

# Learning Disabilities



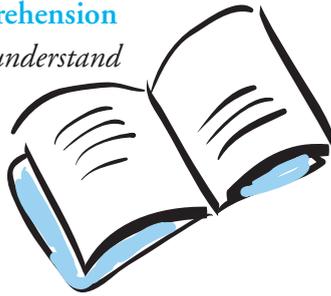
Questions from Parents

# A LEARNING DISABILITY COULD AFFECT ANY OF THESE AREAS:

## Basic Reading Skills

### Reading Comprehension

*acquire, use, or understand  
printed material*



## Written Expression

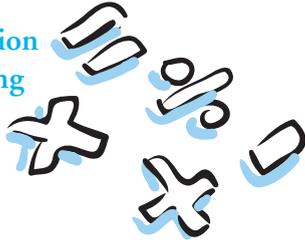
*organize or use motor skills to  
produce information*



## Math Calculation

### Math Reasoning

*acquire, use, or understand  
number facts or concepts*



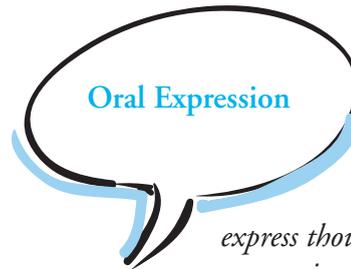
## Listening Comprehension

*use or understand verbal  
directions and information*



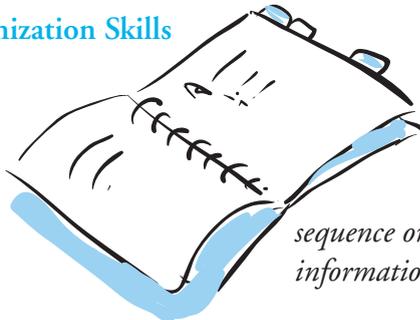
## Oral Expression

*express thoughts and ideas  
or acquire and use vocabulary*



## Organization Skills

*sequence or organize  
information and materials*



# Questions from Parents

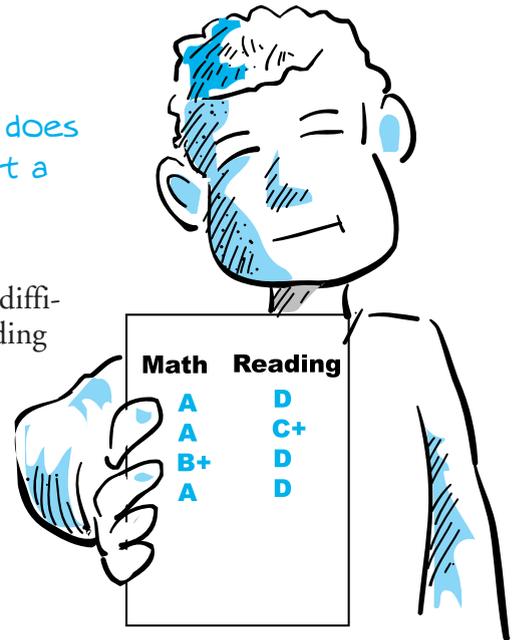
## What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is a neurological disorder that has been defined by federal law as having two basic components. First, there must be a **processing deficit** which impairs the child's ability to process information in an efficient manner. Secondly, that processing deficit must have a **significant impact** on a child's ability to function, which is usually reflected in a *significant difference* between the child's cognitive ability and academic achievement. Sometimes a learning disability is referred to as a "Specific Learning Disability." The terms are basically the same.

My child does quite well in most subjects. He just does not like to read and is not motivated. How is that a learning disability?

For some children the learning disability makes it very difficult for them to develop age and grade appropriate reading skills. For others, the primary educational impact is in the areas of math, writing, memory, or in the organization of information. Most children with a learning disability have little or no trouble learning academic concepts in "non-affected" areas. For some children there are gaps and inconsistencies in learning.

For example, your child may have straight "A's" in math, but struggles to read like his classmates, despite considerable effort on his part. Other children have demonstrated an ability to correctly assemble a bicycle without ability to read the directions of bicycle assembly.



