

Learning difficulties

What are learning difficulties?

The term 'learning difficulties' is currently used by many people to cover a wide and varied range of difficulties. The following features show how children with learning difficulties may appear in the classroom.

- They grasp new skills and knowledge slowly. It is often helpful for their educational activities to be broken down into smaller steps.
- Their ability to speak and understand language is less efficient than that of other children of the same age. They may have difficulty keeping track of a conversation, especially when topics change. Some children with learning difficulties may not develop language at all.
- They have limited ability to plan and organise their work. They may have difficulties in working out what to do, what to attend to and what to remember.
- The children may have difficulty working out which are the important points or bits of information in lessons and conversations. They have difficulty seeing relationships among ideas, events, objects and so on.
- The children may find it hard to concentrate. They may look or move around more than other children spending less time on the tasks and activities.
- They may be socially immature, acting younger than their age. Their play and interests may also be more typical of younger children.

Professionals recognise that it is difficult to subdivide learning disability into categories confidently. Certainly, the effect of the disability is mild in the case of some children (as in the list above), but others are affected much more markedly. For example, people with the most severe learning difficulties may never learn to speak. It is less important to find a label for an individual's category of disability than to make a good match of the child to school placement and educational support.

Some children with learning difficulties will receive this entitlement satisfactorily in their local schools; others will need special support. The best solution for individual children will be worked out in negotiation among their families, the education authority, the other support agencies and (when possible) the pupils themselves. It is important for teachers and parents to work together, exchange ideas on ways which have worked in helping the child to learn, and support each other's efforts to help the child master new skills.

References

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- Tilstone, C, Lacey, P, Porter, J, & Robertson, C** (1999), *Pupils with learning difficulties in mainstream schools*. London: David Fulton

Please note: Afasic does not hold copies of any referenced material. However, it may be obtained via academic libraries.

Other relevant Glossary Sheets

- Dyslexia/specific learning difficulties (2)
- Developmental language delay/developmental language disorder (3)

Other organisations which can help

ACE (Advisory Centre for Education)

1C Aberdeen Studios
22-24 Highbury Grove
London
N5 2DQ
General Advice Line: 080 800 5793 (2-5 pm only)

Mencap

123 Golden Lane
London
EC1Y 0RT
Tel: 020 7454 0454

Written by Gilbert MacKay and Bob Daines, educational psychologist, with thanks to Elizabeth Auger, specialist language teacher

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Afasic
1st Floor
20 Bowling Green Lane
London EC1R 0BD
Phone 020 7490 9410
Fax 020 7251 2834
Email info@afasic.org.uk
www.afasic.org.uk
Helpline 0845 3 55 55 77



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