

Dyslexia Guide



Understanding Special Education and Dyslexia
Navigating the Special Education Process
Support and Resources
Individualized Education Programs
Legal Rights & Safeguards
Resources & Advice



About This Guide

Dyslexia is a brain-based condition that impacts how we process written information. Students with dyslexia have brains that process information in unique ways and need specific reading instruction to learn letters and sounds.

GOOD NEWS

Teachers are now learning and incorporating better ways to teach reading based on new research and evidence, which can help all students, especially those with dyslexia.

IN THIS GUIDE, YOU'LL LEARN

- What dyslexia is and how it affects your child
- How to work with your child's teacher
- What screening tests can tell you
- How to get help for your child



What's Inside This Guide

- What is dyslexia?
- How common is it?
- **Equity & advocacy:** Support for all families
- **Warning signs:** What to look for at different ages
- **Hidden strengths:** The gifts that often come with dyslexia
- Dyslexia Myths vs. Facts
- **Getting a diagnosis:** Understanding school screening and private testing
- Questions to ask your child's school
- **Getting help at school:** IEP and 504 Plans
- **Helpful technology:** Tools that make learning easier
- **Screening tests:** What they are and when they happen
- **Private tutoring:** When and why families seek extra help
- Talking to your child about dyslexia

What is Dyslexia?

IN SIMPLE TERMS

Dyslexia is a learning difference that makes reading and spelling harder than it is for most people. It affects how quickly and accurately someone can read or spell words, and these challenges don't go away even with good teaching. Dyslexia can be mild or severe, and it runs in families.

The root cause is usually difficulty breaking words into sounds (like hearing the three separate sounds in “cat”: c-a-t), though this isn't true for everyone. Children who struggle with spoken language early on may also have trouble learning to read later.

Because reading is harder, other challenges can develop: Students may have more difficulty understanding what they read, less practice with reading and writing, and slower growth in vocabulary and knowledge. This can affect school performance, self-confidence, and even job opportunities later in life.

The good news: with the right help, people with dyslexia can succeed. The earlier support begins—ideally in preschool and early elementary school—the better, though it's never too late to help.

Source: Minnesota Statute 125A.01



CO-OCCURRING CONDITIONS

Dyslexia often coexists with other conditions. It is common for children with dyslexia to also have one or more of the following:

- **ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder):**
Difficulty with focus, organization, and impulse control
- **Dysgraphia:** Difficulty with handwriting and written expression
- **Dyscalculia:** Difficulty with math concepts and number sense

If your child has been diagnosed with dyslexia and you notice challenges in other areas, talk to your child's doctor or school about additional evaluation.

HOW COMMON IS DYSLEXIA?

In the general population, as many as 5–20% of people (1 in 5 to 1 in 20) have some dyslexia symptoms, including:

- Slow or inaccurate reading
- Poor spelling
- Poor writing
- Mixing up similar words

In schools, about 13–14% of students (roughly 1 in 7) have a reading disability that qualifies them for special education. Students with dyslexia characteristics are likely to be in every classroom. Even if they don't qualify for special education, they may still struggle.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

Families of color and low-income communities are more likely to have undiagnosed dyslexia due to systemic racism and a lack of access to resources. According to the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity, dyslexia affects people of all races, ethnicities, and income levels. In a supportive environment, people with dyslexia thrive when they receive proper instruction and accommodations.

Equity & Advocacy: Support for All Families

Every child deserves timely identification and support—but not all families have equal access. Research shows that Black, multilingual, and low-income students are more likely to be under-identified or misidentified when it comes to dyslexia. Families navigating housing instability, language barriers, or systemic inequities may also experience delays in identification and support.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

- **You have the right to request a dyslexia screening** or evaluation for your child at any time, in writing.
- **Schools must provide screening, evaluation, and reading support to all students**—including students who change schools frequently. Under the McKinney-Vento Act, students experiencing housing instability have the right to continued educational services, including reading intervention.
- **Speaking and reading more than one language does not cause dyslexia.** If your child speaks more than one language and is struggling with reading, you have the right to request an evaluation. Evaluations can and should consider your child's home language.
- If your concerns are dismissed, put your request in writing, keep copies of all communication, and ask for a written explanation of the school's decision. You can also contact an advocacy organization (listed in the Resources section) for support.

