



WHAT EVERY
PARENT
NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT
LEARNING
DISABILITIES





The Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) is the oldest organization to serve the learning disability community. Starting with a core of volunteers agreeing to become its nucleus, the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (ACLD) was created and incorporated in January, 1964. The organization was conceived as a group driven by parents and adults with learning disabilities, and the bylaws and structure of the organization -- now known as the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) -- clearly reflect the consumer driven position and philosophy.

LDA's mission has always been to create opportunities for success for all individuals affected by learning disabilities and to reduce the incidence of learning disabilities in future generations. With a board of directors, professional advisory board, 18 committees, state and local affiliates and a small national staff LDA seeks to accomplish its mission by:

Promoting Prevention

We believe that the number of individuals affected by learning disabilities can be reduced with an effective, comprehensive prevention plan. We encourage research that seeks to identify the causes of learning disabilities and disseminate research findings which could lead to the reduction of the incidence of learning disabilities.



Fostering Research in Best Practices

We encourage ongoing research efforts into recognition, assessment and intervention strategies throughout the lifespan. We monitor and disseminate these research findings.

Encouraging Identification

Too many people go through life unidentified. We advocate for early identification, which increases the possibility of successful intervention. We will continue to advocate for access to identification throughout the lifespan.

Supporting Intervention

We strongly support best practice interventions for individuals with learning disabilities throughout the lifespan.

Protecting Rights

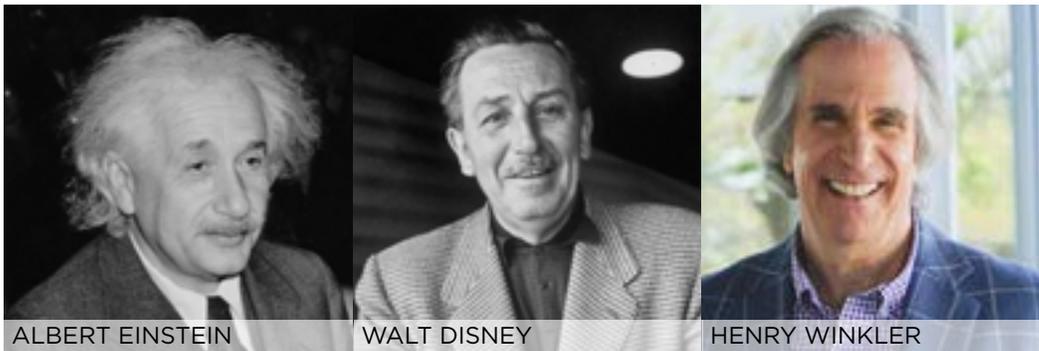
We are committed to advocating for and protecting the rights of all individuals with learning disabilities. This includes legislative advocacy for laws to improve and preserve the rights of all individuals as well as individual advocacy.

Thank you for joining the thousands of individuals who dedicate their resources to helping the millions of children and adults with learning disabilities. Want to get involved? Contact us at info@ldaamerica.org.

Together we can make a difference!

Learning disabilities are neurologically based processing problems that result from a difference in the way a person's brain is wired. Individuals with learning disabilities may have difficulty reading, writing, spelling, reasoning, or recalling and/or organizing information without specific guidance individually tailored to their deficits and/or needs.

Individuals with learning disabilities are of average or above average intelligence.



ALBERT EINSTEIN

WALT DISNEY

HENRY WINKLER



CHER

KEIRA KNIGHTLEY

DANIEL RADCLIFFE

WHOOPI GOLDBERG

Many well-known individuals have struggled and overcome their own learning disabilities. These include: Albert Einstein, Walt Disney, Henry Winkler, Cher, Keira Knightley, Daniel Radcliffe, and Whoopi Goldberg.

BASIC FACTS ABOUT LEARNING DISABILITIES

15% of the population in the U.S. or 1 in 7 individuals has some type of a learning disability.

According to the National Institute of Health, as many as **80% of students with learning disabilities have reading difficulties.**

Learning disabilities should not be confused with learning problems which are the result of other disabilities such as autism, intellectual disabilities, deafness, blindness, behavioral/emotional disorders, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantages.

Learning disabilities is an “umbrella” term describing a number of other, more specific learning disabilities including: **Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)** is a condition that adversely affects how sound that travels unimpeded through the ear is processed or interpreted by the brain. Individuals with APD do not recognize subtle differences between sounds in words, even when the sounds are loud and clear enough to be heard.

Dyscalculia affects a person’s ability to understand numbers and learn math facts.

Dysgraphia affects a person’s handwriting ability and fine motor skills.

Dyslexia affects reading and related language-based processing skills.

Language Processing Disorder is a specific type of Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) in which there is difficulty attaching meaning to sound groups that form words, sentences and stories and relates to the processing of language.

Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities is a disorder which is usually characterized by a significant discrepancy between higher verbal skills and weaker motor, visual-spatial and social skills.

Visual Perceptual/Visual Motor Deficit is a disorder that affects the understanding of information that a person sees, or the ability to draw or copy.

