

It's tough for some

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NINE-year old Ketul Shah (name changed), is in a dilemma. He is no different from other kids his age, but while most of his classmates have no problem in getting their three R's right, Ketul, despite being a bright student finds it difficult to differentiate spellings — like say 'now' from 'won', 'do' from 'bough' and 'left' from 'felt'. His worried parents tried every possible measure including punishments, changing schools and numerous tuition teachers, but to no avail. "I didn't know what to do," says his mother Swati. "He lags behind other students despite knowing his lessons well."

Ketul, after some assessment and diagnosis was found to be suffering from dyslexia — a term used for reading, writing and learning difficulties. Certainly not an uncommon problem but lack of awareness has compounded it over the years. Add to it the increasing academic and parental pressure to perform well in every field that makes the child nervous and suffer from low self-esteem.

In Ahmedabad, there are few organizations that address the issue and provide remedial treatment. Schools too, experts say, do not consider it important enough to give a special attention to the dyslexic child. As a result of which, the student, despite being intelligent in every other aspect, finds it difficult to cope with the pressure of studies consequently suffering from fatigue and stress. What perhaps increases the problem is the lack of awareness among parents and teachers alike. Psychologist Pratima Bhattacharjee says in most cases instead of accepting the situation, parents turn strict disciplinarians and punish their wards for "poor performance". "What is needed is for the teachers to be aware of the problems of an LD (learning disability) child and guide parents accordingly," she says.

Which seems a difficult task considering the fact that few schools in the city have any measures to deal with the dyslexic student. Delhi Public School is perhaps one of the few educational institutes that has made an effort in this direction. Under its DPS Nalanda project, students with learning disabilities are given special attention under trained teachers. School official Unmesh Dixit says, "Initially, we identify students with such problems and then approach the parents to appraise them. Thereafter the students are placed under teachers who give remedial teaching where the emphasis is more on practical understanding than theoretical knowledge. Similarly computers are extensively used and these students are encouraged to make projects on it."

But do these measures make a difference? "Of course they do," says Bhattacharjee. "The change, though a slow and tedious process, is definitely there to see. Besides, if symptoms are diagnosed at an early age, definitely a difference can be made."

Reading and learning are the two things that determine the success of a child in his school career. With a little understanding on the part of parents and school authorities, perhaps, a dyslexic student too can have a school life sans any red marks on the report card.

LEARNING DISABILITY