IF YOU FEEL YOUR CONCERNS ARE BEING DISMISSED

Trust your instincts as a parent or caregiver. You know your child best. If you feel the school is not taking your concerns seriously:

- Put your request for evaluation in writing and keep a copy.
- Ask the school to explain their decision in writing.
- Request a meeting with your child's teacher and the school's reading specialist.
- Contact a parent advocacy organization for guidance and support.
- Consider requesting an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) if you disagree with the school's evaluation.

WARNING SIGNS BY AGE

If you notice three or more of these signs, ask about screening, especially if there is a family history of dyslexia characteristics in your family.

Thank you to Susan Barton and Bright Solutions for a list of signs that may indicate a person has dyslexia.

Pre-K and Kindergarten

- **Late talking:** Not speaking words by their first birthday; may not talk until age 2, 2½, 3, or older
- **Mixing up sounds:** Says "aminal" instead of "animal" or "bisghetti" instead of "spaghetti"
- **Stuttering or cluttering in early speech**
- **Can't tie their shoes**
- **Confused about directions:** Left vs. right, over vs. under, before vs. after
- **Switches hands:** May use right hand, then left hand while coloring or writing (may not settle on one hand until age 7 or 8)
- **Can't rhyme:** By age 4½, can't tell you words that rhyme with "cat" or "seat"—even after hearing lots of rhyming books

- **Trouble with letter names and sounds:** Hard time learning the alphabet and connecting letters to the sounds they represent
- **Unclear speech:** Trouble saying certain sounds, such as R's and L's, M's and N's. For example, may say "wed and gween" instead of "red and green."
Note: This is common in preschool, but if it continues into 2nd or 3rd grade, it may be a concern.
- **Family history of dyslexia**

Elementary School

- **Inaccurate reading:** Slow or choppy when reading aloud
- **May not remember words:** May read a word on one page but not recognize it on the next
- **Poor spelling**
- **Trouble finding words:** "Um, that thing, um, the one that does ____"
- **Can't remember sight words:** Such as "the," "was," "said"
- **Dreads going to school**
- **Trouble following directions with multiple steps**
- **Hard time learning their own address and phone number**
- **Organizing information:** Difficulty with sequences like days of the week or months of the year
- **Misreads words:** Confuses words with the same first/last letters and shape (house/horse, beach/bench)
- **Leaves out or adds letters:** "could" becomes "cold" or "star" becomes "stair"
- **Mixes up letter order:** "who/how," "lots/lost," "saw/was"
- **Substitutes similar-looking words:** "sunrise" for "surprise," "house" for "horse"
- **Substitutes words that mean the same:** "trip" for "journey," "fast" for "speed"
- **Skips small words:** Misses or changes words like "a," "the," "from," "were"

- **Changes word endings:** Says “need” instead of “needed” or “talks” instead of “talking”
- **Gets tired quickly from reading**
- **Low reading comprehension (but good listening comprehension):** Spends so much energy on words, they can’t focus on meaning
- **Trouble with word problems in math**
- **Messy handwriting**
- **Difficulty with timed tasks**
- **Trouble copying from one place to another:**
Such as from the board to paper
- **Does not read for pleasure**
- **Very messy:** Bedrooms, lockers, desks, and backpacks are extremely disorganized

Middle and High School

All the elementary school signs, plus:

- **Limited vocabulary**
- **Misspelling:** Even when copying from the board, book, or screen
- **Poor writing skills:** What they say is much better than what they write
- **Avoids writing whenever possible**
- **Writes in one long sentence**
- **Trouble learning foreign languages**
- **Poor grades in many classes**
- **Gets lost easily:** Confuses north, south, east, west; has trouble reading maps
- **Struggles with sequences:** Like the steps in long division
- **Hard time learning to type:** The random keyboard layout requires memorization
- **Difficulty memorizing facts:** Like water boils at 212°F, the speed of light, historical dates, and names

Hidden Strengths of Dyslexia

WHAT IS "2E" OR "TWICE EXCEPTIONAL"?

This means a person is both gifted and has a learning disability. Their strengths can hide their challenges, and their challenges can hide their strengths.

COMMON STRENGTHS IN PEOPLE WITH DYSLEXIA

Many people with dyslexia excel in areas that don't require strong reading skills:

- High empathy (understanding others' feelings)
- Strong visual-spatial reasoning (understanding shapes, space, and how things fit together)
- Puzzle solving
- Creativity and artistic ability
- Acting talent
- "Outside the box" thinking
- Logical reasoning
- Creative problem solving
- Strong problem-solving skills

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

For parents and caregivers: Help your child find activities where they excel to build self-esteem and balance the struggles they face in reading.