To learn more, [click here](#).



Parents can help children with learning disabilities achieve success by encouraging their strengths, knowing their weaknesses, understanding the educational system, working with professionals and learning about strategies for dealing with specific difficulties.

LD FACTS

Learning disabilities are often accompanied by attention disorders such as ADHD but the two disorders are not the same.

75% - 80% of special education students identified as LD have their basic deficits in language and reading***

2.4 million students are diagnosed with specific learning disabilities (SLD) and receive services under IDEA. This represents 41% of all students receiving special education services.*

It is common to find learning disabilities in other family members.

Some learning disabilities can be detected in the early school years, but others may not be diagnosed until the teenage years when academic content and processing becomes more demanding.

Early Childhood

Communication delays in the early childhood years may cause parents to question if their child has a learning problem because of difficulty with:

- speech, or slow language development.
- understanding what is being said; this is detected when children answer simple questions with incorrect answers, despite knowing the answer.
- following one-step simple directions, such as, "Please get your shoes."
- following commonly used routines without reminders.



Communication delays may affect a child's social interactions, for example if they have difficulty in play:

- entering play routines other children have initiated, like "playing house"
- seeking out peers to play with if they consistently mispronounce words or
- struggle to find the right word to engage in play.

Poor coordination and slow fine motor development may be seen in a young preschooler with a learning disability. They may struggle using:

- scissors,
- buttoning
- zipping clothes
- coloring or drawing lines.

Learning disabilities cannot be cured or fixed but instead are a lifelong issue.

To learn more about learning disabilities in Early Childhood, click [here](#).

Elementary School

Academic demands increase as a child enters elementary school. With increase in academic demands, more signs of a potential learning disability can be seen.

Factual rote knowledge, like reading commonly used sight words, may be difficult for a child with a learning disability to remember and/or retrieve. Multi-step direction may also be hard to remember. This forgetfulness may be seen in organizational tasks, as well, such as losing or forgetting homework materials and/or not handing in these materials to the teacher.

Organizational difficulty can be seen in how they keep track of materials, such as notebooks, binders, and papers. It can also be seen when a child has difficulty planning out steps to complete projects, especially long-term projects, such as book reports, or science fair projects.

Structured organized thoughts are required as a child advances in grades that require more writing and projects. Learning and using basic spelling and grammar rules and doing more complicated math calculations will be required.

To learn more about learning disabilities in Elementary School, click [here](#).



There often appears to be a gap between the individual's potential and their actual achievement. The individual looks perfectly "normal" and appears to be a very bright and intelligent person, yet may be unable to demonstrate the same skill level in comparison with age level peers.

SIGNS TO WATCH OUT FOR IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

- Trouble learning the alphabet
- Numbers, colors, shapes, and/or days of the week
- Difficulty learning letter sounds
- Difficulty writing letters or numbers
- Difficulty reading words
- Difficulty coming up with words that rhyme
- Problems remembering familiar sight words.

Middle and High School

With the right support or intervention, individuals with learning disabilities can succeed in school and go on to have very successful or distinguished careers later in life.

Advanced grades also gravitate towards more oral instruction, through lectures or multi-step directions. The increased use of verbal language may present processing difficulty for a child.

- Following classroom discussion and expressing related thoughts aloud in a cohesive manner can be a daunting task.
- Open-ended test questions and problem solving both require multiple areas of the brain, which can cause difficulty.

Watch for shutdown tendencies

Students with learning disabilities in advanced grades may begin to show shutdown tendencies. For example, they may proclaim to hate reading, writing, or math to avoid calling attention to their learning difficulties.

Students having learning issues may begin to act out behaviorally to draw attention to class-clown tendencies instead of their struggles with academic content or organizational techniques.

These poor organizational skills may be noticed in the home environment. Children may have trouble remembering appointments they have made or fail to pass on messages. Struggles with homework assignments may relate to difficulty either remembering or retrieving the information learned in class that day.

In general, throughout the grades parents may notice that their child takes longer than their peers to learn key concepts or certain skills associated with a specific subject matter.

Parents may also notice the child often complains about struggling to understand the material taught in school. This struggle can be seen when homework becomes a battle every night or the child is failing specific classes, despite studying for hours.



Learning Disabilities and Brain Development

Not all children with learning disabilities will experience the same signs or the same difficulties. The areas of struggle are directly correlated with the wiring in specific brain regions. One task may be easy, and a child is performing on grade-level or above, whereas another task presents a child with significant difficulties. It is important to know that a learning disability cannot be cured with any specific pill; instead students must learn specific strategies and interventions to help provide the brain with alternate compensatory wiring.

To learn more about learning disabilities in Middle and High School, click [here](#).

