

# Let's Talk Learning Disabilities

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## EPISODE 37

Welcome to Let's Talk Learning Disabilities with Laurie Peterson and Abby 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: Welcome to episode 37 of Let's Talk Learning Disabilities. This is Abbey. And if you did not catch our last episode, which was 36, we are in the middle of a two-part interview with Darius Namdaran. In the last episode, we talked a lot about his experiences with dyslexia as a child, and about how he discovered the benefits of mind mapping. Today, we're going to dive into adult dyslexia and dyslexia in the workplace. If you have not had a chance to listen to the last episode, go back and listen to that first, then come back here and get part to enjoy the second half of our conversation with Darius.

Laurie: I would love to share a little bit about the dyslexia at work piece. So if you don't mind giving us a little bit of background about kind of how that started and then where you're at with that.

Darius: Okay, so my interest with dyslexia at work kind of came about from the parents of the children that were helping with bullet map academy. So I was. You know, idealistic maybe a bit, a little bit naive. Um, five years ago, I said, I don't want to chase the money that is teaching mind mapping to entrepreneurs. I want to teach them when they're young. And quite frankly, the reason why children with dyslexia and special education needs have not been taught mind mapping is because there's not very much money in it, quite frankly. And so lots of people have just created apps for it or software, but never actually taught these children properly how to do it. So we spent the last five years really teaching the children how to do that, but the parents kept coming to us saying, Darius, this is just, just, I'm using this in work.

I'm using this as a, you know, an IBM or in the BBC, or, you know, as a professor, et cetera, there's, they're using, they're sitting with their eight year old or 12 year old learning the techniques and using it in work. And they're often using it, uh, more intentionally than the children because they realize. The pain of not having the skills to actually be productive in the workplace. And so last year I bit the bullet and said, right. Okay. We've really got to help adults as well then. So we decided to develop some of our, uh, develop a whole new system for people with dyslexia and ADHD to stay organized at work with an iPad. Because what we discovered over the last five years is the, I think the iPad and the apple ecosystem is probably the secret weapon of a lot of dyslexic individuals. You know, I reckon if you went to most dyslexic entrepreneurs, um, they would probably have a Mac and an iPhone. Um, well, first of all, Steve Jobs was dyslexic. Johnny Ives who'd invented it was dyslexic, you know, Alexander Graham Bell, who was a Scott 150 years ago invented the phone itself, was dyslexic. You go through the list, you know, dyslexics are often attracted to high quality, easy to use tools that they can externally delegate their thinking patterns to. So I've been using the iPad a lot over the last four years. I, I, I kind of, when I bought it and they used the apple pencil, I felt, oh my goodness, is this going to be another one of these purchases that gathers dust after six months? But no, it wasn't actually. And four years later, I'm still using it every day. So what we found. From our cohort of students, um, with Bullet Map Academy is that a lot of the children are using the iPad now as assistive technology. And a lot of the parents are starting to use it as assistive technology at work because you know, if you thought about assistive technology in the past, you had to bring your laptop with a scanning, you know, tool, you know, with some external headphones, with a scanning pen and, I don't know something else. And you'd have this huge bag of stuff that you're carrying around everywhere and with the iPad and the phone, a lot of that changed, but when it became that you could write with a pen on the screen that was utterly transformative for me. And what I've noticed is that a lot of people with dyslexia as adults have to write. Handwrite. Even though they can touch type, even though they can use voice to text, they can use all of these gizmos. They can use Kanban boards. Asana, all sorts of apps to organize themselves, but they end up going to a whiteboard or a piece of paper to just process that information. And for me that was absent. I was wrestling with that for the last 15, 20 years. I have got every single...I've got a MacBook pro. I've got everything you can imagine, but I still had lots of journals just so I could write out my thoughts and map

out my thoughts and doodle my thoughts. And so I think the iPad is now the secret weapon in terms of assistive technology. And so what we decided to do with dyslexia at work is to gather together all of the different apps and pull them together and teach adults with dyslexia. To create, an external reliable process to stay organized with dyslexia. Okay, they'll never be, well, there are some dyslexic people, ADHD, people who are the most organized people in the world books, they have had to learn very intentional techniques. Okay. I'm not one of them. Okay. But we will teach people how to do that with the iPad. That's the goal with dyslexia.

