Trauma Care

Newsletter

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Learning Disabilities

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If you think your child might have a learning disability, you may feel overwhelmed by the information, the numerous tests, and the lack of clarity about how to get the best help for your child. What you need is a roadmap for sifting through the information and finding the valuable support that is available. You also may need a bit of perspective.

The brain has an amazing capacity to change and children respond when given the support and encouragement they need. Early intervention and support can really make a difference in giving your child the best chance for success.

As a parent, discovering that something may stand in the way of your child's success can be unsettling and difficult.

A child with a learning disability cannot try harder, pay closer attention, or improve motivation on their own; they need help to learn how to do those things. A learning disability, or learning disorder, is not a problem with intelligence. Learning disorders are caused by a difference in the brain that affects how information is received, processed, or communicated. Children and adults with learning disabilities have trouble processing sensory information because they see, hear, and understand things differently.

Symptoms

Types of learning disabilities are often grouped by school–area skill set or cognitive weakness. If your child is in school, it will probably be apparent if he or she is struggling with reading, writing, or math, and narrowing down the type will be easier.

Motor difficulties and learning disabilities

Motor difficulty refers to problems with movement and coordination whether it is with fine motor skills (cutting, writing) or gross motor skills (running, jumping).

Math difficulties and learning disabilities

Learning disabilities in math vary greatly depending on the child's other strengths and weaknesses. A child's ability to do math will be affected differently by a language learning disability, or a visual disorder or a difficulty with sequencing, memory or organization.

Language difficulties and learning disabilities

Language and communication learning disabilities involve the ability to understand or produce spoken language. Language is also considered an output activity because it requires organizing thoughts in the brain and calling upon the right words to verbally explain something or communicate with someone else. Signs of a language–based learning disorder involve problems with verbal language skills, such as the ability to retell a story and the fluency of speech, as well as the ability to understand the meaning of words, parts of speech, directions, etc.

Reading difficulties and learning disabilities

There are two types of learning disabilities in reading. Basic reading problems occur when there is difficulty understanding the relationship between sounds, letters and words. Reading comprehension problems occur when there is an inability to grasp the meaning of words, phrases, and paragraphs. Signs of reading difficulty include problems with:

- letter and word recognition
- understanding words and ideas
- reading speed and fluency
- general vocabulary skills

Writing difficulties and learning disabilities

Learning disabilities in writing can involve the physical act of writing or the mental activity of comprehending and synthesizing information. Basic writing disorder refers to physical difficulty forming words and letters. Expressive writing disability indicates a struggle to organize thoughts on paper.

Symptoms of a written language learning disability revolve around the act of writing and include. They include problems with:

- neatness and consistency of writing
- accurately copying letters and words
- spelling consistency
- writing organization and coherence

Auditory and visual processing: the importance of the ears and the eyes

The eyes and the ears are the primary means of delivering information to the brain, a process sometimes called “input.” If either the eyes or the ears aren’t working properly, learning can suffer and there is a greater likelihood of a learning disability or disorder.

Can gifted children have learning disabilities

Many gifted and talented children (and adults) are often misdiagnosed as having learning disabilities or behaviour disorders. This occurs because there are many characteristics of gifted children, both social and emotional, that are mistaken as symptoms of specific learning disorders.

It is not uncommon for some gifted children (those with IQ scores over 140) to display a significant discrepancy (20 points or more) between Verbal IQ and Performance IQ and possess characteristics of a learning disability. Often gifted children have unusual learning styles, and even though they are very intelligent, they may also have learning disorders.

Without intervention, self–esteem issues are almost certain in the life of a child who is both gifted and has a learning disability. Whether or not your gifted child also has a learning disability, they will benefit from extra support, encouragement and love.

WHAT CAN YOU DO AS A PARENT

Your first task as the parent of a child with a learning disability is to recognize that there are many things you can do to help your child:

- **Keep things in perspective –** Try not to be intimidated by the news that your child may have a learning disability – all people learn differently. Your most important job is to support your child and to help them keep their self esteem in tact. Challenges can be overcome. Don't let the tests, school bureaucracy and endless paperwork distract you from what is really important – providing your child with emotional, educational and moral support.

- **Do your own research and become your own expert –** Learn about new developments in learning disabilities, different programs and educational techniques that could make an impact with your child. You may instinctively look to others for solutions – schools, teachers, therapists or doctors – but you need to take charge when it comes to finding the tools your child needs to continue learning.

- **Be an advocate for your child –** You may have to speak up time and time again to get special help for your child. Embrace your role as a proactive parent and work on your communication skills. It may be frustrating at times, but your calm, reasonable and firm voice may make the difference in achieving what you want for your child.

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Remember that your influence on your child outweighs all others

Your child will follow your lead. If you approach the learning challenges with optimism, hard work and a sense of humor, your child is likely to embrace your perspective or at least see the challenges as a detour rather than a roadblock. Also, remember that the school situation doesn't have to be perfect. Focus your energy on learning what works and implementing it in your child's life the best you can.

This newsletter has been issued by:
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Play Therapy * Counselling * Trauma Counselling

Please note that this information must not be used for diagnostic purposes. Please do your own research, become informed. Please visit a medical professional for a correct diagnosis.