

# Let's Talk Learning Disabilities

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## EPISODE 34

Welcome to Let's Talk Learning Disabilities with Laurie Peterson and Abbey Weinstein. Laurie & Abbey spend their days talking about dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, & ADHD they talk to parents of struggling students and adults who have had a lifetime of academic challenges. They want to share those stories, along with their own insights with you. So, *let's talk learning disabilities*.

Abbey: Hi, everybody. Welcome to Let's Talk Learning Disabilities. This is Abbey

Laurie: And this is Laurie.

Abbey: And we're so happy to have you here today. This is season two, episode four, or just episode 34 of Let's Talk Learning Disabilities.

Laurie: We haven't really decided how we're going to count them have we?

Abbey: Right! We started the new year, 2022 with Season 2, but we've just continued on with our series of "Living With..." where we're interviewing various, all different clients and students with various learning disabilities. And today we have a very special guest. We're excited to talk to her. We have SJ here with us today. Hi SJ!

SJ: Hi!

Abbey: How are you?

SJ: I'm good. How are you guys?

Abbey: We're doing good.

Laurie: SJ is what you actually go by, right? We don't want anyone to think we're like trying to be incognito. That's literally what you go by, right?

SJ: Yes

Laurie: Okay.

Abbey: We're so happy to have you here today. Thank you for being here with us.

SJ: Thanks you guys for having me.

Abbey: So SJ, you've been diagnosed with a visual processing disorder, correct?

SJ: Yes.

Abbey: So, oh, before we get into that, actually, sorry for our listeners. Tell us a little bit about you, how old you are, where you go to school. What year you are in school?

SJ: Um, I'm 19. I'm a freshman in college at Belmont university in Nashville, Tennessee.

Abbey: Nashville, wow.

SJ: Yeah, I'm a psych major. And then I'm double minoring in education and nutrition.

Abbey: Oh, wow. Very cool. Good for you.

Laurie: So do you love living in Nashville?

SJ: Yes, I do. I like it a lot.

Laurie: Do you like country music?

SJ: Um, yeah, but I like Dallas too. So it's like...

Abbey: You like Dallas too? I liked Dallas too! But there's always a lot of great live music to hear in Nashville. You're lucky you get that, you have a lot to do and you're a psych major. So what are your goals? What do you want to be when you grow up?

SJ: I have no idea.

Abbey: Well, that's okay.

SJ: We'll figure it out at some point.

Abbey: Okay. Sounds good. So you've been diagnosed with a visual processing disorder. Can you tell me, first of all, how old were you when you were diagnosed?

SJ: Um, I was in fourth grade, so I was, I don't know. How old are you in fourth?

Laurie: Around nine or 10

SJ: So yeah, around 9 or 10 I guess. And so then the second semester, of fourth grade I got glasses from Dr. S and then that summer I started doing vision therapy.

Abbey: Okay. So fourth grade, do you remember what life was like before you were diagnosed and some things that were hard for you or what you experienced as struggles or anything like that?

SJ: Um, always when I was younger, like we have my library card somewhere at home, but I wrote my name. Backwards, like I wrote from right to left.

Abbey: Interesting.

SJ: Always when I was younger. And then even once I stopped doing that, I would always write, like, when I wrote my name, Sarah Jane, I would write the J the wrong direction.

Laurie: Did you know it was the wrong direction? When you went back to look at it or did you just never recognize it was wrong?

SJ: No, I don't think I realized it was wrong, like right to left. And I thought that that was normal.

Abbey: Yeah. And we've seen that we've heard parents talking about their child writes backwards, um, and reversing letters. You were reversing letters. It sounds like beyond those early developmental stages, when it's appropriate, like kindergarten, first grade, even in your own name.

Laurie: What about with your reading? What was reading like for you up to that point?

SJ: Um, reading. I remember we would always read like me and my mom would always read books together before bed and I would have to be like, okay, I can read one page and then my eyes would get so tired that I couldn't read it. And she would have to read like five pages before I could read another page.

Laurie: Could you remember what you read, like while you were reading it or did you have to go back and read and reread?

SJ: Um, I would usually have to go back and reread and reread. And I like, um, especially I remember like in fourth grade at Greenhill, we were doing some sort of like, whatever. It was one of the like standardized testing, whatever we did at that time. And I would just guess and make like shapes on the reading comprehension ones, because I would just make it like a fun pattern because I cut it

Laurie: On the bubble answer document?

SJ: Yeah, the bubble answer document, because I just wouldn't know. Like, I just couldn't like read and then answer questions about it. That was always something that was really hard for me. So.

