



Learning Disabilities

(general overview)



Brought to you as a public service by the Pediatric Neuropsychology Special Interest Group of the AACN

What are Learning Disabilities (LDs)?

When a child has been given good opportunities to learn, but hasn't been able to keep up in a particular subject, they often have a Learning Disability. Learning disabilities affect around 2-10% of children in the US. The rates are even higher for children who also have other developmental or medical conditions. Common areas of learning disability include reading, mathematics, and written expression. Experts disagree about how best to diagnose and treat children with learning disabilities, but there is some common ground. In this sheet we list broad resources that can be helpful across a range of learning concerns. If you want more specific resources for disabilities in reading, mathematics, written expression, and spelling, please see the resource sheets we have developed just for those conditions.

Where can I find help?

Children in the US who have LDs have the right to special educational assistance through the public school system. The rights of these children and their parents are outlined in a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Professionals who are unfamiliar with IDEA can find out more at the web sites listed below. Because of IDEA, learning disabilities specialists should be available at no cost to students within every public school system in the US. However, the law is interpreted a bit differently across the country. Sometimes, an independent evaluator from outside of the school is needed. In those cases, it can be helpful to contact an independent psychologist in the community who works with children. At the bottom of the next page is a link for how to locate a board-certified clinical neuropsychologist. Even if that psychologist is not a learning disability specialist, they can direct you to the appropriate resources.

How does an LD specialist help a child?

Most LD specialists focus on evaluating children and providing recommendations to teachers and other school staff. The evaluations help to clarify whether an LD is present and, if so, identify specific a child's areas of strength and weakness to help plan interventions. What happens during the evaluations can vary. Specialists can learn a lot by looking at how the child performs on actual classroom work. However, that classroom work can fluctuate, and it is often not enough to fully understand why a child is struggling. LD specialists typically go beyond classroom work and give specific one-on-one assessments that are designed to better understand a child's strengths and weaknesses. The best-developed of these are called "standardized tests" and have strong research to show that they are reliable and valid. Some standardized tests are very specific, for example measuring only reading ability and the skills needed to read well. Other standardized tests cover several academic skills. Here are some tests (sometimes called "test batteries") that cover a broad range of learning skills:

- Bateria III Woodcock-Muñoz Pruebas de Aprovechamiento (Spanish)
- Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement – Second Edition
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third Edition
- Wide Range Achievement Test – Fourth Edition
- Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement – Third Edition

Some LD specialists provide tutoring or other interventions themselves. This can be a good thing, if they do high-quality work and don't have ulterior motives. However, be cautious about LD specialists who both conduct evaluations and sell specific treatment "packages", because their recommendations for treatment may be motivated by money, rather than children's needs.

Where can I find online resources?

Resource	Link
LD Online Provides a family-friendly overview of commonly diagnosed learning disabilities, including recommended books and other online resources for each domain	http://www.ldonline.org/
What Works Clearinghouse Developed by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, this site offers a central location for educators to learn about effective interventions.	http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Provides an overview of learning disabilities and offers additional resources including links to other related national websites.	http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/learning_disabilities.cfm
US Department of Education Website reviews the rights of children/families under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guidelines.	http://idea.ed.gov/
Wrights Law Website developed by educational advocates and attorneys to help parents and professionals advocate for the rights of children with special educational needs.	http://www.wrightslaw.com/

Are there books that give the “big picture” on LD for professionals?

Absolutely, but it is impossible to list all of the books that provide general coverage of LD. Here is a good list to start from:

Hunter, S.J. & Donders, J. (Eds.) (2007). <i>Pediatric Neuropsychological Intervention</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Pennington, B.F. (Ed.) (2009). <i>Diagnosing Learning Disorders, Second Edition: A Neuropsychological Framework</i> . New York: The Guilford Press.
Shinn, M.R. & Walker, H.M. (2010). <i>Interventions for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI</i> . Bethesda, MD: NASP Publications.
Thomas, A. & Grimes, J. (Eds.) (2008). <i>Best Practices in School Psychology, Fifth Edition</i> . Bethesda, MD: NASP Publications.
Wendling, B.J. & Mather, N. (2008). <i>Essentials of Evidence-Based Academic Interventions</i> . Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Brochure version 1.1, 1/31/2012, prepared by Drs. K. O'Toole, S. McCann Lahey, A. Arenivas, & G. Christopher

Additional Information:

What is board certification in clinical neuropsychology?

Believe it or not, most states allow licensed psychologists to call themselves neuropsychologists without showing they have any special training on how to care for people who have neurological or neurodevelopmental disorders. Clinicians who are board-certified in clinical neuropsychology have proven, through a rigorous evaluation, that they are fully competent. That evaluation is conducted by the largest certification group in psychology, [the American Board of Professional Psychology \(ABPP; http://www.abpp.org\)](http://www.abpp.org), and its subspecialty board, The American Board of Clinical Neuropsychology. The goal of ABPP is to protect the public by examining and certifying psychologists who demonstrate competence in approved specialty areas.

How do I find a board-certified clinical neuropsychologist?

These are listed by name and by location on the web site of the [American Academy of Clinical Neuropsychology \(AACN; http://theaacn.org\)](http://theaacn.org). Once you find a neuropsychologist near you, click on their name for more information, including the kinds of people they work with and how to contact them.

What is pediatric neuropsychology?

[Click here \(http://www.div40.org/resources.htm\)](http://www.div40.org/resources.htm) to download a pamphlet that explains what makes pediatric neuropsychology unique, and what to expect from an evaluation by a pediatric neuropsychologist.



This information was provided as a public service by the Pediatric Special Interest Group of the AACN. It should be used for general information only, and is not intended to substitute for care from a qualified professional. The AACN does not have any financial relationship with books or web resources listed here. Updated print and web versions of this resource sheet, as well as resources for other conditions, are available at <http://sites.google.com/site/aacnped/welcome/condition-specific-handouts>

