



# LDA's Parent Guide

What you should know  
about learning disabilities



# What is a Learning Disability?

Learning disabilities are neurologically-based processing difficulties that can impact **oral language** (listening, speaking, understanding), **reading, written language** (spelling, written expression, writing fluency), and/or **math** (calculation, fluency, problem-solving).

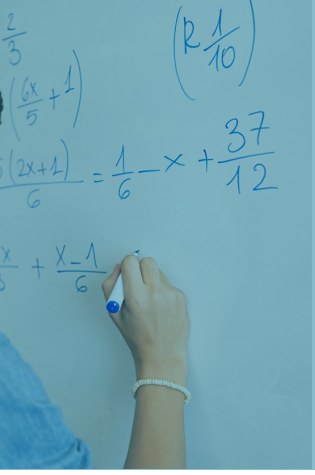
Learning disabilities can also affect phonological processing, visual spatial processing, processing speed, memory and attention, and executive functions (planning and decision-making).

Individuals with learning disabilities are **of average or above average intelligence.**

Learning disabilities **are due to genetic and/or neurobiological factors** that alter brain functioning in a manner which affects one or more processes related to learning.

Individuals with learning disabilities **do not need to just 'try harder,'** they need individualized interventions, accommodations, and supports.

**Learning disabilities are lifelong,** but with the right support, individuals with learning disabilities can excel.



# Types of Learning Disabilities:

## Dyslexia:

A learning disability that affects reading and language-based processing skills that can impact:

- Identifying rhymes
- Hearing and identifying a spoken word
- Word recognition
- Spelling
- Pronouncing written words
- Associating letters with the sounds they make
- Understanding syllables


## Dysgraphia:

A learning disability that affects handwriting and fine motor skills that can impact:

- Legibility of handwriting
- Remembering how to write certain letters or numerals
- Speed of writing
- Sequential finger movements needed to write
- Executive functioning (planning, organizing)


# **Dyscalculia:**

A learning disability that affects the ability to understand numbers and learn math facts that can impact:

- **Estimating a quantity without counting**
  - **Calculation skills**
  - **Using processes to solve equations**
  - **Mental math**
  - **Remembering steps in a sequence**
  - **Reading graphs or charts**
  - **Remembering dates and deadlines**
  - **Counting change**
  - **Navigation skills**
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# **Oral/Written Language Disorder**

A learning disability that affects the ability to understand written or spoken language that can impact:

- **Understanding and expressing oral or written language**
  - **Finding the right words to express their ideas**
  - **Listening and reading comprehension**
  - **Understanding how the order of words in a sentence changes the meaning**
  - **Comprehending words and sentences**
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# **Nonverbal Learning Disability**

A learning disability that affects the understanding of nonverbal cues that can impact:

- **Understanding and expressing oral or written language**
- **Coordination**
- **Social abilities, using social language**
- **Executive functioning, planning, organizing, emotional regulation**
- **Performing new tasks**

## Related Conditions:

Learning disabilities can often co-occur with conditions like ADHD, mental health difficulties, dyspraxia, executive functioning deficit, and others.



# Signs of a Learning Disability by Age:

If you recognize several signs of a learning disability in your child, **it's critical to not delay in seeking support.**

Some learning disabilities can be detected in early school years, but others may not be diagnosed until academic content and processing becomes more demanding.

# Pre-School:

- Pronunciation problems
- Difficulty finding the right word
- Difficulty making rhymes
- Trouble learning numbers, alphabet, days of the week, colors, and shapes
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble interacting with peers
- Difficulty following directions or learning routines
- Difficulty controlling pencils, crayons, or scissors



# Grades K-4:



- Has trouble learning the connection between letters and sounds
- Confuses basic words (run, eat, want)
- Makes consistent reading and spelling errors including letter reversals (b/d, inversions (m/w), transpositions (felt/left), and substitutions (house/home)
- Experiences difficulty learning basic math concepts
- Has trouble learning about time
- Takes a long time to learn new skills
- Has trouble remembering facts

# Grades 5-8:

- Difficulty with reading comprehension or math skills
- Trouble with letter sequences (soiled for solid, left for felt)
- Difficulty with prefixes, suffixes, root words and other spelling strategies
- Trouble organizing their bedroom, notebook, papers, and desk
- Difficulty keeping up with papers or assignments
- Trouble with handwriting
- Difficulty with time management
- Trouble understanding oral discussions and expressing thoughts out loud



# High School & Adults:



- Spelling the same word differently in a single document
- Difficulty taking on a reading or writing task
- Trouble with open-ended questions on tests
- Struggling with memory skills
- Difficulty adapting skills from one setting to another
- Struggling with a slow work pace
- Trouble with grasping abstract concepts
- Difficulty focusing on details
- Frequently misreading information



# Learning Disability Evaluations & Advocacy

Getting **a learning disability diagnosis** is the first step to your child receiving the accommodations, interventions, and protections they need to succeed.

