



Taking the First Step:

A Guide for Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities





This booklet is for parents who suspect that their child needs help because he or she struggles with learning.

Turn to page five for a list of leading organizations with experienced staff who can help you take the next step.





Welcome to a New World of Information

When children have learning problems, their parents are usually the first to notice that something is just not right.

And when they notice, they want reliable information so they can help their children.

That's why we have prepared this booklet—to give you some basic information about learning disabilities and to share the best resources (listed on page five) so that you can help your child achieve his or her full potential.

Take the Plunge

It is scary to admit that your child is struggling to learn. Research tells us that parents fear that their child may be “labeled for life” if he or she is identified as having a learning disability.

Please know that you are not alone. Consider that at least 2.7 million children are receiving help in school because of a learning disability. The National Institutes of Health even estimate that one of every seven Americans (15 percent) has some degree of learning disability.

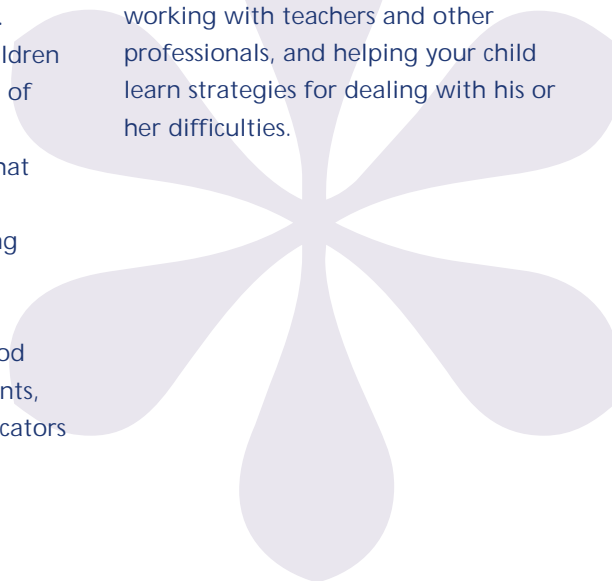
So, keep in mind that you are in good company—not only with other parents, but with legions of experts and educators who are ready to help you.

What are Learning Disabilities?

A learning disability is a neurological disorder. In simpler terms, a learning disability results from a difference in the way a person's brain is “wired.” Children with learning disabilities are as smart or smarter than their peers. But, they may have difficulty reading, writing, spelling, reasoning, recalling and/or organizing information and doing mathematics, if left to figure things out by themselves or if taught in conventional ways.

The reality is that a learning disability cannot be cured or fixed; it is a lifelong challenge. Take heart in knowing that with appropriate support and intervention, children with learning disabilities can achieve in school and go on to successful, often distinguished, careers.

You are your child's best advocate. You can help your child by capitalizing on strengths, defining areas of weakness, understanding the educational system, working with teachers and other professionals, and helping your child learn strategies for dealing with his or her difficulties.



How Do I Know If My Child Has a Learning Disability?



If you suspect that your child has a problem learning, the sooner you act on your suspicions, the easier it will be for your child. It is natural for children to have one or more of the following characteristics at times. But, if your child consistently exhibits several of these signs, you should speak to his or her teachers and other school personnel, talk with other learning experts, and then consider a formal evaluation to answer questions you may have about the way your child learns.

Preschool

- Delay in speech development; difficulty articulating or pronouncing words.
- Slow vocabulary development; using the wrong word.
- Difficulty rhyming words.
- Delay in learning numbers, alphabet, weekdays, colors, shapes.
- Difficulty following directions, learning routines.
- Awkward when running, jumping, skipping.
- Difficulty controlling pencil, crayons, scissors.
- Difficulty buttoning, zipping, tying.
- Increased activity level, inattention and/or impulsive behavior.
- Trouble interacting socially with peers.



Grades K - 4

- Difficulty connecting letters and sounds to decode words; difficulty reading familiar, well-practiced words; difficulty understanding or remembering what is read.
- Difficulty writing down thoughts, including problems with spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, richness of ideas and organization of thoughts.
- Poor spelling.
- Reversing or transposing letters or numbers.
- Difficulty with fine motor coordination, resulting in poor handwriting.
- Unstable pencil grip.
- Difficulty understanding what is said or expressing thoughts.
- Remembering facts slowly.
- Relying heavily on memorization; slow to learn new skills.
- Difficulty learning basic math concepts or applying concepts to doing calculations and solving problems.
- Poor coordination; easily confused by changes in surroundings; prone to accidents.
- Trouble learning about time.





