



Physicians of Ontario Neurodevelopmental Advocacy

Advocacy Toolkit for Children Struggling to Read 8.0

Goal: Evidence based reading instruction for all children.

This toolkit was developed to inform and motivate physicians, parents, teachers and other professionals to speak up on behalf of children who are struggling to read, and to give them access to resources and knowledge. With the first edition published in 2016, a lot has changed since this toolkit was launched. The Ontario Human Rights Commission Right To Read Inquiry Report was published in February 2022, which has put evidence based literacy instruction front and centre in Ontario and other Canadian provinces. I am optimistic that significant change in literacy instruction will occur, and toolkits like this one will no longer be needed. This toolkit was developed with the Ontario education system in mind, however the resources could be used in other Canadian provinces too.

The Ontario government launched language curriculum change in September 2023, with the removal of all references to 3 cueing, and specific literacy goals for the Grade 1 to 8 curriculum. Funding has also been committed to providing reading interventions in all Ontario schools. Universal screening for phonological processing challenges and rapid automatic naming difficulties is being implemented in K to Grade 2 in Ontario. Instruction for teachers in the science of reading is becoming more widely available thanks to organizations like IDA Ontario. There is still significant opposition, however, from some teachers, unions, and faculties of education, so the need for advocacy is not over yet. Implementation of the Right To Read Inquiry recommendations will take time, and we need to make sure that scientifically proven methods of teaching reading are adopted fully.

Reading is a complex skill that most children learn from good teaching. Children are not born knowing how to read, and there is no reading centre in the brain. Exposure to books and language is essential, but not sufficient for most children to acquire this skill. Poor literacy has many negative consequences, including mental and physical health problems, reduced employment opportunities, and higher rates of crime and incarceration. Learning to read is a human right.

Years of scientific research (aka the Science of Reading) show the best teaching approach for reading involves direct instruction, delivered systematically, using phonemic awareness and phonics, and starting early. Regular screening is required to ensure those who aren't learning at the expected pace have access to a more intensive program immediately. With this approach, 95% of students can learn to read well.

Psychoeducational testing is a scarce resource in Ontario schools, particularly as one travels north. Testing is often requested when a child struggles to read, but is not needed prior to reading intervention. IQ tests have been shown to be culturally biased, and do not distinguish who will benefit from appropriate intervention. Instead, children at risk can be identified and monitored using easy to use, free one minute [screening tests](#) administered by teachers.

Please use this toolkit in a spirit of collaboration. Building relationships between stakeholders in education will help optimize student achievement and well-being. We are better together.

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1. **The Right to Read Inquiry – Ontario Human Rights Commission**
 - a. The report <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-to-read-inquiry-report>
2. **The Simple View of Reading** <https://improvingliteracy.org/brief/learning-read-simple-view-reading> and the [Ladder of Reading](#)
3. **Summaries of research on the Science of Reading**

- a. The Rose Report: Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Reading Difficulties
<https://www.idaontario.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Rose-2009-Identifying-and-teaching-children-and-young-people-with-dyslexia-and-literacy-difficulties.pdf>
- b. Teaching Reading is Rocket Science by Louisa C. Moats
<https://www.readingrockets.org/sites/default/files/teaching-reading-is-rocket-science-2020.pdf>
- c. Galuschka K, Ise E, Krick K, Schulte-Körne G (2014) Effectiveness of Treatment Approaches for Children and Adolescents with Reading Disabilities: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. PLoS ONE 9(2): e89900. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0089900
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0089900>
- d. Neitzel, A. J., Lake, C., Pellegrini, M., & Slavin, R. E. (2021). A Synthesis of Quantitative Research on Programs for Struggling Readers in Elementary Schools. *Reading Research Quarterly*.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.379>

4. Evidence Based Programs for Reading Instruction

There are numerous programs being used in schools in Ontario, but only a few of them have high quality research evidence of effectiveness. Key elements of effective programs include explicit, sequential instruction based on phonics and phonological awareness skills. Children should be screened starting in Kindergarten, with struggling readers offered a more intensive program. Reading comprehension is the ultimate goal, but children who struggle with decoding do not develop the fluency needed for good reading comprehension.

- a. SRA reading mastery
<https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/aphd/UserFiles/File/Reading%20Mastery.doc>
- b. Empower <http://www.sickkids.ca/empower/index.html>
- c. Lexia Core 5 Reading <https://www.lexialearning.com/core5>
- d. National Institute for Direct Instruction <https://www.nifdi.org>

- e. Rave-O
<http://www.voyagersopris.com/curriculum/subject/literacy/rave-o/research-results>
- f. What Works Clearing House, Institute for Education Sciences in US
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/21#tab-summary>
- g. What are the essential components of an evidence based reading program?
<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/12-components-research-based-reading-programs>
- h. List of validated reading programs in the UK
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/choosing-a-phonics-teaching-programme/list-of-phonics-teaching-programmes>

