

Learning Disabilities

What are learning disabilities?

Learning disabilities are caused by a difference in brain structure that is present at birth and is often hereditary. They affect the way the brain processes information. This processing is the main function involved in learning.

Learning disabilities can impact how someone learns to read, write, hear, speak, and calculate. There are many kinds of learning disabilities and they can affect people differently.

Learning disabilities do not reflect IQ (intelligence quotient) or how smart a person is. Instead, a person with a learning disability has trouble performing specific types of skills or completing a task.

Learning disabilities are not the same as mental or physical disabilities, such as mental retardation, deafness, or blindness. But, learning disabilities may occur together with mental or physical disabilities.

Children with learning disabilities cannot be identified on the basis of acuity (such as vision or hearing) or other physical signs, nor can they be diagnosed solely based on neurological findings. Learning disabilities are widely regarded as variations on normal development and are only considered disabilities when they interfere significantly with school performance and adaptive functions.

What are the signs and symptoms of learning disabilities?

A delay in achieving certain developmental milestones, when most other aspects of development are normal, could be a sign of a learning disability. Such delays may include problems with language, motor delays, or problems with socialization.

If you think your child may have a learning disability, talk to your child's or educator to discuss options for evaluation and educational interventions. These professionals can screen for potential difficulties, but it is essential that someone specializing in the diagnosis of learning disabilities do a full evaluation to confirm the presence of a learning disability.

What are some types of learning disabilities?

The term "learning disabilities" includes a variety of disorders that affect the ability to learn. Some examples include (but are not limited to):

Reading Disability is a reading and language-based learning disability, also commonly called **dyslexia**. For most children with learning disabilities receiving special education services, the primary area of difficulty is reading. People with reading disabilities often have problems recognizing words that they already know. They may also be poor spellers and may have problems with decoding skills. Other symptoms may include trouble with handwriting and problems understanding what they read. About 15 percent to 20 percent of people in the United States have a language-based disability, and of those, most have dyslexia.

Dyscalculia (dis-kal-kyoo-lee-uh) is a learning disability related to math. Those with dyscalculia may have difficulty understanding math concepts and solving even simple math problems.

Dysgraphia (dis-graf-ee-uh) is a learning disability related to handwriting. People with this condition may have problems forming letters as they write or may have trouble writing within a defined space.

Information-processing disorders are learning disorders related to a person's ability to use the information that they take in through their senses – seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. These problems are not related to an inability to see or hear. Instead, the conditions affect the way the brain recognizes, responds to, retrieves, and stores sensory information.

Language-related learning disabilities are problems that interfere with age-appropriate communication, including speaking, listening, reading, spelling, and writing.