

Cure Your Child's Reading Problem Ruth Beechick

Do you have a child among the ten percent who have a learning difficulty? This article will help you diagnose whether the problem relates to “crossed dominance,” and how to treat it if it is. The majority of reading problems fall into this category.

Symptoms

Symptoms of this dominance problem include confusing *b* and *d* or *was* and *saw*, squinting eyes, or difficulty giving attention to close work. Do not panic the first time a child confuses *b* with *d*. All children need to learn that letters are not like a fork, which is still a fork no matter which way you turn it. But if the reversals persist after careful teaching, and if the child is age five or older, then you should pursue a diagnosis. Dominance, referring to right sidedness or left sidedness, is normally settled at about age five. So do not worry before that time. And do not force right handedness (or left) before that time. Let the child take all the time he needs to develop neurologically.

Infants, too, need to develop in the normal way. One infant lived in Nome, Alaska. He was never allowed on the cold floor, and spent most of his time in a high chair or a small play pen. By third grade he experienced serious reading problems. He cured this, as explained below, by practicing the crawling that he had missed. Do not rush children at any growth stage. They need normal crawling and other body movements for proper brain and neurological development.

High fever, lack of oxygen, or other physical trauma to the body also affect early development. In practically all these cases where the problems are caused during children's development, they can be “cured” as described below. God created us with amazing over-design in the brain and other systems, so we can train the body to learn what it missed in the early years.

Diagnosis

To diagnose your child's dominance you can check eye, ear, hand and foot. Ideally all four should match as either left or right. Any mixture is likely to cause some kind of learning difficulty. The most severe problems usually occur on a mismatch between eye and hand. Here are some informal diagnostic tests that require no special equipment.

- 1. To check eye**, roll a sheet of paper and have the child hold the tube at arm's length and look through it at your nose. Which eye of the child's do you see through the tube? That is his dominant eye.

2. **To check foot**, roll a ball toward the child and ask him to kick it back to you. Repeat this several times trying to roll exactly to center position, so as not to get a false result because the ball rolls too far left or right. An alternative is to hand the child a ball and ask him to kick it to you. Another alternative is to observe him playing soccer or similar activity.
3. **To check ear**, have the child sit in a chair and from behind slowly move a ticking watch first toward one side and then toward the other. Ask the child to signal as soon as he hears the ticking. Determine which ear hears at the farthest distance.
4. **To check hand**, observe which hand the child normally uses for eating, drawing, throwing a ball and other activities.

The last test, handedness, is the most tricky of all these. If you find, for instance, that the child uses his right hand for coloring and the left for eating, then search into his history. Was he started on workbooks or close paperwork before age five and encouraged to use his right hand? If so, that might be a hint that he was born to be left handed but was trained to use his right hand for certain activities and now exhibits a crossed dominance. In such a case it may take only a few days or weeks to retrain the left hand.

If the eye is out of line with the rest of the body, then vision therapy can help. This takes a doctor rarer than the usual optometrist or ophthalmologist who checks acuity—the 20/20 scores. Vision therapists may bill themselves as such, but the Yellow Pages often do not list them that way. These days there is usually someone in each support group or at least in the office of the state homeschool organization who can direct you to one of these therapists. Try to find one who will give you exercises to work on at home instead of doing everything in his office, which will cost more than it needs to.

If the ear is out of line, that is less likely to cause reading problems, but it brings other symptoms. For instance, a child may listen to your directions or assignment and then look intently at you for a time before responding. During that time he is repeating the words to himself. Then he understands them.

Why does mixed dominance cause reading problems? It stems from the fact that any sensory message from the right side of the body goes to the left side of the brain and vice versa. Thus if a child is writing with his right hand that kinesthetic message goes to the left side of his brain. And if his dominant left eye is following the writing, that visual message goes to the right side of the brain. Then the brain has to “stutter” a bit to get the two messages together, and it may settle for seeing the *b* as a *d*.

Treatment

Fortunately, in most cases you can cure this problem by using cross-pattern exercises that will help to retrain the neurological system. Here are some exercises to start with.

- 1. Cross-pattern crawling** . On hands and knees, place right hand forward and left knee forward. Then slide left hand and right knee simultaneously until they are forward. Turn head to look at the forward hand. If this is difficult, you need to get beside the child and help him position correctly after each step. Practice a few minutes each day until the child can crawl rhythmically by himself in this cross-pattern fashion. Three or four weeks should bring excellent results.
- 2. Cross-pattern walking** . Stand with left foot forward, right hand pointing downward at the left foot. Turn head slightly to look directly at the foot also. When ready, step forward with the right foot, left hand pointing and head turning to the right foot. Again, help as much as needed to get the child into the correct position after each step. Practice each day until the child does this easily and rhythmically.
- 3. Cross-pattern “swimming.”** Lie on stomach with face turned to the left. Bend left elbow so hand is close to face. Bend left knee and bring it up close to elbow. Stretch right arm and leg straight downward. Count *one, two, three, turn*. On the word *turn* reverse the position; turn face to right, bend right arm and leg and straighten left arm and leg. Help the child get everything in position and count again. Practice a few minutes each day. By about three weeks the child should be able to do this smoothly and rhythmically, and a bit faster than at first.
- 4. Sleep position** . Learn to sleep in the positions described in 3 above. Right handers sleep lying on the right side of head, face turned left, left arm and leg bent, right arm and leg downward. Left handers sleep in the opposite position.

These exercises are in themselves a diagnostic procedure. If a child has no trouble performing these, then this mixed or crossed dominance is not a problem with him. While a child is working on these exercises let them be his reading assignment for the day rather than an addition to his usual school schedule. You could read to the child sometime during the day.

The method described above was originated by Dr. Carl Delacato in the 1970s. It became popular and proved to be highly effective, so effective that it is not a stretch to say that children were “cured” of their problem. Today some books and workshops present other methods. They seem to show success too.

Some few children with mixed dominance, about ten percent, have inherited the condition. These conditions will not correct, as the developmental problems do. Explain to these children as much as you can about their situation. This frees them

from feeling that they are dumb or do not work hard enough or something that is their fault. Tell them that they can learn to read but will have to work harder than other children. Use kinesthetic methods during the phonics stage of reading. Use oral methods a lot. These students often study engineering or other fields that do not require much reading. And they might excel at piano, or become switch hitters in baseball. God has a plan for each life.

Biographical Information

Copyright, 2009. All rights reserved by author below. Content provided by [The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine, LLC](#).

Dr. Ruth Beechick has taught hundreds of people to read, all ages, and many methods, and she is happy to see a commonsense book like Thogmartin's directed to homeschoolers. Her own newest book is World History Made Simple: Matching History with the Bible (www.HomeschoolingBooks.com or 1-800-421-6645).