

Parent Guide



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What is this resource and how do I use it?

If you've never heard of the term hyperlexia before, don't worry, our guide is here to help you understand the traits of hyperlexia and give you practical tips to help you support your child.

What is the focus of this resource?

Hyperlexia

Empowering Parents of
Children with SEND

Practical Support

Further Ideas and Suggestions

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Hub



Supporting a Child with *Hyperlexia*:

A Guide for Parents



Supporting a Child with Hyperlexia: A Guide for Parents

If you've never heard of the term hyperlexia before, don't worry. Our guide is here to help you understand the traits of hyperlexia and give you practical tips to help you support your child.



What is hyperlexia?

Hyperlexia comes from the words hyper, meaning 'better or above', and lexia, meaning 'reading or language'. In the simplest of terms, it is when a child can read at levels far beyond what is expected for their age and usually far above their comprehension levels. Your child may be able to read complex texts, but with limited understanding of the content.

Hyperlexia is a syndrome which can affect a child's speech, language and social interaction skills. Often, hyperlexia is associated with autism but there are different types of hyperlexia and it is possible to be hyperlexic and not autistic. It is believed that up to 14% of autistic children are also hyperlexic. Hyperlexic children often have a special interest in letters or numbers and may also be interested in other systems of organisation such as the periodic table, significant dates, flags or languages.



What are the types of hyperlexia?

There are three types of hyperlexia:

Hyperlexia I or Type 1

This version of the syndrome that tends to be temporary, wherein neurotypical children show extremely advanced skills in reading compared to their chronological age. This is usually temporary, due to the fact that other children do tend to catch up to them.

Hyperlexia II or Type 2

This is when an autistic child shows early reading skills, along with the more typical signs of autism. Children with hyperlexia II may obsess over books and letters and show great skill in memorising things such as birth dates.

Hyperlexia III or Type 3

This is when a child has not received an autism diagnosis but does exhibit some traits, including hyperlexia, which tend to disappear or fade over time. As with hyperlexia II, children may obsess over reading and have fantastic memorisation skills but, unlike those diagnosed with autism, these children generally have no difficulties with communication.



What are the signs of hyperlexia?

As hyperlexia is currently not recognised as a diagnosis in its own right but rather as a splinter of autism, there is no 'official' list of symptoms. However, you can look out for:

- Fascination with letters, numbers and other visual patterns
- Long attention span for reading
- Ability to decode and read words before being explicitly taught how to
- Difficulty understanding what they have read
- Difficulty understanding what is being said to them
- Ability to recite or identify the alphabet early
- Ability to count early
- Enjoys repetition
- Strong auditory and/or visual memory
- Ability to memorise melodies or songs
- Ritualistic or obsessive behaviours
- A need for routine and sameness
- Echolalic speech (echoing sentence structures or mimicking what they have heard)
- Sensory issues, e.g. with tastes, textures and sounds
- Behaviour issues
- Other traits can include:
 - Stacking or lining up objects
 - Difficulty initiating conversation
 - Developing specific fears or phobias
 - Pronoun reversals
 - Self-stimulatory behaviours

Parents of children with hyperlexia have also noted traits such as enhanced musical ability and strong geographical memory. They have found that their children were late toilet trainers and often suffered from sleeping difficulties.



How to Support a Child with Hyperlexia

As previously noted, it's not currently possible to get a diagnosis of hyperlexia in the UK. It is more likely that your child may be referred for assessment of ASC (Autism Spectrum Condition). There are ways you can support your child with hyperlexia.

Speech and Language Therapy

Speech and language therapy could support your child to use their skills in reading to help them to improve their skills in understanding spoken language. Many children with hyperlexia show intent to communicate but need support putting it into practice. A speech and language therapist can help with this.

Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapy can support your child to learn safely and successfully in their education setting by helping to make adaptations and adjustments. An occupational therapist can also help support you with some of the lesser-known traits of hyperlexia, such as sensory issues and sleep difficulties.

Learning Styles

Children with hyperlexia can have a specific learning style that should be taken into account to support them. This includes:

- Strong visual memory
- Processing of information through chunking
- Repetitions and patterns



How to Support a Child with Hyperlexia

Practical Tips

Label Everything

Seeing something in written form will be really helpful for your child. Add written **labels** to everything you can think of and not just objects - label people, places, actions and **emotions** too.

Keep Lists and Calendars

If you have an important event coming up, don't just tell your child verbally, write it down too. Have a written **daily routine** somewhere visible in your home that your child can refer to and make lists of things such as social customs or household rules for different places. You may also find it useful to use a **now and next board** at home.

Model Language

The more consistently that you model the language you would like to hear from your child, the more likely they are to use it themselves. For example, you could repeat what your child has said, with one word changed or added to show the correct language.

Child: "I want to go park."

Adult: "We can go to the park soon."

Child: "I see'd a cat."

Adult: "Yes, I saw the cat too!"



How to Support a Child with Hyperlexia

Use Patterned Language

Help your child to develop their cause and effect skills by using patterned language, for example, "if...., then...., because...".

Adapt Questions

Try these strategies rather than asking the usual questions. Say you are looking for your child's jacket. Instead of saying, "Where is your jacket?" try these:

- "Your jacket is in the ..." and let your child fill in the blank.
- "Is your jacket in the hall or your room?" Giving limited options of answers can help.

Write It Down

It may seem strange to write down conversations but practising the conventions of conversation can help your child to understand them better. Remember that they are primarily visual learners so the most efficient way to master a new skill is through reading it and seeing it in action. You could write down questions and answers they may get asked at Grandma's house and practise responding appropriately or rehearse what your child might need to say when they get the bus to school. You could use a comic strip template to make this more fun.

Play

Don't try to discourage your child from being interested in letters and patterns - make it into a game! They might enjoy playing with magnetic letters, making letters out of dough, making letters out of blocks or even playing early reader games on a computer or tablet. This can help them develop other skills too.

How to Support a Child with Hyperlexia

Read Together

Provide exciting, engaging reading materials for your child, ensuring that the text is as challenging as it can be whilst also making sure that the content is age appropriate. Read together and discuss afterwards to help your child make sense of what they have read. They might like to do some writing after reading to help them to organise their thoughts. Remember, it doesn't have to just be story books. You could read news articles, graphic novels, maps...anything!

Communicate

Keep the lines of **communication** open between home and school/nursery, making sure that the adults working with your child know how best to support them.

Look After Yourself

Supporting a child with hyperlexia can be a challenge, so it is important to take time to look after yourself too. We hope our guide has given you some useful information and that you are able to use some of our tips to help your child to thrive.



Disclaimers: We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation.