

Does my child have a learning problem?

A “learning disability” is a set of specific, definable, diagnosed problems that occur in about 15% of the population. Some experts say it is a neurobiological disorder in which the brain functions or is structured differently. Learning disabilities can affect one’s ability to speak, listen, read, write, reason, recall, organize information, or do math.

Learning disabilities can be inherited and are often present in those with average to superior intelligence. In fact, many famous and respected people have learning disabilities.

Learning disabilities should not be confused with autism, mental retardation, deafness, blindness, or behavioral disorders. Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) can co-exist with learning disabilities, but the two disorders are distinct and separable.

Your child may have a learning disability if you observe some of the following characteristics or behaviors:

Preschool

- speaks later than most children or has pronunciation problems
- shows slow vocabulary growth or is unable to find the right word
- has difficulty rhyming words
- has trouble learning numbers, alphabet, days of week, colors, or shapes

Elementary Grades (K-2)

- struggles over a long period of time and is slow to link letters and sounds
- confuses basic words
- makes consistent reading and spelling errors including letter reversals (b/d), inversions (m/w), transpositions (was/saw), and substitutions (house/home), transposes number sequences and confuses arithmetic signs (+,-,x/,=)
- is slow to remember facts and learn new skills
- relies heavily on memorization
- is impulsive
- has difficulty planning or trouble learning about time
- uses unstable pencil grip or has poor coordination
- is unaware of physical surroundings or is accident prone

Elementary Grades (3-6) Indicators may be a combination of these consistently presented factors:

- reverses letter and number sequences (soiled/solid, left/felt, money/monkey, 13/31)
- slow to learn prefixes, suffixes, root words, and other spelling strategies
- avoids reading aloud and writing compositions
- trouble with word problems
- difficulty with handwriting, awkward pencil grip, or confusion about right/left handedness
- slow or poor recall of facts
- trouble understanding body language and facial expressions

Secondary students and adults continue to:

- spell incorrectly or frequently spell the same word differently in a single piece of writing
- avoid reading and spelling tasks
- misread information
- have trouble summarizing and with open-ended questions on tests
- have weak memory skills
- have difficulty adjusting to new settings
- work slowly
- have a poor grasp of abstract concepts
- either pay too little or too much attention to details or focus on them too much

Getting more information

Discuss your specific concerns with your child's teacher, the school's special education specialists, or the principal. Discuss the need for a comprehensive medical evaluation with your child's pediatrician or family doctor. Call the Schwab Foundation for Learning at (800) 230-0988 (www.schwablearning.org); the San Diego Chapter of the Learning Disability Association at (858) 467-9158; or The International Dyslexia Association (800) ABCD123 or (410) 296-0232 (www.interdys.org).