

Understanding Learning Disability

Teaching Kids About Learning Disabilities

Most teens struggle with their self-image. Teens with learning disabilities have more concerns because they know they have more learning difficulty than others. Feelings of embarrassment, failure, low-self esteem, and worry about the future are common. While teens and parents may avoid talking about learning disabilities at all, many teens benefit from learning **more** about their learning differences. Here are some quick facts to teach students about a learning disability.

1. Learning Disabled Teens are Smart - LD Teens Have Average or Higher IQ

It's true! Most teens' learning disabilities were diagnosed using an aptitude-achievement discrepancy method. This means their IQ scores were compared to achievement test scores. The difference between those scores helps determine if a learning disability exists.

Because of the statistics involved, most LD students have an average IQ or higher to qualify for the diagnosis. So, you can bank on the fact that you are at least as intelligent as 68% of your peers, and possibly higher.

It is unfortunate we are stuck with the term learning disability, when in fact, LD kids are at least as intelligent as most of their peers. Kids with LDs simply process certain types of information **differently** than others do.

2. All Kids are Different - Learning Disabilities are Just Learning Differences

Every student has learning differences to some degree. Some learn better by reading than they do by listening to a lecture. Others learn best working with hands-on projects than by thinking about ideas in their minds. Some learn best by reading, and others prefer to write. The possibilities are endless. Teens with learning disabilities have strengths in some areas and weaknesses in others, just like everyone else. The main difference is that students with SLDs do not adapt to regular classroom instruction as quickly as others. Most regular classroom instruction is delivered by lecture, reading text, and visual aids. As a result, students who need flexibility in instruction are left behind in the traditional classroom.

3. Learning Disabled Students Learn at Different Rates - Learning Requires Time

Have you ever felt that you didn't understand something your teacher taught in class and then had the understanding just pop into your mind at a later time? If so, you know that learning may take time. Some students need additional time and experience with ideas to understand them. Working with a special education teacher in small groups allows students to have more time to learn than can be provided in a regular classroom. Students with SLDs need instruction that provides:

- Time to listen to ideas presented in a pace natural to them;
- Time to think about and practice ideas;
- Opportunities to work in groups, and additional time to work alone if needed; and
- Time to review frequently before moving on to other material.

4. Learning Disabled Students Learn Best with Different Types of Materials

Traditional teachers lecture, use blackboards, overhead projectors, and handouts. Researchers are finding that these methods do not meet the needs of all students. Even students without disabilities struggle in traditional classrooms. Students with learning disabilities are just like everyone else. They need a variety of learning materials and tools such as:

- Hands-on projects;
- Experiments based on real-world experiences;
- Logical examples to link new learning to ideas they already understand;
- Meaningful visual materials - not just handouts;
- Multisensory learning tools; and
- Flexible testing methods that allow students to show what they've learned in ways that feel comfortable to them.

5. Most Teens Worry About Themselves; Not Your Learning Disability

Most learning disabled students worry about what others think of them. Most teens are too busy thinking about themselves to think about their learning disability. It's true. Here is an experiment. During the next class change at school, look around at all the kids in the hall. Think about how many students you:

- Don't know
- Have never noticed before
- Know who have a harder time academically than you do
- Know who are angry with someone else
- Know who are really hung up on their social lives
- Know who are more concerned about their boy/girlfriend than anything else
- Know who are in legal trouble
- Know who have major behavior problems

All of these students are more concerned with their own issues than with yours.

6. Students with Learning Disabilities Need Differentiated Instruction, Teaching

All students need variety in their learning materials, and additional time to process information. They also need teachers who are more responsive to their individual learning styles. In special education, this is called differentiated instruction. Students with learning disabilities are more likely to need differentiated instruction and to need teachers to adapt instructional materials to meet their needs. All kids would benefit from this, but schools are just not funded or equipped to provide it for everyone. As a result, flexible instruction is usually only provided to the students who need it most. That is why there is a process to diagnose and develop IEPs for learning disabled students.

7. Kids Who Matter Don't Care - Kids Who Care Don't Matter

Real friends will not care that you have a disability. Instead, they will care about and respect you. A few teens and adults will be biased against your disability. This is their character flaw. Character flaws may develop because of difficulties at home, family culture, negative childhood experiences, and lack of conscience. Most likely, you cannot change this; change has to come from within that person. Positive things you can do to protect yourself from negative people include:

- Recognize their character flaw for what it is and nothing more.
- Know it has little to do with you.
- Recognize they will have many bad experiences in life because of their behavior and attitudes.
- Avoid them.
- Develop your own circle of friends.

8. Some Teens Bully Students with Learning Disabilities - Avoiding Bullies

Some students will attempt to bully you. Like people with character flaws, bullies have serious personality problems that have little to do with you and your disability. Bullies will take every opportunity they can find to pick on others. Bullying can be a serious problem. If you're being picked on, talk to your parents, a school counselor, teacher or other supportive adult. If you're having difficulty getting someone to listen, do not be discouraged. Keep talking to adults until you find someone who will listen. If you feel you are in danger, and no one will listen, call the police.

Adapted from: Ann Logsdon, About.com