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RETRAINING THE BRAIN





Retraining the Brain

Dyslexia on Demand brings therapy online

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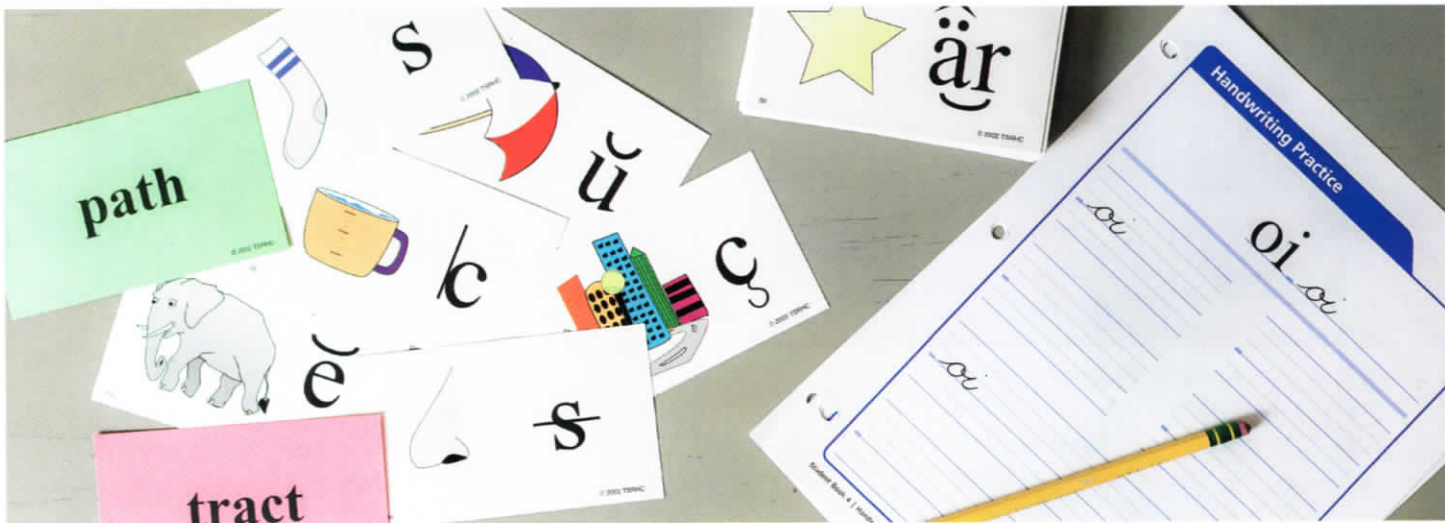
Why is this so hard to read? I could've sworn this word was spelled this way... None of this makes sense... Everyone else gets it, though. What's wrong with me?"