My daughter has very good verbal skills, but she just will not apply herself to doing the work on paper. Everyone says she has great potential but she replies, "why write when it is easier to tell someone?"

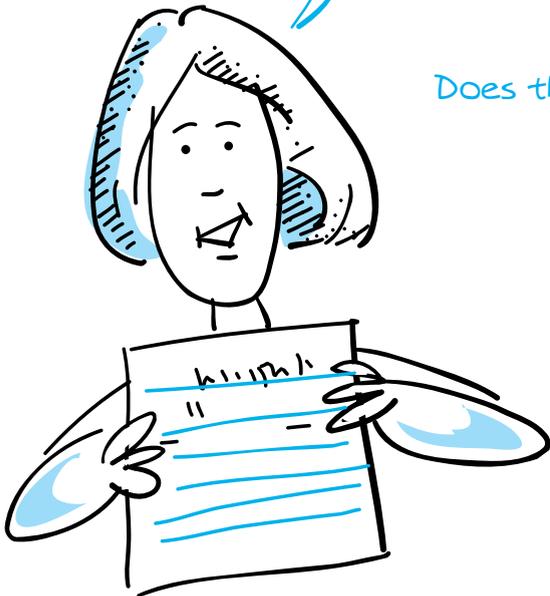
When children have excellent verbal skills they can effectively communicate their thoughts. It is easy to interpret the lack of written work as laziness if we measure potential solely by the ability to verbalize ideas. It is quite common for a learning disability to display itself as a writing disability where the child may have difficulty with the motor task of writing, or with the visual organization of printed material, or with the sequencing of thoughts.

What I  
meant to say

Does this mean my child is dumb?

Absolutely not! Most people have a preferred learning style or some processing preference. When the processing deficit significantly affects a child's ability to read, write, do math, or communicate thoughts and ideas, many children feel dumb.

When children can do math, or science, or play ball like their friends, but read like someone two years younger, they begin to question why. Our goal is to try to put in place the most appropriate instructional strategies, as soon as possible, to reduce the frustration that leads to a negative self concept.



## Does my child have dyslexia?

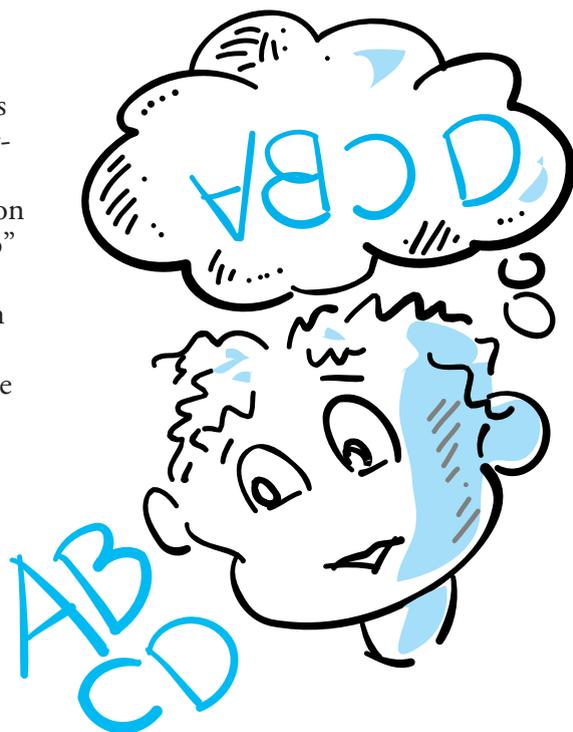
According to the current diagnostic criteria, dyslexia has become defined by some as *any* reading disorder. Unfortunately, the term dyslexia has different meanings to different people. For some, dyslexia is seen as the rotation of letters and numbers in space (“m” for “w”; “b” for “p” “d” “q”; etc.). For others, the term is used to describe letter confusion within words (“maht” for “math”) or in numbers (“34” for “43”). These visual distortions have different instructional implications. Schools may not use the term **dyslexia** in order to avoid confusion.

If my son can not “see” letters and numbers the right way, how do you know if my son’s learning problem is a learning disability and not a vision or hearing problem?

