



Dyslexia and learning disabilities



Types of Learning Disabilities

Dyslexia is a term that describes serious problems with reading. With this problem, your child may not understand letters, groups of letters, sentences or paragraphs.

At the beginning of first grade, children may occasionally reverse and rotate the letters they read and write. This may be normal when first learning to read. By the middle of first grade (and with maturity) these problems should disappear.

However, a young student with dyslexia (reading disabilities) may not overcome these problems. These difficulty can continue as the student gets older. To him a "b" may look like a "d". He may write "on" when he really means "no". Your child may reverse a "6" to make "9". **This is not a vision problem.** The problem involves how the brain interprets the information it "sees".

Dysgraphia is a term for problems with writing. With this problem, your older child may not form letters correctly, and there is difficulty writing within a certain space. Writing neatly takes time and effort. But despite the extra effort, handwriting still may be hard to read. A teacher may say that a learning-disabled student can finish written tests and assignments on time. Supervisors may find that written tasks are always late or incomplete.

Dyscalculia is a term for problems doing math. With this problem, your child may not grasp math concepts. He may do well in history and language, but he may fail tests involving fractions and percentage. Math is difficult for many students. But with dyscalculia, a young person may have a much more difficult time doing math than others his age. Dyscalculia may prevent your child from solving basic math problems that others his age complete with no difficulty.

Auditory memory and processing disabilities is a term for problems understanding and remembering words and sounds. Your daughter may hear normally, but she may not remember key facts because her memory does not correctly store and interpret facts. This is not caused by a hearing problem. It happens when the brain fails to understand words or sound the right way.

Parents, teachers, and pediatricians usually detect learning disabilities during the school years, but a problem may not surface until the teen years. It is important to remember that it is never too late to get help.

Understanding Learning Disabilities

During the preschool years, children undergo rapid change and growth—physically, mentally and emotionally. And they do this at different rates. So it is important to know whether they are ready and able to succeed in school. There are many reasons why they may not be able to learn, such as:

- Hearing problems
- Poor motivation
- Emotional problems
- Mental retardation

Some school-age children with none of the above problems still have trouble in a school setting. These children may have normal, near normal or above normal intelligence. This inability to reach their full potential is called a learning disability.

In many cases, the cause of a learning disability is not known. Experts believe that children with learning disabilities have a problem with the way the brain handles information. This hinders the normal learning process. Learning disabilities often make children feel bad about themselves. Parents need to understand this and provide their children with love and support.

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The problem they are going through is similar to a distorted television picture caused by “technical problems” at the station. There is nothing wrong with the TV camera at the station or the TV set in your home. Yet, the picture is not clear. Something in the internal workings of the TV station prevents it from presenting a good picture.

There may be nothing wrong with the way children with learning disabilities take in information. Their senses of sight and sound are fine. The problem occurs in the brain after the eyes or ears have done their job. For example, it is easy to blame reading difficulties on the eyes. But, visual problems do not cause learning disabilities. Children with learning disabilities have no greater rate of eye problems than the rest of the population.

This problem in brain function delays the normal learning process. For this reason, it requires special teaching methods. A learning disability is not just a minor problem that simply goes away as children mature. A learning disability must be identified and treated early. If it is, there’s a greater chance that children with learning disabilities will reach their potential. If it isn’t, it could lead to major emotional problems causing depression and withdrawal. Both factors are linked to school failure.

Learning disabilities are not common. They appear to be more common in boys than girls. More than one out of 10 public school students may be in need of special education. Of these, about half have some type of learning disability.

Diagnosing and Treating Learning Disabilities.

It may not be easy to detect learning disabilities in children. This type of problem does not reveal itself in a day or a week. There are warning signs, however, that can help parents know if their children have a learning disability. Parents should note if any of the situations listed below are present in their preschool children:

- Delays in language development. By two and a half years old, children should be able to put sentences together.
- Trouble with speech. By 3 years old, parents and others should understand what children say more than half of the time.
- Trouble with coordination. Just before kindergarten, children should be able to tie shoes, button, hop and cut.
- Short attention span. Between 3 and 5 years old, children should be able to sit still while being read a story. (Attention span should increase with age during this period.)

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Regard these signs as risk factors only. Remember that no child develops in the same manner or at the same pace. These signs may not always reveal a learning disability. If you have any questions about the proper activities for your child's age, talk to your pediatrician.

The people who have the most contact with the children are parents, teachers or pediatricians. Doctors or teachers can give screening tests to see if a problem exists. The pediatrician can help the parents decide if further evaluation is needed.

This may include an eye exam by an eye doctor (ophthalmologist), a psychological exam by a psychologist, an ear exam by an ear/nose/throat doctor, or a language assessment by a speech and language clinician.

Despite many frustrations, proper help from a number of professionals can make a difference. While there is no cure for a learning disability, children may learn to achieve and lead a fruitful life in spite of their disability.

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There are people and groups who offer simple answers or solutions for learning disabilities. Be cautious of these claims. Some allege that visual treatments can help although no data support this theory. Others believe in special diets and exercise. Still others claim certain vitamins will provide children's bodies with a needed balance and cure the problem. Keep in mind there is no guidance to support any of these treatments. There are no quick fixes for a learning disability. Dealing with this problem is tough. It's often a lifelong battle.

Early identification and treatment cannot be stressed enough. With the proper help, children with learning disabilities can become quite successful later in life.

