

Talking Book Voices Podcast
Season 3, Episode 10
Dyslexia

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Podcast Transcript
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Summary: In this episode, Engagement Specialist Alicia talks with Lisa Baker of the International Dyslexia Association's Austin Branch about understanding dyslexia, how it can affect reading, and the important role audiobooks play in providing access to books and learning. They also explore the resources and services available through the Texas Talking Book Program for readers with dyslexia.

NARRATOR INTRO: Welcome to Talking Book Voices, the podcast. Get ready to embark on an adventure with us as we dive into and celebrate the magic of the Texas Talking Book Program. Let's raise our voices together and make the world of literature accessible for all. The Texas Talking Book Program is a division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and serves as a regional library for the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, a division of the Library of Congress. The Talking Book Program provides specialized library services to individuals who have a qualifying visual, physical, or reading disability, such as dyslexia.

In each episode of Talking Book Voices, we will delve into the heart of the program, uncovering its history, sharing inspiring stories, and

exploring the vast collection of materials it has to offer. We will bring you the latest updates, interviews with program experts and patrons, and useful tips to make the most of this invaluable program for Texans and beyond.

So, whether you're an avid reader, someone with a print disability seeking accessible materials, or just curious to learn more about this great program, this podcast is made for you! Don't forget to visit us at www.texastalkingbooks.org for more information. So, let's begin Texas Talking Book Voices, a podcast by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

ALICIA: Hello, TBP Voices listeners! My name is Alicia, and I am an Engagement Specialist here at the Texas Talking Book Program.

Today we are talking about a topic that touches so many of our patrons and their families: dyslexia. Right now, there are more than 28,000 patrons using the Talking Book Program across Texas, and more than 6,000 of those patrons are students under the age of 18.

Dyslexia is one of the most common reasons people of all ages qualify for our program, and I am so glad to be joined today by the president of the International Dyslexia Association's Austin Branch, Lisa Baker. Welcome to the podcast!

LISA: Thank you so much for having me, Alicia. I serve as President of the International Dyslexia Association's Austin Branch, and I'm also a Certified Academic Language Therapist, or CALT, with 29 years of experience as a special education teacher in Austin public schools. As an academic language therapist, I have specialized training in providing intensive, explicit, structured language

instruction for individuals with dyslexia and related reading difficulties. I'm certified through the Academic Language Therapy Association, or ALTA. This work is very close to my heart.

The International Dyslexia Association has a long history in the field of dyslexia and reading instruction, with roots reaching back to the pioneering work of Dr. Samuel T. Orton. IDA continues that legacy by advancing our understanding of dyslexia and effective reading instruction. IDA also coined the term Structured Literacy to describe approaches to reading and writing instruction grounded in the science of reading.

IDA Austin is a nonprofit organization that works with families, educators, professionals, and communities throughout Central and South Texas to increase understanding of dyslexia, share reliable resources, provide professional learning, and advocate for evidence-based literacy instruction and appropriate support for individuals with dyslexia.

I'm especially excited about our conversation today because literacy is critical—and having access to books is essential for developing vocabulary, background knowledge, and a joy of reading.

ALICIA: I couldn't agree more. Thank you Lisa so much for telling us a bit about your sterling resume and the amazing work that IDA Austin does and IDA International. Well, let's start with the basics for listeners who may be less familiar with the term dyslexia. What is dyslexia?

LISA: That's a great place to start, because our understanding of dyslexia continues to evolve as the research evolves.

In 2025, the International Dyslexia Association adopted an updated definition of dyslexia that was the first major revision of its definition in more than two decades.

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability with a neurobiological origin. It primarily affects accurate and fluent word reading, decoding, and spelling. These difficulties are often related to weaknesses in processing the sounds and written patterns of language. Dyslexia occurs along a continuum of severity, so it does not look exactly the same in every individual.

The updated definition also recognizes that the causes of dyslexia are complex and involve combinations of genetic, neurobiological, and environmental influences that interact throughout development. Difficulties with phonological processing — working with the sounds of spoken language — and morphological processing — working with meaningful parts of words — are common in dyslexia, but they are not universal.

One thing that is very important for families to understand is that dyslexia is not an indication of intelligence. Individuals with dyslexia represent the full range of cognitive abilities. A difficulty learning to read words efficiently does not tell us how intelligent someone is or what the person is capable of learning.

And dyslexia is not simply seeing letters or words backwards. That is probably one of the most persistent misconceptions we still hear. Dyslexia is not a vision problem; it involves the language and literacy processes needed for efficient word reading and spelling.

Another important part of the updated definition is its emphasis on early identification and support. We do not want to wait for a child to

fail before providing help. Early language and literacy support can make an enormous difference, and identification and targeted instruction remain important at any age.

