

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES



Here is a brief overview of the what, who, where, when, why & how of learning difficulties – our core work at Learning Links!

WHAT ARE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES?

They are challenges in learning to read, write and work with numbers. There are degrees of learning difficulties from something small that can be improved or even eradicated through to something more pervasive that remains resistant to good quality interventions. Learning difficulties can be called so many different things, here is a brief list of what you may encounter: Learning disabilities, learning difficulties, specific learning difficulties, dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD. This is incredibly confusing for families especially when consulting Dr Google. At Learning Links our psychologists diagnose a specific learning disorder using a criterion set out in a manual known as the DSM5 – this might include dyslexia and dyscalculia and you will have opportunities to explore these terms in later presentations.

WHO HAS LEARNING DIFFICULTIES?

- The DSM5 reports between 5-15% of children have a learning difficulty.
- Boys are 2-3 times more likely to have difficulty learning.
- Between 25-50% of children with a learning difficulty also have another concern such as ADHD.
- This leads to 43.5% of Australian adults who don't have sufficient literacy standards for the workplace

WHERE DO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OCCUR?

Learning difficulties are most prevalent at school where children and adolescents are asked to demonstrate their learning, but will also impact other activities including:

- keeping score in a game
- reading street signs
- filling in application forms
- paying for goods and services

WHEN DO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OCCUR?

A specific learning disorder can't be formally diagnosed until a child starts school and has been taught things. For some diagnoses such as dyslexia and dyscalculia an additional 6 months of intervention is needed. However, there are early indicators before school of a learning difficulty including:

- Family history
- Late or trouble to speak clearly
- Early hearing or vision difficulties

Learning difficulties do become more pronounced with time as children with learning difficulties without help only progress 6 months for each year at school, compared to their peers who are progressing the full year, so although they are only 6 months behind in kindergarten this becomes a 2 year gap in year 3, a 4 year gap in year 7 and a staggering 5 year gap in year 9.

WHY DO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES OCCUR?

There may be many factors which contribute to difficulties learning that can help inform how we may help a child or adolescent. These may include physical, intellectual, sensory and emotional factors inherent to the child. Children don't come to school in a vacuum - they come from families where English may not be their first language, resources may not be available for support or there is stress or trauma in the family. At school ineffective teaching, failure or late identification and inadequate support may also contribute.

HOW DO LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IMPACT?

Children and adolescents with learning difficulties are more likely to have:

- inconsistent & poor grades at school
- act out and show their frustrations
- feel helpless and worthless, often dropping out of school early

This can then lead to a cycle of poverty and disadvantage with poorer physical and mental health, increased alcohol and drug dependency, higher rates of unemployment and incarceration.

Learning difficulties exist for multiple reasons and will impact school and life outcomes for up to 15% of children and adolescents at risk of dire consequences without assistance.

Learning links provides assessments and interventions directly to children in our centres and in schools in addition to training and support for families, teachers and schools to change the trajectory for these children.