student begin to develop ways to minimize their reading/writing challenges. You'll want to ensure that any assistive technology and device your child needs are included in their IEP/504. You'll also want to request training for your child on how to use the technology. It's like riding a bike. The first time is wobbly, but they'll eventually get it with practice. I've seen too many schools include assisted technology in a student's plan and "forget" to teach them how to use it. Don't let that happen to your child.

- **Note-taking and organization:** With multiple classes and teachers, staying organized becomes tougher. What hair you have, may be pulled out in frustration as everything becomes a jumbled mess. Note-taking is a common dyslexia accommodation for 504 plans at this age. Teachers provide class notes, outlines, and slide printouts to the student. For example, a history teacher could give an outline of the day's lecture or a copy of the slideshow. The goal of this dyslexia accommodation is to prevent the student from missing key points in a lecture because all their brain power is focused on copying information. If the school is unwilling to provide formal notes, consider allowing the student to take photos of the whiteboard or homework assignments written on the board to ensure they are error-free. Many schools are going phone-free so this absolutely needs to be included in a plan to allow your child access to a camera device. For organizational needs, graphic organizers can be a beneficial dyslexia accommodation. Using mind maps to organize ideas when writing an essay is a great tool to consider. I recorded an entire episode on mind maps that you can check out. You might want to request templates for writing assignments to reduce the load on the student's working memory and help structure their work. Organizational issues are referred to executive functioning, and they can become part of common dyslexia accommodations at this age. This can include breaking long-term projects into smaller deadlines, having check-ins mid-project, or using an assignment planner with teacher check-ins. For example, if a science project is due in a month, you may want the teacher to check in midpoint, at the two-week mark, to review the progress and adjust as needed. This minimizes last-minute crises which happen when reading and writing tasks are underestimated.

- **Testing accommodations and grading:** By middle school, tests and quizzes are more frequent and start to become higher stakes. Standard dyslexia accommodations include extended time for in-class tests and exams. If reading is a barrier, your child's plan can include oral reading of test questions. Many dyslexic students also get a separate, quiet location for test taking. This helps students concentrate and not feel rushed or self-conscious. Another common accommodation is not penalizing spelling errors in written assignments. A book report might be graded on understanding of the book and effort, rather than taking points off for every misspelled word. You might also want to consider specifying alternatives to traditional bubble tests such as an oral presentation or a creative project.

Middle school can be a tricky time socially and academically, but with the right dyslexia accommodations students can flourish. It's a time to encourage independence while still communicating with your child's teachers. Now, on to high school, where we prepare for the leap into adulthood and higher education.

High School (Grades 9–12) – Accommodations for Independence

High school is the home stretch of K–12 education. For students with dyslexia, it's a time to maximize support, *and* build independence for the future. The curriculum is more demanding than ever: complex novels in English, lengthy reading assignments in history, foreign language classes, state graduation exams, and high-stakes tests like the SAT/ACT. It might sound daunting, but with the right accommodations, students with dyslexia can not only keep up, but truly excel. In this section, let's talk about dyslexia accommodations in high school and consider how parents can help their teens take the reins of self-advocacy.

- **Advanced assistive technology and alternative media:** By high school, most students with dyslexia will be regularly using some form of assistive technology. Audiobooks and text-to-speech apps remain critical accommodations. If your school uses Google Classroom make sure your child knows how to use all the built-in accessibility features. Speech-to-text is extremely valuable for lengthy writing assignments like research papers. Evaluate dyslexia-friendly fonts (like Arial or Verdana, or specialized ones like Dyslexie. Some students find it easier to read using a larger print or a different font. Request that teachers provide digital versions that the student can adjust. There is another tool that high schoolers can benefit from: smartpen devices. Using a Livescribe pen or an app to record class lectures can allow students to fine-tune their class notes and ensure key points from a lecture are included. In summary, by high school the goal is for students to know what tools help them and have them readily available. Remember, if it's not included in the plan, then theoretically it doesn't exist for the student. Having everything listed on your child's plan ensures there isn't any discussion about access. It also provides the background for higher

educational requests. Now let's talk about another hurdle that needs to be overcome at this age.

- **Curriculum and testing accommodations.** Many students have a foreign language requirement. This can be an issue for some dyslexic students. Remember dyslexia can affect letter-sound patterns which need to be learned in a new language. You have different options. If your child wants to learn a foreign language, consider accommodations like reduced emphasis on spelling in the foreign language class. Another option is to take American Sign Language instead of Spanish or French. Finally, there might be a foreign language waiver. Talk to your child and the school to decide which option is best for your family. At this stage, it's critical to ensure accommodations are granted for college entrance exams, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams if your teen is taking any of them. The process for SAT/ACT accommodations typically involves applying with documentation of the disability and proof of accommodations in school. As a parent, you can initiate that process with your school's guidance.

- **Organization and time management:** High school students juggle multiple classes, extracurriculars, and even job responsibilities. As I mentioned earlier, these organizational and time management issues are called executive function challenges. Don't get me started on why we have to give everything a fancy name. Suffice to say organizational and time management issues can go hand-in-hand with dyslexia. Accommodations here might include use of an organizational app or digital planner and having weekly check-ins with a resource room advisor to plan the week's workload. A resource room accommodation can provide additional support in a multitude of areas.

- **Self Advocacy:** High schoolers are learning to advocate for themselves. That said, your child might have mixed feelings about their accommodations. Some teens fully embrace them, while others feel stigma and start to resist using them. They want to "fit in" and believe accommodations separate them from their peers. This is an important conversation that needs to happen. It can be helpful to share that accommodations level the playing field. If appropriate, share stories of older students who used accommodations and went on to college. If higher education is the goal, start building your child's self-advocacy skills now. Once they enroll in college *students* are expected to request accommodations and communicate their needs. You can start by having your teen practice explaining their dyslexia and what helps them. Consider having them attend part of their 504-plan meeting. Explaining their needs to the committee can build the confidence they'll need beyond high school.

With appropriate dyslexia accommodations, a student can tackle honors classes, write insightful essays, and show their strengths. As a parent, you continue to advocate but also start stepping back so your teen can step forward. There is no expiration on accommodations. Your child can use them on the first day of kindergarten, and on the

last day of senior year. In fact, 504 plans can continue into college. Universities must provide accommodations under the ADA.

Conclusion

Before we end this episode, I want to take a moment and remind listeners that There's no limit to the number of accommodations a student can have in a plan. If someone says differently, simply ask the person to show you the written regulations or the law stating that the number of accommodations is capped. Trust me, they won't be able to! I do encourage you to build positive relationships with your child's educators. When they see you're all on the same team it usually leads to better consistency and cooperation.

We've covered a lot of in the past two episodes surrounding dyslexia accommodations. I want you to walk away feeling empowered as a parent. At the beginning of this episode, I mentioned a **Dyslexia Accommodations Checklist** that I created for my listeners. This is a parent-friendly, list of common accommodations for students with dyslexia. Think of it as a menu of options that you can check off and use as a starting point when working with your child's school. Remember, not every accommodation is right for every child. The dyslexia accommodations checklist is downloadable, and a link can be found in the show notes. So, head over to the show notes to find the link, and please share this episode with another parent.