# Peter Hitchens' claims on dyslexia and ADHD spark backlash from experts



The discourse surrounding dyslexia and ADHD gained significant traction last week following comments made by Daily Mail columnist Peter Hitchens, who asserted that these conditions do not exist. Citing the book *The Dyslexia Debate* by Elena Grigorenko and Julian Elliott, Hitchens claimed that the diagnoses of dyslexia and ADHD lack essential medical evidence, characterising dyslexia as a "rare affliction that people actually want to have" and comparing it to ADHD, which he described as its "equally fictional cousin". He further expressed the view that dyslexia could largely be attributed to poor teaching methodologies prevalent within the UK's current educational curriculum.

In response to Hitchens' remarks, Louise Lawrence, a speech therapist diagnosed with both dyslexia and ADHD, cautioned against the potential harm of such statements. Speaking to the *Mirror*, she stated, "Peter highlights a disturbing trend of blaming individuals rather than addressing the real challenges we face." Lawrence articulated her distress over Hitchens' dismissal of her lived experience, underscoring the far-reaching implications such scepticism could wield over the neurodivergent community. "If influential figures continue to dismiss or misrepresent the nature of dyslexia and ADHD, fewer people might be willing to seek the accommodations that can truly level the playing field," she warned.

The implications of Hitchens' claims are particularly significant given that nearly 10% of the UK population is estimated to experience dyslexia, as suggested by various health reports. Furthermore, Hitchens notably targeted Jamie Oliver, a well-known public figure and advocate for dyslexia awareness. Lawrence expressed that focusing on high-profile individuals such as Oliver serves to amplify the hurtful implications of such comments, conveying a stark message that those who have attained leadership roles are not immune to public ridicule.

Clinical Psychologist Dr Rebecca Varrall, who co-founded an organisation called Neurodiversity Unravelled alongside Lawrence, refuted Hitchens' assertions, describing his perspective as a "narrow view that ignores decades of neuroscience and psychology research." In discussing the importance of diagnostic criteria, she explained that while no single, repeatable test exists for ADHD or dyslexia, their diagnoses rely on a combination of clinical observations, behavioural assessments, and standardized questionnaires. Dr Varrall noted, "Currently, there aren’t ‘lab tests’ that can definitively prove the presence of these conditions. Instead, research using brain imaging and other methods has shown consistent differences in the brains of individuals with ADHD or dyslexia."

The conversation surrounding the legitimacy of these conditions has raised concerns within the neurodiverse community, with experts like Varrall warning that pervasive misinformation might lead to reduced funding and interest in studying these disorders. According to Varrall, spreading doubts about ADHD and dyslexia's validity could discourage individuals from seeking help or lead professionals to question established diagnostic criteria.

Lawrence concluded by emphasising the need for public figures to support and uplift neurodivergent individuals rather than undermining their experiences. "In the end, we need leaders and public figures who stand up for neurodivergence, not tear it down," she stated, referencing the continual struggle for understanding and acceptance faced by those with dyslexia and ADHD.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYL8XHX5-1o> - This video supports Peter Hitchens' claims about dyslexia and ADHD, where he argues that these conditions lack clear definitions and are often linked to benefits, and criticizes teaching methods as a cause of reading difficulties.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7455059/> - This article provides a historical perspective on the dyslexia debate, discussing how critiques of dyslexia have emerged over time and how the condition's definition remains controversial.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62kFNLViVsA> - This video features Peter Hitchens discussing the UK's school system and dyslexia, highlighting issues with teaching methods and the prevalence of dyslexia.
* <https://www.dyslexia.org.uk/> - This website provides information on dyslexia, including its prevalence and the challenges faced by individuals with the condition, which contrasts with Hitchens' views.
* <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/adhd> - This webpage offers insights into ADHD and dyslexia, emphasizing the importance of understanding and supporting neurodiverse individuals, which counters Hitchens' skepticism.
* <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/neurodiverse-conditions/dyslexia/> - This resource provides an overview of dyslexia, including its effects and how it is diagnosed, which supports the legitimacy of dyslexia as a condition.