BUILDING CHARACTER

When students are given access to tools for dyslexia that support their experience in an educational environment, they develop:

- Resilience (bouncing back from setbacks)
- Perseverance (not giving up)
- Strong communication skills

Source: University of Michigan – The Many Strengths of Dyslexics



Myths and Facts

MYTH #1: Writing letters backwards is the main sign of dyslexia

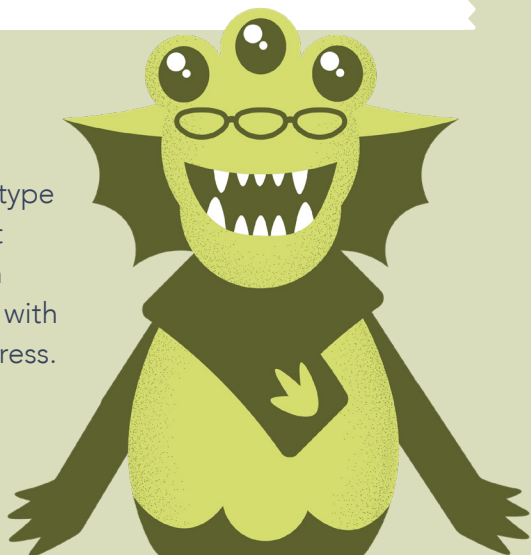
FACT: Some kids with dyslexia reverse letters, and some don't. Many young children reverse letters (like b/d or p/q)—it's normal. If your child still does this by the end of first grade, ask about an evaluation.

MYTH #2: Dyslexia doesn't show up until elementary school

FACT: Signs can appear in preschool or even earlier. Warning signs include difficulty rhyming and being a "late talker."

MYTH #3: Kids with dyslexia just need to try harder

FACT: The brain processes information in unique ways in kids with dyslexia. It's not about effort—it's about the type of instruction. With the right teaching methods based on research and evidence, kids with dyslexia can make real progress.





MYTH #4: Dyslexia goes away once kids learn to read

FACT: Learning to read helps, but dyslexia doesn't disappear. It's lifelong and can continue to affect reading speed, comprehension, spelling, and writing.

MYTH #5: Dyslexia is a vision problem

FACT: Vision problems don't cause dyslexia. Kids with dyslexia aren't more likely to have eye problems than other kids. Some may have trouble with visual processing (how the brain interprets what the eyes see), but that's separate from dyslexia.

MYTH #6: Dyslexia only happens in English

FACT: Dyslexia exists worldwide in all languages. It may take longer to identify in multilingual kids because teachers might think they're struggling because they're learning a new language.

MYTH #7: Dyslexia is caused by not reading enough at home

FACT: Dyslexia is a brain-based condition, not caused by lack of exposure to books. Reading at home is important for all kids, but it doesn't cause or prevent dyslexia.

Getting a Diagnosis

SCHOOL SCREENING (FREE AND AUTOMATIC)

Public schools now give screening tests to identify students who may have dyslexia characteristics:

- K–3 students: Tested 3 times per year
- Grades 4–12: Tested until reading at grade level

These tests help teachers identify students who exhibit early warning signs for dyslexia.

Important: School screening is not the same as a diagnosis.

Screening tells us a child may be at risk for reading difficulties—it does not tell us why. Schools can identify reading difficulties and provide intervention, but a formal diagnosis of dyslexia must be obtained from a qualified professional, such as a neuropsychologist, psychologist, or other licensed evaluator.

PRIVATE DIAGNOSIS (COST PAID BY CAREGIVER)

Why get a private evaluation? School screening may not provide thorough testing results for a student to receive specialized services or in a time frame that best supports a student. A private diagnosis provides:

- Detailed testing results
- Documentation needed for intensive support
- Eligibility for specialized interventions

A diagnosis is not a negative label—it opens doors to the specific support your child needs to succeed.

WHERE TO GET A PRIVATE DIAGNOSIS

Note: This list is not complete. There are other qualified providers.

- International Dyslexia Association, Upper Midwest – Access to a provider directory
- Groves Academy – St. Louis Park
- The Reading Center – Rochester and Woodbury
- LDA of Minnesota – Golden Valley



Questions to Ask Your Child's School

As a parent or caregiver, you are your child's best advocate. Here are questions you can ask your child's school to better understand what support is available and how your child is progressing:

- What reading curriculum or intervention program is being used with my child?
- How often is my child receiving reading support, and for how long each session?
- How will my child's progress be measured, and how often will results be shared with me?
- Can I see the data from my child's screenings and progress monitoring?
- What should I be looking for in the screening results that are shared with me?
- At what point should I consider requesting a formal evaluation or private diagnosis?
- What is the school's intervention plan, and how long will we try it before considering other options?
- Who can I talk to if I have concerns about my child's reading progress?