Give Your Child the Edge

It is very important that you seek help as soon as you realize your child is having difficulty learning. Seeking help — and certainly recognizing the early signs of a learning disability — can mean the difference between success and failure for your child in school.

Grades 5 – 8

- Continued difficulty with grade-level reading comprehension, written language or math skills.
- Avoids reading, writing, math or other specific skills.
- Difficulty organizing space (bedroom, locker, etc.), material (loses or misplaces paper, assignments, etc.) or thoughts when writing or speaking.
- Difficulty planning time and developing strategies to complete assignments on time.
- Difficulty understanding discussions or expressing thoughts when speaking.
- Difficulty making friends.

Grades 9 – Adult

- Continued spelling errors; frequently spells the same word differently in a single document.
- Avoids reading, writing, math or other specific skills.
- Trouble with open-ended questions on tests.
- Weak memory skills.
- Difficulty adjusting to new settings.
- Works slowly.
- Poor grasp of abstract concepts.
- Pays too little or too much attention to details.
- Misreads information.

Most learning disabilities affect reading and language skills. In fact, a significant majority of students with a learning disability have problems with reading. If these children receive appropriate help in the early grades, most of them will become skilled, independent readers. When help is delayed, it becomes harder and harder for children to catch up.

Perhaps the most important reason to seek help early is to spare children the frustration and failure they experience when they don't do well in school and don't know why. You must help your child understand that he or she simply learns differently.

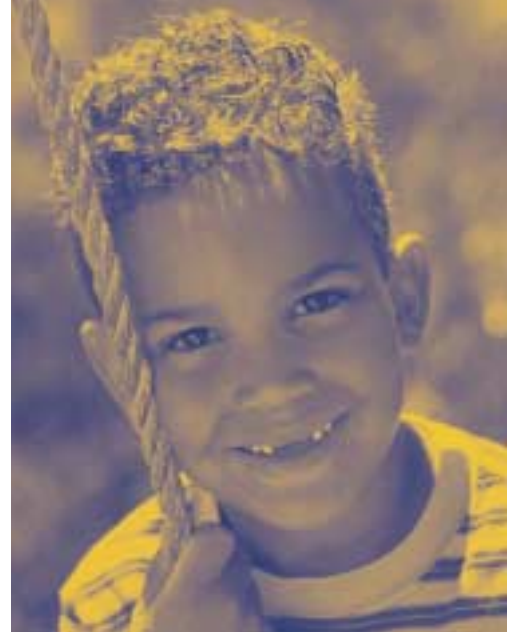


Not All Great Minds Think Alike

Did you know that Albert Einstein couldn't read until he was nine? Walt Disney, General George Patton and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller had trouble reading all their lives. Whoopi Goldberg and Charles Schwab have learning disabilities, which hasn't affected their ultimate success!

What Should I Do First?

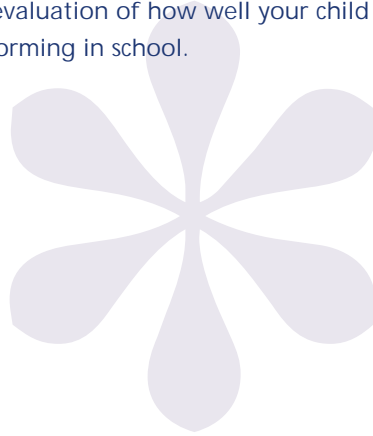
- Trust your intuition! No one knows your child better than you, so if you suspect a real problem, speak to teachers and other school personnel, seek information and expert opinions, and do not be afraid to have him or her evaluated right away.
- Meet with your child's teacher and guidance counselor. They can tell you how well your child interacts with his or her peers, as well as help to arrange a full evaluation of how well your child is performing in school.



- Know your legal rights and responsibilities. Learn about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If you prefer to have information shared in a language other than English, be sure to ask for a summary of your rights and evaluations in your native language.
- Observe your child's strengths and interests. Encourage him or her at school and at play, and reward your child for the many things he or she does well.
- Realize that you are not alone and that experienced people and groups have information and help for you right now.
- Learn as much as you can. The more you know about learning disabilities, the more you can help your child. Start with your school. Then contact one of the organizations on the following page or visit any of them at www.aboutLD.org.

Why Get Help Immediately?

