

## **The Teacher Says My Child May Have a Learning Disability! What Does That Mean? What Do I Do?**

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### **What does the term "learning disability" really mean?**

A learning disability reveals a significant gap between a child's intelligence and the skills that he/she is able to perform at a particular age. The teacher may notice that there are delays in a child's development or academics in comparison to his/her peers. These delays are more obvious and significant in the primary grades.



Educational psychologists use age-appropriate standardized tests to compare a child's level of ability to the child's level of intelligence. When there is a discrepancy between the two, this signifies that a learning disability may be present. Psychologists compare these scores to other children of the same age across the nation. The results of these tests not only depend on the child's actual abilities and the reliability of the test, but the child's ability to pay attention and understand questions from the test.

There are many classifications of learning disabilities. Teachers or parents may notice problems with speech and language abilities, intelligence, vision and hearing, academics, or specific behaviors that are disruptive to the child's learning experiences. Speech therapists, psychologists, audiologists, occupational therapists, and physicians work together to exclude or pinpoint the presence of any disorders. Parents can request that their child go through testing if the school personnel doesn't notice problems that may generally occur at home or away from school.

### **How do I know if there is a problem?**

Your child's teacher will contact you with his/her concerns if your child is having considerable problems in the classroom. Meet with the teacher as soon as possible. The teacher will describe what he/she is observing, and you, as the parent, will be able to give information that will help determine if there truly is a problem that deserves further investigation. If both of you agree that testing is the next step, it is important to be an active participant in the school's evaluation of your child.

### **What does the testing process involve?**

One of the first steps in the testing process is completing a parent questionnaire. You will give extensive information about your child from gestation to the present.

The psychologist then administers a battery of tests that will give a clear academic and intellectual picture of your child. If the psychologist in your school determines that there is a learning disability, then the school must, by law, provide assistance to the child using an IEP (Individualized Education Plan). An IEP is a legally binding document that includes all test results, your child's strengths and weaknesses, specifically outlines appropriate learning strategies to address the skills that the child needs to develop, and sets appropriate goals for success.

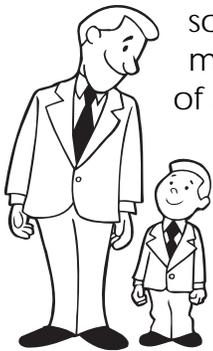
### **How do I find out about the test results?**

The educational psychologist will schedule a meeting with a parent(s) to discuss the test results. If results determine that a learning disability is present, the psychologist asks the special education teacher to attend the meeting and, with your permission, begin creating a plan (IEP) to provide assistance to your child. The special education teacher will schedule times for assisting your child during the school day. If results show that the learning disability is severe, then the administrators, psychologists, and special education leaders may suggest placement in a special class. With your permission, they will provide the best placement for your child.

An IEP is unique for each child, therefore, ask questions to make sure you understand exactly what the diagnosis or alternate placement means for your child and how you, as a parent, will work with the school to address the child's needs.

### **What if my child thinks he's a failure because he needs special classes?**

If your child hears comments within the family or from friends that he/she is "slow", "behind", or "failing", then you may see your child retreat from social interaction due to a feeling of embarrassment. Encourage family members and friends to actively support and encourage your child in all of his/her efforts. Help your child develop self-confidence at home and in school by structuring tasks and environments that promote success.



Together with your child's teachers and other family members, you can find ways to help your child recognize his/her strengths and cope with his/her disabilities. Counselors, teachers, and school psychologists can offer countless, practical suggestions for helping your child (and family) cope with the struggles of a learning disability.

Resource

"Diagnosing Learning Disabilities" HealthLink 2003 Medical College of Wisconsin from The National Institute of Health.  
<http://healthlink.mcw.edu/article/952720781.html>