

DO I HAVE A LEARNING DISABILITY?



By Michael Abruzzese, MA, MA, PhD., HSPP

Use These Tips To See If YOU (Yes, YOU!) Might Have A Learning Disability (LD).

What Is A "Learning Disability"?

Nobody's perfect – Nope. Nobody. (Or, as the Wizard said in The Wizard Of Oz, "Not Nobody, Not NO-HOW!" He was pretty clear when he meant 'NO!" But just because no person is perfect, that doesn't mean that a person can't be wonderful! Or terrific! Or great! Or smart! Or have a Learning Disability! Or be a great dancer! Or ride a horse! Or be awesome in math! Or reading! Or sports! Or have a Learning Disability! Or love dogs! Or cats! Or....well, you probably get the idea. Nobody's perfect. But even though you and I aren't perfect, we can still be pretty great! ANYBODY can be pretty great! And ANYBODY can have a Learning Disability (LD): Even someone who's wonderful or a great dancer or who loves animals or is great at math or reading. Kids with Learning Disabilities aren't perfect; but they're still pretty great!

In fact. MANY FAMOUS PEOPLE have had Learning Disabilities. Ever hear of Mozart? Many historians believe he had LOTS of problems; but he made pretty great music! How about Einstein? Same thing. (And at age 8, he STILL couldn't read.) But he did some pretty great things with math (yuck!). Or Beethoven? He was hard of hearing and eventually became deaf. Helen Keller? She was born deaf AND blind and couldn't speak because she couldn't hear how words were made – yet she became world famous and was an inspiration to millions EXACTLY because she – with the help of an awesome teacher named Anne Sullivan - OVERCAME her obstacles and learned how to speak AND how to read...AND how to teach, write and inspire millions! Pretty good for a kid with two major Learning Disabilities, huh?

Many MODERN famous people have learning disabilities –also called just plain ol' LD, for short – but they just never talk about it much. No, they don't TALK about their LD; they just OVERCOME it and try to do terrific stuff with their lives. In fact, the National Center for Learning Disabilities lists Quarterback Tim Tebow, Italian Renaissance Man Leonardo da Vinci and Hollywood director Steven Spielberg, to name just a few successful and well-known people, who have LD and USED THEIR LD TO BECOME FAMOUS AND SUCCESSFUL! That's because LD is just a part – a small part – of who they are. And yeah, LD can cause us problems. BUT! LD can ALSO be the inspiration for kids to succeed BIG TIME in music, art, science or business....and LIFE!

LD is like having brown hair or blue eyes or curly hair or a big nose – it's just another part of who we are. BUT even those small parts of who we are can seem REALLY BIG things when we're still in school. Let's face it - kids can be mean and make fun of other kids – A LOT! Sometimes just because kids have.... curly hair. Sometimes because they have blue eyes or brown hair. And sometimes because they have a Learning Disability. And, because kids are afraid they might get teased, LOTS of kids will pretend that they don't have a Learning Disability....but they really do. And because they never tell anyone they have a problem learning stuff at school, or at home, kids with LD can suffer.

And they don't have to suffer.

They should just tell someone who can get help for them....because it can make their academic life – and even the rest of their whole life – a whole lot easier.

We've come a long way in psychology and modern science techniques, such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), Positron Emission Tomography (PET) and lots of other fancy things have continued to show us that MOST of human behavior and communication is LEARNED and controlled by "hidden psychological processes" - which is just a fancy way of saying that we all do things - like remember, think, walk, sing, eat, ride bikes and a lot of other stuff - that we usually don't think about very much. But we learned how to do them, didn't we?

Sometimes it was easy to learn, sometimes it was hard. When it's REALLY hard to learn stuff, it might mean that we have a little problem learning or it's just that we learn things in a different way from other people. When kids – and teenagers and adults, too – have problems learning or just learn things in a different way, then teachers and doctors often notice that and call it a "Learning Disability." It's not as scary or weird as it sounds – usually, it's just a nuisance. Especially if it prevents a kid from making friends or getting good grades on tests!

How Can I Tell If I Have A Learning Disability?

Well, the one sure way to tell if you do is to go to a special doctor called a psychologist and have some special testing done. Don't worry! It's not like you get a test for allergies or a shot for asthma or something like that. These tests are different and are way more like the tests you take at school – but some are A LOT more interesting. And some are A LOT more boring. And it usually takes A LOT more time to do them, so you can go on more than one day. Sometimes you can get them done at school and sometimes you go to the psychologist's office. Some psychologist's offices are really cool and WAY MORE fun than a regular pediatrician's office. But there are other ways to tell, too.

Ask yourself these THREE questions:

How are my grades?

