

# Learning Disabilities and ADHD

Learning disabilities and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) often co-exist. ADHD is not a learning disability (LD); however, it does make learning difficult. For example, it is hard to learn when you struggle to focus on what your teacher is saying or when you can't seem to be able to sit down and pay attention to a book. Research has shown children with ADHD are more likely to have a learning disability than children who do not have ADHD.

## The Connection Between Executive Functions, ADHD, and LD

Learning involves using the executive functions of the brain which include the ability to focus, pay attention, engage with a task, and use working memory. We know that ADHD affects the executive functions of the brain.

Many people with ADHD struggle with learning and schoolwork because of executive function problems, yet they do not have enough of an impairment to be diagnosed with a learning disability.

When a person has co-existing conditions of ADHD and LD it means they have the broad impairment of executive functions combined with the impairment of the particular skills needed for reading, writing, and/or math.

## What Are Learning Disabilities?

Learning disabilities are neurological and are not a reflection of intelligence or how hard they are trying. One way to think about learning disabilities is that your brain is wired differently and you receive and process information in a different way. Learning disabilities can make reading, writing, spelling, and math difficult. They can also affect your ability to organize and recall information, to listen and speak, and can impact your short term and long term memory and timing.

The term learning disabilities describes a range of specific learning challenges. Learning disabilities are not problems with learning as a result of vision or hearing problems or learning in a second language. People with learning disabilities usually have average or above average intelligence and yet there is a gap between their achievements and their potential. However, with the right support and interventions, they are able to close that gap and demonstrate their skills.

Examples of Learning Disabilities:

- Dyslexia: Reading disorder
- Dyscalculia: Math disorder





### Resources for Families

Need more information on IDEA, IEPs, or special education? Scan the QR code to access our online resources.



### Partners Resource Network

 Offices in Lubbock, Houston, Austin, El Paso, and Dallas/Fort Worth

 1.800.866.4726

 [info@prntexas.org](mailto:info@prntexas.org)

 [prntexas.org](http://prntexas.org)



- Dysgraphia: Writing disorder
- Dyspraxia: Problems with motor skills
- Dysphasia/Aphasia: Problems with language
- Auditory processing disorder
- Visual processing disorder

## The Effects of LD and ADHD

Learning disabilities are often discovered in school because of problems with academic work. However, their effects go beyond the classroom walls. They can impact family relationships and life at home and at work.

In addition, a LD affects a child's self-esteem. There is a general assumption that if someone is smart, they do well in school. However, this is not necessarily the case for someone who has a LD and ADHD.

A child with LD experiences problems with learning and demonstrating their knowledge in the standard way. In addition, children with ADHD have difficulty behaving as expected. For example, being able to sit still for long periods, pay attention without acting impulsively, or daydreaming. When a child realizes they are not able to do the tasks that other children seem to be doing easily, they can feel isolated and different.

## Getting Diagnosed with ADHD and LD

Having one condition can make it harder to diagnose a second condition. If you already have an ADHD diagnosis, it can be easy to attribute all your challenges to ADHD. In addition, in the same way that ADHD presents itself differently in everyone, so do learning disabilities, which makes recognizing them harder.

Like ADHD, there is a strong genetic component to learning disabilities. If you or your partner have a learning disability, your children may be more likely to have one as well.

Remember, knowledge is power. Learn as much as possible about learning disabilities and ADHD. If you or your child have already been diagnosed with ADHD and are following a treatment plan but still facing challenges, consider there may be another condition present.

## The Importance of Treating Both ADHD and Learning Disabilities

It is important to treat both ADHD and learning disabilities. If your child is on medication to help with their ADHD, their learning disability problems will still persist. Likewise, if they are receiving assistance for their learning disability, they will not get the full benefit of these services if they are struggling with executive functions associated with ADHD.

Neither ADHD nor learning disabilities can be cured. However, that does not mean your child can't have a successful and happy life. There are many successful people with ADHD and learning disabilities.



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