

Facts about Learning Disabilities

What is a learning disability?

Simply, a learning disability results from a difference in the way a person's brain is "wired." Young people with learning disabilities are as smart, or smarter than their peers. But they may have difficulty reading, writing, spelling, reasoning, recalling and/or organizing information if left to figure things out by themselves, or if taught in conventional ways.

A learning disability can't be fixed; it is a lifelong issue. With the right support and intervention, children with learning disabilities can succeed in school and go on to successful, distinguished careers later in life.

Parents can help children with learning disabilities achieve success by encouraging their strengths, knowing their weaknesses, understanding the educational system, working with teachers and support staff to learn about strategies for dealing with specific difficulties.

Not all great minds think alike

Did you know that Albert Einstein couldn't read until he was nine? Walt Disney, General George Patton, and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller had trouble reading all their lives. Whoopi Goldberg and Charles Schwab and many others have learning disabilities which haven't affected their ultimate success.

Facts about learning disabilities

- 15% of the U.S. population, or 1 in 7 Americans, has some type of learning disability, according to the National Institute of Health.
- Difficulty with basic reading and language skills are the most common learning disabilities. As many as 80% of students with learning disabilities have reading problems.
- Learning disabilities often run in families.
- Learning disabilities should not be confused with other disabilities such as mental retardation, autism, deafness, blindness, and behavioral disorders. None of these conditions are learning disabilities. In addition, they should not be confused with lack of educational opportunities like frequent changes of schools or attendance problems. Also, children who are learning English do not necessarily have a learning disability.
- Attention disorders, such as attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities often occur at the same time, but the two disorders are not the same.

Common learning disabilities

- dyslexia – a language-based disability in which a person has trouble understanding written words. It may also be referred to as reading disability or reading disorder.
- dyscalculia – a mathematical disability in which a person has a difficult time solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.

- dysgraphia – a writing disability in which a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space.
- auditory and visual processing disorders – sensory disabilities in which a person has difficulty understanding language despite normal hearing and vision.
- nonverbal learning disabilities – a neurological disorder which originates in the right hemisphere of the brain, causing problems with visual-spatial, intuitive, organizational, evaluative and holistic processing functions.

Common Signs of LD

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 assignments
- Slow or poor recall of facts
- Difficulty making friends
- Trouble understanding body language and facial expressions

High School Students and Adults

- Continues to spell incorrectly, frequently spells the same word differently in a single piece of writing
- Avoids reading and writing tasks
- 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

LD Ideas for PARENTS:

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!

1. Work as a team to help your child

If the evaluation shows that your child has a learning disability, your child is eligible for special education services. If eligible, you will work with a team of professionals, including your child's teacher, to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a written document summarizing your child's current educational performance; annual goals and short-term objectives; nature and projected duration of your child's special services; and methods for evaluating progress. For students 16 years and older, an IEP must include a transition plan to move the student from school to the "real world."

If your child does not qualify for special education, it is still important for you to work with your child's teacher to develop an informal program that meets your child's learning needs. You are an important part of your child's education!

2. Talk to your child about learning disabilities

Children with learning disabilities must be assured that they are not dumb or lazy. They are intelligent people who have trouble learning because their minds process words or information differently. It is not easy to talk with your child about a disability that you do not fully understand. Be informed. It is important to be honest and optimistic-explain to your child that they struggle with learning, but that they can learn. Focus on your child's talents and strengths. Tell them you are confident that with effort and the right help they will be able to meet the challenge and succeed!

3. Find accommodations that can help

Teachers can change classroom routines to help children with learning disabilities. Meet with your child's teacher about these possibilities: reading written information aloud, allowing extra time on exams, taping lessons, and using technology. Have your decisions written into the IEP.

4. Monitor your child's progress

Watch your child's progress to be sure that your child's needs are being met. Keep your child's education folder up to date, adding new samples of schoolwork and test results. If your child is not making progress, discuss your observations with school personnel and work together to make changes. Keep a copy of your child's IEP and review it before each IEP meeting.

5. Know your legal rights

Learn about your special education rights and responsibilities by requesting a summary of legal rights in your native language from your child's school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that your child has the right to a "free and appropriate public education."

IDEA is a law that requires all states and territories to provide a public school education to children with disabilities between ages three and 21, no matter how severe their disabilities are. As soon as children with learning disabilities are identified, they are entitled to services under this law.

If your child is identified as having a learning disability, it is your right under IDEA to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Basically, this is a written document that summarizes your child's educational performance, plans short-term educational goals and outlines annual goals. It also identifies criteria for measuring progress. You are a big part of this program so don't be afraid to speak up.

Tips on how to organize information about your child's learning disability

- Start a folder of all letters and materials related to your child's education.
- Add copies of school files and names and dates of all tests and results, including medical exams and information from other professionals.
- Collect samples of schoolwork that demonstrate your child's difficulties, as well as strengths.
- Keep a contact log of discussions with professionals.
- Keep a log of your own observations.

This information will help you monitor your child's progress. Review it with other professionals as your child grows.

More Parent Tips:

1. Work with your child at home

Parents are a child's first and best teachers. Show your child that reading can be fun. Read to your child every day. Visit the library frequently. Point out words on billboards and traffic signs as you drive, on food labels at the grocery store, on packages, mail, and letters. Play word games. Set an example by giving your child a chance to see you reading and writing at home.

[See the tips](#) below on how to help your child with schoolwork.

2. Join with others who care

You are not alone. By joining with other parents and professionals you can increase awareness of the issue, dispel popular misconceptions, help establish educational systems that provide for the needs of children with learning disabilities, and get support for yourself. Look into the organizations in [LD Resources](#) for ways to become involved and learn more about learning disabilities.

3. Work with professionals

There are many trained professionals who can help your child. Ask your child's teacher or a resource consultant for names of individuals who can help. Contact one of the organizations in [LD Resources](#) for additional suggestions and information.

Professionals who can help

- [Audiologist](#) – measures hearing ability and provides services for auditory training; offers advice on hearing aids.
- [Educational Consultant](#) – gives educational 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 behavior management; provides counseling; consults with parents, staff, and community agencies about educational issues.
- [Speech and Language Therapist](#) – helps children with language and speech difficulties.

Tips for helping with schoolwork

- Show an interest in your child's homework. Inquire about the subjects and the work to be done. Ask questions that require answers longer than one or two words.
- Help your child organize homework materials before beginning.
- Establish a regular time with your child to do homework-developing a schedule helps avoid procrastination.

- Find a specific place for your child to do homework that has lots of light, quiet, and plenty of work space.
- Encourage your child to ask questions and search for answers, taking the time to figure out correct answers.
- Make sure your child backs up answers with facts and evidence.
- Practice school-taught skills at home.
- Relate homework to your child's everyday life. For instance, teach fractions and measurements as you prepare a favorite food together.
- Be a role model-take the opportunity to read a book or newspaper or write a letter while your child studies.
- Praise your child for both the small steps and big leaps in the right direction.