Does My Child Have a Learning Disability?

Learning disabilities are usually tested for and diagnosed when a child's achievement in school is significantly below expectations based upon age, educational experience and level of intelligence. Low achievement does not necessarily indicate a learning ability. Below-average academic performance can result from a lack of motivation on the child's part, a lack of educational experience or instruction, or environmental factors such as allergies. Poor hearing or vision often contributes to below-average scores.

During Preschool years:

- Speaking late, often with pronunciation problems
- Slow vocabulary growth
- Difficulty learning numbers, letters, colors and shapes
- Difficulty rhyming words
- Trouble interacting with peers
- Difficulty following directions or routines
- Fine motor skills slower to develop

Elementary School years:

- Inability to remember telephone number by the end of kindergarten
- Confusing basic sight words
- Frequent reading and spelling errors such as letter reversals or substitutions
- Unstable pencil grip
- Transposing number sequences and signs (+, -, /, =)
- Impulsiveness
- Poor coordination
- Difficulty learning letter sounds or learning to write letters and numbers in first grade
- Seeming to learn something one day and soon forgetting it
- Low frustration tolerance (crumpling papers, crying, and not wanting to go to school)

Frustration often results from repeated failure and undermines confidence. These two things undermine motivation and the ability to persevere with challenging problems. Without some success, it's easy for a child to begin to feel that is impossible to learn. By middle school or high school, a young person with learning difficulties can become anxious, discouraged, and depressed. In some cases, the student may choose to act out and display behavioral problems.

Middle School years:

- Confusing a sequence of letters, such as left/felt
- Difficulty interpreting facial expressions or body language
- Poor handwriting
- Difficulty recalling facts
- Social difficulties
- Problems learning spelling strategies
- Avoidance of writing assignments
- Difficulty with analytical skills like word problems
- Fear of reading aloud in class or even at home

High School years:

- Difficulty adjusting to new settings
- Poor memory skills
- Problems with open-ended questions, inferential thinking
- Avoidance of reading and writing assignments
- Misreading information
- Poor grasp of abstract concepts
- Working slowly
- Difficulty summarizing and organizing information—either overlooking important details or getting bogged down in attention to detail
- Spelling problems, such as spelling the same word differently in a single composition.

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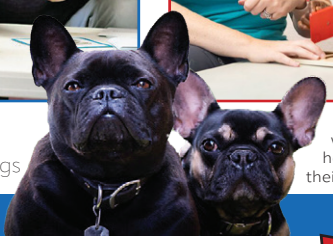

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