



News & Announcements

About the Interviewees

Karey Hope is the dyslexic mother of three grown, and successful, dyslexic children. She is the creator of Dyslexia Victoria Online's teaching solutions and the website of the same name. She and her partner, Howie deGraaf, do Dyslexia Assessments which include individualized, custom teaching strategies for the client.

STR in the Community

STR runs workshops for middle school and high school level students, parents and teachers.

Workshop Topics Include:

- ▶ Study Skills for Parents
- ▶ Study Skills for Students
- ▶ Exam Preparation
- ▶ Memory Techniques

If you are interested in hosting a talk by Smart Tutor Referrals, please contact us.

Happy Birthday to Us!

Smart Tutor Referrals is celebrating 8 years of supporting families in education. We began in 2002 and since then have helped many hundreds of students in Victoria. Hooray!

Thank you for continuing to support this local, values-based business.

STR's Values

STR has been able to build a solid foundation in Victoria through working from its core values: honesty; professionalism; respect; positive vision; building learning confidence, individual ability and contribution; and positive support of students, families & teachers.

Dyslexia: Learning Difference Not Disability

This is an interview with Karey Hope and Howie deGraaf of Dyslexia Victoria Online.

Some Characteristics of Dyslexics

Karey: There is a tendency for dyslexics to be very intelligent. We look at dyslexia as a learning difference – a right-brained processing style. Depending on the research you're looking at, 10-25% of the population has some level of dyslexia.

While some dyslexics struggle with reading, spelling and writing, for some dyslexics, their challenge shows up in math and processing, or in an inability to understand instructions as they are given.

Most dyslexics think using many images – their mouth tripping over itself trying to keep up. They know what they want to say but can't find the words. They can see the ideas in their minds but can't express the ideas well in written or spoken form. They're thinking so many things at once that other people have a hard time following and understanding what they're trying to say.

We can often recognize a dyslexic student through their writing: they may start a thought at the beginning, and then finish the thought later in the middle of the paper. That's because they are trying to say everything that's in their mind all at once and it just comes out.

As well, dyslexic students are generally extremely spatial and this begins to impact them in terms of understanding instructions. They tend to sense all around themselves at once. So, if a teacher asks them to point to the back of the chair, they need to get very specific: the student will ask if it's the front or back of the chair back that they should point to.

They have a need for complete instruction. For example if a boss puts a package on the desk and asks them to mail it, they won't do it if they don't understand the full instructions (or are afraid to ask). They don't know whether to send it UPS or Canada Post; take it to the post office or get someone to pick it up; send it to arrive tomorrow or next week, etc.

So, these students are the ones asking a million questions (even if the questions were already answered the week before). They are very literal and need to know if each situation is the same or different. They never assume and always want to double-check.

Howie: They'll start asking questions after instructions are given. Many times what they're asking for is the information to be presented in a different way.

Interestingly, when writing out steps and equations, they don't trust that step one leads to step ten. They don't want to hear step one but to hear the whole concept first.

Dyslexics also tend to go off on tangents and go off-track a lot. They know they're smart, but they are very impacted by their learning difference. Sadly, they're often told they're not working hard enough or that they're lazy, but this isn't really the case.

How Dyslexic and Right-Brained Students Think

K: It's not that dyslexics can't understand abstracts; dyslexic individuals are actually excellent at understanding abstract ideas. Some of the most famous inventors and scientists in history have been dyslexic.

Dyslexics have difficulty understanding the abstract ideas of decoding words, sentences, phonics and numbers the way they are usually taught in the regular classroom. So we need to understand that this issue with abstracts is part of right-brained processing. Roughly 40% of people process with the right-brain. This doesn't mean that they are necessarily dyslexic but they can have issues with abstracts as well.

Non-dyslexics think primarily in words while dyslexics process information primarily in images. This is one of the reasons dyslexics tend to go off on tangents: they just have so many images and ideas that come to mind when working on a problem or working out a process. NASA did a study and found that non-dyslexics can process or think about 252 words per minute, whereas dyslexics can process about 10,000 images per minute.

This is also one of the strengths of the dyslexic: they make great problem solvers because they naturally can think outside-the-box. In fact, about 50% of CEO's of the top Fortune 500 companies in England are dyslexic. There are similar statistics for companies in North America as well.

The ability to read and write is not genetically encoded. We have been taught how to use many abstract concepts in order to read and write and

About Us

We provide **1-on-1, in-home tutorial support** throughout Victoria, Saanich and Sooke.

