

Learning disability is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of skills requiring listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span.

Simply stated, a learning disability is a processing difficulty and any one or more of the five senses, may be impaired.

Learning disabilities DOES NOT imply mental retardation, nor are they the result of a poor academic background, emotional disturbance, lack of motivation, or visual or auditory acuity problems (Association of Higher Education and Disability).

Learning disabilities may include problems with perception of space or sounds, or of numbers or letters (dyscalculia and dyslexia); forming letters (dysgraphia); processing memory; attention disorders; motor coordination; following verbal directions; or separating literal from metaphorical ideas. Most of these students can learn strategies and techniques to cope and manage their underdeveloped skills.

All children need love, encouragement, and support, and for children with learning disabilities, positive reinforcement ensures that they emerge with a strong sense of self-worth, confidence, and the determination to keep going even when things are difficult. In searching for ways to help children with learning disabilities, we must remember that what we need are ways to help them help themselves. Our job as parents / teachers / support providers is not to “cure” the learning disability, but to give the child the social and emotional tools they need to work through challenges. In the long run, facing and overcoming challenges helps children to be stronger and more resilient. How we behave and respond to challenges has a big impact on the child. A good attitude won’t solve the problems associated with a learning disability, but it gives the child hope and confidence that they will eventually succeed. It is important to know and understand the correct techniques for working with students with learning difficulties and to implement strategies that are effective in the classroom.

Focus on strengths, not just weakness

Children are not defined by their disability. A learning disability represents one area of weakness, but there are many more areas of strengths. Focus on the child’s gifts, talents and strengths. The child’s life—and schedule—shouldn’t revolve around the learning disability, instead we must nurture the activities where they excel, and make plenty of time for them.

Everyone—with learning disability or not—has their own unique learning style. Some people learn best by seeing, some by reading, others by listening, and still others by doing. We can help all children and specially those with a learning disability by identifying their primary learning style. Is the child a visual learner, an auditory learner, or a kinesthetic learner? Once we have understood how they learn best, we can ensure that learning is reinforced using appropriate techniques.

Is the child a visual learner?

Visual learners:

- Learn best by seeing or reading.
- Do well when material is presented and tested visually, not verbally.
- Benefit from written notes, directions, diagrams, charts, maps and pictures.

Tips for Visual Learners:

- Use books, videos, computers, visual aids and flash cards.
- Make detailed, colour -coded or highlighted notes.
- Make outlines, diagrams and lists.
- Use drawing and illustrations (preferably in colour).



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Is the child an auditory learner?

Auditory learners :

- Learn best by listening.
- Do well in lecture based learning environments and on oral reports and test.
- Benefits from class room discussion, spoken directions and study groups.
- May love music, languages and being on stage.

Tips for Auditory Learner:

- Read notes or study materials out aloud.
- Use word associations and verbal repetition to memorize.
- Study with other students. Talk things through.
- Listen to books on tape or other audio recordings.
- Use a tape recorder to listen to lectures again later.

Is the child a kinaesthetic Learner?

Kinaesthetic learners :

- Learn best by doing and moving.
- Do well when they can move, touch, explore and create, in order to learn
- Benefits from hands-on activities, lab classes and field trips.
- May love sports, drama, dance, arts and crafts.

Tips for Kinaesthetic Learners:

- Do experiments, hands on activities and take field trips.
- Use activity based study tools, like role-playing or model building.
- Study in small groups and take frequent breaks.
- Use memory games and flash cards.
- Study with music on in the back ground.

Regardless of what type of learning disability a student may exhibit, some techniques work for all. Here are some examples.

Experiential Learning and Scaffolding

Researchers have long known that methods using meaningful experiences improve comprehension in students of all ages. Experiential learning uses visual, auditory and hands-on approaches, with self-directed student participation, to enhance comprehension and reinforce content. Today, teachers combine this approach with scaffolding, which breaks concepts into structured steps that can be modelled. Teachers can then guide students to master content more easily while supporting independent learning skills. As a result of these combined approaches, students benefit from active engagement in the learning process, process content more efficiently, and are more likely to increase their comprehension and retention of target material.

Direct Instruction and Scripts

Unlike experiential learning and scaffolding approaches, where teachers guide students through self-paced activities, direct instruction uses scripts to explicitly teach concepts through structured routines in group or individual settings. Used correctly, these methods provide fast-paced, interactive lessons that engage students in the learning process. As a long-established teaching methodology, direct instruction adapts beautifully to new ways of use when combined with the use of scripts. Together, these approaches help to develop automatic recall skills, acting as cues for students to remember previously learned information



Technology Applications

The importance of technology that assists students to access content more easily cannot be overstated. Established technology includes a wide variety of tools, including: calculators, note-taking or voice-recognition programs, screen reading software and digital organizers. Added to these are today's modern applications that provide students with independent learning opportunities as part of daily learning routines. Apps get high marks from teachers as motivating, technological tools that engage students to independently practice math, writing, reading, study skills, memory strategies, organization, note-taking or handwriting by strengthening speed, accuracy, automatic recall and critical thinking skills.

Students with learning disabilities can be successful learners when they identify their learning strengths and the strategies that work best for them. To that end, teachers must assess individual learning styles and provide the appropriate instructional approaches that can maximize each student's learning potential.

How to Help Children with Learning Disabilities Succeed in School

Most instruction at home or in school can be adapted to accommodate the needs of students with learning disabilities. These strategies can be used to modify instruction in most subject areas to improve students' comprehension of tasks and the quality of their work. These approaches, incidentally, can be helpful for almost all students.

- **Set the stage for learning by telling children why the material is important, what the learning goals are, and what the expectations are for quality performance.**
- **Use specific language and state clear expectations. For example, in a writing assignment, you might grade/mark based on correct punctuation, spelling, and the inclusion of specific points. Tell the students that clearly.**
- **Have the student repeat the instructions for a task to ensure they understand. Clear any misunderstanding before they begin the actual work. Check back on the student as they work to ensure that they are on the right track.**
- **Use graphic organizers to help students understand the relationships between ideas.**
- **Instruction should include specific, step-by-step instructions that are explicitly stated by the teacher and modelled for the student.**
- **Create models of quality work that students can see and analyse. Include both spoken and written explanations of how the work fulfils academic expectations.**
- **Never use a student's work as a public example of poor work for the class to see. This is humiliation, and it has no place in any classroom or home.**

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