- Eighty (80%) percent of students with a learning disability have trouble reading.
- Ninety (90%) percent will read normally if they receive help by the first grade.
- Seventy-five (75%) percent of children who receive help after the age of nine will have some difficulty throughout life.



Organizations You Should Contact

- The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) — an international organization offering information and referral and other services for people with dyslexia and related difficulties in learning to read and write.

www.interdys.org
(410) 296-0232
(800) ABCD123 (toll free)

- Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) — a parent-driven national organization offering support groups and information to help families dealing with learning disabilities.

www.LDAAmerica.org
(888) 300-6710 (toll free)
(412) 341-1515

- National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) — a national organization that develops and delivers research-based programs for teachers and parents, shapes public policy and maintains an online database of learning disabilities resources.

www.LD.org
(888) 575-7373 (toll free)
(212) 545-7510

- Schwab Learning — Schwab Learning is an online guide to the landscape of learning disabilities, developed by the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation especially for parents of children who are newly identified with a learning disability.

www.schwablearning.org
(650) 655-2410

CCLD is supported and endorsed by two leading non-profit organizations that work primarily with educators:

- Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD) — an international organization that promotes new research and effective ways to teach people with learning disabilities.

www.cldinternational.org
(913) 492-8755

- Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD) — an international group of teachers, university professors and researchers who work to improve education for people with learning disabilities. DLD is part of The Council for Exceptional Children.

www.dldcec.org
(888) 232-7733 (toll free)



Another very good resource on the World Wide Web is www.LDonline.org.





The Usual Suspects

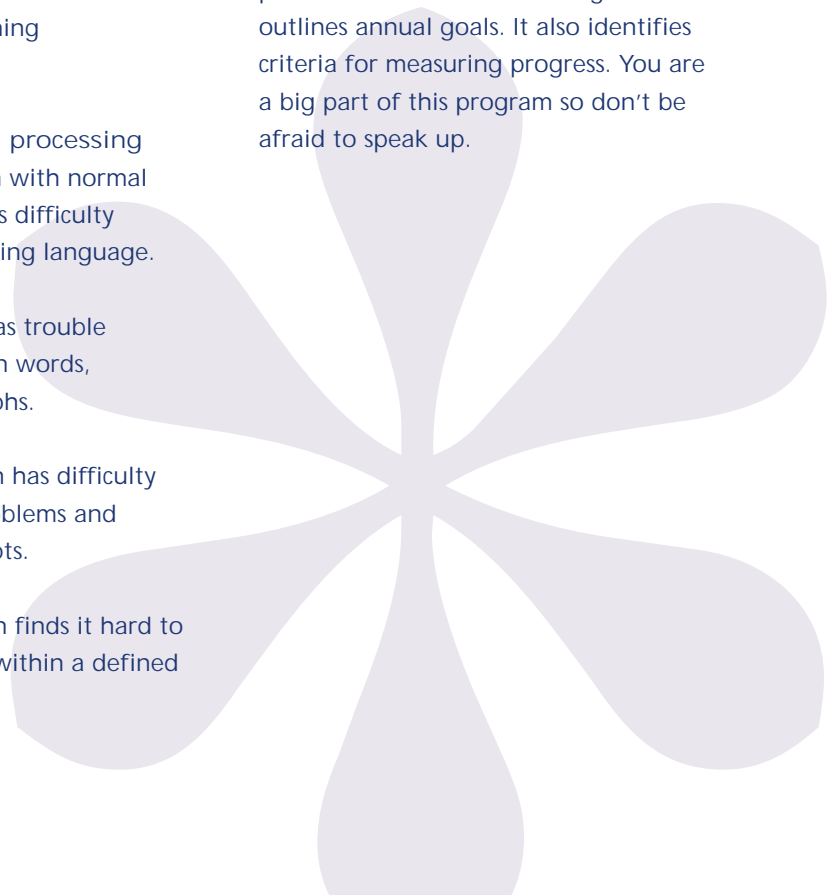
The most common learning disabilities are:

- Auditory and visual processing disabilities: a person with normal hearing and vision has difficulty understanding and using language.
- Dyslexia: a person has trouble understanding written words, sentences or paragraphs.
- Dyscalculia: a person has difficulty solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.
- Dysgraphia: a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space.

Rights of Passage

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that requires all states and territories to provide a public school education to children with disabilities between ages three and 21, no matter how severe their disabilities are. As soon as children with learning disabilities are identified, they are entitled to services under this law.

