

Screening Adults for Learning Disabilities

What is learning disability (LD) screening?

Screening is the first step in the process of gathering relevant information about an individual with a suspected learning disability. Screening **does not** determine whether or not the person has a learning disability. It may include observations, informal interviews, the use of a written tool, and/or a review of medical, school, or work histories.

How is LD screening different from LD diagnosis?

An **LD diagnosis** is a formal assessment that determines the **actual presence** of a learning disability. **LD screening** is an informal process that shows whether there is a **probability** that the person might have an undiagnosed learning disability. Informal screening can be done by an advocate for the person with a suspected learning disability, but formal diagnosis must be done by a qualified professional who can evaluate learning disabilities.

Why should LD screening be done?

Adults who have struggled with school and work may have undiagnosed learning disabilities. Screening is a way for an advocate to better determine the probability of the suspected learning disability, and to help the person decide if he or she needs to continue with an LD diagnosis.

Also, LD screening can identify areas of strengths and challenges that will help the person better understand why he or she has struggled in certain areas of life. Knowing one's strengths can help determine the best strategies and/or technology to use to succeed in school or at work.

Observations

Observations may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Does the person show unexpected underachievement in some areas, but demonstrates at least average ability in other areas?

Does the person show signs of poor vision or hearing?

Does the person having problems in the following areas: reading (oral and silent), expressive language (writing, spelling, handwriting), or math?

Does the person exhibit social behaviors that can interfere with learning, working, or daily living?

Informal Interviews

Advocates who conduct LD screening may ask the person, in an informal discussion, some questions about their past



successes and challenges. The answers may indicate past behaviors, events, or characteristics that are associated with adults who have learning disabilities. Typical questions may include:

- Did you get special help in school?
- Do any of your family members have problems learning?
- Have you had difficulty getting or keeping a job?
- Do you have problems with reading, writing, or math skills?
- What do you enjoy most, and why?

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Informed consent ensures that the person undergoing the screening process understands the purpose of the screening, who will conduct the screening, how the results will be used, and how confidentiality will be maintained. Individual screenings by advocates should include a signed consent which should include the following information:

- The name of the screening instruments used
- The interval of time for screening
- The purpose of screening
- Who will see the results
- How the results will be used
- Where the forms will be stored and for how long
- The adult's signature and date
- The advocate's signature

Screening Tools

There are a number of screening tools available for advocates to use with the person who may have an undiagnosed learning disability. Some of these tools require special training, while others are available online. Some tools are free; others require training and may have associated training costs.

It is important, however, to choose a screening tool that is designed for the appropriate age group. When conducted and reviewed appropriately, using the right screening tool can be a valuable step in determining the need to seek further advice and evaluation.

Screening tools should also be:

- Inexpensive
- Quick to administer, score, and easy to interpret
- Narrow in purpose
- Able to provide information in several areas, such as language, motor, and social skills

LD Screening Follow-Up

Advocates should be familiar with follow-up resources for those whose screening indicates a strong possibility of a learning disability, especially if the lack of documentation is a barrier to completing educational and career goals. The appropriate next step is to locate a licensed diagnostician to complete a formal LD assessment. For more information about LD assessments, see the information page at

<http://ldaamerica.org/aboutld/adults/assessment/assessing.asp>

Resources

- Learning Needs Screening Tool, <http://www.onestops.info/pdf/LearningNeedsTool.pdf>
- National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), Adults and College Students, <http://www.nclld.org/age-related-content/college-adult>
- National Center on Workforce and Disability Screening Tool, http://www.onestops.info/article.php?article_id=28
- Adult LD Characteristics, http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/agencywide/documents/pub/dhs16_146029.pdf

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