

# Learning Disabilities

According to the National Institutes of Health, one in seven Americans has some type of learning difficulty. Learning disabilities are not indicative of intelligence level. Rather the classification refers to various neurological disorders in which a person has difficulty receiving or processing information. The cause of these disorders is most often unknown and they are not curable. However, with interventions a child or teen can manage their difficulties and succeed.

## Types of Learning Disabilities:

Classification is based on the type of difficulty and a child or teen may have more than one.

-Reading Disorder or Developmental Dyslexia: includes difficulty with word recognition, or reading rate, reading comprehension

-Math Disability or Dyscalculia: includes difficulty memorizing math facts, organizing numbers, grasping math concepts, solving math problems

-Writing Disorder or Dysphasia/Aphasia: includes difficulty with handwriting, spelling, or the organization of ideas

-Auditory or Visual Processing Disorder: includes difficulty understanding and processing language despite normal hearing or vision

-Nonverbal Learning Disability: includes difficulty with motor coordination, visual-spatial skills, social relationships, or organizational skills

## Diagnosis:

The most common model for diagnosis is to determine if a child or teen's cognitive capacity (i.e. measured IQ) is higher than their academic performance (i.e. achievement) in any particular area.

In order to determine diagnosis, psychologists or neuropsychologists complete a comprehensive assessment. They utilize standardized testing measures, direct observation of the child or teen, interviews with and/or questionnaires completed by parents and/or teachers to evaluate the child or teen's intelligence, academic achievement, classroom performance, social interactions, memory, attention, and language, among other areas.

## Interventions:

Parents or teachers are often the first to notice that a child or teen appears to be learning differently, falling behind academically, or struggling with a particular subject area. A parent has the right to request an academic evaluation for their child or teen. If the child or teen is home-schooled or enrolled in private school, the district public school is responsible for the evaluation.

Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act sets forth protected civil rights of individuals with disabilities. Schools must afford students with disabilities equal opportunities as students without disabilities through modifications or accommodations as set forth in a 504 plan or an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). Interventions are provided within the regular education classroom or within a smaller special education classroom for any portion or all of the academic day.

The type and extent of modifications or accommodations depends on the unique learning characteristics of each child or teen. Various interventions include:

- Preferential seating near the teacher and away from distractions such as windows or doors
- Frequent breaks
- Instructions broken into small, concrete steps
- Instructions given in different modalities including written, oral, and demonstrative
- Extended time on assignments or tests
- Shortened assignments
- Taped textbooks
- Use of a calculator
- Assistance with note taking
- Use of tape recorder for lectures
- Oral testing
- Resource period for additional time to complete assignments and homework
- Tutoring

Parents can also help by utilizing such strategies within the home milieu. For example, provide instructions step-by-step or allow extra time for your child or teen to complete tasks. Most importantly, focus on and praise successes and seek help from other parents or a mental health professional if your child or teen appears to be developing emotional or behavioral issues related to their learning difficulties.