

Learning Disabilities

Reading disorders or learning disabilities, and specifically dyslexia impact approximately 20% of the population. The NC and SC public school systems have resources in special education to identify individuals with learning disabilities however, procedures and guidelines are such that most children are not identified with learning disorders until 2nd or 3rd grade and in order to be identified their delays must be significantly impacting their educational performance. Therefore, many children with mild delays simply “fall through the cracks” as their mild delays turn into moderate and severe delays without appropriate intervention. Research indicates the children make the greatest gains in learning to read in grades K through 2nd. Research has also shown that if the reading gap is not remediated by the 3rd grade, it is very hard to close. Therefore, it is imperative that professionals in the medical field collaborate with parents and educators to help identify individuals with learning disabilities.

Learning Disability sub-types:

- Dyslexia is a phonological based *reading disorder* which shows in an “unexpected difficulty” with reading tasks such as fluent word recognition, reading decoding, spelling and likely reading comprehension.
- Dyscalculia is a *mathematics disorder* in which functioning in either arithmetic calculation; math concept formation and/or speed of execution are substantially below a student’s expected level for age, ability and educational experience.
- Dysgraphia is a *developmental written expression disorder* in which the complex set of motor skills and information processing skills required to produce writing are delayed in handwriting, spelling and the organization of the written word on paper.
- Nonverbal Learning Disability is not presently a diagnostic condition but rather refers to a syndrome characterized by significant deficits in motor, visual spatial and social skills resulting from an individual’s difficulty interpreting nonverbal information.

Pre-academic/Pre-school Warning Signs of Learning Disabilities:

- Late speech development
- Late development with learning alphabets letters and sounds (late is considered by 5 to 5 ½ years)
- Inconsistent development and learning of the alphabet and sounds
- Poor rhyming skills
- Avoiding drawing/coloring, pre-writing tasks
- Weak fine motor skills
- Late established hand dominance
- Immature or muddled speech (says animal for animal)
- Difficulty with word retrieval (says ummm and thing)
- Advanced vocabulary in comparison to development of reading skills
- Late color recognition

Warning signs for school aged children:

- Oral reading is slow or labored
- Reads with substitutions, adds words or guesses at words
- Poor decoding skills (not able to properly “sound out a word”)
- Poor spelling skills (often individuals with dyslexia will spell words correctly on a spelling test ,but are not able to generalize into other day-to-day writing assignments)
- Poor fine motor skills, handwriting
- Trouble with recall or retrieval of math facts, especially quick retrieval
- Writes or reads letters and/or numbers reversed
- Doesn't enjoy reading and/or writing

Often times teachers do not pick up on signs of learning disabilities until later grades as letter reversals and poor handwriting are often times viewed as developmental concerns. However, if a parent has any concern it is best to at least speak with an Educational Specialist and/or Psychologist to determine the need for evaluation. Early intervention is the key.