

Who is qualified to test your child for a specific learning difficulty (SpLD)? What happens if I choose the wrong person?

By Liz Dunoon



- ✓ An in-school learning support **teacher** or counsellor **with the appropriate postgraduate qualifications**. You need to check qualifications thoroughly. If you require further clarification check with the specific association in your state or territory.
- ✓ A **developmental paediatrician**, however you may need a referral from your family doctor.
- ✓ A **developmental child psychologist**.
- ✓ An **educational neuropsychologist**.
- ✓ An **educational psychologist**. These educational psychologists are sometimes available to assist you through your Government Education Department and school system.
- ✓ **A children's hospital** will often have **a department specifically for children with development or specific learning difficulties/disabilities** where all the appropriate specialists are available. This can include, paediatricians, educational psychologists, social workers, speech therapists, physiotherapists, nurses, teachers and others. These departments often have close links with education authorities meaning you may not need further testing and will receive a comprehensive report covering all aspects of your child's learning difficulty/disability, support services and what you can do to support them effectively.
- ✓ **A private clinic** that specialises in the diagnosis of children's developmental and learning difficulties/disabilities.



What happens if your SpLD assessor is not qualified?

There are many people out there who know a huge amount about SpLD's; how to assess them, how to treat them and how to support individuals with them. BUT... and this is a big 'but' their diagnostic testing methods and subsequent reports must also be recognised by your state or territories education authority in order for your child or student to receive the appropriate educational support and accommodations they may need in the future. If in doubt, please contact your educational authority to check what is accepted in terms of an SpLD assessment.

Choosing the right SpLD assessor

Now this is important. Just because a person is qualified to test for a specific learning difficulty/disability such as dyslexia, it does not automatically make them the best person to assess your particular child. If you have the ability to choose, the importance of finding the right person can be critical for your child, so you need to conduct some research. Not only do they need to have the right qualifications, so you get exactly what you need in the way of an accurate diagnosis, they must also have the right personality to suit you and your child.

If you just don't have this option and are referred to a specialist within your education system, you can still be well informed as to what form the assessment will take, who will conduct it and have a good idea of what you will need to get out of it.

The individual or team who assesses your child must have a proven track record in assessing and diagnosing learning disabilities. They must have a knowledge and background in psychology and education. They must be aware of the latest research, educational and medical advances in SpLD. They must also have knowledge of how individuals learn, an understanding of what it is that causes people to struggle and they must also know how to measure learning difficulties and your child's general intelligence in order to make an accurate diagnosis and recommendations.



Make sure you get...

At the end of the testing process you need a plan of action. More specifically, you need to understand your child or student's learning strengths and weaknesses in detail and have recommendations for specific programs that will utilise their strengths and assist them to overcome their weaknesses. Once you have this, you are well on your way to seeing dramatic changes in your child's educational outcomes and their levels of well-being and self-confidence.

Source: The Learning Differences Handbook (2019)