



# — KNOW — LEARNING DISABILITIES

## What are learning disabilities (LD)?

**Learning disabilities** are a condition of the brain that affect a child's ability to either receive, process, store and/or respond to information. Simply put, their brain works differently, because of which they may take longer to learn new information and skills and put them to use.

Children with LD can face challenges in basic skills like reading, writing, spelling, math and also in higher order skills like planning, abstract reasoning, applying information to figure out solutions to problems & in organizing information. Sometimes these challenges may go beyond academics and affect their thinking and problem solving in daily life as well. This is not because they are not trying hard enough or are lazy or have lower intelligence levels. In fact, they are just as capable as everyone else, if not more. Their brains are simply wired differently which impacts how they learn and respond.

Although learning disabilities are present in childhood, they are commonly diagnosed at a school going age. Learning disabilities are a lifelong condition and cannot be 'cured', but it can be worked upon with early identification & early intervention. With the right support & interventions, children with LD can learn to compensate for their areas of challenges and go on to have successful careers and lead fulfilling lives.

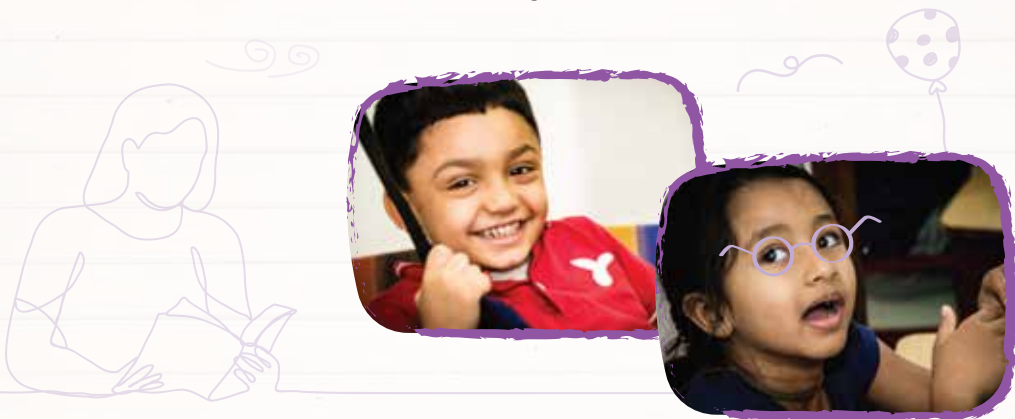
## What are the different types of learning disabilities?

There are multiple kinds of learning disabilities. The most common types are those that impact the areas of reading, math, and written expression:

- **Dyslexia**, perhaps the most commonly known, is primarily used to describe difficulty with reading and/or comprehending what is being read. While some children have difficulty in learning letters, associating sounds with letters, spellings, reading words, sentences, or paragraphs, others may read well but find it difficult to understand what they have read. And still others may have challenge in both reading as well as comprehending.



- **Dyscalculia** describes learning disabilities in math. This may include difficulty with learning number concepts, difficulty in identifying numbers, in counting, doing math calculations and solving word problems.
- **Dysgraphia** describes learning disabilities in writing. It is used for both the physical act of writing and the quality of written expression. This includes handwriting that is hard to read, difficulty with spelling & grammar, missing punctuation, difficulty in organizing thoughts and putting it on paper, making jumbled up sentences, and maintaining proper spacing between words and sentences while writing.



## Do all children who struggle with academics in school have learning disabilities?

Many children struggle with academics at school - sometimes it's because they find a subject boring or their interests lie elsewhere. These are not learning disabilities.

Learning disabilities should also not be confused with difficulties in learning which arise from visual or hearing challenges, intellectual disability, autism, emotional disturbance or due to environmental, cultural, and economic disadvantages.

## What are some signs that might indicate learning disabilities?

Unexpected or low academic achievement without any obvious reasons; problems with learning that don't go away or get better with time are probably the most obvious indicators of possible learning disabilities. Some general signs of learning disabilities that one can watch out at different age groups are:

### Pre-school (3-5 years)

- Difficulty in processing and understanding information presented either visually or auditorily
- Difficulty in remembering concepts being taught
- Difficulty in rhyming words, associating sounds to letters, recognizing letters & numbers, differentiating shapes & colours
- Trouble following directions or routines
- Difficulty with motor skills (e.g. holding a pencil or cutting with scissors)
- Difficulty with social skills (sharing, turn-taking)



### Primary School (6-11 years)

- Difficulty in processing and understanding information presented either visually or auditorily
- Poor handwriting and spelling, Letter reversal while reading & writing
- Difficulty in reading fluency and/or reading comprehension
- Trouble with written expression and errors in grammar and punctuation
- Difficulty in copying from the blackboard
- Difficulty in math – mixing up signs in computations, confusion in understanding the word problems, telling time, memorizing tables
- Difficulty in recalling information and in following instructions
- Difficulty in organization al skills – keeping track of assignments, belongings
- Difficulty in social skills –making friends, reading social cues