Laurie: Did your, did you get tested for any other kind of learning disability before you went to see Dr. S or did that, did your parents know to go there first? Because that's always fascinating to me how people get that diagnosis or how they end up.

SJ: So my brother has dyslexia and went to Shelton. So whenever he went through all of that and did all that testing, I did the same thing or the same, I guess, testing and. They said that I was perfectly fine, had nothing wrong with me.

Abbey: Um, that's unfortunate.

SJ: And then in fourth grade we started working with a tutor outside of school, who I ended up homeschooling with her, fifth and sixth grade. And she noticed that I would write with my paper turned sideways, but like my, like I would, the paper would be turned, but my head would be straight. And so I would just completely write.

Laurie: Like horizontal?

SJ: Yes. And, um, I guess I was just doing a few other things that were a little questionable and she, so she had, um, referred us to Dr. S.

Laurie: And Dr. S was on, and I should have looked to see what episode he was on. He was on one of our earlier episodes where we talked about vision, what he did, did you get the episode number?

Abbey: Episode number seven, Visual Processing with Dr. Shidlofsky.

Laurie: And so Dr. S is here local in the north Texas area. Um, and so if you want to know more about what he does in his, his practice and a little bit more about visual processing, good episode to check out after you're done with

this one, sorry to interrupt. But so she referred you to Dr. S, SJ and you, so you went in for your evaluation.

SJ: Yes. And so originally I got glasses, I think they were like the prism ones.

Abbey: Prism Glasses.

SJ: Yeah. Um, and so from there the first night I got them, I hadn't been able to read at all. And I read a 400 page book in two days.

Abbey: Oh my gosh.

Laurie: Wow.

SJ: So that was like really big. And then I fell asleep one night and my dogs ate them.

Abbey: Oh, no!

SJ: Like right after I'd gotten them, then I couldn't read again. Um, so then I ended up getting another pair and then started doing vision therapy and all that, which really changed more of like my like day to day life, I guess, because when I was little, like if I was riding a bike, if I turned my head, the entire bike would turn.

Laurie: That's interesting!

SJ: So like, especially, I mean now with driving and everything. Thank goodness I don't do that because..

Abbey: That's right, thank goodness. So you had some motor planning challenges, it sounds like with your depth perception and your peripheral vision.

SJ: So if look at anything, everything I was doing would turn.

Laurie: And it's better now that you have the glasses?

SJ: Yes, a lot better. But when I was younger, I was always falling, like always had scrapes all over my legs, um, from just like tripping and like visually not perceiving the things where I guess where they were.

Laurie: Right. You couldn't, it was hard for you to judge your distance between like you and the curb or you and the wall or whatever. And so you would...yeahthat makes sense. That makes total sense. So the vision therapy really helped more of your visual spatial stuff. Whereas the lenses, which were prison lenses really helped the reading, kind of the fine motor, the tracking across the page.

SJ: Right. And then I can, me and my mom were texting about it earlier. Cause I was just trying to make sure I had all my things straight.

Laurie: All your facts, great. Moms are good for that.

SJ: And then, so I, I also had glasses before this in kindergarten and we just went to like whatever normal ophthalmologist and they didn't help at all. Um, and, but I guess the head of my preschool had noticed that I w I copied a drawing weird. And they recommended that I go to, to get a visual exam and I ended up getting glasses because they didn't really do anything, I guess.

Laurie: You saw like a regular optometrist who gave you glasses. Right. But, but they didn't really help?

SJ: No, they didn't really change anything. Um, and so then after. Going Dr. S doing vision therapy, all that for a little bit. I didn't wear glasses at all. And then at the beginning of high school, I was just still noticing I was having issues. Like if I'm like looking at a piece of paper, then I couldn't like focus on the board back and forth. And so I ended up going to Dr. S again and getting glasses I have now, which are blue blockers and...

Abbey: Prism, probably

Laurie: Or are they just like a nearsighted farsighted?

SJ: I don't know, they had me do something, some computerized machine thing to figure it out, but I don't know.

Laurie: Dr. S has a lot of really cool toys!

Abbey: With the glasses, you notice a big difference. Can you copy from the board or the overhead now or from?

SJ: Well, it's easier, it's a lot easier to focus back and forth.

Abbey: Back and forth focusing, yeah.

SJ: If I'm not wearing my glasses, my head will start hurting really bad if I'm on my computer or even just like reading a book, I'll notice that like, if I have them on, I can comprehend as I'm reading a lot better than if I don't have them.

Abbey: Huh. That's interesting. That's so cool.

