

International Dyslexia Association • Northern New England Alliance
Reading, Writing, and Mental Health: The Research Behind The Reality

Blog Series

July 2022

Introduction

All too often, members of the International Dyslexia Association of Northern New England Alliance have seen the reality of students struggling with both reading difficulties and mental health, yet have not encountered studies reporting this prevalence. For at least twenty-five years, researchers have found an association between reading disabilities, including dyslexia, with mental-health concerns. While many well-meaning practitioners in the field may suspect or have seen instances of this co-occurrence, all should know that poor reading skills can lead to the internalization and externalization of mental-health problems (Boyes et al.).

To close this gap, members of the IDA-NNEA Board have risen to the task of initiating a blog series with parents, educators, and mental-health practitioners in mind. Each blog will begin with a fictionalized narrative that maintains the confidentiality of those we serve in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, and illustrates the scope of the problem. These portraits will be followed by research findings that reveal the association between reading and mental-health difficulties. Interspersed throughout will be excerpts of interviews with prominent psychologists with expertise in the science of reading, who have been consulted in preparation for this series. Finally, our recommended, evidence-based reading interventions appropriate to the students depicted will be described in order to provide suggested models of care for those beset by both.

While we will make every attempt to reference relevant research, this blog series is not peer reviewed as a scientific journal. Instead, each article is reviewed by IDA-NNEA board members for accuracy and readability for a general audience.

Not all students with reading difficulties have mental-health problems, and not all students with mental-health problems also have a reading disability. In our literature review, scholars in the field have characterized the co-occurrence as an “association,” a prevalence unquantifiable, since not all children or youth are screened for both reading and mental-health problems. While the academic and economic consequences of low literacy levels are well known by educational and mental-health professionals, the socioemotional impacts, from internalized low self-concept to externalized misbehavior warrant the immediate attention and thoughtful action by families, school districts, mental-health agencies, and state officials.

Topics planned for *Reading, Writing, and Mental Health: The Research Behind The Reality* include:

1. An introduction to the association between reading difficulties and mental-health concerns
2. The benefits and concerns of labeling a person who struggles with reading and mental health as dyslexic
3. Seminal research on reading problems and mental illness, from the 1990s to the present
4. Dyslexia, mental health, and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic
5. Interventions to address the co-occurrence of reading and mental-health concerns, in support of students, parents, and practitioners

Please join us in this journey by reading each blog in the series and sharing this information with others devoted to the literacy and wellbeing of children and youth. We welcome questions: please contact us at info.nh@dyslexiaida.org.

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Resources

If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges, know that help is available. Please refer to the following resources.

National

Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention: www.acgtionallianceforsuicideprevention.org

American Association for Suicidology: www.suicidology.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org

The Connect Suicide Prevention Program - Prevention/Intervention, and Postvention

www.TheConnectProgram.com

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.naminh.org 1.800.242.NAMI (6264)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24/7): 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
Crisis Text Line: TEXT 741741

Mental Health America: www.mhanational.org

Spanish Language National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1.888.628.9454

Suicide Prevention Resource Center: www.sprc.org 1.877.GET.SPRC (1.877.438.7772)

Youth Resources: www.reachout.com

Crisis Phone Line: Dial **211**

State

Maine: <https://www.maine.gov/suicide/index.htm>

New Hampshire: <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/programs-services/health-care/mental-health>

Vermont: <https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/services/emergency-services/how-get-help>

Work Cited

Boyes, Mark E., et al. "Correlates of Externalising and Internalising Problems in Children with Dyslexia: An Analysis of Data from Clinical Casefiles." *Australian Psychologist*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2020, pp. 62-72.