5. Ontario Ministry of Education documents that discuss intervention for children with learning disabilities

- a. Special Education in Ontario, policy and resource guide 2017 (Draft) – this is a highly detailed document which supersedes many other ministry publications
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools_2017e.pdf
- b. IDENTIFICATION OF AND PROGRAM PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: policy/program memorandum 8
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/ppm8.pdf>
<https://www.ldathome.ca/2017/01/ppm-8/>
- c. Learning for All
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/learningforall2013.pdf>
- d. Highlights of IPRC Regulation 181/98 (Identification Placement Review Committee)
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/hilites.html>
- e. Guide to Special Education: Every school board must post one specific to their board on their website e.g. Simcoe County District School Board - Special Education Plan
https://p14cdn4static.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_210898/File/Elementary/Special%20Education/Special-Education-Plan.pdf

- f. Shared Solutions: A guide to preventing and resolving conflicts regarding programs and services for students with special education needs
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/shared.pdf>

6. What physicians can do to help their patients with reading difficulties through advocacy

- a. Educate yourself
 - i. Understand the OHRC Right to Read Inquiry 2022 [report](#)
 - ii. Be aware of your local school board and provincial resources
 - iii. Develop a deeper understanding of dyslexia and how it is best treated
 - iv. Connect with local champions and agencies such PONDA and Pediatricians Alliance of Ontario
- b. Promote literacy with your patients: CPS Statement
<https://www.cps.ca/documents/position/read-speak-sing-promoting-literacy>
- c. Request evidence based interventions in your consultation reports and letters to schools to support your patients with learning disabilities
- d. Request a meeting with the teacher/principal at your patient's school (see sample letter below)
 - i. Billing with code K704 can be used if 2 school personnel and parent are present, 10 minute intervals \$31.25, includes telephone conferencing
- e. Develop a positive working relationship with your local school board
 - i. Invite school psychologists, special ed teachers to relevant lectures, symposiums, workshops in your area
 - ii. Develop a working group with school representatives to share information and develop pathways to help students with complex learning, behavioural and mental health needs
 - iii. Attend school case conferences for your most hard to serve patients/students to help find solutions together
 - iv. Have a policy of welcoming school staff to call you or attend office visits to help serve the needs of complex and hard to serve patients/students

- v. Meet with the superintendent of special education at your local school board(s) to discuss their tiered approach to reading education
- f. Use social media to get your message out
- g. Make a submission to the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) of your local school board
- h. Consider speaking to traditional media outlets or writing an opinion piece for your local paper
- i. Motivate parents and students to speak up: they are the ultimate stakeholders

7. Resources for families:

The role of parents as their child's first teachers is a critical one, and there are countless ways parents can encourage literacy in the home starting from birth. Daily dialogic reading is important but not sufficient in helping children with significant reading challenges. Tutoring using evidence based strategies is often helpful, but expensive and hard to find in some parts of the province. Advocating for your child at school starts with speaking to their classroom teacher, special education teacher and/or principal. For help in obtaining appropriate intervention and accommodations in school, you may need to get help from professional advocates.

- a. Promoting literacy from birth
http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/read_speak_sing_to_your_baby
- b. Promoting literacy in school aged children
http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/promoting_reading_in_school_aged_children
- c. OHRC policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-accessible-education-students-disabilities>
- d. Making a Human Rights claim to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal If your child is not receiving the required intervention/accommodations in school <https://www.hrlsc.on.ca/en/how-guides-and-faqs/human-rights-ontario#HRTTO>

- i. Arch Disability Law Centre
<https://archdisabilitylaw.ca/services/legal-services/>
 - ii. Justice for Children and Youth <https://jfcy.org/en/>
 - iii. Human Rights Legal Support Centre Toll Free: 1-866-625-5179

- e. International Dyslexia Association, Ontario branch – lots of great resources, videos, meetings
<https://www.idaontario.com/supporting-your-child-at-home/>

- f. LDAO website provides education, knowledge and resources to families
<http://www.ldathome.ca>

- g. Mobile app with preK to Grade 1 activities that targets literacy and numeracy <http://more.starfall.com/info/about.php>

- h. Guide to helping your child to read at home.
<http://www.fivefromfive.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/homereading.pdf>

- i. Free online books to help you teach your child to read
www.parkerphonics.com

- j. **Integra** is a children's mental health agency providing evidence-informed, therapeutic programs and services to children, youth and their families who are dealing with mental health issues complicated by learning disabilities (LDMH).
<http://www.childdevelop.ca/programs/integra-program>

- k. Reading rockets has lots of helpful information
<http://www.readingrockets.org>

- l. TD Summer Reading Club: available at a library near you!