Famous Americans with learning disabilities include inventor Thomas Edison, Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, scientist Albert Einstein and athlete Bruce Jenner. These people rose above their disability and went on to achieve great personal and national goals.

People who learn to overcome their disabilities can do great things in life. For children with a learning disability, nothing can replace a good educational program and proper medical management. As important are loving and supportive parents, family and friends.

Dyslexia is.....

The following paragraphs were written by students studying at The Dyslexia Center in Santa Rose California. They were written to explain how the world is experienced by the dyslexic and provide understanding of the many facets of dyslexia.

Dyslexia is...

- The ability to see multi-dimensionally, all at once, or from any one place at a time. The ability to think in pictures and to register those pictures as real. Thus, you mix in creative thinking with reality and change what you see and hear.
- Running daydreams: A process of always rapidly creating in your mind, so you never hear what others really say, or you forget what they say. Therefore, you can't hear or see things around you accurately.
- Disorientation: The imagination starts running when something "triggers" you. You become spacey; you "drift" and make mistakes. It can be seen in your eyes and felt inside. Triggers can be written or spoken words, movement, confusion, sounds, people, exhaustion, sensitivities, emotions, hunger, fear, etc. Thus, dyslexia affects your life and of those around you.
- A talent to think 3-dimensionally, in pictures like computer graphics: This talent interferes with symbols, print, spoken language, balance, movement, and the sense of time. One needs to learn when it needs to be turned off; each person has to learn when this is most necessary for them.
- Optical Illusion: You perceive things in a different, unique way. You see changes in the details around you. The shift, they get brighter or duller.
- Not just in academics: It affects your abilities to integrate what you hear, see, think, and your ability to follow through successfully. It affects your sequential thinking and your ability to stay on task.

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- A spatial, verbal, and thinking disability: Dyslexia is easily unsettling. This can create extra movement, extra anxiety, and tends to speed up the thinking rate which, in turn, can speed up the talking rate immensely. Trying to catch up to the rapid thinking increases stumbling and fumbling for words. It can also cause a misperception of what others say. Dyslexics can't even begin to explain all of the thoughts and feelings. They always feel that there is something missing, something unidentifiable

Dyslexics are often missing the feeling of well-being.

- An emotional disability: Dyslexia can move you from a calm state of mind into confusion in seconds. It's hard for others to understand a dyslexic. Confusion tends to make a dyslexic moody, overly sensitive, and unable to communicate easily with others. There is no question that it affects your relationships.
- Variable with its symptoms: Symptoms fluctuate and depend on the tolerance for confusion that moment, that hour, that day. Ordinarily, confusion precedes learning; in a dyslexic, confusion leads to more confusion, which tends to block the learning process.

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- Hand in hand with other disabilities: Dyslexia can also cause problems in math (dyscalculia), handwriting (dysgraphia), listening (receptive language problem), the processing of verbal instructions or information (central auditory processing problem), and/or a problem with day dreaming and staying on task (Attention Deficit Disorder, or ADD).
- A collection of symptoms in reading: Dyslexia causes the omission of words; letters in words; or not “seeing” a word; addition of words; transpositions (switching) of letter order; repetitions of words or sentences; reading and rereading, practicing what you’re to read and still making embarrassing mistakes; reading worse under pressure; not remembering what you read; reversals of word order; reversal of letters, reversals of words; stumbling over words; sounding out a word and then not recognizing it in another sentence; confusion over the author’s meaning or purpose; “rewriting” the author’s words; feelings that you’re dumb; total frustration because you can’t understand what you’re reading. You feel that something is wrong with you.
- Confusion in math (dyscalculia): Dyslexics may be burdened by: adding, subtracting, multiplying, or dividing incorrectly, with seemingly small, “careless” errors; transposing and reversing numbers; “forgetting” to do something; somehow coming up with other answer; adding when you should be subtracting; suddenly dividing when you should be adding, somehow losing the process. Not “seeing” a problem to be worked on the page and, thus, not answering it can be another complication. Dyslexics often don’t know how they did on a test. They can work the sample problem, but can’t apply the process to a slightly different problem. Everyone thinks the dyslexic could do it if they would “just try”.

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- Inconsistent in subject matters: Though perhaps accomplished in math, dyslexics may not have a clue when it comes to reading, writing and spelling. Or the opposite may be true. Dyslexia can affect learning in all the subjects areas, or a few at a time, this can vary throughout your life. Without correction we have to work 7 times as hard as anyone else, or else just give up.
- Irritating to others: the person who has dyslexia may make mistakes that look careless
- Sensitivity: Dyslexics are keenly sensitive to others, and are able to perceive thoughts and feelings; this makes mistakes upsetting. Dyslexics also have a strong sense of justice and are always right!
- A talent: Excellent in art, music, drama, sports, carpentry, mechanics, and electronics, dyslexics can brainstorm their way out of anything. Dyslexics are creative and bright, giving others the impression that they should try harder!
- Multi-faceted: Dyslexics have complex lives; they are intense and "high maintenance" people who are bright, entertaining and unique.
- Correctable: once someone has been trained to do the correction, catch their confusions, and clear up their "stumbles," dyslexia becomes self-correctable. Dyslexia can then have the experience of being focused.

When you learn to focus, you are finally able to realize many facets of your potential and are able to take charge of your life. You experience choices and successes that have eluded you all of your life. You open up to increased self-esteem, the value of which is immeasurable. You learn to understand and accept yourself. You are different, unique, and talented!

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