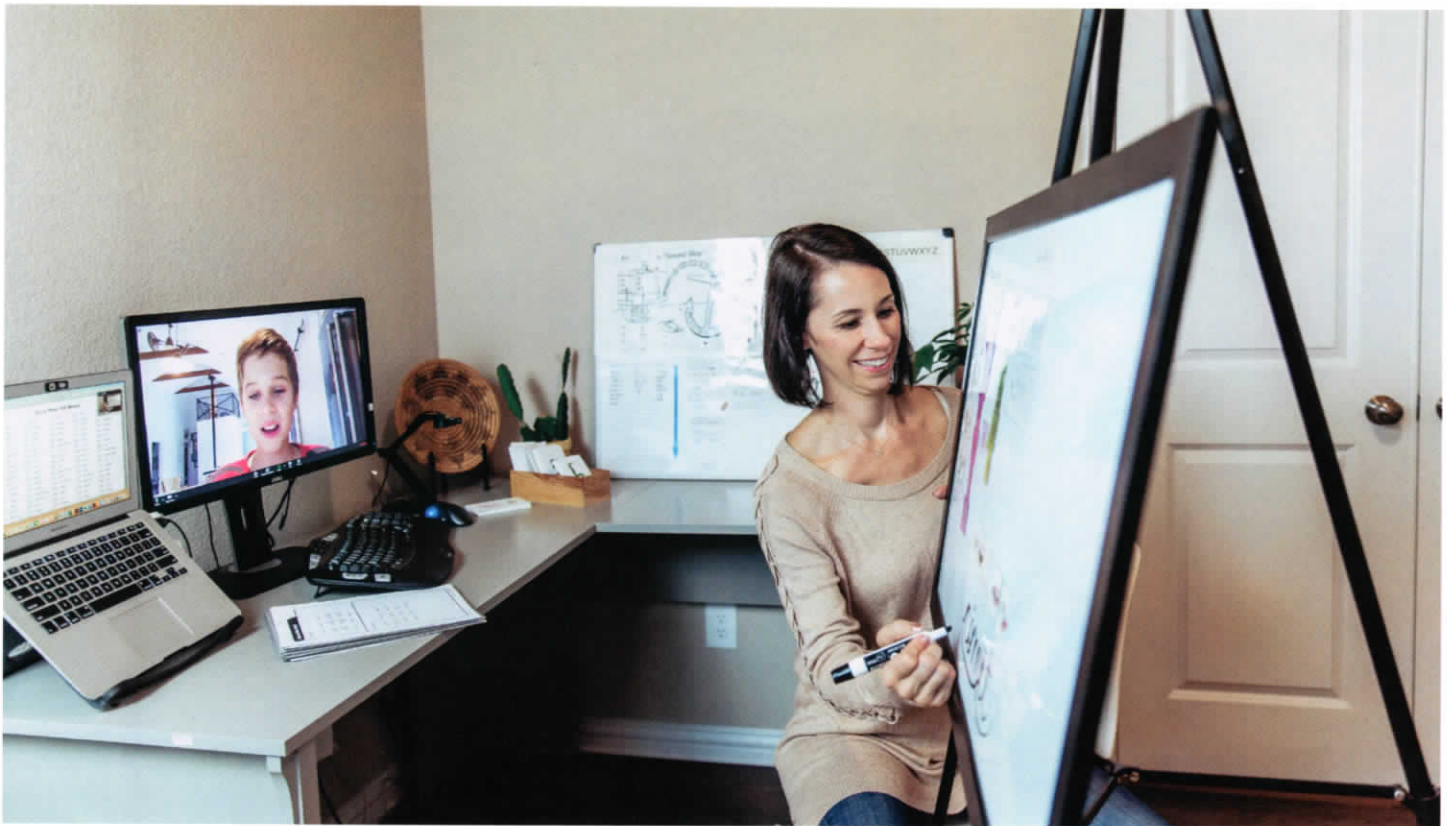
These are just a few of the thoughts going through a dyslexic's mind on any given day as their brain struggles to make sense of written content. Dyslexia is a neurological learning disability that impacts as much as 20% of the population. If this figure is surprising, it may be because dyslexia symptoms aren't visually apparent.

Dyslexia is typically caught through complications with

reading, low confidence or behavioral problems, avoidance of school, and poor writing and spelling abilities. This isn't because dyslexics are unintelligent, but rather the incessant struggle they have with reading and writing. Their brains don't see a letter and attach the sound to it like a regular brain does. Unfortunately, dyslexia has no cure, but it can be treated.

Megan Pinchback, a certified academic language therapist and owner of Dyslexia on Demand, has spent the last ten years helping students overcome their learning disability through a scripted program called Take Flight: A Comprehensive Intervention for Students with Dyslexia.





“We retrain the brain through a multi-sensory approach,” Megan advises. “We can’t cure dyslexia, but we can retrain the brain to stimulate it in another way to get that phonological awareness to stick.”

