

Special Educational Needs and Mental Health



Many children may struggle in school with some topics or skills from time to time. When children try hard and still struggle with a specific set of skills over time, it could be a sign of a learning difficulty. Having a learning difficulty means that a child has difficulty in one or more areas of learning, even when overall intelligence or motivation is not affected.

Examples of Specific Learning Difficulties include:

- **Dyslexia** – difficulty with reading
- **Dyscalculia** – difficulty with math
- **Dysgraphia** – difficulty with writing

Children with learning disorders may feel frustrated that they cannot master a subject despite trying hard, and may act out, act helpless, or withdraw. Learning disorders can also be present with emotional or behavioural disorders, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or anxiety. The combination of problems can make it particularly hard for a child to succeed in school. Properly diagnosing each disorder is crucial, so that the child can get the right kind of help for each.

Treatment for learning disorders

Children with learning disorders often need extra help and instruction that are specialised for them. Having a learning disorder can qualify a child for special education services in school. Schools usually do their own testing for learning disorders to see if a child needs intervention. An evaluation by a healthcare professional is needed if there are other concerns about the child's behaviour or emotions. Parents, healthcare providers, and the school can work together to find the right referrals and treatment.

Children with specific learning disabilities are eligible for special education services or accommodations at school.

The role of healthcare providers

Healthcare providers can play an important part in collaborating with schools to help a child with learning disorders or other disabilities get the special services they need by:

1. Identifying children in need of early intervention or special education services.
2. Sharing relevant information with early intervention or school personnel.
3. Meeting with early intervention or school personnel and parents or guardians.
4. Using early intervention or school information in medical diagnostic or treatment plans.
5. Working within an early intervention, school, or school-based health clinic.
6. Working at an administrative level to improve school functioning around children with special needs.



Reference:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov

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