If your child is identified as having a learning disability, it is your right under IDEA to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Basically, this is a written document that summarizes your child's educational performance, plans short-term educational goals and outlines annual goals. It also identifies criteria for measuring progress. You are a big part of this program so don't be afraid to speak up.





The Name Game: Professionals Who Can Help

Educational consultant — conducts educational evaluations and may have a background in special education issues.

Educational therapist — develops and operates programs for learning and/or behavior difficulties.

Learning disabilities specialist — a teacher with specific training and credentials to provide *individualized* educational services to students with learning disabilities and their teachers.

Neurologist — a medical doctor who can look for possible atypical brain patterns.

Occupational therapist — helps people improve motor and sensory functions so they can perform daily tasks.

Pediatrician — a medical doctor for infants, children and adolescents who is trained in overall growth and development, including motor, sensory and behavioral development.

Psychiatrist — a medical doctor who diagnoses and treats severe behavioral and emotional problems and who can prescribe medications.

Psychologist — provides psychological and intellectual assessment and treatment for mental and emotional health.

School/Educational psychologist — gives and interprets psychological and educational tests, helps with behavior management, provides counseling, and consults with parents, staff and community agencies about educational issues.

Speech and language therapist — helps correct language and speech difficulties.



What Is the Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities?

Six nonprofit leaders in the field of learning disabilities form the core of the Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities (CCLD):

- Council for Learning Disabilities
- The Division for Learning Disabilities of The Council for Exceptional Children
- The International Dyslexia Association
- Learning Disabilities Association of America
- National Center for Learning Disabilities
- Schwab Learning, a program of the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation

These organizations work together to make people aware of learning disabilities, share information with parents, and promote the need for early detection and intervention.

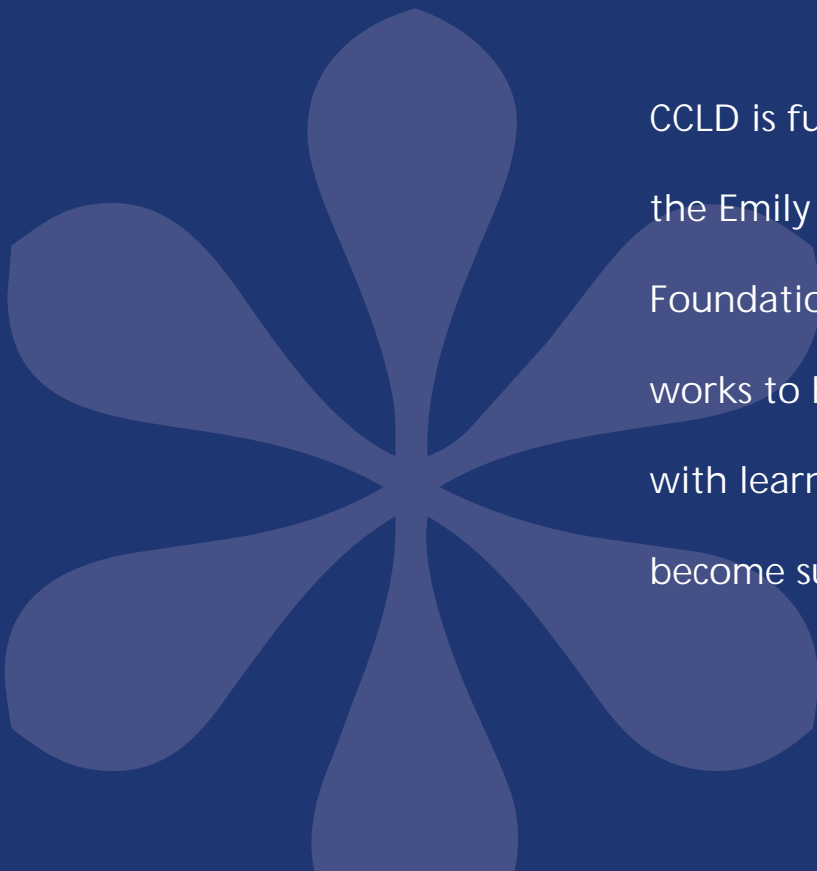




This book was made possible through the generosity of Schwab Learning. Schwab Learning is an online guide to the landscape of learning disabilities, developed by the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation especially for parents of children who are newly identified with a learning disability.



CCLD is funded by the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, which works to help people with learning disabilities become successful.





The Coordinated
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(202) 326-8700
www.aboutLD.org

Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities
c/o Communications Consortium Media Center
1200 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005-1754

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