## What is a Learning Disability Evaluation?

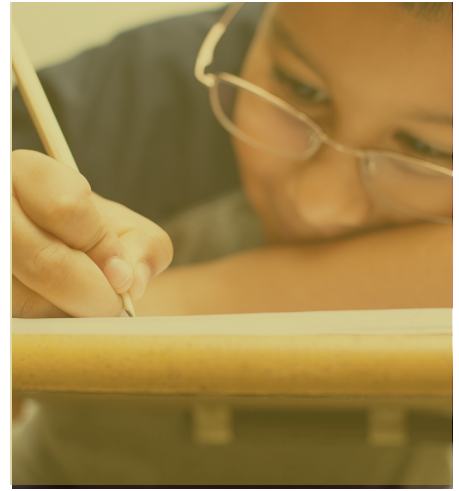
A learning disability evaluation is **a formal process which includes assessment of cognitive abilities, academic skills, attention and executive functioning, and social and emotional functioning**. Evaluations are ideally performed by a team of qualified professionals with input from parents and guardians.

This team will gather relevant information about your child's area of strengths and weaknesses to determine **whether or not they have a learning disability**, and **what types of interventions and accommodations** are needed.



# Why Should I Have My Child Evaluated?

Students identified as having a specific learning disability may be eligible for **special education services** under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or **entitled to the rights and protections** of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).



## How Can I Get an Evaluation for My Child?



As a parent, guardian, or advocate, **you have a legal right under the IDEA to request that your public school evaluate your child for special education.**

This evaluation is to be provided at **no cost to the family.**

Parents can **request an evaluation in writing** to your child's principal, the school district's director, or coordinator of special education.

The IDEA sets a time frame for the completion of the evaluation of 60 days from when a written request is received, however, some states have their own timelines.

## IEPs and 504 Plans

If your child is eligible for special education, they may be provided with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan. These are legal documents that define the special education services (IEP) and/or the accommodations (Section 504) that the

public school (traditional or charter) has agreed to provide to your child.

## **General Tips on Advocating at Your Child's School:**

- Reach out and stay in contact with your child's teachers, their counselor, and other relevant school professionals.
- Keep records on all correspondence with the school, notes from meetings, your child's evaluation paperwork, progress reports, samples of school work, your child's IEP or 504 Plan, and notes on your child's behavior or progress.
- Stay up-to-date on the rights and protections your child is entitled to in your state.
- Know that you can appeal your child's IEP or 504 Plan if you don't feel it's working for your child. Utilize your records that show your child's progress when appealing.
- Try to settle all disagreements amicably. Most teachers and administrators want your child to succeed, but many schools are understaffed, and many educators aren't provided with enough training about learning disabilities.
- Don't be afraid to voice your opinions or ask clarifying questions. You are an important part of your child's success, and your input is important.



# You Are Not Alone

Navigating your child's learning disability and the special education process is no small task, but **there's a community of support here for you.**

**Students with learning disabilities are the largest category** of students receiving special education services, so there are many other families who may be going through the same things you are.

Organizations like the Learning Disabilities Association of America are working every day provide **support to individuals with learning disabilities and their families**, to educate teachers and professionals who work with individuals with LD, and to advocate at the local, state, and national levels to protect and expand the rights of individuals with learning disabilities.

At LDA we have helpful resources on our website, provide educational resources like webinars, podcasts, and our conference, and have over 35 state affiliates filled with volunteers to help you to find local resources.

We wish you and your child every success, and LDA is here to help you at each step of your journey.

# Further Resources

## By Topic:

### General Parent Resources:

[LDA's Parent Page](#)

[A Parent's Guide: What to Expect When Your Child Has LD](#)

[Parents With Learning Disabilities: What You Should Know](#)

[Key Conversations: Talking to Your Child About LD](#)

[Parenting Complex Kids with a Coach-Like Approach](#)

### Evaluations:

[Right to an Evaluation of a Child for Special Education Resources](#)

[Evaluating Children to Determine Eligibility for Special Education Services and Reevaluation Requirements](#)

### Advocacy

[Special Education Terms to Know](#)

[Advocacy in Special Education: A Talk with an IEP Coach](#)

[Section 504: The Tool That Should Be in Every Advocate's Toolkit](#)

[Disability Rights & Advocacy](#)

### Co-Occurring Conditions:

[What is ADHD?](#)

[What's the Big Deal About Executive Functions?](#)

[Related Disorders of a Learning Disability: What You Should Know](#)

[Learning Disabilities and Mental Health](#)