- m. Neuropsychologist who researches the brain basis of learning and memory. Website has many useful articles and resources.
<http://www.danielwillingham.com/articles.html>

8. Resources for educators

- a. <https://www.idaontario.com/effective-reading-instruction/>
- b. <https://www.literacyhow.org/> Empowering teachers with knowledge supporting best practices.
- c. <http://www.ldatschool.ca/>
- d. Free validated screening tests using Curriculum Based Measures for identification and monitoring students K-Gr6
<https://acadiencelarning.org/acadience-reading/k-grade6/>
- e. YouTube presentation on how to use screening tools to drive literacy instruction <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fm8JYyE4otY>
- f. [Www.raz-kids.com](http://www.raz-kids.com)
- g. 2020 report to the American Federation of Teachers by Louisa C. Moats <https://www.readingrockets.org/sites/default/files/teaching-reading-is-rocket-science-2020.pdf>
- h. Free evidence based resources for reading instruction
www.parkerphonics.com

9. Resources for physicians

Physicians have an important role to play in promoting literacy in their practices. Students are also frequently referred to paediatricians to help sort out why they are struggling in school.

- a. Literacy Resources for physicians <https://www.cps.ca/en/tools-ouils/literacy-resources-for-physicians>
- b. Promoting Early Literacy: a CPS Strategic Priority
https://www.cps.ca/uploads/strategic-priorities/CPS_EarlyLiteracy-EN.pdf
- c. Children with School Problems – A physician’s manual
<https://www.cps.ca/en/issues-questions/children-with-school-problems>
- d. Jacob G, et al. Literacy Promotion by Health Care Professionals: A Comprehensive Biomedical and Psychosocial Approach. Paediatr Child Health, 2017;Vol XX, p 1-6.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321227359_Literacy_promotion_by_health_care_professionals_A_Comprehensive_biomedical_and_psychosocial_approach

10. Resources for Psychologists

- a. Consensus statement on guidelines for assessment and diagnosis of children, adolescents and adults with Learning Disability
[http://www.psych.on.ca/getattachment/37646d71-1469-4731-a3c6-55a458a8238f/OPA-Guidelines-for-Diagnosis-and-Assessment-of-Learning-Disabilities-Sept-7-2018-\(1\)-1.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf](http://www.psych.on.ca/getattachment/37646d71-1469-4731-a3c6-55a458a8238f/OPA-Guidelines-for-Diagnosis-and-Assessment-of-Learning-Disabilities-Sept-7-2018-(1)-1.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf)

11. Other Advocacy Groups

- a. Dyslexia Canada <http://www.dyslexiacanada.org/>
- b. Decoding Dyslexia Ontario
https://www.facebook.com/DecodingDyslexiaOntario/?ref=page_internal
- c. Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation <https://childrensliteracy.ca/>
- d. International Foundation for Effective Reading Intervention
<http://www.iferi.org/iferi-inform-factsheets/>

12. Resources for other learning/behaviour issues

- a. Decades of research have helped experts identify key concepts that-if not learned properly-will hinder a child’s progression in mathematics.
www.knowledgehook.com
- b. Many individuals with learning difficulties also struggle with:
 - i. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder www.caddra.ca
 - ii. Tourette’s Syndrome www.tourette.ca
 - iii. Developmental Coordination Disorder www.canchild.ca
 - iv. Language Disorder
 - v. Autism Spectrum Disorder www.autismontario.com
 - vi. Mental health conditions
<http://www.childdevelop.ca/sites/default/files/files/Sept%202%20Integra%20LDMH%20Handbook%202016.pdf>

Glossary of terms

<https://www.teachspiced.ca/glossary-old>

<https://www.ldatschool.ca/learn-about-lds/glossary-terms/>

Sample letter for physicians to use

Principal

School's name

Dear <insert principal's name here>

I am a physician working in this community. I am also a member of PONDA (www.ponda.ca, @pondanetwork), a group of physicians and psychologists very interested in working collaboratively with school boards to maximize outcomes for students with learning disabilities in Ontario.

<Insert Name> has been referred to me because of his/her difficulties in school. I believe he/she has significant difficulties learning the skills needed for proficiency in reading, including phonemic awareness, and phonological processing.

In my clinical practice, I meet many children who struggle with their learning, particularly with reading and writing. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has released their report from the Right to Read Inquiry, outlining how reading instruction in Ontario must improve to meet the needs of many children at risk for reading disabilities.

The Ministry of Education (EDU) in Ontario instructs school boards to have a dedicated approach to teaching children with LD in PPM8. The tiered approach to learning, described in Ministry documents such as Learning for All and Education for All, outlines the process of identifying students at risk for LD early and intervening in a stepwise approach with increasing intensity of interventions, rather than waiting for them to fail.

I recommend that <insert name> be assessed as soon as possible for reading intervention, and I recommend programs such as Jolly Phonics, EMPOWER, SRA and Lexia as evidenced based reading programs.

I would be happy to discuss your school's overall approach to a tiered intervention for children with literacy based learning disabilities and how this would help your student<insert name>. I know we share a desire for the best possible outcome for his/her achievement and wellbeing.
Sincerely,

<your name>