

## What is a Learning Disability?

It is a condition in which there is a significant discrepancy between what a person has the potential to do and what they do. People with this problem have trouble gathering information and processing it accurately. The information often gets scrambled.

Individuals with learning disabilities are of average or even superior ability, but have difficulty with listening, reading, spelling, writing, speaking or math calculations. They may also have some problems fitting in socially or with self-esteem.

A learning disability is not the same as being mentally retarded, lazy or stupid.

## Common characteristics of Learning Disabilities

Ten percent (10%) of the population has some form of a learning disability. If a child has trouble with one or more of the following he may have a learning disability that should be diagnosed and remediated:

- thinking clearly
- spelling accurately
- learning to compute
- putting things in sequence
- writing legibly
- learning to read
- copying
- following directions, or
- if he is often confused, clumsy, impulsive, hyperactive, disoriented, becomes frustrated and rebellious, depressed, withdrawn or aggressive.

**Remember** -- if a child exhibits only a few of these characteristics, he or she is not necessarily learning disabled. Most children show some of these at different stages in their development. It is the child who has a **cluster** of these symptoms who needs "further examination."

## How do parents find "further examination?"

There are special tests who can be used to identify specific learning disabilities. If you think your child needs to be tested, contact your child's teacher, school principal, or the school district's special education administrator, **in writing**, requesting that your child be evaluated. Describe your concerns and the "cluster" of characteristics which cause you to feel that your child may have a learning disability.

If the school denies your request, you may request (in writing) an independent evaluation at the school's expense. If this request is also denied there are procedural guidelines that you may follow, with the final step being a Due Process Hearing.

You may also have an independent evaluation done by a private agency or therapist. The results of this evaluation should be shared with school personnel for consideration.

## What if my child does not qualify for Special Education?

If your child has been evaluated, has a diagnosed disability, but does not qualify for special education services, he may qualify for services- accommodations or modifications- under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. (Request PIC Section 504 brochure).

## How can I help my child at home?

- ✓ **Make directions specific and simple** -- Be sure that you have your child's attention, be brief and precise; give one direction at a time, gradually increase the complexity of directions (i.e. instead of "clean your room" start with "pick up all the red things," then expand to "pick up all the dirty clothes and put them in the hamper."
- ✓ **Help your child get organized** -- Have a place for everything; establish routines and try to stick with them, when they must be altered, take time to explain the change and "walk your child through" the new procedure; provide work charts and checklists as reminders.

- ✓ **Repeat learning experiences** -- Your child may have learned to spell the words for his spelling test, but an hour later can't remember them. Repeat the task and try other approaches (such as a multi-sensory approach -- write the words on paper, write them in sand or shaving cream, spell them into a tape recorder and play it back.)
- ✓ **Help your child learn how to learn** -- Play learning games; make learning a fun experience by trying different modes of learning; telling, showing, doing the tasks in different ways; making up rhymes or songs; create a study center for your child and teach study skills (read, recite, review, answer questions, review again); use objects to teach number skills.
- ✓ **Communicate frequently with school** -- Develop a system of communication between school and home (a notebook, phone calls, e-mail, etc.) that allows the teachers to share how they are teaching different subjects and how you can carry through with the same approaches at home; brainstorm with teachers to find ways to help your child compensate in the areas of most difficulty (taped textbooks for a child with reading deficits, copies of class notes for a child who has difficulty writing).
- ✓ **Keep expectations and goals attainable** -- Start with small goals that you know your child is capable of achieving. Once they are accomplished, increase the expectation level. Choose goals that emphasize your child's strengths. Place your child in "win" situations as often as possible to boost his self-esteem.
- ✓ **Establish clear rules and consequences** - Write rules, as well as the consequences for breaking the rules (i.e. homework must be completed, checked and corrected before watching TV), discuss rules with your child and post them in a conspicuous place; follow through consistently with consequences; avoid nagging, reminding, negotiating or making exceptions!

## How can I help my child deal with social situations?

Children with learning disabilities often have a difficult time relating to others, particularly peers. These children often miss the gist of a story or misinterpret body language. They may stand too close to others while talking, bump into another person while walking or interrupt a conversation -- all without realizing what they have done wrong. This can strain relationships at home as well as at school. Parents and teachers can help children with learning disabilities by:

- **Acknowledging the child's frustration** -- Let your child know you understand his difficulties by saying something like, "I know it's harder for you to spell than other kids -- and I can see that you are trying really hard!"
- **Praise and encourage the activities at which your child excels** -- You can help boost his sense of self-esteem and accomplishment and deflect some of the pressures in the areas that are difficult for him; children with learning disabilities may be sensitive to criticism, easily discouraged and over dependent -- but they can be taught to compensate, to have self-confidence and to be independent.
- **Model and role play social situations with your child** -- Prepare your child for situations he is likely to encounter by talking about it and how he can handle it -- then role play the solutions (e.g. if your child often bumps into others, role play how to acknowledge what happened, apologize, and also what to do if the other person reacts with anger).
- **Reward your child for appropriate behavior** -- Tell him when he does something right, use encouragement, praise, hugs and rewards to acknowledge persistence and achievement. (Children with learning disabilities know when things are going wrong, they endure so much criticism, impatience, frustration and shame that they need positive feedback and re-enforcement as much as possible).
- **BE PATIENT!**

## For more information about LEARNING DISABILITIES

### CONTACT:



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# LEARNING DISABILITIES

*Disability Brochure #11*



## Characteristics and Coping Strategies

## Parent Information Center

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