Each therapy session is presented in the same, predictable order, but Megan seeks to engage all the senses by activating all the areas of the brain simultaneously as students look, listen, write and repeat sounds, letters and words. Exercises include flash cards, written work, and exercises like looking at the shape of the mouth when saying a letter or word and how it feels to say it. “When we start spelling, the kids manipulate sound pictures,” Megan explains. “They’re pictures of the shape their mouth makes when making each phonetic sound. We use them to build words, so they attach the sound and letters to those pictures.”

Take Flight is a two-year program, and Megan advocates students see the whole program through to fully realize its benefits. She eases clients into that commitment via a six-week trial to see if Take Flight therapy is right for them. If it is, clients sign a four-month agreement. At the end of that period, Megan provides a progress report, then clients may renew for another quarter. “The program is a marathon, not a sprint,” she advises. “There’s a lot of material to get through because we’re returning to the foundation and building knowledge back up.”

Dyslexia therapy requires students attend multiple one-hour sessions every week, which automatically triggers thoughts of long drives to reach the therapist’s office, traffic jams and high fuel bills. Worry not, because Megan’s sessions are provided

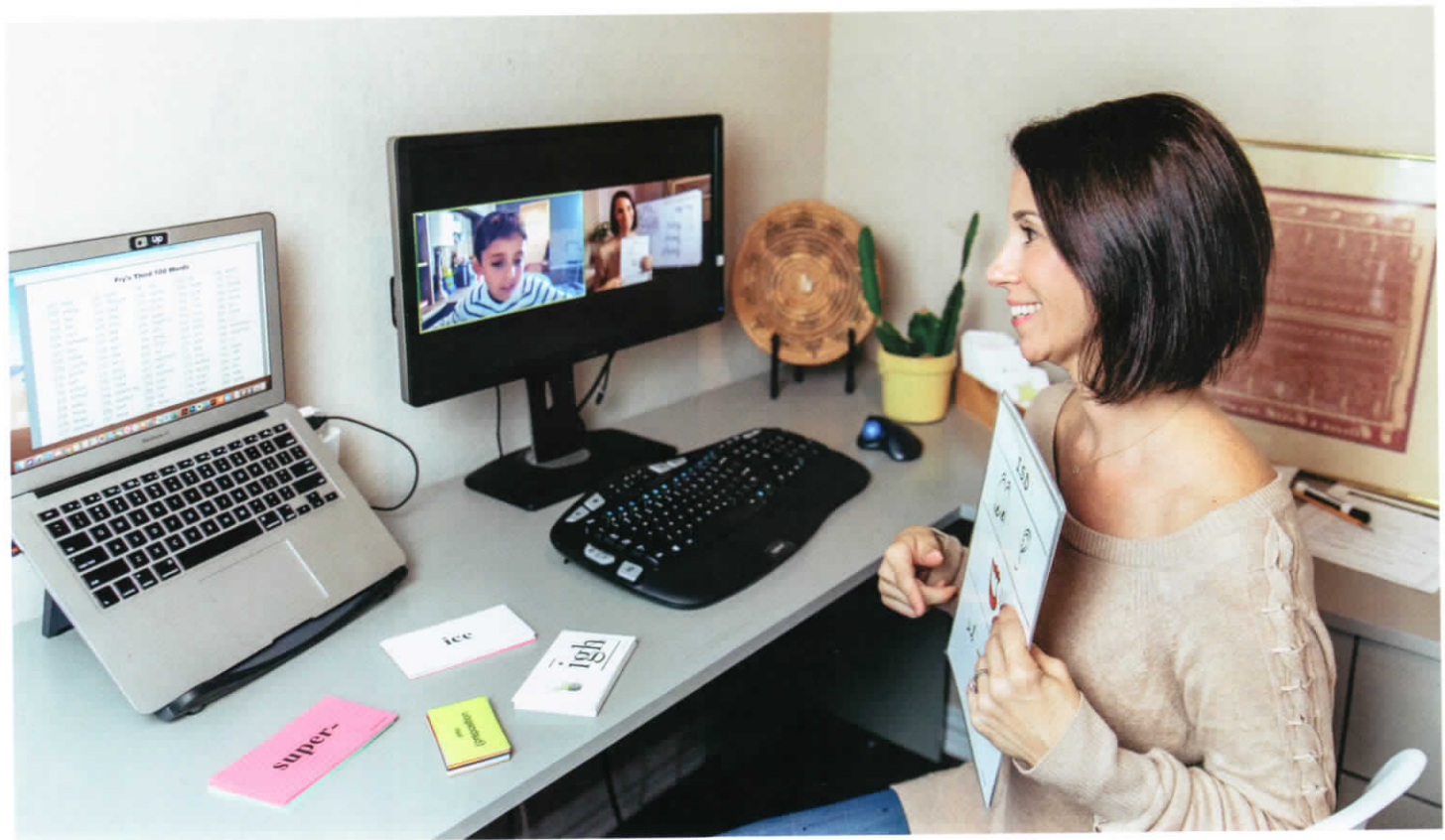
online. Working in the virtual environment means Megan has fewer scheduling restraints and can offer her services to a broader geographical area than she’d be able to via in-person sessions. This is a godsend for rural areas like Johnson City and Marble Falls that have a dearth of dyslexia therapists in the vicinity.

