

# Learning Disabilities

BIRTH DEFECT RESEARCH FOR CHILDREN



How do you know if a child has a learning disability?

All children do not learn in the same way or at the same pace. But most children can master basic skills in speaking, reading, writing, spelling, and math in the early grades of school or before. For the child with a learning disability however, it is extremely difficult to progress in one or more of these basic skills without special help.



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The child with an LD has a cluster of difficulties in one or more of these four categories:

1. Speaking and listening.
2. Reading, writing, and spelling.
3. Reasoning skills.
4. Arithmetic concepts and computation.

Other symptoms that may help identify a child with an LD include:

- short attention span
- poor memory
- difficulty following directions
- problems in telling the difference between letters, numbers, or sounds
- eye-hand coordination problems
- difficulties with sequencing
- disorganization
- inconsistent performance from day-to-day
- impulsive behavior
- late or immature speech development
- difficulty telling time and right from left
- late motor development
- discipline problems
- difficulty naming familiar people or things

## Dyslexia

Dyslexia (a term used to describe specific language difficulties) and other types of LDs that can affect a child's ability to read, write, spell and do math. A child with dyslexia may have one or more of these problems:

1. Great difficulty in learning and remembering a printed word or symbol
2. Reversals of letters or improper letter sequencing
3. Unusual spelling errors
4. Illegible handwriting
5. Poor composition of written work

## What causes Learning Disabilities?

There is probably no single cause of LDs, but some of the causes which scientists are investigating include:

**Genetic Pre-disposition:** The family of a child with an LD will often report that other family members have had similar problems.

**Brain Differences:** A recent study has found differences in the size and shape of parts of the brains of children with dyslexia compared to the brains of children who do not have dyslexia.

**Toxic Substances:** Exposure to high levels of toxic substances like lead can cause hyperactivity and learning problems that may contribute to an LD.

**Prenatal Exposures:** Researchers are studying the effects of substances (drugs, chemicals, alcohol, additives) which may be toxic to the central nervous system of the developing baby.

## Helping a child with a Learning Disability

**Medical:** Every child who is suspected of having an LD should have a complete physical examination to rule out any health problems like high lead levels.

Certain drugs may be prescribed to control symptoms of hyperactivity and inattention that may be associated with your child's condition. When you are considering drug treatment for your child, it is important to ask your physician to explain both the benefits and the risks of the recommended drug.

**Educational:** An educational assessment of your child's learning problems can be arranged through your school system or a licensed psychologist. Since Public Laws 504 and 94-142 provide for equal educational opportunities, many school systems have developed excellent programs that help students with LDs.

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Students with less obvious LDs may not qualify for these programs, but can be helped by working on special learning strategies at home.

**Psychological Assessment:** A qualified psychologist or psychiatrist can provide the testing to help identify your child's area of specific LD. They can also help you and your child cope with behavioral and emotional problems that may go along with LDs.

**Support Groups:** National support groups provide the latest information on LDs and teach parents strategies to help their child succeed.

**Exercise:** A child with an LD often has problems with balance and coordination that make taking part in team sports difficult. A child with an LD can benefit from regular exercise and the pride of mastering a physical skill. Encourage your child to try sports which depend on individual effort like dance, martial arts, bowling, ice skating, tennis or golf.

What is special about a child with a Learning Disability?

Most children with LDs are bright with average or above average intelligence. Some very famous people had LDs: Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Leonardo de Vinci, Auguste Rodin, Hans Christian Anderson, General George Patton, Woodrow Wilson, Nelson Rockefeller, Bruce Jenner, Cher, Whoopi Goldberg, Charles MacArthur, and Tom Cruise. Help your child focus on their strengths and compensate for any weaknesses.

Will a child outgrow Learning Disabilities?

LDs do not just disappear when children become adults. Although some problems may improve, the basic difficulty remains. That is why it is so important to teach your child with a learning disability how to succeed.

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