NeuroFX
Changing Minds

CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS · 5.9

ADHD and Dyslexia: The Common Overlap

ADHD and dyslexia co-occur far more often than chance. They are not the same condition, but they share genetic risk factors and need to be considered together when either is being assessed.

FOR
Adults and parents considering ADHD and dyslexia

AUDIENCE AGE
All ages

REVIEWED
17 May 2026

PART OF
The NeuroFX resource library

info@neurofx.co.uk · 0333 533 3303 · neurofx.co.uk

IN SUMMARY

ADHD and Dyslexia: The Common Overlap

The link in plain terms

- **Two distinct conditions that often appear together.** ADHD affects executive function: attention, working memory, impulse control, emotional regulation. Dyslexia affects the cognitive mechanics of reading and spelling, particularly phonological processing. They are different things.
- **Around 25 to 40 percent overlap in either direction.** A quarter to two-fifths of children with ADHD also meet dyslexia criteria; a similar proportion of children with dyslexia also meet ADHD criteria. Twin and family studies show shared heritable risk factors.
- **Different assessment routes.** ADHD is a medical diagnosis under NICE NG87. Dyslexia is identified by educational psychology or specialist assessor, not by medical diagnosis. The two are separate processes that often inform each other.

How it shows up

- **Surface features overlap.** Reading that loses its place could be ADHD distractibility or dyslexia decoding difficulty. Avoidance of writing tasks could be either condition. Slow reading could be ADHD working memory or dyslexia phonological processing.
- **ADHD does not protect against dyslexia and vice versa.** Children whose ADHD assessment shows persistent reading difficulty disproportionate to their other abilities should also be considered for dyslexia. Children whose dyslexia assessment shows persistent attention difficulty across settings should be considered for ADHD.
- **Both are lifelong.** Neither resolves in adulthood. Both can be substantially supported. The right support package usually has elements addressing each condition specifically.
- **Many adults reach diagnosis late.** Lifelong difficulty with reading or writing worked around but not resolved. ADHD difficulties intensifying with adult life. A child or partner diagnosed first. These are common adult presentations.
- **Medication helps the ADHD, not the dyslexia.** ADHD treatment often improves the attentional and working memory contributors to reading. It does not address the underlying phonological difficulty. Specialist literacy support and assistive technology do that work.

What helps and where to start

- **ADHD medical management where indicated.** Standard NICE NG87 pathway with stimulants or non-stimulants. NeuroFX provides this for adults and for children aged 6 and upwards.
- **Specialist literacy support and assistive technology.** Structured literacy programmes delivered by specialist teachers, text-to-speech, speech-to-text, reading rulers. The British Dyslexia Association has resources for finding specialist assessors.
- **School and workplace adjustments.** EHCPs for children where appropriate. Reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 for adults at work and in higher education. Examination access arrangements (extra time, scribe, reader).

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP if you suspect ADHD in yourself or your child. Speak to the school SENCo, or to an educational psychologist or specialist dyslexia assessor, where dyslexia is suspected. The British Dyslexia Association website has information on finding a specialist assessor. Seek urgent help via 111, 999 or A&E for any acute mental health crisis.

SOURCES

NICE NG87; DSM-5-TR; Willcutt & Pennington 2000 (J Learn Disabil); Germano et al. 2010 (Dev Neuropsychol); British Dyslexia Association