

# Let's Talk Learning Disabilities

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## EPISODE 39

In this Episode of the “Living With” series, Laurie and Abbey interview a friend and colleague, Stacey Harari, who shares her experience with dyslexia, ADHD and visual processing disorder. She talks through being diagnosed, coping with various struggles in school through college and getting her masters, as well as what she does professionally now as a language therapist.

### **Diagnosed with Dyslexia in 1st Grade (2 min)**

Stacey was diagnosed with dyslexia as a first grader after a teacher approached her parents and let them know about the struggles she was having in class. The teacher went out of her way to let them know about testing for learning differences, and her parents began doing their own research to gather information on testing as well. Stacey doesn't remember where she went to have the testing done, but she was diagnosed with severe dyslexia. She was in public school at the time, and has memories of being frustrated, school being hard, and even having anxiety about how horribly she was struggling. Stacey remembers specifically sitting in the older desks in elementary school where there was a cubby at each desk, and writing down everybody's grades that were called out by the teacher on her manila folder, comparing herself to other kids in class and knowing that there was something different about her. Reading, especially out loud was dreaded, and spelling was a big struggle for her. Being diagnosed answered a question for her of why it had been so hard for her to learn versus other kids her age, but it still identified that there was in fact something “wrong” with her, and she remembers struggling with that.

### **Private School with Dyslexia Programs (4 min)**

After being diagnosed in 1st grade, Stacey attended a private school in the Dallas area called Shelton, that has a focused dyslexia program. The school caters to students with learning differences, and she remembers really feeling

like that school was a safe haven for her. She was surrounded by students who has similar struggles, and the teachers understood her brain, and how she needed to learn differently than a typical student her age might learn and process information. With being enrolled in such an intensive dyslexia therapy, Stacey improved quickly and her improvement was noticeable both in the quality of her work and her confidence in her approach to learning. During remediation and the intensive focus on dyslexia, you are actually changing the neurological pathways of the brain, which affected many areas of her daily life, not just her school work. Along with the private school and the extra attention to her dyslexia, Stacey says her parents were a huge factor in her success with learning how to overcome her learning challenges. Her mom was a great help with English, spelling and grammar, and her dad helped her to talk out math problems and make sense of whatever math they were working on together.

### **Coping with Dyslexia (10 min)**

Going back to regular school after 7th grade, Stacey was intimidated but also surrounded by a lot of support. She had a 504 plan and took advantage of the resources that were available to her. Much of her success has come from being able to utilize aides such as extra time on assignments or tests, even through graduate school. Stacey talks about approaching her professors, introducing herself and identifying her dyslexia right off the bat. She would ask her professors how they would like for her to take advantage of extra time on tests, whether that's staying later, or coming back to their office after class, etc. When she would study for tests in her graduate courses, she remembers having to recall lots of facts or quotes, and came up with a great system of her own to color code facts and quotes, because she could remember seeing a specific color and that would help her to recall the person who that fact or quote belonged to. She would sit at the front to keep her attention and also took her tape recorder to class to record the lectures, and would listen to them again later. Even in graduate school, she would fax papers to her mom to proofread for grammar and spelling corrections

### **Finding the Language Therapy Path (17 min)**

Stacey knew that she wanted to help others, and had decided that counseling was the path to follow professionally. After graduating, she practiced counseling for about 10 years, stepping into many subsets of counseling such as drug and alcohol abuse, marriage and family abuse, sexual abuse, suicide and crisis, eating disorders, etc. One day, she was spending time with a friend who was a certified language therapist, and overheard her during a reading therapy session with one of her clients. That's when she realized that's really what she wanted to do. With her own challenges with learning differences, she knew she wanted to help others who struggled in those same areas and ended up getting certified as a language therapist as well. Now she works with kids who have dyslexia, visual processing disorders, audio processing disorders, ADHD, and so on. Stacey has her own practice and loves the way she is able to help in a field that hits so close to home for her.

### **Language Therapy Approach (22 min)**

One way that Stacey gets to spend intentional time with kids who have learning differences, is by pulling them out of class into a small group, and observe how they are processing the information or assignments. She can take it at a slower pace, and help them pull apart words or numbers, and put them back together. Ultimately, she says, repetition is key. It's all about engraining a process that they can understand, so that their thought processing can follow them wherever they go. Moving those skills from short term memory to long term memory is key.

### **Visual Processing Disorder & Dyslexia (27 min)**

Along with having dyslexia, Stacey also is challenged by ADHD and visual processing disorder. She mentions this at length because she struggles to process large information visually such as text, and at the same time, visual processes also help her to process smaller bits of information for memory. She has a hard time following lines on a page from the end of one line to the start of the next. Copying information from one place to the other can be a challenge, as well as understanding space around her.

### **Developmental Optometry (30 min)**

Stacey has seen a neuro visual specialist who focuses on developmental optometry. She works with Stacey on her learning related vision issues, not just visual acuity. Prism glasses and reading therapy have allowed the doctor to help Stacey re-train her brain to allow for a thoroughly more inclusive processing capability. She has seen great improvement with this and will be sure to recommend it to others who may have trouble processing information visually, whether that is written text or content, or depth perception and spatial processing. She is enjoying the many benefits that vision therapy has created for her, one of them being less bruises from bumping into things as she walks down a hall.

### **Resources:**

Stacey's Website: <http://www.staceyharari.com>

Contact info for the podcast: [letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com](mailto:letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com)

E-Diagnostic Learning Website: <https://ediagnosticlearning.com>

Social:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/eDiaglearning/>

Twitter: @diaglearning

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/diagnostic-learning-services/>

Instagram: @diaglearning

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