



# *What Are Some Common Signs of Learning Disabilities?*

The good news about learning disabilities is that scientists are learning more every day. Their research provides hope and direction.

If parents, teachers, and other professionals discover a child's learning disability early and provide the right kind of help, it can give the child a chance to develop skills needed to lead a successful and productive life.

A recent US National Institutes of Health study showed that 67% of young students who were at risk for reading difficulties became average or above average readers after receiving help in the early grades.

Parents are often the first to notice that 'something doesn't seem right'. If you are aware of the common signs of learning disabilities, you will be able to recognise potential problems early. The following is a checklist of characteristics that may point to a learning disability. Most people will from time to time see one or more of these warning signs in their children. This is normal. If however, you see several of these characteristics over a long period of time, seek a complete assessment.

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## **IN INFANCY**

- Trouble with nursing, sucking or digesting
- Resistance to cuddling and body contact
- Lack of, or excessive response to sounds or other stimulus
- Trouble following movements with eyes
- Unusual sleep patterns
- Delays in crawling, sitting, standing, walking
- Little or no vocalization
- Irritability

## **PRESCHOOL**

- Speaks later than most children
- has immature speech patterns
- Slow vocabulary growth, often unable to find the right words, pronunciation problems
- Difficulty rhyming words
- Trouble learning numbers, alphabet, days of the week, colors, shapes
- Extremely restless and easily distracted
- Trouble interacting with peers
- Difficulty following directions or routines
- Difficulty with dressing
- Fine motor skills slow to develop
- Exaggerated response to excitement or frustration

- Tendency to trip, or bump into things
- Difficulties skipping, bouncing and catching a ball

## **GRADES K-4**

- Slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds
- Confuses basic words (run, eat, want)
- Makes consistent reading and spelling errors including letter reversals (b/d), inversion (m/w), transposition (felt/left), and substitutions (house/home)
- Transposes number sequences and confuses arithmetic signs (+, -, x, /, =)
- Slow to remember facts
- Slow to learn new skills, relies heavily on memorization
- Impulsive, difficulty planning
- Unstable pencil grip, poor printing, writing
- Trouble learning about the concept of or telling time
- Poor coordination, unaware of physical surroundings, prone to accidents
- Difficulty cutting with scissors, coloring and printing inside lines
- Cannot tie laces, button clothes, or get dressed
- Reads but does not comprehend

- Difficulty playing with more than one child at a time, may prefer to play alone
- Difficulty remembering the names of things: the seasons, the months, streets, etc.
- Does not understand the difference between 'up and down'; 'top and bottom', 'in and out'; 'front of and behind'; etc.

#### **GRADES 5-8**

- Reverses letter sequences (soiled/solid, left/felt)
- Slow to learn prefixes, suffixes, root words and other spelling strategies
- Avoids reading aloud
- Trouble with word problems
- Difficulty with handwriting
- Awkward, fist-like, or tight pencil grip
- Avoids writing compositions
- Slow or poor recall of facts
- Difficulty making friends
- Trouble understanding body language and facial expressions
- Difficulty expressing ideas and relating events in sequence

#### **HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

- Continues to spell incorrectly, frequently spells the same word differently in a single piece of writing, laborious handwriting
- Avoids reading and writing tasks
- Difficulty with putting thoughts on paper

- Trouble summarizing
- Trouble with open-ended questions on tests
- Weak memory skills
- Difficulty adjusting to new settings
- Works slowly
- Poor grasp of abstract concepts
- Either pays too little attention to details or focuses on them too much
- Misreads information/lacks logic, poor reasoning ability
- Vulnerable to peer pressure, often the 'scapegoat' in situations
- Difficulty organizing and/or concentrating on homework
- Rarely relates past events or experiences in sequence or detail

#### **ADULTS**

- Excellent verbal ability, but cannot express thoughts on paper
- Mechanical aptitude, but difficulty with reading, writing or spelling
- Lacks social skills and has difficulty maintaining relationships or making friends
- Learns well when shown, but cannot follow written and/or verbal instructions
- Feels constantly anxious, tense, depressed and has a very poor self-concept
- Has difficulty organizing belongings, time, activities, or responsibilities.

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### **WHAT IF I SEE THE SIGNS OF A LEARNING DISABILITY?**

Trust your intuition! If you suspect a real problem, collect information about your child's performance. Meet with your child's teachers, tutors, and other school support personnel, seek information and expert opinions, and do not be afraid to have him or her evaluated right away. Observe your child's strengths and interests.

### **HAVE YOUR CHILD EVALUATED**

Ask school authorities to provide a comprehensive educational evaluation including assessment tests. Tests for learning disabilities are referred to as assessment tests because they evaluate and measure areas of strengths and areas of need. A comprehensive evaluation, however, includes a variety of procedures in addition to the assessment tests, such as interviews, direct observation, reviews of your child's educational and medical history, and conferences with professionals who work with your child. Either you or the school can request this evaluation, but it is given only with written permission. Since you are one of the best observers of your child's development, it is important that you be an active participant in the evaluation process. If you don't understand the test results, ask questions!

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Parents need to know how and where to get appropriate information. Learn about your special education program and services, your rights and responsibilities as a parent of a child with special needs by requesting a summary of legal rights and services from your child's school, district/board. Visit their websites to learn more about their program. Contact your local Learning Disabilities Association for more information and support.

## PROFESSIONALS WHO CAN HELP

**AUDIOLOGIST** - measures hearing ability and provides services for auditory training; offers advice on hearing aids.

**EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT** - gives education evaluations, familiar with school curriculum but may have a background in special education issues.

**EDUCATIONAL THERAPIST** - develops and runs programs for learning and behavior problems.

**LEARNING DISABILITIES SPECIALIST** - a teacher with specific training and credentials to provide educational services to students with learning disabilities and their teachers.

**NEUROLOGIST** - looks for possible damage to brain functions (medical doctor).

**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST** - helps improve motor and sensory functions to increase the ability to perform daily tasks.

**PEDIATRICIAN** - provides medical services to infants, children, and adolescents, trained in overall growth and development including motor, sensory, and behavioral development (medical doctor).

**PSYCHIATRIST** - diagnoses and treats severe behavioral and emotional problems and may prescribe medications (medical doctor).

**PSYCHOLOGIST (CLINICAL)** - provides psychological and intellectual assessment and treatment for mental and emotional health.

**SCHOOL/EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST** - gives and interprets psychological and educational tests; assists with behaviour management, provides counseling; consults with parents, staff, and community agencies about educational issues.

**SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST** - helps children with language and speech difficulties.

## The most common learning disabilities are:

Auditory and visual processing disabilities: a person with normal hearing and vision has difficulty processing language

Dyslexia: a person has trouble understanding written words, sentences or paragraphs

Dyscalculia: a person has difficulty solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.

Dysgraphia: a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space

### FACT SHEET

#### *What are some Common Signs of LD*

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