

## **Learning Disabilities**

The definition of a Learning Disability is 'a significant gap between a person's intelligence and the skills the person has achieved at each age.'

Learning disabilities can affect people their whole life, in school, work, social, and family situations. Learning Disabilities (LD) are a handicap in the same way that blindness is a handicap, but it is deceiving: the visible symptoms of the disabilities are sometimes hidden and hard to identify. LD is a disorder that affects people's ability to learn, interpret what they hear or see, or process information. There are many ways that LD can show up: in writing, reading, speaking, hearing, learning, or difficulties with attention.

There are many causes of LD, some can be identified and some can't be. Sometimes there may be errors in the development of the fetal brain caused by genetic factors. Drug and alcohol use during pregnancy may be a factor. Environmental factors such as lead or other toxins in childhood could be a factor

### **Learning Disabilities can be divided into three categories:**

- Developmental speech and language disorders
- Academic skills disorders
- "Other" - a very broad category that includes some coordination disorders, attention disorders, and learning handicaps not covered by the more specific disorders.

### **Developmental Speech and Language Disorders**

Developmental Articulation Disorder: These disorders are not uncommon and in most cases are outgrown. Children with this disorder may lag behind other children their age in the way they articulate the sounds of speech 'wittle wabbit' instead of 'little rabbit', for instance

Developmental Expressive Language Disorder: Some children have trouble expressing themselves with speech.

Developmental Receptive Language Disorder: Some children have problems understanding just certain aspects of speech. They can hear, but they can't interpret certain words.

### **Academic Skills Disorders**

Developmental Reading Disorder: This not uncommon disorder is also known as dyslexia. Dyslexia is difficulty with language. Intelligence is not the problem; the problem is language. People who are dyslexic may have difficulty with reading, spelling, understanding language they hear, or expressing themselves clearly in speaking or in writing. An unexpected gap exists between their potential for learning and their school achievement.

Developmental Writing Disorder: Dysgraphia - a neurological-based writing disability in which a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space.

Developmental Arithmetic Disorder: Dyscalculia - a mathematical disability in which a person has unusual difficulty solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.

### **"Other" Learning Disorders**

Coordination of fine and large motor skills, delays in language acquisition and Attention Deficit Disorders fall into this category. Although ADD is not considered a learning disability by itself, but because this disorder seriously interferes with and impairs school performance this disorder often accompanies academic skill disorders.

### **Identification and Diagnosis**

The first people to identify any problems with any child are the child's parents. Sometimes some development is delayed and that is perfectly normal for that particular child. In order to make an accurate determination, sometimes it's best to wait for the child and the brain to mature. But if as a child matures and there is no noticeable improvement, the child should be evaluated by a physician.

As a child grows older she or he spends more time in school, and the child's teachers have a good opportunity to observe the child and the child's abilities and possible difficulties. A teacher or parent may come to the conclusion that the child is having a great deal of difficulty and needs evaluation.

In order to successfully diagnose a learning disability, a series of tests are administered by the child's school, learning specialist, physician, or a clinician. Each and any of these specialists can help determine what the problem is and recommend a program of special education to work with the learning differences that the learning disability may impose upon the child.

The methods and tools of the assessments vary as regards the kind of disability that is being explored. You'll find a partial list of some of the many different tests that are administered at the end of this article.

Children with Learning Disabilities are guaranteed a free and appropriate education to meet their needs under two federal laws. They are: 1) the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B [IDEA] and 2) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

#### **1. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

Children suspected of having learning disabilities must be evaluated at the school's expense and, if found to be eligible, provided service under either of two federal laws, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Some of the services that could be provided to eligible children include modified instructions, assignments, and testing; assistance from a classroom aide or a special education teacher; and behavior management.

IDEA provides special education for those children who meet the eligibility criteria for one of a number of categories. If the child does meet the criteria of a disabling condition that affects school

performance, then that child requires special education and may be eligible to receive the services that are spelled out under this law.

In its regulations implementing IDEA, the US Department of Education includes AD/HD and ADD as conditions that may qualify a child for special education services under the "Other Health Impaired" category. A child may be eligible under this category if the disorder limits alertness to academic tasks, adversely affecting educational performance to the extent that special intervention is necessary.

## 2. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 is a civil rights statute that prohibits schools from discriminating against children with disabilities and provides reasonable accommodations. Under some circumstances, these reasonable accommodations may include the provision of special services.

