

Letter/Word Reversals: Why There Isn't An Easy Answer

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As a Remedial Reading teacher, the most common question I have heard from parents is, 'Why is my child writing letters backwards?' The parents also become more concerned when told there is no quick answer or solution. However, there is a necessity to investigate past experiences and to continue documentation of all attempts to improve the situation, before officially providing a diagnosis. The process of helping your child involves investigating the following topics: Development During the Early Childhood Years; Demands of the Early Elementary Years; and Parental & Professional Documentation.

As a parent, the following milestones should be observed during the early childhood years:

- *by three years old, your child should be putting sentences together
- *a three year old will have a vocabulary of up to 900 words and verbalize a sentence without omissions
- *talking at the age of four may still include grammatical errors
- *child is able to follow two or three step directions
- *child's speech is understood more than half the time

To help your child reach these milestones:

- *take the time to discuss the daily routines with your child
- *provide proper modeling for your child (ex. child states- 'ball yellow' and parent responds- 'yes, you're right the ball is yellow!')
- *share short stories with your child and slowly increase the length as they mature
- *participate with your child while playing games to build spatial awareness, turn-taking and following directions

The following milestones will occur for the child between the ages of five to seven years old:

- *identifies the left and right hand
- *able to sequence without difficulty
- *word accuracy and fluency is appropriate for age level
- *by the age of seven, letter/number reversals should be minimal
- *reads with good comprehension

To help your child reach these milestones:

- *discuss a daily schedule with your child
- *review and discuss misread or misspelled words
- *read and retell with your child (retelling includes- setting, characters, sequence, and events)
- *reread familiar books to develop phrasing, fluency, and word accuracy

While reviewing these topics/stages with an educator, administrator and/or medical professional, you will recognize if your child has had the necessary experiences to help him/her master age-appropriate expectations. Many theories suggest that reversals

are caused by a neurological deficit (something is wrong inside of the child's brain), and therefore causing many parents to use the word dyslexia. A word that only means 'difficulty with words or language' and does not provide a complete diagnosis to help the child compensate with his/her learning disability. However, before anyone should assume a neurological problem, you cannot neglect the importance of investigating if the child's perception is effected from past experiences. A person has the ability to read or learn anything, but only after becoming aware of it through one of the senses. Let's use the following example: No one should expect a six year old to write his/her name on the first day of school if he/she has never held a pencil before. Although it is expected for most children at this age to master the task, a child cannot be labeled remedial without first given the necessary experiences with a pencil and paper. However, after an appropriate length of time has passed and professionals, parents and/or caregivers document that minimal progress has been made- additional support and assessments would be provided.

Most cases of letter/word reversals are due to a lack of previous experiences and/or a weak memory. What happens when this is not the answer for your child? After the process of reviewing your child's history and documenting growth (or lack of) in school, you will then be able to discuss other options to help your child. These options can range from seeking a thorough vision and hearing screening to working closely with remedial and special education teachers. Helping your child to find a learning style that works best is usually not a task that is quickly solved. The process involves communication, teamwork and commitment from the child, parent, medical professionals and school staff members.

I hope the information regarding letter/word reversals is helpful. As a Remedial Reading teacher, I enjoy working in the public school system and providing helpful information to parents and their children. *If you have any further questions/concerns I may help you answer, please send e-mail to Linda at LINDAMASSUCCI@aol.com*