Abbey: That's brilliant.

Laurie: Okay. Awesome. Are there any specific apps you recommend?

Darius: Oh, yes. Um, okay. So if I was to give you a, a quick cheat sheet on it all is you get an iPad? Probably the \$350 one with, the pencil. And then you would get yourself Goodnotes or Notability to take your notes on. Okay. I would recommend Goodnotes is amazing for mind mapping. It's not ideal perfect for my mapping, but it's probably the best that's there because you can make your page landscape and things like that, which you couldn't do with Notability. I think they've just added that as a feature. Notability is a very good feature where it will actually record what you're listening to if you're in a meeting or whatever, as an audio recording, and then you can scrub through the recording and it will show you exactly what you were writing at the time of the recording.

Abbey: It transcribes the recording?

Darius: No, no, it doesn't do that. What it does is, it's got the audio as an audio file and you can scrub through with your finger and then you've got your handwritten notes underneath and it will redraw your handwritten notes to exactly the points you were writing. So let's say you're in a note and you put an asterisk by it and you say, I missed that. And that was quite important. You can scrub through until it gets to that point. And then just listen to that and add to your notes. So it's incredible for often people who might have auditory processing difficulties or they're dysgraphic and they don't write as

fast, et cetera. So instead of listening through the whole one hour meeting to find that crucial bit, you can scrub straight to it within a second.

Laurie: That's so great. And I'm thinking for college students, that could be really amazing to use in class, yeah!

Darius: Yes. So I would say Notability and Goodnotes are your foundation apps. Then there's another app called Otter, which is very good voice to text. I mean, Siri is pretty decent now in terms of voice. It detects throughout the whole ecosystem. And we teach people how to use Siri. Um, and the last update, six months ago, Siri did a major jump because you no longer get cut off after 60 seconds or 30 seconds, which is really annoying, but now it goes on and on for a long time, which is great. But Otter, is another voice to text app that is really very good, high quality voice to text. And it's the sort of thing that you can go and do a zoom meeting, and they will do a full transcription of your zoom meeting afterwards for you immediately. And you can then have that as a backup that you can scan through and you've got your written notes to go with it. So Otter is a biggie. In addition to Otter there's, um, I think. Uh, obviously it has to be Google calendar because, uh, uh, crucial, uh, executive functioning technique is if it's not in your calendar, it's not going to get done. It doesn't matter. Even if it's on your to-do list, if you're dyslexic or ADHD, if it's not in your calendar, it's not going to get done. Okay. So even if it's a 15 minute task or half hour task or whatever, I recommend half hour tasks, um, You put it in your Google calendar. Okay. And the Google calendar set up. So it gives you a three minute and a 10 minute warning, or even a one hour or one day warning beforehand. And it's automatic. So that's crucial. Um, what else? Um, so you've got your handwritten notes, your mind-mapping in Goodnotes. You've got Otter for some voice to text and some text to voice, and you've got Goodnotes to put your tasks, um, Google calendar to put your tasks into.

Laurie: Um, so you feel like Google calendar works as a good like reminder app instead of having a separate app for reminders or to do is just put everything in your calendar and you're good?

Darius: Well, you do need a to do app as well. So, um, and for that, I would suggest I'm still exploring this because I'm very much a paper to do person,

and I'm starting to develop all of this within the iPad. Um, but I, I was, I'm intrigued by tick, tick. Okay.

Laurie: I've heard about that one.

Darius: Tick, tick. Tick tick has, uh, an interesting feature that I think is very important for people with dyslexia. And we'll be using this with our dyslexia at work clients. Is that when you create the. You do it with your voice. So you press the button and you speak the task to it. And it types out because if you think about the zero gravity workshop that we often have in our minds with dyslexia, the moment you put your head down and start writing a task down your, your attention has shifted from the big picture and it starts to float away and disintegrate. But if you can keep your attention on what you're thinking of and speak it out without writing it out, it's like, you've got your head up focused on and you find the actually you get distracted less in terms of you don't get to your second or third task and go, oh my goodness, what was I talking about there? You can actually talk through all of your tasks and get them all down quite quickly. And so a lot of these, a lot of these things are very subtle, but if you understand the dyslexic, ADHD and these sorts of executive functioning, um, points, which trip you up, you can then start putting in strategies and habits that, um, make you step over them automatically.