"The eligibility for Section 504 is based on the existence of an identified physical or mental condition that substantially limits a major life activity. Children who are not eligible for special education may still be guaranteed access to related services if they meet the Section 504 eligibility criteria."

### The IEP (Individual Education Plan)

The IEP is developed by a committee that includes at least a school administrator, the student's teacher, the parents, the student, and occasionally a social worker, learning specialist and a psychologist. The IEP is a list of goals and objectives based on the student's needs and present level of performance. The IEP is very specific and identifies and the services that will be provided for the student to meet the goals that are determined. The IEP is a commitment and a legal document that lists the goals of the school and the student, and the resources that the school will provide to meet those goals.

In the attempt to obtain reasonable accommodations for their children, parents can hire consultants to help them. Advocates (usually in the law profession) exist in each state to assist in the quest for these accommodations. They can also serve as mediators between parents and the schools. Educational and Placement consultants can also help parents choose the right education programs for their children.

Name of Test	Diagnostic Purpose	Notes
Kaufman Speech Praxis	Dyspraxia.	Pre-school
Gray Oral Reading	Measures growth in oral reading.	Ages 7 - 18
Wide Range Assessment of Memory and Learning (WRAML)	Distinguishes memory from learning, verba vs. spatial, length of time of recall.	Ages 5 - 17
Test of Language Development Primary and	Measures ability to combine sentences, understand word	Ages 4 - 13

Intermediate	meanings. Tests child's listening and speaking skills.	
Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-3) and Pre-school	Measures language skills, identifies language deficits.	Ages 6 - 21
Test of Non-Verbal Intelligence	Abstract symbolic problem solving - helps in appraising children whose test performance is impaired by language and motor skills.	
Woodcock-Johnson Revised Achievement Tests	Consists of a series of achievement tests.	Ages 2 - 90
Test of Auditory Comprehension and Language	Test measures a child's auditory comprehension skills.	
Oral and Written Language Scales	Measures expressive language.	Ages 3 - 21
Goldman-Fristoe Woodcock Test of Auditory Discrimination	Measures the ability to distinguish words that sound alike.	Ages 3 - 8 and over 70
Pre-school Language Scale	Assesses receptive and expressive language, attention abilities, social communication and vocal development.	Ages 2 wks - 7 yrs.
Token Test for Children	Measures child's ability to follow spoken directions.	Ages 3 - 12.5
The Structure of Intellect	Assesses cognitive abilities to give a profile of an individual's strengths and weaknesses.	
Bruinsky-Oseretsky Test of Motor Proficiency	Assesses motor functions of children 4.5 to 14 years.	Ages 4.5 - 14
Southern California Sensory Integration Test	Assesses perceptual motor skills and related deficits. Helps determine the nature of sensory dysfunctionality.	
Pre-writing Skills Checklist	Assesses a child's readiness for writing.	
Test of Visual Motor Skills	Determines a child's visual-motor functioning.	
Children's Handwriting Evaluation Scale		
Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual Motor Integration	Assesses visual perception and fine motor coordination.	
Jordan Left-Right Reversal Test	Assesses visual reversals of letters, numbers and words.	Age 5 - Adult

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills	Tests targets necessary for academic success.	
Brigrance Inventory of Basic Skills	Assesses academic readiness skills.	
Basic Achievement Skills Individual Screener	Appraises students' test taking attitudes and behavior.	Grades 1 - 12
Stanford Achievement Test	Consists of tests of vocabulary, reading, word study skills, mathematics and listening comprehension. Can detect problems in recalling and identifying main ideas.	
Wide Range Achievement Test	Measures the codes needed to learn the basic skills of reading, spelling and arithmetic.	
Learning Disability Checklist	Evaluates various learning and behavior problems.	
Winston Grammar	Assesses the ability to identify various parts of speech.	
Informal Assessment of Developmental Reading Disorder / Dyslexia	Early identification of reading disorders can enable the child to begin special reading instruction.	
Informal Tests For Diagnosing Specific Reading Problems	Assesses specific skill weaknesses in phonics and comprehension.	
The Connors Rating Scales for ADD / ADHD	Connors Teachers Rating Scale contains scales for hyperactivity, conduct disorders and attention difficulties. Connors Parents Scale assesses behavior and learning problems.	
Learning Style Inventory	Assesses a child's unique learning style.	
T.O.V.A.® Test of Variables of Attention	Assessment of Attention Deficit Disorder is a measure of visual and auditory information processing. It tests reaction time, statistically isolating inattention and impulsivity.	Children and Adults