

What Are Learning Disabilities?

All children learn and develop at their own speed. When a person has a learning disability, they have trouble with one or more ways the brain takes in, understands, remembers, or shares information. A learning disability can make it harder to build certain skills such as reading, writing, spelling, math, and remembering and organizing information.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How common are learning disabilities?

Learning disabilities are very common, affecting an estimated one in five children.

For Parents and caregivers: What should I do if I suspect my child may have a learning disability?

Start by talking with a medical provider. They can look into learning or development concerns. For children younger than three years, ask about Early Intervention. In New York State, these local programs offer free evaluations and services. For children age three and older, talk with your child's teacher or your school district's special education department about testing and any supports your child may need.

For Youth: What should I do if I think I may have a learning disability?

Talk to an adult you trust, such as a teacher, family member, or medical provider. Tell them what's hard for you or what you're worried about at school.

What kind of help is there for a learning disability?

Common ways to support young people with learning disabilities include:

- **Individualized Education Programs (IEP):** An IEP is a personal learning plan. Parents, educators, and (in some cases) the student develop the plan as members of the committee on special education (CSE). An IEP outlines specific goals, services, and accommodations to support learning.
- **504 plan:** Some students need supports that don't require specialized services. A 504 plan, which has fewer requirements than IEPs, is another way to remove barriers to learning.
- **Classroom accommodations:** Many students benefit from classroom accommodations. Accommodations are supports for learning that take a student's learning disabilities into consideration, changing *how*, but usually not *what*, they learn. For example, some students may need extra time for assignments and tests, special seating in the classroom, or assistive technology. Accommodations are stated in the IEP. When the specialized services of an IEP are not needed, students can use a 504 plan to list specific accommodations they need.

What other conditions are common in people with learning disabilities?

Sometimes, learning disabilities occur with other conditions such as ADHD, autism, hearing loss, or speech and language disorders. Be open with the medical provider about all symptoms.

Talking with a Medical Provider

When talking with medical providers or specialists, you might want to:

- **Bring notes!** Ahead of the appointment, take notes on anything you've noticed that worries you. Share any concerns that others have pointed out.
- **Discuss** if your child's learning and development is typical for their age.
- **Ask** if there are other providers or specialists your child should be seeing.
- **Request** that they make recommendations for accommodations needed at school.

What You Can Do at Home

Getting help can take time. While waiting for your appointments or school meetings it may help to:

- **Focus on strengths:** Praise and encourage your child for their hard work!
- **Stay in touch with the school:** Building relationships with educators and checking in on progress and support throughout the school year is important.
- **Be patient and celebrate small wins:** Everyone learns differently and at their own pace. Celebrate success whenever you see it. Encouragement for the little things goes a long way!

Learning about a learning disability and getting help is a journey. You're not alone.

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NYS Department of Health County Programs – CYSHCN



<https://on.ny.gov/43ho1ZK>

ACT for Youth: Learning Disability



<https://bit.ly/act-learning-dis>

About This Series

This series of handouts on health conditions was written by clinicians in Weill Cornell Medicine's Pediatric Mental Health Integration Program, partners in the ACT for Youth CYSHCN Program Center of Excellence at Cornell University.

