

## Letter Reversals

### Should I be concerned?

Parents and teachers may become concerned when a child reverses letters or words: writing b's instead of d's, "tac" instead of "cat" and so on. The truth of the matter is that most beginner readers/writers will make reversals; it's not all that uncommon. It's very common for young children up to age seven to reverse the letters "b" and "d" and "p" and "q." Some researchers find that this is due to immaturity in brain development. Others have found that the students simply don't pay too much attention to the way letters are oriented.

When children first learn to write they frequently have letter reversals. Many children continue to have reversed letters in first and second grade. It is not uncommon or unusual to see children 4, 5, 6 and even 7 years of age making letter and/or letter reversals. There may be a need for some concern if a child continues with letter reversals or mirror reading/writing into and beyond the 3rd grade.

**Letter/word reversals are, for the most part, due to a weak memory, the lack of enough previous experiences, or a lack of left-right awareness.**

Many myths surround the children who make reversals such as: the child is learning disabled; the child has some type of neurological dysfunction; or the child will become dyslexic. Dyslexics often have many reading/writing errors including reversals so this theory is difficult to prove. However, very little research has been done regarding the matter of reversals.

While letter reversal is one of the signs of dyslexia, many more signs of the disorder have to exist for a child to be diagnosed as dyslexic. Any questions you have about dyslexia can probably be answered by visiting the [International Dyslexia Association](#) website.

Become concerned about reversals only if the child continues to reverse letters after s/he has had considerable instruction in the left-to-right direction in both reading and writing. Then, if he is having difficulty learning to read, the possibility of a reading problem should be investigated.

### How do I help?

- ✓ Most teachers have discovered that there is not a magic cure for children who display reversals in their reading or writing. However, there are some strategies that may be helpful:
- ✓ In the meantime, the best way to ensure that a child becomes a good reader is to be read to every night. Also listen to him/her read the stories that s/he is working on at school.
- ✓ Praise is another important component in helping young children learn to read. When your child reads to you, find something good to say about his efforts. And try to keep reading fun so he will enjoy reading to you.
- ✓ Children need to be taught to use the left hand margin and need to be taught that their work should be organized from left to right. This is difficult to teach the child who does not know his left from right.
- ✓ For a second grade student who consistently reverses his letters, introducing cursive early may help correct the reversal errors.
- ✓ Practice finger writing in shaving cream, sand, rice, pudding, etc.
- ✓ Give the child a visual cue at his desk for commonly reversed letters. For example, *“d’ is the first letter of ‘dog’. A dog has a tail. This stick is like the dog’s tail. The body comes first, then the tail.”* As the child improves his skills he will no longer rely on or use the visual cues.
- ✓ Over-teach 'b", then over-teach 'd"', before presenting both together.
- ✓ Trace, then write, the confused letter or word and pronounce it as written.
- ✓ For young children, encourage left and right awareness. Give the child time to develop motor skills.
- ✓ If the child is confused about his own left/right, use a ring, watch, ribbon or band on his writing arm. Color cue side of desk/table or paper or word as a starting place.
- ✓ Use weighted wristband to designate right or left hand.

- ✓ Trace hands on paper. Label "right," "left."
- ✓ Play "Simon Says" - "Touch right foot; raise left hand," etc.
- ✓ Have the child follow directions: drawing lines up, down, right to left, etc. and in touching parts of body.
- ✓ Invite the child to connect dots on white/chalkboard to make a completed pattern.
- ✓ Have the child march: left, right, left, right. Now add the hands: left, right, left, right.
- ✓ Have a child find a space in the room. Then have them name objects on right and on left. Move to different parts of the room and repeat.
- ✓ Arrange story pictures in sequence, left to right.
- ✓ In reading, use markers, "windows," and other left-to-right directional aids.

*Education Expert Advice from*

- Peggy Gisler and Marge Eberts, Family Education
- Sue Watson, Special Education Developmental Support Counselor
- Child Development Institute, LLC