That is also why IDA continues to emphasize evidence-based reading instruction. Students with dyslexia need explicit, systematic instruction that addresses the structure of spoken and written language and is responsive to the learner.

ALICIA: That's really helpful context. Thank you, Lisa. So, I'm also curious, how does dyslexia actually affect someone as they are reading?

LISA: For someone with dyslexia, reading often requires much more effort. Think about what happens when a skilled reader picks up a book. We recognize most words quickly and automatically, which allows our attention to go toward understanding the ideas, making connections, learning new information, and enjoying the story.

For a reader with dyslexia, that word-reading process is not as automatic. Reading can be slower and more laborious, and maintaining that level of effort over time can be exhausting.

Difficulties with decoding, accurate and fluent word recognition, spelling, and reading rate can all contribute to mental fatigue and distract from the efficient comprehension of the text.

A student can struggle to independently read a grade-level passage and demonstrate excellent understanding when that same material is read aloud or provided in an accessible format. We have to be careful not to mistake difficulty accessing print for an inability to think, understand, or learn.

IDA's updated definition also recognizes that the effects of dyslexia can extend beyond word reading and spelling. Reduced reading and writing experiences can impede growth in language and knowledge and can affect reading comprehension, written expression, academic achievement, and psychological well-being. These are secondary consequences rather than defining characteristics of dyslexia.

The impact can also be emotional. Repeatedly struggling with reading, watching classmates finish more quickly, or being asked to read aloud when reading is difficult can lead to frustration, avoidance, anxiety, and a loss of confidence. That is one reason early identification and appropriate instruction matter so much.

Dyslexia looks different across individuals. The challenges a young child experiences while learning to decode can look different from the challenges an adolescent or adult experiences with reading speed, spelling, written work, or the amount of effort required to manage large volumes of print.

Every individual with dyslexia also brings a unique set of strengths, interests, talents, and ways of thinking. We should recognize and build on those individual strengths without assuming that dyslexia itself creates one particular type of strength.

Ultimately, we want to build readers, not simply reading skills. The skills are the bridge. The book is the destination.

ALICIA: Wow, I love that perspective! Well, so many of our patrons with dyslexia use audiobooks. From your perspective, how do audiobooks help dyslexic readers?

LISA: Audiobooks give students with dyslexia access to books and information while they continue developing their word-reading skills. A student with dyslexia can listen to grade-level books, learn new vocabulary, build background knowledge, understand complex ideas, and enjoy literature without the difficulty of decoding every word.

That connects directly to an important point in IDA's updated information: reduced reading and writing experience can impede growth in language and knowledge. Audiobooks help prevent difficulty accessing print from becoming a barrier to all of the learning that comes through books.

Through listening, students can encounter sophisticated vocabulary and language, build background knowledge, strengthen comprehension, participate in grade-level learning, and experience literature that would otherwise be difficult to access independently. Just as importantly, they can experience the pleasure of a really good book.

Some readers benefit from listening while following along with printed text. Others use audio independently. The best approach depends on the reader and the purpose of the activity.

Audiobooks are a legitimate accessibility tool and accommodation — not a shortcut and not cheating. They provide a way for a person to access the content they are capable of understanding. If a person needs glasses to access print visually, we do not say the glasses are doing the reading for them. In much the same way, an audiobook can remove a barrier between a person and the content they are capable of understanding.

At the same time, audiobooks do not replace appropriate, evidence-based reading instruction for a child who is learning to read. They serve a different purpose. Reading instruction builds the skills needed for increasingly accurate and independent word reading, while audiobooks provide access to books, knowledge, vocabulary, and grade-level content. These two supports can and should exist side by side: we can remediate the reading difficulty while also accommodating the reader.

A child should not have to wait until they can independently decode a book before they are allowed to experience everything that a book has to offer.

ALICIA: Wow, thank you so much for sharing all of that. This has been such a helpful conversation, and I know our listeners will get a lot out of it.

LISA: Thank you, Alicia. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk about dyslexia and to highlight the importance of both effective reading instruction and access to books. When we understand dyslexia and respond with the right instruction, resources, and accommodations, we remove barriers to learning while keeping expectations high.

My hope is that families leave this conversation knowing that difficulty accessing print should never limit access to knowledge, literature, or opportunity. Individuals with dyslexia deserve both the instruction that helps them develop as readers and the tools that allow them to participate fully as learners.

ALICIA: You're absolutely right about that, and I'm just curious, is there anything else you'd like our listeners to know about IDA Austin, or how they can get connected with your chapter?

LISA: Absolutely. IDA Austin, along with two other branches in Texas, serves individuals with dyslexia, families, educators, and communities throughout Texas. We provide educational programs, professional learning, community events, resources, and advocacy related to dyslexia and evidence-based literacy instruction.