STR was established in Victoria, BC in 2002 and has built a solid reputation for creativity and professionalism.

With over 50 tutors, we are able to find the best match for each student. Our tutors are certified teachers and professionals, all carefully screened. After talking with each student to learn more about the details of his or her learning history and needs, **we chose a tutor specifically to match the needs and learning styles of each student.**

Our goal is to enhance students' skills and to cultivate learning confidence through support that is truly individualized: matched specifically to each student's needs, recognizing each student's unique talents and abilities.

We support families in education.

For more information and resources, visit us on-line at:

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do mathematic calculations. It is because these abstracts are difficult to understand for the right-brained or dyslexic that they are at a distinct disadvantage in regular schools as compared to the left-brained or non-dyslexic.

Left-brained people, looking at words and numbers, use the left brain to process them, accessing the language part of the brain which has systems for decoding. Right-brained people don't use their left brain to look at words and numbers; they may be using the part of the brain that processes faces. This works with symbols efficiently, but these symbols need to be directly connected with something real.

For example, pre-historic man looking at a dinosaur footprint (a symbol), recognized it as representing something real (food or something to fear). Right-brained people are trying to use this same logic to relate to words. The sounds of the letters C-A-T, however, don't have any real-world meaning unless connected to the image or experience of an actual cat. These sounds, or phonemes, don't have any correlation with something that is real. So, it's possible for kids to read phonetically but with no understanding of what is being read.

When we go with an approach that uses whole-word recognition, students' ability to recognize words goes up. In this approach, we are using 'concretes' and an image that links to what it's meant to be representing.

H: Dyslexics are experiential in their learning. If you can't ground them in something they can experience or sense, then they will most likely not understand the abstract on paper.

Techniques for Working with Dyslexics

H: Dyslexics process information in a different way: it's a learning difference. Once that is understood, then information can be presented in a way that works. It can be accommodated easily – not necessarily with totally new lesson plans, just different techniques for presenting the same information.

If material is being presented in terms that the dyslexic can't understand, they have a hard time doing the work. It may seem like they're day-dreaming; often they are afraid to ask. We need to change their learning environment to suit their learning styles as much as possible – to stack the deck so that learning will be easier for them.

K: Time, measurement, and spelling are all things that need to be explained in a way that make sense to them. Then they open up and have a tendency to run with it because they're very intelligent. Dyslexics are most often very

inquisitive; once they learn a topic they tend to want to learn more.

H: There is a way to teach to dyslexics that involves "whole word" recognition. This is how we teach spelling and reading, and it increases comprehension. Most dyslexics have great, nearly photographic memories.

K: Teachers often introduce a topic sequentially, step-by-step, rather than with an overview. Dyslexic students, then, get lost – not sure what was being taught without the whole picture to compare it to. Dyslexics need to understand the bigger picture.

Mind maps, clustering, and bubbles are so effective for these students for many subjects. Make it into a picture first then break it into steps. What they need to be able to do is to start with the key ideas then break it down into the components, and then write from that. If they don't do this, they can't write well.

When dyslexic students have difficulty writing essays, for example, it's because they do not know how to take big the picture perspective (the forest) then describe the smaller details (the trees). So that's where they have to be lead: to see the forest before the trees. Students need to be taught how to put their thoughts down on paper and then organize them.

H: One teen we worked with didn't understand geometry. I took a piece of paper and folded it into a triangle. A triangle drawn on a flat sheet made absolutely no sense to her. Once she saw that a triangle was a real thing she could experience and interact with, then everything else fell into place, like the formulas and working out the angles. It's not that she couldn't understand the steps in solving the equations, but she had to know what a triangle meant: what it looked and felt like.

Draw everything or do it physically, if you can. Help the student to understand it as a real thing, then they can understand it on paper. They need a reason to do it.

They need to see the end result. They need to see a complete example first then go back and learn the steps. Let them see the movie then read the book. Let them read the last chapter first. Show the end result first then go through the steps – they have to see the big picture. Let students see a book review before asking them to write one. Show examples of formatting; don't just tell them about formatting. Show them a completed science project, a completed book report, a completed essay, etc.

K: When checking spelling, grammar and writing, make comments on how to improve specifically. Demonstrate and correct the changes that need to be made. Don't just mark on a concept or give a grade, let students rewrite after explanations. They quickly improve with practice and a little extra guidance.