Routine vision and hearing checkups are a good idea for all school-aged children. Frequently schools request information from these specialists to rule out a vision or hearing problem before proceeding with the comprehensive educational evaluation.

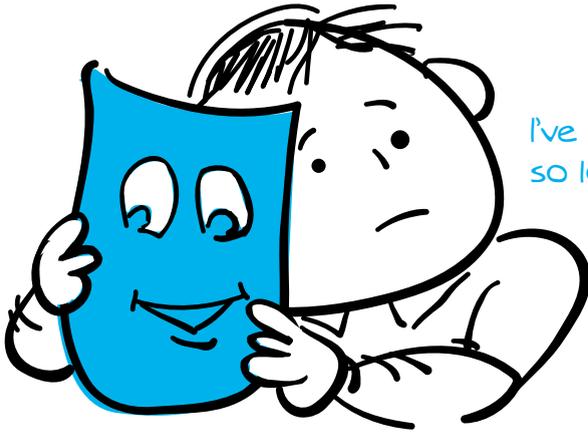
However, for many children who rotate or reverse letters and numbers, the problem is not their eyes’ ability to see (visual acuity) but what the brain does with that visual information that creates the processing deficit.

Likewise, a child’s difficulty learning sound-letter pairings is not a hearing (auditory acuity) problem but an auditory processing deficit. The information obtained in comprehensive educational evaluations helps to better define the nature of the academic difficulties.



When I work with my daughter at home she seems to understand. How can there be such a difference between school and home?

At home, children may have access to an adult's individual attention where they can use facial cues, or other non-verbal gestures, as guidelines to measure the accuracy of their responses. One-on-one, they have additional time to process information. Parents, in an effort to help, may re-phrase or provide cues that help the child understand better.



I've known about this for some time. Why did it take so long for the school to figure it out?

Many children have become so good at compensating that they can “mask” their learning problems in some situations. In a classroom environment, it is hard for one teacher to observe the individual learning needs of all children at the same time. In some cases, the teacher has tried various strategies but still does not know what is wrong. Parents have information on how their child has developed over the years, which can be very helpful to the school.

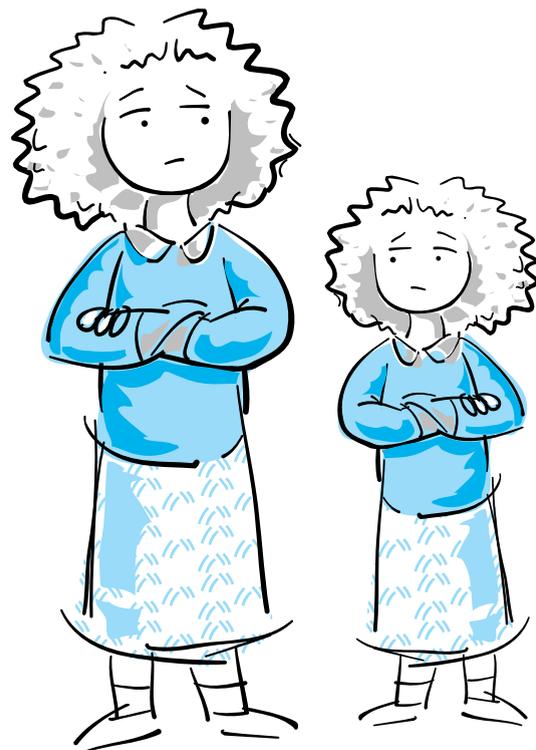
Why does the school want to evaluate my child?

Formal evaluation has one primary purpose - to gain more information about your child so that we can better define the most appropriate instructional strategies. *The most important goal is to increase your child's ability to be successful at school.* The typical evaluation procedure allows a comparison between your child's ability and actual academic skills, at that point in time. Processing strengths and weaknesses, as well as learning preferences, are better defined. This information is shared with you and your child's teacher(s) to help your child become more successful in learning.

I was just like that when I was a kid and I turned out okay. If I had a learning disability, I wouldn't be able to do my job – right?