Laurie: That is so cool. You know, you know, Abbey and I hear that a lot from, from parents and students that, you know, they knew something wasn't right. So they'd go to the eye doctor and the eye doctor would do an exam and say, I mean, everything seems to look okay, but. We think based on your complaints that may be trying these glasses for like a slight sighted or a slight near-sighted no might tweak something that will make a difference. And so a lot of times we have younger kids that come in that already have glasses. It can sometimes be a red flag, like, okay, they've already noticed something's off with vision. Maybe whatever they're doing is all they needed or maybe it's not. And we need to look further into the visual processing stuff. So that's really interesting that you went down that same road. Really quick, how are your grades, like in those low, in your younger, where you getting grades in first, second, third grade, or was it impacted by some of your struggles?

SJ: I don't think we like really had grades. I don't, I don't really know. Um...

Laurie: Were your teachers concerned about your progress?

SJ: Um, uh, the main, like concern I would say is like, I could never spelling, never worked for me. Um, it would just take me so much longer to read. So especially on like achievement things, like I said with reading comprehension, I would just do horribly on them, but it was just like so hard for me to like, comprehend what I was reading and answering questions, that again, I would just like, make it a zigzag down the page. And I didn't know if I was doing good because it was too hard.

Laurie: Right.

Abbey: So now are you doing well in school?

SJ: Um, yeah, I'm doing pretty well in school right now. Um, definitely college is a lot different also though.

Abbey: Sure. It is a lot harder.

SJ: Um, but like right now I have good grades.

Abbey: Good. And did you do well throughout high school for the most part?

SJ: Um, at a high school I did. Okay. I did better after COVID hit. I stayed online for the rest of high school, cause I didn't really like my school. And so it was a lot easier online. And so I haven't taken like a real test or anything in two years. Um, even first semester of college, I didn't take a real test. So it'll be interesting once I have to do that.

Abbey: Yeah.

Laurie: That's not uncommon right now, I think a lot of kids are going through that, figuring out what school is all about now that we're kind of getting, trying to get things back to normal. So doing tests online, or no tasks at all made it easier for some kids.

Abbey: Right. As you know, I'm curious too, as Jay, when you were in elementary school, middle school, high school, did you get after you were

diagnosed, did you get any accommodations, like extra time for reading or taking tests or having your tests read to you or...?

SJ: No, I didn't get anything like that at all. And that was actually whenever I took the ACT before college. I had to spend so much time working on the like reading comprehension part of it. And, um, at one point during that I had lost my glasses. Um, and so we went back to Dr. S and like, I, my prescription got changed a little bit too, and we had to like expedite them. So I got them in time to take the ACT because without them, I like reading comprehension was completely like out of the question.

Abbey: Oh, really? So. So with your, with your glasses and with the vision therapy, you had enough correction and help so that you didn't need academic accommodations?

SJ: Right. For the most part.

Abbey: Okay, good.

Laurie: Do you like to read?

SJ: Um, I kind of go in stages, but like this recently I've been reading a lot.

Laurie: You don't notice like that your eyes get tired now or you don't get the headaches or the, or do you feel that. You read and you comprehended and there are really no issues?

SJ: Um, yeah. As long as I'm interested in, when I'm reading.

Laurie: That makes sense too right? Nobody likes reading something boring. When you were younger, did you hate reading? I mean, did you fight it?

SJ: Um, well we would like always just growing up, like I said, my mom would read a book with me and my brother before bed every single night. Um, And I like loved audio books and I loved her reading to me, but like, I didn't want to read.

Abbey: Hmm. Interesting.

Laurie: Did you get asked when you were younger? Did you have to read aloud in school very often?

SJ: Not really. I don't think.

Laurie: I would think that would make, make me nervous. Right. If I struggled with reading, have it being asked to read aloud, I think they've gotten better about it. It's interesting. I don't hear that as much, but I do have some students that have complained about that, where you know, they get called on and it's super embarrassing. What about writing? So I know you said it affected spelling, but, but think of thinking about like, just your ability to put your thoughts on paper. Is that something that's been hard for you?

SJ: Um, I think that mainly with spelling and then like punctuation was something that like, I can never understand. Like it just never made sense to me. Um, vocabulary and none of that. So I was always like and to this day, if I write a paper, my friends will read it and be like, you have about eight run-on sentences in one paragraph, like fix this. Um, so I definitely struggled with that in a sense of like, I would just kind of word vomit, everything out and just hope for the best.

Laurie: Right. I love that.

Abbey: So when you go back and read what you've written, do you find places where you think there needs to be a pause or punctuation?

SJ: Um, sometimes, but usually I just don't even reread things cause it's not worth it because I think I'm right. Like, I think it makes sense.