GETTING HELP AT SCHOOL: IEP VS. 504 PLANS

Students with a dyslexia diagnosis must meet state and federal requirements to qualify for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan.

Check out the [Special Education Guide](#) for more resources and guidance to navigate the Special Education Process!

IEP (INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM)

Who qualifies: Students who need special teaching methods because of a disability (like a learning disability or cognitive challenges)

Important: An IEP is a legal document with specific rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As a parent, you are an equal member of your child's IEP team.

What you get:

- Customized education services
- Specific learning goals
- Regular progress tracking
- Accommodations (for instance, extra time on tests)

504 PLAN

Who qualifies: Students who need accommodations but not special teaching (such as those with ADHD, chronic health conditions, or physical disabilities)

What you get:

- Accommodations in the classroom, such as extra time, specific seating, and breaks
- Accommodations for sports or extracurricular activities
- Accommodations for homework, test taking, notes, and other assignments
- Use of assistive technology



KEY DIFFERENCES:

	INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)	504 PLAN
WHAT IS IT?	Your child gets specialized teaching methods and modified instruction to help them learn. An IEP is a legal document with specific rights under the IDEA act.	Your child learns the same material as other students but receives accommodations (such as extra time or a quiet space) to help them succeed.
WHO QUALIFIES?	Your child has one of 13 specific disabilities which requires specific teaching methods to make progress in school.	Your child has a disability that makes regular classroom learning harder, but they can make progress with the right support.
OUTCOMES OF THE PROCESS	A detailed plan that includes: • Where your child is now (their current skills) • Specific, measurable goals for the year • Exactly what services they'll get, how often, and from whom • Regular progress tracking	A list of accommodations, such as: • Accommodations in the classroom (extra time, seating, breaks, assistive technology) • Accommodations for sports or extracurricular activities • Accommodations for homework, test taking, notes, and assignments
WHO IMPLEMENTS THE PLAN?	• You (the parent or caregiver) • General education teacher • Special education teacher • School psychologist or specialist • District representative who can approve resources	• You (the parent or caregiver) • General education teacher • School principal
YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARENT OR CAREGIVER	• School must get your written permission before evaluating your child • You must be notified in writing before any changes • Plan reviewed every year • Full re-evaluation every 3 years	• School must get your written permission before evaluating your child • The parents or caregivers must be notified of significant changes • Plan reviewed every year as needed • Full re-evaluation every 3 years

Helpful Technology

Assistive technology is any tool, device, software, or equipment that helps with learning. It does not “give answers.” It removes barriers so your child can show what they know.

For many students with dyslexia, assistive technology is not a shortcut—it is a support. Most schools already have many of these tools available. Families just need to know to ask.

COMMON TYPES

Text-to-speech (for reading)

The device reads text aloud to your child.

- Like when Siri reads a message
- A computer reading a website or a document
- Built into many school devices

This helps students access grade-level content even when decoding is still developing.

Speech-to-text (for writing)

Your child speaks, and the device types the words. Instead of struggling to spell every word on paper, students can focus on getting their ideas out clearly.

Speech-to-text tools include:

- Built-in dictation on Chromebooks, iPads, and smartphones
- Google Docs voice typing
- Microsoft Word dictation
- Word prediction software that suggests words as your child types

This support reduces frustration and allows students to show their true thinking—even when spelling and handwriting are still developing.

Audiobooks

Listen to books instead of reading them. Audiobooks allow your child to access stories and information at their thinking level, not just their reading level.

Note-taking assistance

Tools that help students capture notes without having to write everything down, such as audio recording apps, shared notes from classmates, or teacher-provided outlines.

WHERE TO USE IT

Once you know what type of technology helps, choose a platform:

- Desktop programs
- Web-based tools
- Browser apps and extensions, such as Chrome, Safari, Google
- Microsoft tools
- iOS or Android apps

Learn More

- [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org) has examples of many assistive technology options
- PACER's Simon Technology Center offers services and technology consultation locally

Screening Tests Explained

The READ Act (Minnesota law, section 125A.56) requires regular reading screening.