A great place to start is our IDA Austin website at aus.dyslexiaida.org. Our website is a gateway to both our local work and our larger International Dyslexia Association. Listeners can learn about our local programs and upcoming events, find resources for families and educators, and connect with the broader information and national resources available through IDA.

You can also follow IDA Austin on Facebook. This is one of the easiest ways to stay connected with our local programs and events and with the dyslexia and literacy information and resources we share with our community.

One of the things I appreciate about IDA is that our work continues to evolve as the science evolves. The updated 2025 definition of dyslexia is a good example of that, as is IDA's continuing work around Structured Literacy and educator knowledge and preparation.

ALICIA: Wow, I hope that some of our patrons do take advantage of all of the services that you have on offer. And thank you again for joining us today, Lisa. We really appreciate you taking the time to help our listeners understand dyslexia a little bit better.

Now I want to spend some time talking about how the Talking Book Program specifically supports readers with dyslexia, because this is a resource many families don't know is available to them.

TBP provides free access to more than 180,000 audiobooks and audio magazines for patrons with a qualifying reading disability, including dyslexia. Our collection includes literary classics that are often assigned in school, current bestsellers, and fiction and nonfiction in every genre, for every age and reading level, with new titles added daily. Audiobooks open up a world of learning and imagination for students with dyslexia.

LISA: Love that. So how does a student or family actually get started with TBP?

ALICIA: Well, it's a straightforward process. Schools that want to bring TBP into the classroom can find the School Classroom Application Form on our website and email the completed form to our Reader Services team. Parents and guardians can sign their child up individually using our Individual Application form, which needs to be certified by a Certifying Authority, such as a doctor, nurse, psychologist, therapist, or a professional like a certified reading specialist, school psychologist, counselor, or librarian, who can confirm the student's reading disability.

There is no minimum age to become a TBP patron, and families do not need to submit medical records or insurance information. The application itself is just four pages, and it is available in both English and Spanish as a fillable PDF on our website.

LISA: And what about the technology side? What do patrons need to actually listen to the books?

ALICIA: Our audiobooks are available through BARD, the Braille and Audio Reading Download service, which works on smartphones, tablets, and Chromebooks through the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. They're also available through BARD Express on Windows computers. If a patron doesn't have access to one of those devices, we can mail them a Digital Talking Book Machine, along with cartridges preloaded with books, which works offline and on the go.

Beyond audiobooks, TBP also offers physical large print books and physical accessible games, and our reader consultants and librarians can build custom, personalized book lists on almost any topic. We also have bilingual staff available to support Spanish-speaking patrons and families.

LISA: We sometimes hear TBP compared to other audiobook services for students with reading disabilities, like Learning Ally or Bookshare. How is TBP different?

ALICIA: I'm so glad you asked! Well, all three services have large collections, and none of them have wait times, unlike some public library apps such as Libby or Hoopla. One main difference is that TBP does not include textbooks, while Learning Ally and Bookshare do. Another difference is that TBP's app does not have a read-along feature, where text scrolls on screen while the audio plays, while Bookshare and Learning Ally both offer that read-along component. Other key differences are that TBP is free for all people with a qualifying disability, whether that person is a student, a non-student, a child, an adult, or a school institution itself. Finally, TBP always uses human narration, never any AI or synthetic voices, which you'll find is not always the case with other audiobook

services. But here's the thing — we recommend families take advantage of all three services, and their library apps, if they can!

LISA: Yes, that is such useful context for families who are weighing their options. Is there anything else you want listeners to know?

ALICIA: Yes, I always like to mention our Disability Information and Referral Center, or DIRC. The DIRC offers health-related information and can answer questions about dyslexia resources, scholarships and grants, local support groups, medical equipment, assistive technology, and more.

You do not have to be a registered TBP patron to use the DIRC. It is a free reference service open to anyone in Texas. Just call 1-800-252-9605 or email dirc@tsl.texas.gov to ask your question.

Well, that is just about all the time we have for today. I want to thank Lisa Baker again for joining us and helping our listeners better understand what dyslexia is, how it affects readers, and how tools like audiobooks and TBP can make such a difference.

LISA: Well, thank you for having me, Alicia. It has been an honor to be here today and to participate in this podcast.

ALICIA: We're so grateful for you. Well, if you or someone you love has dyslexia, TBP Voices listeners, or another qualifying reading disability, we would love to help YOU get connected to TBP's collection of books, magazines, and games. Give us a call at 1-800-252-9605 or reach out via email at tbp.services@tsl.texas.gov. We look forward to helping you find your next great read. Thanks for listening, and we will see you next time on TBP Voices.