

# Life Skills

Developing Skills  
for Life's Challenges

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## A Lot of Smart Kids Have Trouble in School

### Learning Disabilities— What Are They?

Estimates suggest that between 5% and 15% of school-aged children have learning problems significant enough to be termed a disability. Learning disabilities are a hidden handicap that interfere with a person's ability to process information and learn. As our society continues to place greater and greater emphasis on learning and education, awareness of such disorders is increasing. The person with a learning disability usually has average or above average intelligence and may be very bright. However, for some reason there is a gap between potential and achievement.

Dyslexia (a disability in reading or verbal skills) and Attention Deficit Disorder are two learning disabilities receiving much attention today. But people can have disabilities in many areas, such as memory and learning, non-verbal or visual-spatial abilities, and the comprehension and integration of information. Learning disabilities may occur in many forms: visual, auditory, motor control, verbal, comprehension, memory, reading, math, attention/concentration, etc. Specific

learning disabilities are a weakness in the psychological or neurological process of understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest in a problem in the ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do math calculations.

### Finding the Problem

A child with a learning disability may look healthy, see correctly, and act normally. Special tests are necessary to identify learning disabilities. These tests can determine what an individual can do well and what areas are weak. Psychological tests can tell why a child is not getting the grades he or she should, and can help analyze and explain learning difficulties.

The assessment of learning disabilities requires an approach that integrates historical information about the individual, behavioral observations, and psychological test results. The diagnosis is established based on these sources of information. Recommendations for the management of learning disabilities proceed from such an assessment.

Professionals who are qualified to offer such assessments include psychologists and school psychologists. A comprehensive evaluation involves several hours of testing followed by a careful analysis of the data to develop

an understanding of the individual's strengths as well as weaknesses.

### Finding the Solution

Knowing what is wrong is not enough. Once the individual's strengths and weaknesses are known, follow-up with parents, schools, and health professionals is important to achieve the improvement that is needed. Special techniques, based on the results of the evaluation, are implemented to overcome the obstacles to learning. Special education plans for teachers, skills groups, tutoring, counseling, and special accommodations are additional ways that children with learning disabilities may be assisted in making progress, once the specific problems are identified.

### Finding Help

Professional assessment is often the best answer to finding out why a person is having difficulty—whether in learning, relationships, work, or emotions. And counseling or therapy can help a person to do better in managing life's challenges.

Every person is different. In my practice, I develop a special program of testing or therapy for each individual, to meet his or her unique needs. I focus on strengths while seek-

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ing to develop skills in needed areas. Resources such as family, spiritual, personal strengths, school programs, and others are involved and utilized to give further support.

Services offered include comprehensive assessments, limited assessments for specific questions or purposes, consultations for reviewing previous testing or making decisions about educational matters, school consultations, inservice training for educators and health professionals, and support services.

Testing for learning problems usually covers several domains such as intellectual strengths and weaknesses, academic achievement in reading, spelling, math, writing, etc. verbal and

non-verbal memory, visual-perceptual-motor development, speech and language development, attention and concentration, behavior, and social and emotional development. A selection of tests is administered to objectively measure individual abilities in each domain. From this, a clinical picture develops which identifies the causes of learning difficulties, targets of remediation, and strengths which can be utilized.

Following the testing, the evaluator meets with the client or parent to go over the results of the assessment. Identified problems are explained, as well as strengths, and specific recommendations are offered for improvement. Follow-up may include the evaluator serving as a consultant to

the individual tested, the parents and/or family, and school.

If you think your child or a child or adult you know could be doing better in school, you may be right. But help may be needed to find out what's getting in the way of his or her doing better, to get over stumbling blocks, and provide guidance along the way.

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- Growth Oriented Psychotherapy
- Assessments/Testing
- Counseling
- Consultations
- Workshops

## **Symptoms of Learning Disabilities**

The symptoms of learning disabilities are many and diverse. Only a comprehensive testing and evaluation can determine the presence and nature of a learning disability. However, any person who evidences a number of the following symptoms may well be experiencing a learning disability. This is just a sampling of the symptoms of learning disabilities. In many cases, a learning disability is very difficult to spot. Testing and a thorough evaluation are required to identify and explain a person's learning problem.

### **Most common:**

Short attention span  
Poor memory  
Difficulty following directions  
Trouble discriminating among letters, numbers, or sounds  
Poor reading ability  
Eye-hand coordination difficulty  
Difficulties with sequencing  
Disorganization

### **Reading:**

Reads very slowly  
Reading is not enjoyed  
Can't remember what just read  
Skips words  
Has trouble sounding out words  
Mistakes one word for another  
Has difficulty understanding what reads

### **Spelling:**

Frequent spelling errors  
Rotates letters (e.g. b for d)  
Reversals (e.g. gril for girl)  
Letters often out of sequence  
Very inconsistent or poor speller

### **Writing:**

Has trouble organizing thoughts  
Freezes or blocks when trying to write  
Produces very little when writing  
Difficulty sequencing or developing ideas  
Mechanics and structure are weak

### **Math:**

Reverses numbers  
Difficulty with concepts  
Problems with basic calculations  
Many careless errors and oversights  
Trouble with word problems

### **Speech:**

Trouble pronouncing unfamiliar words  
Trouble getting points across  
Difficulty reading aloud  
Hesitancy in speech  
Difficulty understanding spoken language.

### **Attention/Concentration:**

Very distractible  
Mind wanders  
Trouble focusing or sustaining attention  
Fails to follow through with tasks  
Disorganization  
Forgetful  
Bored easily