WHAT GETS TESTED

At a minimum, students are tested on:

- **Phonemic Awareness:** Can they hear individual sounds in words?
- **Phonics & Decoding:** Can they connect letters to sounds?
- **Oral Reading Fluency:** How fast, accurately, and with expression do they read aloud?
- **Rapid Automatic Naming:** Can they quickly name letters, numbers, or objects?

Some schools add extra tests.

SCREENING RESULTS

Schools must share test results with parents and caregivers. These tests help identify struggling readers early so they can get help quickly.

Private Tutoring

START WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Before seeking a private tutor, work with your child's school to understand what reading support is already available. Schools are required to provide interventions for struggling readers. Ask about the school's intervention plan, how progress will be tracked, and how you will be kept informed. If school support is not enough, a private tutor can provide additional help.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A TUTOR

Anyone can call themselves a tutor, but not everyone knows how to tutor a student with dyslexia effectively. When looking for a tutor, we recommend someone trained in an Orton-Gillingham (OG) based approach. The tutoring needs to be explicit, systematic, cumulative, and multisensory. There are multiple OG-based reading instruction programs.

WHY FAMILIES USE PRIVATE TUTORS

- More frequent sessions (year-round)
- One-on-one instruction
- Specialized methods for dyslexia

Tutors trained in the Orton-Gillingham method typically charge \$60–\$100 per hour. We recommend looking for package discounts.

FINDING A QUALIFIED TUTOR

We recommend using the following directories to find a trained and certified tutor, rather than hiring someone without verified credentials:

- International Dyslexia Association, Upper Midwest (ida-uppermidwest.org) Tutor referral list
- Orton-Gillingham of MN (ogmn.org) Find an OG tutor in your area
- Orton-Gillingham Academy, OGA, (ortonacademy.org) Find a certified teacher or tutor
- Academic Language Therapy Association, ALTA (altaread.org) Find an ALTA professional
- International Dyslexia Association (dyslexiaida.org/provider-directories) National provider directory
- Bright Solutions for Dyslexia (dys-add.com) Find a Barton tutor
- Decoding Dyslexia MN (decodingdyslexiamn.org/tutoring) Tutoring resources and information



Talking to Your Child About Dyslexia

Children's confidence around reading can be affected early on. Many children with dyslexia may feel frustrated, embarrassed, or like something is wrong with them. How you talk about dyslexia at home can make a big difference.

TIPS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

- **Use simple, honest language:** "Your brain learns to read differently. That's okay—we're going to get you the right kind of help."
- **Focus on strengths:** Remind your child of the things they're great at. Dyslexia is only one part of who they are.
- **Normalize the experience:** Let your child know that many successful people have dyslexia and that it has nothing to do with intelligence.
- **Avoid blame:** Dyslexia is not caused by anything you or your child did. It's how the brain is wired.
- **Encourage a growth mindset:** Help your child understand that reading can get better with practice and the right support—even when it feels hard.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN ABOUT DYSLEXIA

Reading books with characters who have dyslexia can help children feel seen and understood. Here are some places to find age-appropriate books:

- The Literacy Nest: "12 Children's Books with Dyslexia" (theliteracynest.com)
- Your local library—ask a librarian for recommendations about books featuring characters with learning differences

Quick Action Guide

If you think your child has dyslexia:

- Talk to your child's teacher about screening results
- Ask what reading help is available at school
- Consider a private evaluation if school support isn't enough
- Look into tutoring options
- Request a meeting about a 504 Plan or IEP
- Remember: Your child has strengths too—
help them shine in other areas

You are your child's best advocate. Don't hesitate to ask questions and push for the help they need.

RESOURCES: SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD AT HOME

- Decoding Dyslexia MN (decodingdyslexiamn.org) provides free:
 - Webinars and events for families to learn more about dyslexia
 - Resources to use at home
- How to teach kids with dyslexia to read (Understood.org)
- Ten Things to Help Your Struggling Reader (Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity)
- Understanding 504 Plans ([Understood.org: understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/504-plan/understanding-504-plans](https://Understood.org/understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/504-plan/understanding-504-plans))
- IDA Dyslexia Handbook: What Every Family Should Know (dyslexiaida.org/ida-dyslexia-handbook)
- IEP and 504 Binders from Decoding Dyslexia MN (decodingdyslexiamn.org/binders)

Process Flowchart for Struggling Readers



Is your
child behind
grade level?

NO

Schools don't normally provide reading services for a child not behind grade level. Check with your District's local literacy plan.

YES

Does your child have an IEP?

Was your child
evaluated for an IEP?

