

# SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY

## ■ Definition of Specific Learning Disability under IDEA

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Disorders not included. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. 34 CFR 300.8(c)(10)

### DESCRIPTION

- Learning disabilities vary from person to person. One person with LD may not have the same kind of learning problems as another person with LD. Researchers think that learning disabilities are caused by differences in how a person's brain works and how it processes information.
- Children with learning disabilities are not "dumb" or "lazy." Their brains just process information differently.
- People with LD are of average or above-average intelligence but still struggle to acquire skills that impact their performance in school, at home, in the community, and in the workplace.
- Learning disabilities are lifelong, and the sooner they are recognized and identified, the sooner steps can be taken to overcome the challenges they present.

### INCIDENCE

- As many as 1 out of every 5 people in the United States has a learning disability. Almost 1 million children (ages 6 through 21) have some form of a learning disability and receive special education in school. In fact, one-third of all children who receive special education have a learning disability (Twenty-Ninth Annual Report to Congress, U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

### POSSIBLE SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The child may:

- Learn language late and have a limited vocabulary
- Struggle to pay attention and attend to tasks
- Work at a slower pace than their peers
- Frequently forget to do assignments or homework
- Have trouble learning the alphabet, rhyming words, or connecting letters to their sounds

- Make many mistakes when reading aloud, and repeat and pause often
- Have difficulty understanding what he or she reads
- Have real trouble with spelling
- Have very messy handwriting or hold a pencil awkwardly
- Struggle to express ideas in writing
- Have trouble remembering the sounds that letters make or hearing slight differences between words
- Have trouble understanding jokes, comic strips, and sarcasm
- Have trouble following directions
- Have difficulty following the social rules of conversation, such as taking turns, and may stand too close to the listener
- Confuse math symbols and misread numbers

It is normal for children to experience one or more of these warning signs from time to time. However, if a child exhibits one or more of these characteristics over a long period of time, the child may need to be evaluated to see if he or she has a learning disability.

### TEACHING TIPS/INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- Break learning into small steps
- Administer probes
- Supply regular quality feedback
- Use diagrams, graphics and pictures
- Provide ample independent, well-designed, intensive practice
- Model instructional practices
- Let students with reading problems use instructional materials that are accessible to those students with print disabilities
- Let students with listening difficulties borrow notes from a classmate or use a tape recorder
- Let students with writing difficulties use a computer with specialized software that spell checks, grammar checks, or recognizes speech; and
- Teach organizational skills, study skills, and learning strategies

### This information developed from the following resources:

- **National Dissemination Center for Children and Disabilities (NICHCY)**  
[www.nichcy.org/disability/specific/ld](http://www.nichcy.org/disability/specific/ld)
- **National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)**  
[www.nclld.org](http://www.nclld.org)
- **Bright Hub Education**  
[www.brighthouseeducation.com](http://www.brighthouseeducation.com)
- **LD Online**  
[www.idonline.org](http://www.idonline.org)