Laurie: So through your dyslexia at work program, you actually work with individuals on how to get their iPad set up, get these specific apps loaded, and then how to really use them efficiently correct?

Darius: Yes. Well, we've got, we're a bit lucky and I'm sorry. Ma if you're most of your listeners in America are, are in America, please forgive me. Okay. But in the UK, I'm going to show off. Okay. The UK has got this grant for people in the workplace. If they've got dyslexia or ADHD, that government will actually pay for specialist training. On how to, uh, it's called workplace strategy coaching for dyslexia or ADHD. And so they will pay like \$1,000-\$3,000 for the training. They may, may even buy your iPad for you or a laptop or other assistive technology. And they will. Also pay for workplace awareness training with your colleagues to teach your colleagues how your dyslexia thinking style or ADHD might affect you as a team.

Abbey: That's brilliant. So awesome.

Darius: So we're going to be doing that. It will cost about two thousands pounds to 3000 pounds to, uh, train someone to use their iPad throughout the year. Okay. Um, because one of the biggest challenges that's hidden in all of this that we don't talk about enough is automaticity. It's how to build a habit of staying organized. I mean, we talk about working memory. We talk about, you know, um, You know, your cognitive flexibility and your, uh, inhibitory control within executive function, but there are also areas of ultimate diversity that are so important within executive function. That is basically the ability to develop good habits. And so we're factoring that into our training program where we basically say, look, we can teach you all this really quickly within like a month or two, but it'll go in one ear out the other and you'll feel guilty six months later because you never turned it into a proper habit. And then you feel you beat yourself up even more because you should know better, sort of thing now. And so our plan is one hour a week for 12 sessions. So you, so for example, The way, I think if you're going to learn a habit, this is the strategy I would take with the iPad. Even if you were doing it yourself, get the iPad, set it up and then take one app. Okay. And let's say you take Goodnotes. Okay. And you spend an hour just learning from someone who knows about Goodnotes. And it's like, well, how will I organize my notebook? You know, should I have one for every topic or should I just have one for the month of March? And I go for the month of March because I'm so disorganized. I will never put it in the right topic. I just go in chronological order and I can use search to find what I need. Okay. And so they go, oh gosh, am I allowed to do that? And you're like, yes, you are. Okay, great. Let's do that. And so. Uh, strategy. And then you meet again next week with not a workplace strategy coach like me, you would meet with someone who's technically able with that. So they would just sit down and help you. Oh, this is how you drag and drop and select and then long drag and so on. Because often you need to learn techniques that don't get tripped up by your working memory. So for example, in the iPad, it's very important to use split screen as much as possible because you've got the two elements of something side-by-side rather than flicking between the two, because the moment you flick between two things, you drop the ball. And it uses a lot of cognitive loads to remember it from one page to another. And so it can cause quite a lot of stress and slow you down. So those sorts of techniques are really important to learn. And once you start learning them, let's say after a month, you've

got good notes under your belt where like, right. Let's show you how to use Otter. So you've got notes and you can just take a note that you've done. Talk to altar and it will transcribe an email for you and how to use that within your email, you know, workflow, et cetera. And we'll spend a month on that, et cetera. And then once you spend, let's say four months mastering each one of these four apps, then you just touch base once a month to make sure you're maintaining that habit and developing that habit. And then after a year you've got a lifetime of increased productivity. That's the goal.

Abbey: That sounds amazing.

Laurie: Well, we deal with a lot of adults who come in that are looking for workplace accommodations and need help in the workplace. They're struggling. So to have you as a resource and have these things as a resource, it's going to be, it could be a game changer for a lot of these people that can help them keep a job.

Abbey: Absolutely. Individuals with dyslexia and various different learning disabilities and ADHD. A lot of people struggle with organization at work.