Well, maybe. Learning Disabilities were not well known or well defined 20 to 30 years ago. You could have exhibited the same behaviors and had just as much difficulty learning as your child does now. Learning disabilities run in families, so it is not uncommon to hear parents say, “I was just like that.”

As people learn to compensate, processing and organizational problems are not so noticeable. For example, if we tend to forget quickly, we write important information down on paper. It is important to note, however, that learning disabilities do not “go away.” The impact of the processing deficit, however, can become less obvious.



## What is an evaluation?

An evaluation consists of procedures that are used selectively with individual students to determine whether a student has a disability. Specific procedures are determined by the questions and concerns that initiated the referral. The typical evaluation includes, but is not limited to, a standardized achievement instrument and a standardized intellectual test.

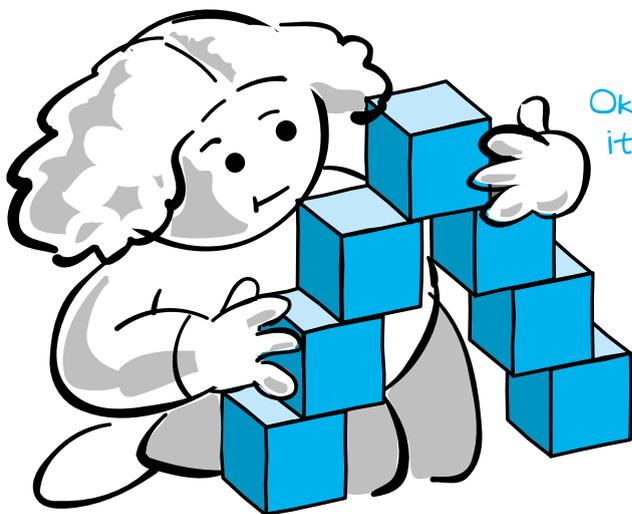
An achievement instrument is given by the special education teacher in order to provide the school a measure of the child's current academic levels. Intelligence tests and visual perceptual measures are usually combined with various other instruments by the school psychologist. In most cases, the children view the individual attention as enjoyable.

Where will this evaluation take place? Just exactly what will happen to my child?

In most cases, your child will be taken out of class by a teacher and/or the school psychologist. Accommodations are made by your child's teacher so that he is not penalized for the class work missed. The evaluation takes place one-on-one so that your child's approach to learning can be closely observed rather than only viewing the numbers, or data, of the test instruments.

What should I tell my child about the evaluation?

Explain to your child that some people are going to be *working* with him to find out *how* he learns best. Some of the items will seem like games, while others will be like the work done in class. Some activities that he will be asked to do may be easy, while others may be hard. He is not expected to know all of the answers and should not worry about getting everything just right. However, all of this work is important and therefore he needs to try his best.



Okay, you've found a learning disability. What does it mean? Just how will it affect my child's life?

The goal of the school is to provide your child with an appropriate instructional program which may include teaching compensatory strategies. The hope is that the compensatory strategies become "second nature" and therefore reduce the impact of the processing difficulties. Children can grow up to work, go to college, and lead normal, productive lives.

Why do you need to "label" my child as having a disability?

