

What Are the "Early Warning Signs" of Learning Disabilities?

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Children with learning disabilities exhibit a wide range of symptoms. These include problems with reading, mathematics, comprehension, writing, spoken language, or reasoning abilities. Hyperactivity, inattention and perceptual coordination also may be associated with learning disabilities but are not learning disabilities themselves. The primary characteristic of a learning disability is a significant difference between a child's achievement in some areas and his or her overall intelligence.

Learning disabilities typically affect five general areas:

- 1) Spoken language: delays, disorders, and deviations in listening and speaking
- 2) Written language: difficulties with reading, writing and spelling
- 3) Arithmetic: difficulty in performing arithmetic operations or in understanding basic concepts
- 4) Reasoning: difficulty in organizing and integrating thoughts
- 5) Memory: difficulty in remembering information and instructions

Among the symptoms commonly related to learning disabilities are:

Academic Symptoms

- poor performance on group tests
- reversals in reading and writing
- difficulty in copying accurately from a model
- slowness in completing work
- easily confused by instructions
- difficulty with tasks requiring sequencing

Cognitive Symptoms

- difficulty discriminating size, shape, color
- difficulty with temporal (time) concepts
- distorted concept of body image
- poor organizational skills
- difficulty with abstract reasoning and/or problem-solving
- disorganized thinking
- often obsesses on one topic or idea
- poor short-term or long-term memory
- lags in development milestones (e.g. motor, language)

Physical Symptoms

- general awkwardness
- poor visual-motor coordination
- hyperactivity
- overly distractible; difficulty concentrating
- lack of hand preference or mixed dominance

Behavioral/Social Symptoms

- impulsive behavior; lack of reflective thought prior to action
- low tolerance for frustration
- excessive movement during sleep

- poor peer relationships overly excitable during group play
- poor social judgment
- inappropriate, unselective, and often excessive display of affection
- behavior often inappropriate for situation
- failure to see consequences for his actions
- overly gullible; easily led by peers
- excessive variation in mood and responsiveness
- poor adjustment to environmental changes
- difficulty making decisions

When considering these symptoms, it is important to remain mindful of the following:

- 1) No one will have all these symptoms.
- 2) Among LD populations, some symptoms are more common than others.
- 3) All people have at least two or three of these problems to some degree.
- 4) The number of symptoms seen in a particular child does not give an indication as to whether the disability is mild or severe. It is important to consider if the behaviors are chronic and appear in clusters.

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