

My daughter is in 1st grade and confuses the letters b and d

Most children confuse letters when they start to read.

Confusing letters at the beginning of first grade is a normal specificity of brain development when learning how to read. It is not necessarily a sign of dyslexia. However, some children confuse letters over a longer period of time. This impacts their reading or spelling. When should one start to worry?

Amandine's current difficulties at school

Her teacher alerted her parents because Amandine gets confused when she reads and writes. At the end of first grade, she confuses the letters b and d. She also confuses p with q and b with p. However, Amandine loves to read: she has started picking up small books and tries to decipher them by herself. When she must learn her spelling lists for school, she does well and makes fewer mistakes. She confuses sounds more when she writes down a new word. She likes going to school.

Amandine's overall development

When she was young, she did not have any trouble speaking. She started developing her language skills normally at 12 months.

Currently, she does her math exercises well, but sometimes she writes 3 and 5 backwards. Her mother says: "I remember that her older sister also confused letters in first grade, but the teacher never talked to us about it and it disappeared around third grade. Now I'm wondering if Amandine needs a speech therapist evaluation?"

When should you start to worry?

Most children confuse letters and numbers when they start to learn. This is a normal specificity of brain development when we start reading.

Amandine confuses letters like b and d, p and q, p and b. However, this does not stop her from learning how to read and write. Development is happening normally. She loves to read. Lastly, she also confuses numbers and it is very likely that she wrote her first name backwards when she was 3-4 years old.

For the moment, there is no cause for concern. Confusion regarding letters or numbers is going to resolve itself naturally.

When difficulties continue

Some children may confuse letters, which could disrupt their reading or spelling performance.

Confusion could be due to difficulty with understanding sounds if this continues past third grade and reading and spelling difficulties are observed. If there is still confusion and Amandine starts to slow down in her reading or spelling, a speech therapist evaluation should be scheduled to find out if treatment is necessary.

Who should be consulted?

You will need to consult a general physician and explain the situation. They will then undoubtedly prescribe a *"speech therapy evaluation with physical therapy, if necessary."* Then, you will need to contact the speech therapist of your choice.

The speech therapist evaluation

The first consultation with a speech therapist will consist of understanding the situation, the child and their difficulties. Tests will be carried out, which will make it possible to explain why Amandine gets certain letters confused. When confusion lasts, it is often a sign of difficulty with understanding sounds, which leads to problems with reading and writing words. It is pretty common that these same children also pronounced certain words wrong when they were 4-5 years old.

While waiting for the speech therapy evaluation, what can I do at home?

- It is essential for Amandine to remain confident in herself. She needs to be reassured and explained that it is not her fault, nor that of her parents, or teacher. She has nothing to do with these difficulties, that she is loved for who she is and not for her academic results.
- You can write the 2 letters that she confuses down on a piece of paper and give her tips on how to remember which letter is b and which letter is d. You could tell her that one is pronounced with the mouth closed and the other with the lips slightly opened. Thus, by drawing the shape of the lips under each letter, she will avoid the mistake and, therefore, the confusion. Frequency induces learning: the more she sees the model, the less she will make the mistake.
- This can also be done with numbers by writing down the correct example of easily-confused digits on a piece of paper. She can then look at this each time she needs to write a 3 or a 5, allowing her to avoid errors as well as memorize the number's correct appearance.

Most children confuse letters when they start to learn. In this event, it is not necessary to consult a speech therapist. If there are no consequences on their reading (they don't read too slowly) or spelling (can't remember how to spell words), there is no need to consult a speech therapist. This type of confusion is going to resolve itself naturally in most cases. However, some children systematically confuse letters, which can have consequences on their performance in reading or spelling. A speech therapist consultation is therefore advised.

In both cases, it is important to prevent children from getting confused. You should immediately correct them or prevent the mistake by proposing tools that will help them find the right sound all by themselves. It is important to prevent confusion from settling in.