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COMMON TERMS: SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Active Vocabulary: Words a person understands and uses in regular, everyday conversations.

Decoding: The skill of reading an unfamiliar word by breaking it down into smaller parts like syllables and individual letter-sounds.

Encoding: The skill of spelling a word accurately by considering the parts of the word (syllables) and individual letter-sounds.

Fluency: The ability to read text with accuracy, appropriate speed, and expression.

Phonemic Awareness: The ability to identify and manipulate the sounds within a word.

Phonics: The correspondence between letters and their sounds.

Naming Speed: A measurement of the rate of retrieving the name of a symbol, digit, color name, or letter.

Reading Comprehension: An understanding of written text that includes both literal and inferential comprehension. This may include fact recall, understanding vocabulary given context, forming opinions based on the text, making predictions, and more.

Executive Function: A set of higher-level cognitive skills necessary for carrying out and managing cognitive abilities and behaviors. The umbrella of executive function includes many skills including, but not limited to, attention, organization, self-monitoring, planning ahead, meeting goals, flexible thinking, and regulating emotions.

Processing Speed: The pace at which someone can get something done or take in/process visual (numbers, letters) or auditory (spoken language) information. Pace of processing is different, person to person. A person's processing speed isn't related to intelligence. However, slow processing speed can lead to frustration and challenges in school, at work, and socially.

Working Memory: The ability to hold and manage information mentally over short periods of time. This is different from rote memory, which is passive memorization of information. Working memory is important for many parts of learning, but it can especially impact a person's ability to remember, recall, and follow directions, especially those with multiple steps.

Written Expression: The ability to express one's ideas and thoughts clearly in writing. This involves one's written work to be organized, appropriately detailed, and to apply proper grammatical rules.

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COMMON TERMS: INTERVENTIONS AND APPROACHES

Educational Advocate: Someone who works with you and your school so that your child receives the services they need and that are owed to them by law. An advocate is not necessarily a lawyer, though some have law backgrounds. Educational advocacy does not need to get legal, and in fact, it's best for all parties if it doesn't. Advocates can review testing, 504 plans, and IEPs. They can attend meetings with you and negotiate with the school on your child's behalf.

Occupational Therapy: OT is a treatment that can address sensory, physical, and cognitive issues and is done with a trained and certified professional. It often helps improve coordination, self-regulation, and motor skills (all are keys to success in school). Treatment can improve these skills, ultimately leading to greater confidence and self-esteem

Speech-Language Pathologist: An SLP often does work to address receptive and expressive language, social pragmatic, and other communication issues, such as difficulties in articulation, voice, fluency and motor planning, communication issues, and speech difficulties like articulation and stuttering.

Structured Literacy: This is the most effective approach for teaching all students to read, write, listen, and spell, but it is essential for students with dyslexia and other language-based learning differences. This approach is specific in both content and the type of instruction. The structured literacy approach should include instruction and practice of many skills including, but not limited to, written expression, reading fluency, handwriting, spelling, decoding, vocabulary development, background knowledge, and comprehension. Effective instruction should be direct, sequential and informed by ongoing assessment. One example of a structured literacy approach is Orton-Gillingham.

Orton Gillingham: A direct, explicit, multisensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic, and prescriptive approach to teaching literacy. At its core, it focuses on phonemic awareness as the building block for becoming a capable and skilled reader, writer, and speller. The Orton Gillingham approach is one example of structured literacy instruction and it requires extensive training for anyone executing it either as a classroom teacher or one-on-one tutor.

Decodable Text: Used during beginning reading instruction, these are intentionally sequenced, phonetically-controlled books that take into consideration what letter-sounds, rules, etc. have been taught to the child. They are short texts that, based on a child's progress in their literacy development, should be able to be decoded and read with success.

Sight Words: These are words that are recognized quickly and effortlessly, whether or not it is phonetically regular or irregular, and depending on individuals and their skill development.

Nonsense Words: Nonsense words are not actual words in the English language. The spelling of these words does follow the rules of the English language. This means that fluent readers can decode nonsense words that align with their progress in a literacy program. The purpose of nonsense words is to assess a child's ability to use their decoding skills to read a word, eliminating the possibility that they can read a word they recognize or have memorized by its appearance.

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COMMON TERMS: DIAGNOSES

Dyslexia: Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities.

Dyscalculia: A learning difference that impacts one's ability to learn math and to interpret and write numerical information.

Dysgraphia: A breakdown in the communication pathways between the image of a letter and the ability to produce that letter in written form.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: ADHD is a common learning difference that can impact a person's ability to focus, monitor their attention, organize materials, and manage emotions. There are two distinct types: hyperactive and inattentive. The latter often doesn't *look* like ADHD since the person may not exhibit visible characteristics associated with the diagnosis, such as hyperactive and disruptive behaviors in a classroom. A person can also have a "combined" diagnosis of both types. Despite the long-standing myth, males and females are equally likely to have this learning difference.

Disorder of Written Expression: A difficulty putting ideas into writing. This can involve expressing your thoughts fully, organization of written work, and challenges applying proper capitalization and punctuation. This diagnosis often accompanies a dyslexia and/or ADHD diagnosis.

Autism Spectrum Disorder: ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts a person's ability to interact and communicate socially, as well as their interaction with the world around them. While autism can present differently for different people, it often includes difficulties participating in conversation and in reading nonverbal cues, and a tendency to think quite literally. Oftentimes, people with ASD have intense or special interests in a specific topic or area.

References: International Dyslexia Association, EarlyBird Education, Understood.org