Laurie: You read it in your own voice, like how you meant it, what you meant it to say, even if it's not what it says. Right?

SJ: Well, usually I just don't read over anything and just turn it in. Cause it's not even worth it.

Laurie: So, you know, SJ. My favorite part about having you here today is that we actually have a lot of people in the community that still don't really buy into that there is benefits that come from vision therapy, there's not enough research on it. So they think it's, I've actually heard the word "quackery." And so I love that you're able to talk about the performance and the afters and what I mean, the fact that you went home the first day you had your glasses and you started a 400 page book. And finished it and do days that's bonkers, right? Like that is unbelievable. And had you tried that prior to your glasses, do you think you would have even finished it? Would you have even started it?

SJ: No, probably not. Like it was a really big deal, um, that I had read it to the point where I literally fell asleep with my glasses on my face. And they ended up falling off. My dogs ended up eating them because of that. I would like fall asleep with my glasses on because I had fallen asleep reading, which would have been completely out of the question before that.

Laurie: So I, I love that to me. How can you argue that right? Before and after, like there was nothing else that you were doing that would have made that kind of difference, right? The fact that you, it has made such a, I mean, think about what, where you'd be today. Had you not gone through that when you did. Because even if you had waited and gotten diagnosed in ninth grade, you know, I mean, think about where your attitude about reading would have been by then, and how much less you would have been reading. Um, it, would've made a big difference even where you are today. So the fact that you hadn't done it at a fairly young age, but you're old enough to remember the difference that it made and kind of appreciate it the process. I think that's amazing.

Abbey: It is amazing, that's a great testimonial for sure.

Abbey: Absolutely, absolutely. And you don't run into things or fall down anymore?

SJ: No, I do, not walk in straight lines if I, if I'm like walking with friends and I don't have my glasses on, I can not walk in the straight line to save my life. I like wear off.

Abbey: That's interesting.

SJ: Everyone kind of makes fun of me for that.

Abbey: But once you have your glasses on, then you can walk a straight line. Can you walk, do you know, have you ever tried walking with your eyes closed? No. And do you feel like your spelling skills have improved with your glasses and vision therapy?

SJ: Um, they've definitely gotten better. Like I think that I used to not be able to even like, like now if I see a word and I, I'll know, I spelled it wrong, like I'll recognize that it looks wrong. Whereas before I would even recognize that it looked wrong, that doesn't necessarily mean I can tell you what's wrong with it, but I can see it and be like, wait, that's not how that's supposed to look.

Abbey: Right.

Laurie: That's huge.

Abbey: That is huge.

Laurie: That's exactly how we explain it to people. That spelling is so visual, that a lot of, a lot of students that have vision issues tend to spell how the word sounds, not how it looks.

SJ: But when I was younger, I would definitely like, look at those words and think like, oh, and so now I think I can definitely like, look at a word and be like, wait, I spelled that wrong. I just won't necessarily know how it's wrong.

Laurie: That makes sense. That makes sense.

Abbey: It does make sense. Very cool. That's awesome. So do you have to go back for checkups or any type of re-evaluation with Dr. S for the visual processing?

SJ: So I went back when I lost my glasses. So junior year when I got these, um, and they just rechecked my vision since I was going to have to get a new pair anyways and tweaked my prescription a little bit. And then over this past summer, I went back just to check in on my vision and everything and everything looks good. These glasses actually have really bad scratches on them so I'm getting another pair right now. We're waiting on them, but they're the same prescription and everything. And then I think next summer would be my next. So I think it's just a yearly, like kind of check in. Just to tweak prescription, whatever, but nothing crazy.

Laurie: You don;t think you'll need to do vision therapy again? I mean, we all go in annually for our vision checks, but right.

Abbey: That's great. That is for the vision therapy makes a big difference. Yeah. The vision therapy made a big difference. Just doing it for however many sessions, 10, probably 10 to 12 sessions or something you did. Maybe you remember how. How long you went?

SJ: 2 to 3 times a week for a whole summer?

Abbey: Oh, really?

SJ: And then was doing at home exercises on the computer.

Laurie: I think, and here's, what's pretty severe. I mean, if she was bumping into things, it gets pretty severe. So I don't doubt that it was pretty intensive, but still just a summer to your, your reading and your coordination. You know, below what's typical to almost above is pretty amazing. So definitely.

Abbey: That's awesome. So SJ, if you knowing what you know now and functioning, how well you're functioning now, what advice would you give? If you could go back in time to your younger self, to that third grade student who hated to read, who struggled with bumping into things, is there any advice you would give to your younger self?