Darius: Well, the British dyslexia association are doing some tremendous progress within the area of dyslexia in the workplace. They've actually now got a formal qualification for a workplace needs assessor for dyslexia. And so they will spend three hours, two to three hours sitting with you, looking at your workplace and your work processes and say, did you know if you use the second monitor in this way, or you split screened in this way, or if you set this up or did this or that technique and this app or whatever, and they list it all down and then they categorize it into three categories. For example, this is how I would do it. What is, it's called in, in the, in the UK. It's called, uh, what do they call it? A reasonable adjustment. In the workplace. So there's a legal term called a reasonable adjustment. Okay.

Laurie: Which would be reasonable accommodation in the U S right.

Darius: Okay. So, um, uh, w an employer will make a reasonable adjustments or accommodation of maybe allowing you to print things on colored paper or

changing the font of something, or maybe you're allowed to raise desk or standing desks because you need to move around because you're ADHD or whatever it is. There's some reasonable adjustments to be made but the UK government recognizes, there are some adjustments that kind of unreasonable to ask the employer to do. Um, our kind of unreasonable to ask the employee to fund. And so that's where the government funds this, um, these adjustments, maybe if everyone else has laptops and it works fine, but you really need to write things down and get them digitally rather than with notebooks, because of remote working and sharing your, your notes and so on. They'll still stretch to saying, okay, you, you you're eligible for a laptop, an iPad with a pen, for example, but that's not what a normal employee would deliver to a typical employee. So it's, it's, it's a, it's an above it above and a reasonable adjustment. And then there's a third category that's ideal, an ideal accommodation. So, you know, it might be instead of a 340 pound iPad, it might be a 1000 pound iPad pro with a 13 inch screen because it's the size of a piece of paper. And, you know, an executive goes, look, I'm not going to get the government to pay for that. I'm just going to pay it for myself and it'll pay itself off over the next couple of months sort of thing, and increased productivity. So it's kind of three levels of accommodations that people kind of need, and I think it's really helpful to find someone to do that for you because you don't know what you don't know. And in terms of, in terms of, you know, when it comes to one small productivity hack, I mean, I'll give you an example. This is mind blowing. Okay. I spoke to a manager of a charity. And she's in charge of 50 people and she has to put in funding applications occasionally. Okay. And I said to her, she said to me, well, I, um, it takes me three days to do a funding application. I said, well, fair enough. That sounds pretty reasonable. I'm dyslexic. It takes me forever to do stuff like that. She's dyslexic too. And I said, so how long does it take? She says, it's faster when I sit down with a colleague. I said, so how long does it take with a colleague? And she said two hours. And I said, what two hours to tell the colleague what to do? And then they go do the rest. She says, no between me and my colleague within two hours, the whole application's done. And I'm like, you've got to explain that to me. And she says, this is what happens. I sit at the desk. And my colleagues sucks at the computer and I say, oh right. Yes, there was that, um, incident that we had where it helped that person over there, we need to include it. And while she's talking about that, the person goes and finds that record and she found it, put it into the document and she says, oh, there's this that we did. We've got that. And remember, Becky did

that and remember this and the colleague is finding, the colleague is doing the processing. Well, and the working memory tasks and the executive functioning tasks, while the manager is doing the high level, uh, big picture thinking and they get it done in two hours. If she's done on her own, what happens is she's clicking between this screen. Oh, I've got to go and find that. And she loses her train of thought while she's finding this. And so on and within hours, she can have spent three, eight hour days and it's normally her weekends is two of those eight hour days. And she has to do that four or five times in a year. Can you imagine how much that impacts her home life? There was a point in your life with dyslexia that you cannot start compensating for all of this extra time by taking your work home with you to make up for that extra time, because someone has got to pay for that. And it's often your wife or your children who are the soft targets, and there comes a point roundabout 35, where you realize. I have got responsibilities here at work and at home, I've got to find a better way than just spending more time grinding through this. And that's where one small technique like that, where we say right from now on, you have to make a decision every time you've got a work thing to do a funding application, you put in two hours with that colleague and it will save you a whole weekend of grief with your family.

Laurie: Right. Wow, that's awesome.

