

F.Y.I. (For Your Information)



JUST THE FACTS HOW TO FIND AND SELECT AN ACADEMIC THERAPIST

What is an academic therapist?

Academic therapists (sometimes called educational therapists or academic language therapists) are specialists specifically trained to work with students with dyslexia. They have completed extensive accredited training in multisensory structured language teaching. They are trained in the structure of the English language and how to teach that structure in a multisensory manner. They are trained to remediate problems in reading, spelling, and written language. Not all students need academic therapy; some just need tutoring for help with a particular subject.

What is the difference between tutoring and academic therapy?

Tutoring is a support service that assists the student in specific areas with which he or she may be having difficulty as far as a subject or curriculum is concerned. Tutoring supports the student in meeting the grade level in any necessary subject including basic study skills. It involves instruction in subject content and/or in the total curriculum by a private instructor who works with the individual student or in a small group. The focus generally is directed toward completing a curriculum or a specific area of work.

Academic therapy is an intensive remedial approach that starts the student with dyslexia with the basics and rebuilds the learning continuum step-by-step. Academic therapy starts from ground zero so that no gaps are left in the student's grasp of and facility with processing information in reading, writing, spelling, and/or math. It includes an adaptation of the content, curriculum, and materials based on the student's skills and specific needs. It is individualized, structured instruction which is written and planned for a particular student and is delivered by a thoroughly trained individual.

How do I find a good academic therapist?

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) maintains a nationwide database of members who provide one-to-one instruction for people with dyslexia. While IDA does not make endorsements, these therapists provide detailed information to IDA about their educational background and training that can help consumers make judgments about qualifications. Other organizations screen academic therapists and publish directories of or have websites with recommended therapists or provide personalized referral services to match students with therapists. (See the list of such organizations at the end of this fact sheet.)

IDA branches, schools, libraries, pediatricians, counselors, diagnosticians, and parents also can be sources for locating one-to-one instruction.

How do I know the academic therapist is reputable or qualified?

Take time to assess whether or not the person you are considering is a good match. Initially, you should elicit general information over the phone:

- How long has this individual been in practice?
- Can this person supply you with references from families, schools, and related professionals?
- Is this person involved in other professional activities (serving on boards or committees, speaking at conferences, conducting

workshops, etc.) that enable you to verify good standing in the field?

- Is this person certified by an accredited program?
The next step is to meet and interview this individual to determine if he or she has a personal style that is comfortable for you and teaching expertise that is appropriate to your student's learning needs.
- Ask about previous work experience, education, and special training in instructional approaches designed to address the needs of students with dyslexia. (IDA has a list of teaching approaches designed for students with dyslexia.)
- Describe your situation and find out if this specialist is willing to attend school conferences and to consult with teachers and any other specialists.
- Lastly, do schedules coincide and is the person located nearby?
Sometimes payment is expected for a preliminary session, so inquire about this before a meeting.

No matter what title, degrees or credentials is presented, you must feel you can establish rapport and a good working relationship.

Is testing necessary?

Yes. IDA publishes a fact sheet that explains testing for dyslexia. (Dyslexia cannot be determined by one single test.) If an evaluation has been conducted, give the report, along with other pertinent reports or documents, to the academic therapist. Making these materials available a week or two prior to the interview allows the therapist to determine in advance if his or her expertise fits the student's needs. It helps, too, in preparing an appropriate sample lesson or preliminary instructional plan to review at your first meeting. (An academic therapist also can help translate and clarify your evaluation report, often a difficult document to decipher.) In addition to the diagnostic evaluation, many academic therapists may do additional assessments for teaching purposes.

How long does the academic therapy take and what can I expect?

How long it takes depends on the severity of the problem and the frequency of the sessions. Optimally sessions should occur two to four times a week for two to three years until the student reaches a level of independence commensurate with his or her age and cognitive ability. Success is not always immediately measurable. Remember, one-to-one academic therapy is a process, not a product. It is not a quick fix. For the student with dyslexia, it can be an important step in a lifetime of learning.

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