



Children's Health

Learning Disabilities

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THEM

Children with learning disabilities have a neurological disorder that causes them to learn in a different way than other people. If your child has a learning disability, he or she probably is of at least average intelligence and his or her problems at school are not caused by social, emotional, visual, hearing or motor disturbances. So if your child is doing poorly in school, don't assume he or she is lazy or is having emotional problems.

Learning disabilities, which include dyslexia and attention deficit disorder, also affect children outside of the classroom. They can affect your child's daily activities, playtime and friendships.

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF A LEARNING DISABILITY

- your child fails to speak by age 3
- your child has difficulty with motor skills (buttoning, tying, climbing) by age 5
- your child dislikes school or is having difficulty learning

ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD)

Children with attention deficit disorder may be hyperactive, impulsive and easily distracted. About 20 percent of children with other learning disabilities also have ADD, but ADD must be treated separately. Attention deficit disorder is considered to be hereditary, as are most learning disabilities.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- inability to stay focused
- impulsiveness
- inability to wait for a turn
- blurts out questions and comments
- lacks social skills
- poor short-term memory
- mood disorders and other learning disabilities

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Proper diagnosis must be made by a qualified professional. Specific psychological tests may be used to uncover ADD. The ideal treatment regime includes stimulant medications when necessary, special education, behavioral training and open communication between parents, school and your healthcare professional.

DYSLEXIA

Children with dyslexia, in general, have a hard time grasping the meanings of letters, words or symbols in sequence. They may also have difficulty with the concept of direction. Sometimes there is a family history, but often the cause of dyslexia is obscure.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- inability to recognize letters and words on a printed page
- reading ability much below the expected level for the age of the child
- spells the same words several different ways
- reverses entire words or part of a word

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

Even severe dyslexia can be difficult to diagnose because parents may mistake the symptoms for laziness, obstinance or below-normal intelligence. Special training in phonetics can often bring a child's reading up to grade level or above. Using a computer or typewriter will often help your child overcome writing difficulties. Proper evaluation and training through public school or private courses is essential.

WHAT TO DO

If you suspect your child has a learning disability, it is essential to get him or her help as early as possible. Children whose problems are recognized early can overcome or learn to compensate for their disabilities.

- Contact your child's school. Public schools are required by federal law to evaluate children who may have a learning disability. The school is also required to provide special education for your child.
- Learn more about your child's learning problems. Build on his strengths and adjust to his weaknesses.
- Help minimize stress and develop your child's self-esteem by thinking ahead when it comes to her limitations.
- Pay attention to your child's talents, skills and interests, and encourage him to develop them.
- Help your child understand that, just like all people, there will be some things she won't be able to do. Emphasize the things she can do.