If they are about the same as everyone else's, maybe no problem. Unless you want to do better and can't.

Do I have a hard time getting my work done?

You know this answer BETTER than anyone else does. Is it hard or easy for you to get your work done in school? What about homework? If YOU think it's hard for YOU, then maybe you need some help. After all, it's YOUR schoolwork.

Have I ALWAYS had a hard time, or is this new?

Sometimes schoolwork has always been hard – and we get used to it and don't notice it much any more – but sometimes schoolwork has been really easy and THEN it starts getting hard. That might mean you've bumped into your Learning Disability.

So, how'd you do? If TWO out of THREE questions made you think, maybe you should ask one of your parents to talk to the teacher about it to get the teacher's opinion.

But Wait! There's More!

Kids with learning problems USUALLY – not always, but USUALLY – have trouble in the following areas. And sometimes it can be noticed as early as in pre-K or elementary school. Have you noticed any of the following about yourself? Seriously.....

1. Are you extremely restless and easily distracted?
2. Do you have trouble getting along with other kids your own age?
3. Do you have difficulty following directions or rules?
4. Do you talk a lot? Like, REALLY a lot?
5. Do you miss the point of what your teacher or friends are talking about? Does it happen a lot?
6. Do you get confused with words?
7. Do you make mistakes reading letters that look kind of the same, like d,b,p,q?
8. Do you put other words in when you read thing? Do you leave some words out when you read a sentence?
9. Do you make math mistakes like using the wrong number sequences or arithmetic signs like: +, -, x, =?

If you're in **Middle School**, then sometimes these things start happening:

1. Is it hard to remember facts?
2. Is it hard to learn new things? Do you prefer to just remember what you already know?
3. Do you have difficulty planning your work?
4. Do you have trouble holding your pencil?
5. Did you have trouble learning about time?
6. Are you clumsy – really clumsy?
7. Is it hard to figure out the looks on other kids faces?
8. Do you tell the truth so much it gets you in trouble?

If you're in **High School, College or at Work**...then ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you incorrectly spell the same words over and over, sometimes in the same paragraph or essay?
2. Do you avoid reading and writing tasks?
3. Do you have trouble summarizing articles, books, chapters or presentations?
4. Do you have trouble answering essay questions, organizing information or answering open-ended questions?
5. Do you have difficulty adjusting to new tasks, environments, rules and people?
6. Do you work too slowly? Too quickly?
7. Do you have a tendency to misunderstand questions, directions or information?

Your Turn!

WHEW! As you can see, learning disabilities can affect A LOT of areas. And the list of questions above is only a partial list! That's why you need to consult a professional for help in determining if you have a Learning Disability. If you think **THREE** or more of these problems **DO** describe you, then you should take action now to improve your academic, social (and, later on, work) life.

Talk to a parent, teacher or college advisor and get information about how you can be tested for a Learning Disability. Testing for a Learning Disability is covered by a couple of laws, and schools can't refuse to test kids (but they **CAN** talk you out of it, so stand your ground and know your rights!) Don't just **THINK** about what you've read here so far - **USE THE INFORMATION** here to make your life better. The younger you are, the more you need to rely on a parent to help. And your teacher, too. But first, talk to one of your parents.

TAFN...

That's **All For Now** – wow, isn't that enough? Whenever you're ready for more, check out other articles that interest you or listen to the radio program **MAKE YOUR GRADE** on our web site www.totalschoolsuccess.com. Or send me a question through our website. If you want to know some more people reported to have LD, see the list below.

And don't forget our newsletter, coming to you each week! Until then,

Best Wishes,

DRA+

Michael Abruzzese, Ph.D.

www.totalschoolsuccess.com

A Few Other Pretty Great People...who are reported to just happen to have some learning difficulties:

1. Cher – can't remember phone numbers or balance a check book. (She's a movie star and singer).
2. Thomas Edison – had so many problems, his Mom home schooled him! (He went on to invent the light bulb, among other things. Way to go, Mom!)
3. Frank Woolworth – he was considered a "slow" child. (He went on to invent the modern five and dime store known as Woolworth's.....and made enough money to build what was once known as the fifth tallest building in New York City, when building tall buildings was REALLY hard).
4. Gorge Patton – at age 12, it was said he still couldn't read. (He became a General in World War II and was in charge of the surrender of Japan.)
5. Walt Disney – He doodled in school and his teachers reportedly said he was a slow worker. (He went on to become...well, WALT DISNEY. You know, DisneyWorld?)
6. Tom Cruise – He's someone who DID get tested for LD and was diagnosed as Dyslexic; that means he has trouble reading. (He went on to be a famous actor and movie start.)