

**Just  
the facts.**

**ANSWERS  
TO YOUR  
QUESTIONS ABOUT  
PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH**

## **Learning Problems**

### **What is a learning disorder?**

Learning disorders are diagnosed when a person's achievement on individually administered standardized tests in reading, mathematics, or written expression is significantly below the level expected for age, educational placement, or level of intelligence. Accordingly, a significant discrepancy exists between a person's potential for learning and what is actually learned. The learning disabled often show an uneven pattern of language, physical, and academic development. Meanwhile, learning problems are not due to environmental disadvantage, mental retardation, or emotional disturbance.

### **What are the major kind of learning disorders?**

Learning disorders typically impact one or more of the following five general areas:

- **Spoken Language.** Delays, deficiencies, and deviations in listening and speaking often occur.
- **Written Language.** Difficulties with reading, writing, and spelling may be seen.
- **Arithmetic.** People with learning disabilities often struggle in performing numerical operations and in understanding basic arithmetic concepts.
- **Reasoning.** There are often difficulties with concept formation, organization, and integrating thoughts. Sequential processing deficits are also common.
- **Memory.** People with learning problems often have difficulty in remembering information and instructions.

### **What causes learning disorders?**

Many conditions appear to be associated with learning disorders. Some children simply mature at a slower rate than others and, as a result, they are unable to do the expected school work. This may be referred to as a maturational lag. Additionally, some children with normal vision and hearing may misinterpret everyday sights and sounds because of some perceptual disorder. Also, injuries before and during birth or in early childhood may account for some learning problems. Furthermore, learning disabilities tend to run in family, so there may be a genetic predisposition. In general, learning disabilities are more common in boys than girls, possible because boys tend to mature more slowly. Learning disorders are sometimes associated with a variety of general medical conditions (e.g., lead poisoning, fetal alcohol syndrome, or fragile X syndrome).

### **Why is it important to seek treatment for learning disorders?**

Learning disorders do not go away on their own. Left untreated, they can have serious consequences. People with learning disorders underachieve both in school and in their careers. They also may be school dropouts. Low self-esteem, deficient social skills, and feelings of failure and demoralization often result.

### **What types of psychological treatment are helpful?**

Psychologists complete psychoeducational or neuropsychological assessment to determine the presence of a learning disability and to possibly rule out the presence of neurological/organic factors which may be contributing to the learning problem.

Also, psychologists consult with a client, parents, and school personnel about designing effective individualized learning programs that build on the client's strengths and compensate for weaknesses.

The client is taught more effective study skills and test taking strategies.

Furthermore, psychologists assist the client in coming to an understanding and acceptance of the limits that surround disability.

The client is helped to identify ways of increasing motivation and to develop positive coping and self-control strategies to inhibit impulsive or other negative behavioral patterns.

If any ADHD or emotional problems interfere with learning, the psychologist may arrange for medication consultation.

### **What benefits can be expected from successful psychological treatment?**

Successful treatments do not work instantly, but many benefits can be expected over the long-term. Clients with learning disabilities will feel enhanced self-esteem. Their achievement will move closer to their actual ability. Feelings of discouragement are replaced by feelings of optimism and confidence. They will accept and understand the limits that surround their specific learning disability. They will feel greater support from family, friends, and school personnel. Social, study, and test taking skills will improve. Overall, clients will improve their ability to cope with their difficulties and lead more happy, fulfilled lives.

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