

How do I know if my child has a learning disability?

Learning disabilities aren't always obvious. However, there are some signs that could mean your child needs help. Keep in mind that children develop and learn at different rates. Let your pediatrician know if your child shows any of the following signs:

Preschool children may have

- **Delays in language development.** By 2½ years of age, your child should be able to talk in short sentences.
- **Trouble with speech.** By 3 years of age, your child should speak well enough so that adults can understand most of what she says.
- **Trouble with coordination.** By 5 years of age, your child should be able to button, cut, and hop. She should be able to copy a circle, square, or triangle.
- **Short attention spans.** Between 3 to 5 years of age, your child should be able to sit still and listen to a short story. As your child gets older, she should be able to pay attention for a longer time.

School-aged children and teens may find it difficult to

- Follow directions.
- Get and stay organized at home and school.
- Understand verbal directions.
- Learn facts and remember information.
- Learn subjects taught in school (for example, math, reading, or spelling) but seem smart in other things.
- Fit in with their peers or communicate with others.
- Sound words out and read or spell.
- Write clearly (may have poor handwriting).
- Concentrate and finish schoolwork (may daydream a lot).
- Explain information clearly with speech or in writing.

Common learning disabilities

The following are brief descriptions of some common learning disabilities. Keep in mind, not every child with a learning disability fits neatly within one of these types. Careful evaluation is important.

Children with a **reading disorder**

- May not remember the names of letters and the sounds they make.
- May not understand words that are read to them.
- May not understand that words are made up of sounds and that letters stand for those sounds.
- May not be able to sound out words at the right speed and correctly.
- May have trouble spelling.
- May take longer to read words they know.

Children with a **writing (graphomotor, written expression) disorder**

- May have trouble using a pen or pencil.
- May not remember how letters are formed.
- May have trouble copying shapes or drawing lines and spacing things out correctly.
- May have trouble writing words to express themselves.
- May have trouble organizing and writing their thoughts on paper.

Children with a **math disorder**

- May have trouble with math concepts such as number values, quantity, and order.
- May have trouble with fractions, percentages, geometry, and algebra.
- May have trouble with things like time, money, and measuring.
- May have other problems, including problems with shapes and drawing.

Children with **nonverbal LDs**

- May have problems with nonverbal cues, like body language.
- May have poor coordination.

Children with **speech and language disabilities**

- May have problems understanding and using language (this may affect how well they can read and write).
- May struggle to understand instructions or new information.

Children with **central auditory processing disorders**

- May have no problem hearing, but they may not interpret and store words that are heard.
- May have a specific weakness in learning from sounds. These children may have even more difficulty when there's a lot of background noise.

Children with **ADHD**

- May have problems completing schoolwork or homework.
- May have problems remembering assignments.
- May have problems staying seated.
- May have problems staying focused or paying attention.
- May have problems remembering information.
- May become easily distracted.
- May have disruptive classroom behavior.

Schools are required by law to help all children with language or learning difficulties at no cost to parents. If you're concerned about your child's problems with learning or think your child may have a learning disability, talk with your child's teacher and your pediatrician. Informal screening and formal evaluation are ways that teachers and other education specialists can help determine if there's a problem.

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Healthcare professionals may order this publication in multi-copy packs.

Parents can find more information on this topic in *Caring for Your School-Age Child: Ages 5 to 12*. To order a copy of this book visit the AAP Bookstore.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.