HOW A LEARNING DISABILITY MAY CHANGE FAMILY DYNAMICS

Having a child with a learning disability can affect a family in ways you may not have expected. It can be difficult sometimes or take a while to diagnose a learning disability. A LD can affect how a child views himself or how he behaves. This does not mean that the learning capacity of the child is inferior or inadequate and many people with learning disabilities learn to capitalize on their strengths over time. Here are a few things to consider:

- It can take time for parents, and a family, to accept that their child has a learning disability. Parents may not see the deficits in the child's learning the same or one parent may not want to accept that their child has learning issues. This can create an atmosphere of misunderstanding.
- Siblings can also feel the effects. Siblings can act and feel resentful of the sister/brother with a learning disability, as that sister/brother may require more time to be spent with her/him for homework and other tasks.
- Extended family members may express concern that too much is being done or not enough is being done. Or, extended family members may not understand the nature of the learning disability.
- Children with learning disabilities can be disorganized at times, forget things, or take longer to complete a task. These things can affect a family dynamic (particularly if the family is well structured or detail oriented). The child with a learning disability may always understand directions when they are given.



- The child with a learning disability can experience frustrations with learning. These frustrations can be difficult for family members. If family members are feeling stress themselves, it is important to make time together as a family for fun activities and for family members to also make time for themselves personally.

Support from outside sources and people may be needed at times. Parents should not try to depend on themselves alone, but educate themselves on systems and community supports to help the child with the diagnosed learning disability and the family structure.

- All individuals with learning disabilities need to know their strengths and weaknesses and how to use them to empower them. Parents should help their child understand the diagnosed disability and how it affects how learning and other situations, but it does not define him or her as a person or an individual. To learn more about learning disabilities and family dynamics, click [here](#).

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY

Parents are the best advocates for their children with learning disabilities. To be the best advocate, the following tips may be helpful:

Be familiar with the special education laws of your state and the regulations of your school district. This helps you to know what services your child can receive and how to secure them.



Know the faculty members and administrators at your school. Know who they are and what they do. These are the people who will be on your team and will be helping make decisions about your child's education.

- If you have a concern, contact the teacher first and talk about it.
- Knowing roles of personnel at the school will allow you to know who to talk to if you need to go further. Follow the proper chain of command.

Be present.

- Volunteer as much as you can.
- Be visible at school functions.
- Introduce yourself with a letter or by visiting the school.

Make requests in writing and keep good records.

- Keep copies of all requests and communications.
- Take notes when talking about your child with a teacher or school administrator
- Ask for names and contact information.
- Keep copies of assessment, evaluation data, and IEPs.
- Organize information by date and keep information in a filing system, etc.

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

***Keep a few copies of work samples that demonstrate work progress.
Keep notes of delays and deficits in learning.***

Know your child's strengths and interests. Involve your child in decision making if and when you are able to do so.

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD (CONTINUED)

Be educated and informed.

- Know how your child learns best and what works best for him or her.
- Read articles, information, books, and your child's individual assessment reports.
- Attend workshops and conferences that can provide guidance on how to help your child.
- Become familiar with educational terminology and jargon related to the education and services your child can receive.
- Ask questions. If you are confused about something, ask for clarification

Communicate effectively.

- Use notes and information to ask for what your child needs in a manner that is useful.
- Be prepared when you attend the IEP meetings and conferences prepared.
- Ask for specific outcomes.
- Be prepared to explain why the outcomes are needed by your child and how the change or outcome will impact his learning.
- Be calm when making requests and try to not be overcome with emotion.
- You can be assertive without being aggressive.
- Listen to the ideas and reasoning of other IEP members.
- Consider options and recommendations made.

Ultimately, your child will learn to advocate for himself by watching you. Seeing advocacy in action, will help your child learn advocacy skills and how to apply them. To learn more about advocacy, please [click here](#).



Work Habits

- Is my child following multi-step directions on his/her own?
- Does my child ask for help when needed?
- How long (time period) does my child stay on-task?
- Does my child keep an organized work area?
- Is my child rushing through work?
- Is my child managing time appropriately?
- Has my child missed any homework assignments?



Social Skills

- Does my child actively participate in discussions?
- Does my child get along well with their peers?
- Is my child respectful towards adults and peers?
- Does my child have a core group of friends?
- Is my child having trouble following any of the classroom rules?
- Are you concerned about any behaviors?

Academic Concern Areas

- How is my child doing academically?
- What are his/her strengths?
- How are you monitoring progress in all areas?
- What do these assessment results mean?
- Where does my child still need to improve/develop?
- What strategies have you tried?
- What strategies are working best for my child?

Home-School Partnerships

- What is the best way to contact you?
- What can I do to support classroom instruction at home?
- Do you recommend resources I can use at home?

STATE/LOCAL AFFILIATES

You are not alone. LDA is a national network of volunteers with thousands of members including individuals with learning disabilities, their families, and the professionals who work with them. There are over 100 state and local affiliates throughout the United States.

State and local affiliates offer a variety of services that can make a difference in the lives of individuals with learning disabilities and their families. State and local activities may include: support groups, regular informational meetings, resource libraries, advocacy assistance, newsletters, annual conferences and opportunities to network with other parents, teachers, professionals and adults.

To locate the affiliates nearest you, click on the map.



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