SJ: I don't know if there's advice or that honestly like Dr. S was just like, the best thing that could have happened. Um, I think the only thing that I would say to my younger self is to be a little more consistent with my homework during vision therapy.

Abbey: That's good advice.

Laurie: That is great advise.

Abbey: The at-home exercises. They gave you to be more consistent with those. Cause it's not necessarily fun, but looking back, it helps so much that I understand why it's so important that you're doing that every day.

Laurie: So a quick question though, I do. I'm curious to know if, if there's a parent or a student listening, what would you say would be the top three red flags? That would indicate they might want to go have their vision checked by somebody like Dr. S like somebody who specializes in that, what are the three things that you could think of that would be the big red flags?

SJ: I would say definitely any sort of like writing backwards. Um, and then definitely if you're reading and just have we'll could read like five pages and then have no idea what you've read or how, like, how that would apply. Um, and then the third thing I would say is definitely like, if, if you or your kid is struggling with spelling and things, but they don't realize that they're wrong. Like they think there's nothing wrong with what they're spelling. That's definitely a red flag. Cause I feel like from my experience, at least most of my friends, if they didn't know how to spell, it was like, well, I know this is spelled wrong. Whereas I was just like, oh, that's right.

Abbey: Ok. That's great.

Laurie: If you're spelling how it sounds, you know, all you have to rely on. Do you feel like you have really good listening skills, um, like audio books or listening to things like, do you feel like especially backwards?

SJ: Um yeah, I like always loved like audio books. I love listening to podcasts. Um, they're a lot easier for me to like focus and concentrate on.

Abbey: So strong listening skills. That's good to know. That's great information for our listeners. Thank you, SJ.

Laurie: Yes. Awesome.

Abbey: So do you have anything else to share with our listeners today? I think you've done a great job helping us understand more about visual processing.

SJ: Um, I think that's kind of it.

Laurie: I think it's incredibly helpful. I do. Like I said, I feel like there are so many people that look at this as being kind of made up or not a real thing. Um, and even when we meet with parents, they look at us like we've got two heads until we really explain it to them and they go see one of the doctors and then they're like, okay, this is a thing. I get it. Right. And you make a world of difference. So, I mean...

SJ: It is definitely a real thing.

Abbey: It is a real thing. And I think we will also include in the show notes, the, um, college of Optometric Development. [thecovd.org](http://thecovd.org)

Laurie: We'll just say that in the show notes, we're going to include a link to a website that will take you to, um, that will give you some information about the doctors that, that assess for visual processing and also provides a directory because there are doctors across the whole country that do this, and you want to make sure that you're getting someone who really has a solid understanding. Um, lots of people are doing vision therapy, but do they really kind of offer the whole process from the evaluation, through the lenses and therapy, not just somebody who's just doing vision therapy. So we'll put that website in the show notes.

Abbey: To find an optometrist that specializes in learning related vision issues.

Laurie: And then out of you had printed off also, um, a, uh, Uh, symptoms checklist that will also include some kind of look at, and if you know, you

have a lot of the symptoms or just kind of see some of the red flags, they overlap, overlap a lot with dyslexia. So it is good to kind of rule out. Is this dyslexia or is it vision? But definitely spelling phonetically is not typical of a dyslexic student. It is very typical of a visual processing disorder.

Abbey: And reversing letters and reversing words and reversing numbers and transposing and writing backwards, or seeing words moving on a page or feeling like you have double vision. Those are not characteristics of dyslexia. They are more signs of a visual processing disorder.

Laurie: And like we have preached a million times. The letter reversals are pretty normal through second grade after that, it's probably vision. So. Definitely keep an eye out for that. So SJ, thank you for doing this. Thank you for being here. It was a good story. You tell it very well. You're very, well-spoken, you have a good handle on where, where you're at and the things you've struggled with, and we really appreciate you sharing.

Abbey: Absolutely. We really appreciate it. And thank you to our listeners. For listening today. And if you guys have any questions or other topics you would like to hear more about, feel free to email us at [letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com](mailto:letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com) and we look forward to, more "Living With..." Series and future episodes.

Laurie: Thanks again everybody.

Abbey: Thanks everybody.

Laurie: Have a great day.

Thank you so much for joining us today. In our show notes you can find information about today's talk, as well as links to the resources and other episodes. If you have questions about today's talk, have ideas for future episodes or just want to stay connected, you can contact us through Diagnostic Learning Services on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. So, Let's Keep Talking Learning Disabilities. This podcast is sponsored by E Diagnostic Learning. You can find more information at [www.ediagnosticlearning.com](http://www.ediagnosticlearning.com).

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