Without access to Megan’s online therapy, it’s likely that those students would have to go without treatment. “It’s an enormous commitment for kids in an area like Johnson City to access services like dyslexia therapy,” Megan states, “because their parents would likely have to drive one hour each way four times a week, and it’s just too much.”

Megan staunchly endorses the Take Flight program, knowing that it changes lives. Though the program is recommended for ages 7 through 13, some of the most remarkable results have been achieved by older students. Megan recalls her most memorable student was a high-school freshman who came to her after being adopted out of the foster care system. When he started therapy, he was reading at a second-grade level. Yet he committed to the program and within two years, he was reading at a tenth-grade level. Megan still gets emotional remembering how she received his graduation announcement with a note that he couldn’t have done it without her help.

Then there are the parents of dyslexic children that receive help themselves after their child attends therapy. “I’ve seen them stand up, crying, ‘I can read now,’” Megan recalls. “Really, age doesn’t matter. I’ll see anybody who needs it.”

Those who seek Megan’s help come because they received



a formal dyslexia diagnosis, or because dyslexic parents are concerned their child has inherited the disability. Others come because they're struggling academically but haven't pinpointed why yet. For those students, Megan provides informal screening and helps those expressing symptoms get a formal diagnosis. "Dyslexic or not, if the student is presenting signs of being significantly behind, I find nothing patches that like therapy," Megan advises.

Beyond the obvious benefits of online therapy, Megan says because students are in their home environment, they're comfortable and they attend every session without fail. She's seeing an improved response rate with online sessions over in-person sessions, too. Though she notes that it doesn't hurt to have the student's parents within earshot to keep the child on track.

With thousands of clinical hours and years of specialized dyslexia therapy training under her belt, Megan knows how to keep her students focused and progressing. Her prior career gave her experience in a variety of special education classrooms—behavior units, autism classrooms, life skills classes (for children with intellectual disabilities), and then eventually a resource class. It was here that her work with dyslexic students began and her path in special education became more specialized.

After receiving dyslexia therapy training through the Luke Waites Center for Dyslexia & Learning Disorders at Scottish Rite Hospital, she went on to implement it with dyslexic and non-dyslexic children and watched as their academic performance improved.

Marriage and motherhood eventually took her out of the public-school system but offered her the chance to open her own practice and provide all students who need her help the opportunity to receive it. To Megan, education instruction isn't one-size-fits-all, and she hopes the public education system agrees one day. "Dyslexic students often have an above average IQ," Megan says, "yet their brain works differently and because of that, we need to approach each one as a fingerprint, and be open to teaching them differently."



Dyslexia on Demand is an online service providing one-on-one treatment for students with dyslexia. To learn more about dyslexia or dyslexia therapy, visit www.DyslexiaOnDemand.com.