

Let's Talk Learning Disabilities

EPISODE 32

In this Episode, Laurie and Abbey interview Kendra Wagner, a Learning Specialist out of Seattle, Washington. Kendra shares her insight specifically with dysgraphia and shares her knowledge in treating, coaching and adapting to a life with dysgraphia. Read below for highlighted moments in this information packed interview.

What is Dysgraphia? (4 min)

Initially the definition of dysgraphia was to have difficulty with the formation of letters. This definition has slowly morphed inside of the international dyslexia association to mean any kind of difficulty with writing and getting thoughts from your brain into a written format. Under this umbrella falls fine motor penmanship & execution on page with a pen or pencil, organizing your thoughts in a readable format and even keyboarding.

Foundational Formation Help (6 min)

Laurie and Abbey see a large group of kids who struggle with the formation of letters, which is addressed early on in working with a dysgraphic individual. They ask Kendra where it's best to start when working with a student who is having trouble to make those letter formations. Kendra recommends starting really large to create muscle memory of those letter formations. Their brains need a different way to learn and remember those letter formations, and to really make it stick, it's got to be large, and it's got to be multi-sensory. Making large letter shapes on a whiteboard, or in various textures like shaving cream, sand, or sandpaper is really great because it allows the student to feel the execution of the letter formation.

Spelling Trouble in Students with Dysgraphia (9 min)

Kendra teases that spelling programs for students with dysgraphia could be a whole other podcast episode, simply because there is so much to unpack there, but names a great resource for parents and teachers called “All About Spelling.” It is tile based learning that seems less overwhelming to students because they are moving tiles to spell words, and can easily make changes if something doesn’t look right. She also affirms Lauries note that learning cursive and the flow from letter to letter can be much easier than the starting and stopping of writing in print.

OWL: Oral Written Language Disability (13 min)

Kendra references Virginia Berninger with the University of Washington in Seattle, who has provided tons of research and explanations of Oral Written Language Disability. Virginia has recorded a noticeable difference in the quality of writing when you put pen to paper, versus typing thoughts on a keyboard. Even though the quality of the writing might be better when you can master the formation of letters, keyboarding may still be better for individuals with dysgraphia because it removes that physical barrier. Many students with dysgraphia may still struggle with the organization of their thoughts, even though that physical barrier is removed.

504 & IEP Recommendations for Those with Dysgraphia (20 min)

From a Dysgraphia Specialist’s perspective, Kendra recommends a graphic organizer. She says that sometimes those are written into the 504 or IEP, but that she would recommend even making a revision to allow the student to choose their own. Additionally low pressure coaching which basically is individual time to talk this over with the teacher, that isn’t for a grade. This is typically called, an availability of a scribe. So many 504 & IEP plans include extra time on assignments, and for individuals who struggle with dysgraphia, time is needed in a space to talk out and organize their thoughts. They need more thinking and process time, not necessarily more time to procrastinate on a task that might seem overwhelming. Also, micro deadlines are a great way to break up large assignments in smaller, more manageable tasks for a dysgraphic

individual. Kendra gives an example of finishing up three main ideas from the notes by Thursday, rather than finishing up all notes by next Thursday.

Pencil Grips for Dysgraphia (27 min)

Pencil grips are a common tool used with Dysgraphic students to help adjust their grip and take pressure off of how hard they typically press down on the paper. There are so many different variations available on Amazon alone, and so Laurie & Abbey ask Kendra what she thinks about using these grips, and if they truly help. Kendra recommends the claw type of pencil grip. Because of the dome around each finger, it allows the user to form a good grip, and not move from it after that point.

Heavy Pressure Writing (30 min)

Writing with very heavy pressure is a common occurrence in individuals with dysgraphia, even to the point of page ripping. Kendra recommends practicing with short, quick movements on a page, almost like a race. Forming waves across a page, or small circles rapidly will allow students to relieve some pressure from the page because their movements are so quick, they don't have the capacity to press very hard at that speed.

Practical Resources (31 min)

Kendra mentioned several resources available to teachers and parents to use in support of a student with dysgraphia. All About Spelling, Reading Without Tears, and Dianna King's Writing Skills are great tools for elementary aged children. Writing Revolution and Step Up to Writing are great tools for middle and high school aged kids to use. Check out the links below to access more info on these resources.

Resources:

Kendra Wagner - kendrawagner123@gmail.com

Kendra's Website - www.readingwritingthinking.net

Handwriting without Tears - <https://www.lwtears.com/hwt>

The Writing Revolution - <https://www.thewritingrevolution.org>

Step up to Writing -

<https://www.voyagersopris.com/literacy/step-up-to-writing/overview>

All About Spelling - <https://www.allaboutlearningpress.com/all-about-spelling/>

Diana King Series on Writing - <https://amzn.to/3Io5gXT>

Claw Pencil Grip - <https://amzn.to/3qIA7IB>

Contact info for the podcast: letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com

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