

## **Learning problems and learning disabilities**

### **What are learning problems?**

A child with a learning problem has a hard time learning basic reading, spelling, writing, and math skills. It may be related to problems with attention, language, or memory.

### **What is a learning disability?**

A learning disability is a specific and significant weakness in important school skills like reading, math or writing. Most often, there is a problem in just one skill area where the child needs extra help. Every child with a learning disability is unique. Each child has their own set of strengths and weaknesses.

With support and help, children with learning disabilities can learn to work with their weaknesses and be successful.

Children may have some of the following signs at some time in their development. It doesn't always mean there is a learning disability.

### **Signs you may see in your child:**

#### **Problems with:**

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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• letters, numbers or sounds, or sounding out words</li> <li>• following directions</li> <li>• understanding words or concepts</li> <li>• getting work done</li> <li>• staying organized, either with homework or keeping track of personal items</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sorting things into groups</li> <li>• listening or remembering</li> <li>• telling time or knowing right from left</li> <li>• being clumsy</li> <li>• poor memory</li> <li>• adjusting to change</li> </ul> |
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#### **Other signs:**

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensory problems</li> <li>• Says one thing, but means another</li> <li>• Performs differently from day to day</li> <li>• Acts without thinking</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor reading or writing skills. May mix up letters not put letters in the right order.</li> <li>• Has a hard time sitting still</li> <li>• Short attention span. Easily distracted</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor eye-hand coordination. This might include problems catching a ball or being slower at video or computer games.</li> <li>• Started to talk later than other children or speech is not clear</li> </ul> |  |

## How are learning disabilities treated?

A child with a learning disability has a hard time with some school skills. A good treatment plan will focus on **extra help** in those areas. This extra help should start as soon as the problem is found, probably in kindergarten or 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Your child's school may have a program to help your child. If not, you may need to find help at a learning center.

## What can I do?

Get involved early. If your child has any of the above signs, talk to your child's doctor. Your child may need to be tested by a neuropsychologist. Or talk to your child's teacher or principal and request a meeting to discuss an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan, which is a formal plan from the school describing interventions and support that will be provided to your child to help him or her learn.

## How can I help my child?

- Request an evaluation for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan in place.
- Recognize your child's strengths and celebrate successes.
- Help your child learn to organize. Start early with small tasks like sorting the silverware or setting out clothes for the next day. This will make larger tasks seem easier to manage.
- Have set times for meals, homework, and bedtime. Stick to the times as much as possible.
- Help your child plan their weekly schedule. Start with a day at a time, then several days and work up to planning the week. Help your child make choices and set goals.
- Keep in close contact with your child's school. Volunteer if you can. Attend school.
- Help your child develop the same behaviors you expect from other children in the family.
- Help your child understand that the learning disability is just a small part of who they are.

## Other teaching sheets that may be helpful

- #3073.01 Homework Tips for Children with Learning Problems
- #3073.02 Resources for Children with Learning Problems

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

**This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.**