



## Learning Disabilities

Learning Disabilities are a complex group of disorders that greatly affect how children perform in school. They have a wide range of symptoms and vary in the way that they present to professionals.

### Definitions

Learning Disabilities are defined as a child being two years behind in a given subject or having a 10% difference between standardized IQ tests and standardized achievement tests. The child must be impaired or disabled by this learning condition.

### Types of Learning Disabilities

There are several types of learning disabilities. The 3 most common are listed below:

- Learning Disability in **Reading** (Dyslexia)
- Learning Disability in **Math** (Dyscalculia)
- Learning Disability in **Written Language** (Dysgraphia)

There are other types of Learning Disabilities. One is called **Non-Verbal** Learning Disability and the other is called **Complex** Learning Disability. These are beyond this handout.

Learning Disabilities occur in about 6-10% of the population. Boys outnumber girls 3 to 2. The cause is unknown; however, it is felt to be a link between genetics and other neurobiological events. In 50% of children with a learning disability one of the parents has had a diagnosis of the same learning disability.

### Signs and Symptoms

Immature vocabulary	Misunderstanding of words	Restlessness
Trouble learning sequences	Spelling difficulties	Poor memory
Feelings of worthlessness	Poor sense of balance	Poor retention
Right-Left problems	Difficulty with time	School phobia
Academic failure	Poor self-control	Attention deficits
Poor self-esteem	Disorganized Depression	Uncoordinated
Impulsive	Feelings that they are stupid	Mispronounces spoken words
Difficulty with recall of details	Problems with size and spacing	Problems with spatial relations
Problems with using scissors or pencil		



### **Common Presentations**

Common ways for children with learning disabilities to present to professionals include school failure, school refusal, somatic complaints like headaches and stomachaches, learning problems, behavior problems, depression and anxiety. Any child who is having any of these conditions should at least have learning disabilities considered as a possible cause.

### **Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities**

Our federal government has mandated that all public schools be able to test for learning disabilities. Educational testing can occur in your school by asking for it. It usually takes several months, and will take 2-3 half days from the classroom to complete the tests. Your child would have an IQ test, and then a battery of achievement tests, looking specifically at standardized tests for math, reading and written language.

Because teachers are not licensed, they cannot diagnose learning disabilities. School officials will only tell you if your child meets criteria for assistance based on learning disabilities. The government is specific about who should have help and who should not. The criteria is quite strict and many children with true learning disabilities will not meet criteria for help in our public schools today.

### **Long Term Consequences of Learning Disabilities**

Half of children with learning disabilities will have lifelong consequences of their learning disability. The most common is academic failure and quitting school before it is complete. Because a high school diploma is essential in today's market this will have a huge impact on our children as well as the community. The effect on self-esteem, productivity and effectiveness is also great.

### **TREATMENT**

- **Demystification** - It is important for the families to understand that a child with a learning disability is not dumb or stupid. Once can be very bright and learning disabled. This is a common disorder. It is not anyone's fault. It can be treated.
- **Bypass Strategies** - These strategies include bypassing weakness. For example if a child cannot read, then giving them the assignment to read a chapter in history will fail. Books on tape or having a parent or teacher read the chapter to the child would be a bypass strategy.
- **Remediation** - Using a tutor or teacher to review and teach skills a second or third time giving the child enough time to understand the concept.
- **Teach to Strengths** - Some children are visual learners, some are hands on learners and some learn best by listening.
- **Curriculum Modifications** - Modifications might include extra time to complete an assignment, separate environment to test in, fewer problems to solve, assignment notebooks and having a copy of the teacher's notes to study from.
- **Exceptional Children's Program** - This is a program in your school for children to receive special services to learn. One must qualify for this program and sometimes the criteria is quite strict. For children in the program they would receive more one on one teaching and different teaching styles would be used to assist children in progressing.



### **WHERE YOU CAN GET HELP**

- National Center for Learning Disabilities - [www.nclid.org](http://www.nclid.org)  
212-545-7510
- International Dyslexia Association  
800-ABC-D123
- Learning Disabilities Association  
412-341-1515
- LD Online - [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)
- “All Kinds of Minds” by Mel Levine
- “Their world” by the National Center for Learning Disabilities
- “When Your Child has LD: A Survival Guide for Parents” by G. Fisher and R. Cummings

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