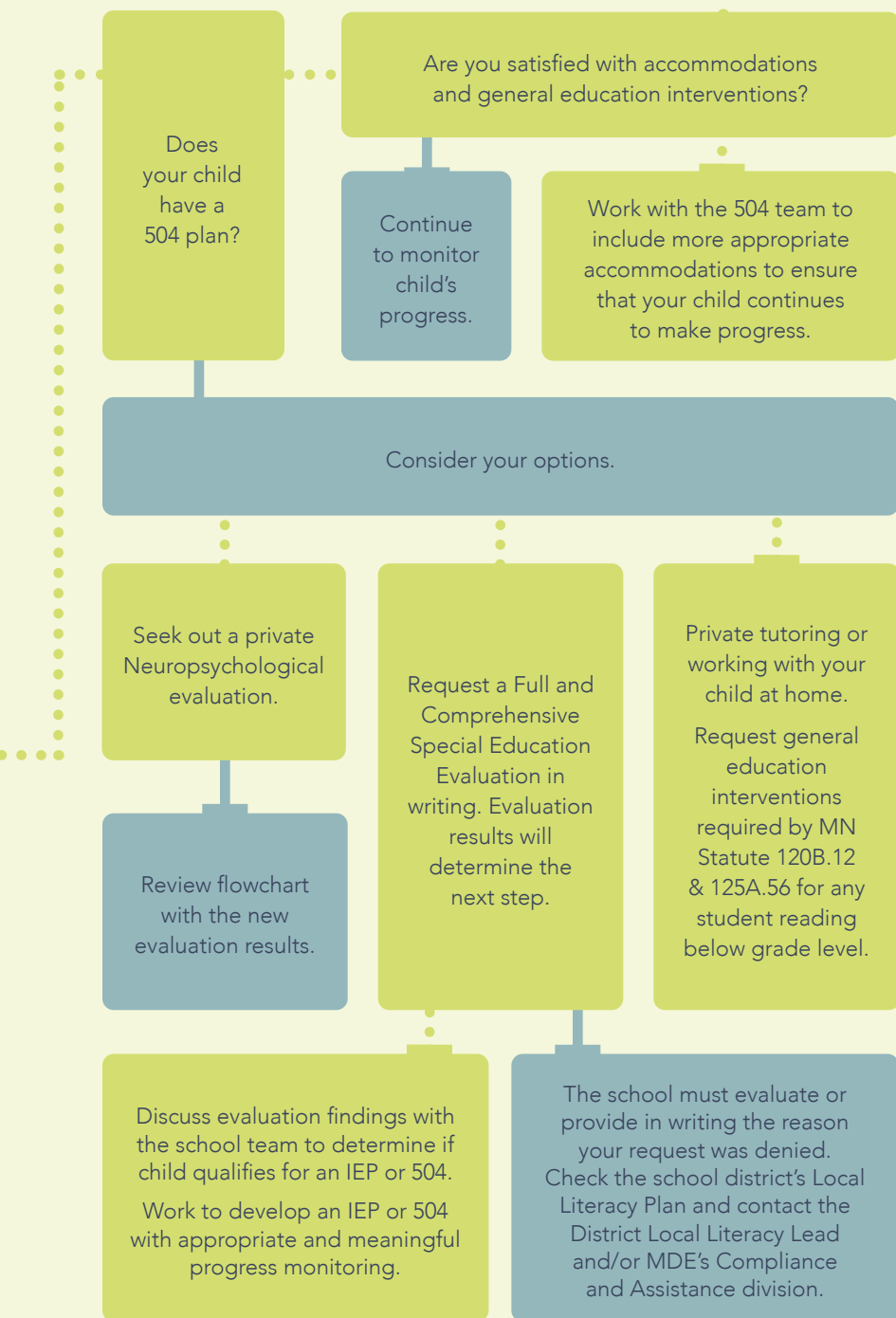
Does your child's IEP include
appropriate instructions
interventions and are they
making meaningful progress?

Request an IEP
Evaluation in writing
and work to develop
an IEP that includes
Appropriate instructions
and meaningful

Great!
Keep
monitoring
progress.

Call an IEP
meeting to
review the
effectiveness of
the current plan.

Progress. Make sure to
include items such as
Assistive Technology
and accommodations,
and continue
monitoring progress.





Brought to you by Great MN Schools and Decoding Dyslexia MN, local non-profit organizations. Find out more & donate at greatmnschools.org and decodingdyslexiamn.org.