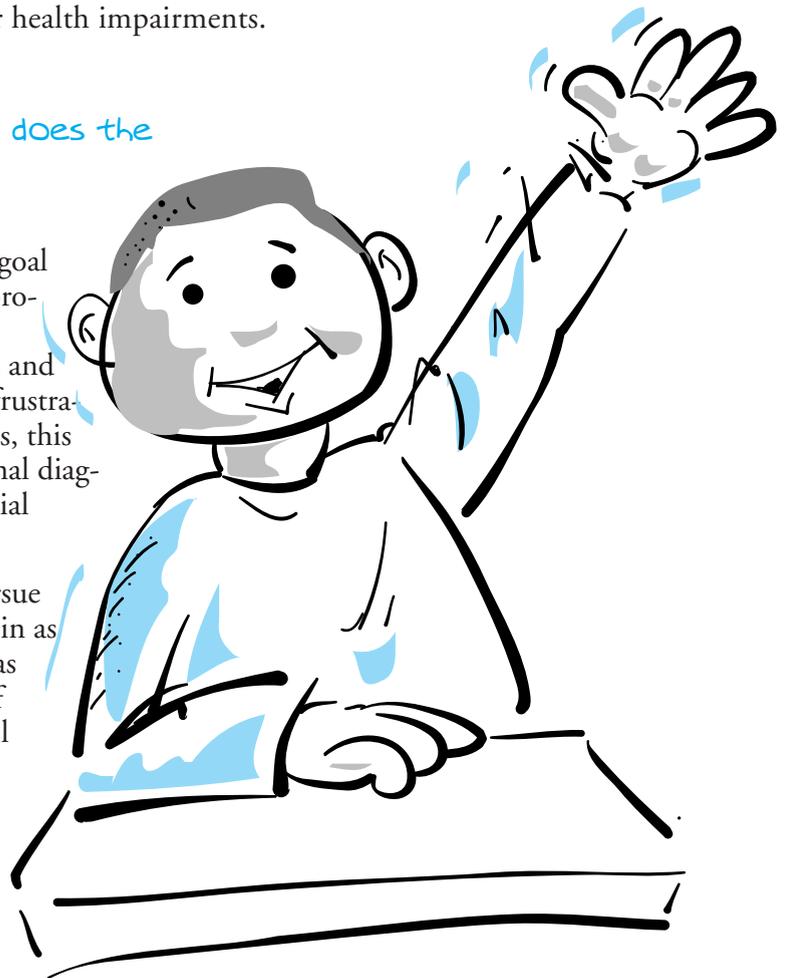
Defining the disability provides information that is specific and clear and allows the school system to use federally funded special education services. The people involved in educating your child this year may not be the same people next year or in five years. A learning disability has different instructional implications from the diagnosis of other learning problems, such as attention deficit disorder, mental retardation, pervasive developmental disorder, or health impairments.

In all cases, all information is utilized to help your child develop learning strengths.

Where do we go from here? What does the school intend to do to help my child?

As stated from the start, the primary goal is to learn information so that an appropriate educational program can be designed. Your child's ability to learn and grow, educationally, without undue frustration, is most important. In some cases, this information may lead to an educational diagnosis and a recommendation for special education assistance.

The school system is obligated to pursue an appropriate educational program, in as normal an educational environment as possible, when developing any sort of intervention strategies. *In all cases*, all information is used to help your child develop learning strengths, improve areas of need, and achieve academic success.



# RESOURCES

## Books for Adults

### **The Learning Disabled Child: Ways That Parents Can Help**

Suzanne H. Stevens 1980, John F. Blair Publishers. Winston-Salem, NC  
1-800-222-9796

### **The School Survival Guide For Kids With Learning Differences**

Gary Fisher 1990, Free Spirit Publishing, Inc. Minneapolis, MN  
1-800-735-7323

### **You Don't Outgrow It: Living With Learning Disabilities**

Marnell L. Hayes 1993, Academic Therapy Publications, Inc. Novato, CA  
1-800-422-7249

### **No One To Play With: The Social Side of Learning Disabilities**

Betty B. Osman 1989, Academic Therapy Publications, Inc. Novato, CA  
1-800-422-7249

### **Diamonds In The Rough: An Infancy to College Reference Guide for the Learning Disabled Child**

Peggy Strass Dias 1989, Slosson Education Publications, East Auroa, NY

### **Unicorns Are Real: A Right Brained Approach to Learning**

Barbara Meister Bitale 1982, Warner Books New York, NY

## Books For Kids

### **Keeping ahead in school**

Dr. Mel Levine 1990 Educators Publishing Services, Inc.

### **All Kinds of Minds**

Dr. Mel Levine 1993 Educators Publishing Services, Inc.

## Support Groups

### **The Council for Exceptional Children**

1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091  
1-800-486-5773

### **Association for Children and Adults With Learning Disabilities**

P.O. Box 1004, Severna Park, MD 21146  
(410) 761-6686

### **Additional information may be obtained by:**

- ◆ calling your physician
- ◆ contacting your school psychologist or guidance counselor
- ◆ visiting your local library