

DEFINITION OF A Learning Disability

A learning disability is legally defined under United States Public Law 94-142 (The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975):

Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Functionally, a specific learning disability is characterized by low achievement in relation to potential or aptitude. It is indicated when a severe discrepancy between achievement and cognitive ability is identified in all or some of the following areas of performance:

- oral expression
- visual perception
- listening comprehension
- basic reading skills
- reading comprehension
- written expression
- mathematics computation/calculation
- mathematic reasoning

Characteristics of the Learning Disabled

ORAL EXPRESSIVE PROBLEMS

- difficulty with coherent speech
- poorly organized speech
- omissions, substitutions, deletions, insertions etc.
- incorrect pronunciations

READING/SPELLING PROBLEMS

- difficulty with reading from printed page

- erratic spelling
- problems with following directions
- confused by crowded page of print
- lack of comprehension when reading
- problems with sound-symbol relationships
- tracking difficulties

MATHEMATICS CALCULATIONS

- difficulty with computations
- transposals, reversals, and substitutions
- directional difficulty
- ability to add and multiply, but inability to subtract and divide
- difficulty with grasping mathematical concepts

AUDITORY PERCEPTION PROBLEMS

- difficulty in listening comprehension
- easily distracted
- bothered by background noises
- trouble with following oral directions
- poor attention span
- appears bored and unmotivated
- difficulty repeating and remembering what is heard
- confuses similar sounds

FINE MOTOR PROBLEMS

- difficulty with writing legibly
- small or extra large, cramped handwriting
- difficulties putting together a puzzle

ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS

- difficulty completing work
- confused about time and space—often extra late or early
- mixes up right and left, up and down, yesterday and tomorrow
- slow in task attack, task completion
- appears not to be prepared—lacks pens, notebooks, etc.

VISUAL PERCEPTION PROBLEMS

- difficulty with reversals, transpositions, inversions, substitutions, omissions
- difficulty with figure/ground
- directionality problems □