Abbey: That is awesome. Wouldn't that be nice if we all could do that too, right?

Laurie: Those, those efficiency strategies. So if we have adults on, on the side of the, of the pond that are interested in the, in the dyslexia at work, is that, is that a service you can provide virtually and to people outside of the UK?

Darius: Well, yes, our specialism is for remote workers. Um, so yeah, we deliver it to remote workers with dyslexia, ADHD, because remote working is actually making it better and also worse in different ways for people with dyslexia, ADHD, and ADHD, or, and/or. Um, so yes, we can do that remotely. Uh, we won't be able. Get this government grant to pay for all butt, uh, it's worth the \$2,000 or \$3,000 it does to do it, you know?

Abbey: Definitely. I can think of several individuals that I've recently met with and evaluated that could really benefit from your, your services and your help. That's so great. What you're doing. Amazing like you, I feel like we could do a whole nother hour like this. I love that you have such a passion for helping people with dyslexia. You have so many great, um, resources and services to offer. And so I want to make sure we include all of your links in our show notes, both to Bullet Map and to the Dyslexia At Work. Um, thank you. I mean, I just, I can't even thank you enough. This has been amazing. And I feel like we may be circling back with you again, because I feel like.

Abbey: Definitely! You're so knowledgeable and you've shared such important pieces of your knowledge, um, combined with your experience, personal and clients. And I just appreciate that so much, and I really think it's going to be beneficial to our listeners. So thank you so much for sharing all of your knowledge and your stories and your experience with us.

Darius: My pleasure. Thank you for that lovely feedback. Um, at some point, maybe I can come back in the future and tell you about the app we're planning on developing as a result of, you know, our, our goal, our mission actually is to train people how to use the iPad and these four or five different apps or more apps, and then find exactly what features people actually use with dyslexia and ADHD, not what people think they'll use, but what they actually use. And then we'll create one app that puts them all into one place and makes it into a killer dyslexia at work app and ADHD at work app.

Laurie: We will definitely have you back for that. That is. No, we love, we love being able to provide our families with amazing resources and, and things that we know we're going to help and make a difference in their life. So I feel like that is going to be, yeah. We'd love to help you on the other side of developing it too, because I feel like we have a little bit of input. Don't you think Abbey?

Abbey: Yeah, I think so, for sure. I think I could benefit from that. Well, I'm going to download some of the apps, yeah.

Darius: I need as much help as I am, as I can, because I'm not a dyslexia expert. You know, um, I'm, I'm not, I've not got a formal training in

dyslexia. My role basically has been to translate dyslexia to other dyslexics with the zero gravity workshop, with a stick shift analogy, which isn't share here with different ways of understanding this paradigm. So dyslexics can actually understand. Experts in dyslexia because often experts in dyslexia don't have dyslexia and they don't explain it in a dyslexia way, friendly way, you know?

Abbey: And they don't have nearly as much resources to recommend either. Typically, they don't have the experience with all the different resources that you've worked on and touched on to share with individuals. So you've given us a lot of extra resources to tap into more than just using someone that's an expert in the field of dyslexia.

Darius: It's fascinating to see that within the realm of dislikes, you, you either it's, it's either you either have to go and pay for a real, super expert, or get nothing. And there isn't necessarily a gradient in between, you know? And, and sometimes you don't need really an expert. Like for example, within the dyslexia at work strategy, you don't need a workplace strategy coach to be teaching you that you can select it like this and press hard and drag it across. But that is what you actually need to learn. And so I think there needs to be kind of like tiers of different people so that sometimes you need the real experts in a particular area that can adapt what you're doing. And other times you need a more niche sort of technician.

Laurie: I agree. I agree.

Abbey: I agree.

Laurie: Thank you so much for being here. We're going to include all of your contact information in the show notes. Um, both of your websites, um, This is awesome. I'm excited.

Abbey: This was so awesome. I'm so excited for everyone to get to hear this and thank you to our listeners for sticking with us today and for listening and if you have any other topics you'd like to hear more about, feel free to

email us at [letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com](mailto:letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com). Thanks so much Darius, have a great day.

Laurie: Thanks Darius. Bye everyone.

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