### Secondary School (12–18 years)

- Difficulty in reading comprehension, writing essays and advanced math
- Difficulty in summarizing, paraphrasing and inferencing information
- Struggling to keep up with pace of classroom instruction
- Time management and study skills
- Difficulty in social skills – understanding group dynamics



These signs can vary from child to child and on the type of learning disabilities. Please note, presence of signs alone does not necessarily indicate learning disabilities. A professional assessment is necessary to diagnose learning disabilities.





## Who should I contact if my child shows signs of learning disabilities?

Diagnosis of LD is a comprehensive evaluation process involving observation, history taking and testing. Developmental paediatricians are generally the first point of contact. They assess the child by engaging them in a variety of activities, through which they try to understand how they are thinking, processing, and responding to information presented to them. They can then make recommendations for the type of support needed for the child.

A psycho-educational assessment by a qualified professional is also required. It comprises of 2 tests - an intelligence (or IQ) test and an educational test (reading, writing, arithmetic, oral language, and other cognitive processes such as memory, visual processing, sequencing etc). Most children found to have a learning disability have a significant discrepancy in the scores of the two tests, i.e., they have average or above-average intelligence but do not fully demonstrate that potential on achievement tests.

It is critical to speak to all those who are connected to the child, throughout the evaluation process. These could include schoolteachers, tuition teachers, parents, therapists, and the child too, if they are old enough to articulate their thoughts.

The results from all these evaluations are to be considered together to determine whether a learning disability is present and, if so, what type.

**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** often co-occurs in children with learning disabilities. ADHD features can include: marked over-activity, distractibility, and/or impulsivity which in turn can interfere with the child's ability to benefit from instruction. In such a situation, both the learning disability and ADHD need to be supported separately

## Why did my child get LD?

There is no single, specific cause for learning disabilities. Research shows that both genetics as well as physical environment may be predisposing factors.

# I have just received an LD diagnosis for my child. What should I do?

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No parent wants to see their child struggle and it can be tough to face the possibility that your child has a learning challenge. You may wonder what it could mean for your child's future or worry about how they will fare at school.

The important thing to remember is that children with learning disabilities are just as capable as everyone else. They may have difficulties in some areas of learning, but they also have great aptitude, skill, and talent in areas of their interest, which should be recognized, celebrated and strengthened.

A learning disability is not insurmountable. Children with learning disabilities can, and do, succeed. If you approach their learning disabilities with a positive & supportive attitude, your child is likely to embrace your perspective.

## What kind of interventions does my child need?

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A child with learning disabilities will benefit from professional support & services which could involve some or all of the following, depending on the child's specific needs and challenges:

- 1. Special Educators:** They work with the child, parents, and teachers to develop learning goals and outline strategies, accommodations and modifications for school and home that would help address the child's unique needs while considering their preferred learning style.
- 2. Occupational Therapist:** They can help the child improve fine motor skills, sitting tolerance or any sensory challenges that may be causing academic difficulties for the child. They also help in establishing routines and breaking down information into steps which help children in organizing themselves, especially around activities of daily living.
- 3. Tutoring support:** They work with the child one-on-one to reinforce what they are learning in school and provide extra practice and support in areas that they find challenging.
- 4. Counsellor psychologists:** They can provide counselling strategies to support overall well-being and organizational skills and manage stress and anxiety related to learning.

In any intervention that you consider for your child, remember that the goal is to enable the child to help themselves. Keep reinforcing the strategies suggested by the professionals at home and follow the appropriate intervention consistently over the recommended period of time to see impact.

## What support does my child need in school?



Learning Disabilities are included in the 21 disabilities recognized under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, India (2016). A child with LD is entitled to:

- Reasonable accommodations in curriculum and exams depending on what the child needs. The exact accommodations vary from board to board, but typically include additional time for exams, provision for reader/writer, exemption from second language, allowances for spelling errors etc.
- 5% reservation of seats in colleges/institutes of higher education for all students with disabilities including those with learning disabilities.

You have to apply to the board through the school, for availing exam concessions for the 10th and 12th board exams. A Learning Disability certificate\* from government authorised hospitals is mandatory to avail these concessions.

It is good to work closely with the school to share your child's learning needs and suggest some practical strategies for additional support in the classroom, for example:

- Giving one-on-one support
- Breaking down concepts into smaller sections
- Giving time to process information & to complete tasks
- A safe environment for the child to make mistakes
- Assigning a peer buddy to help the child
- Using alternate modes of assessment



\*Get in touch with Ummeed's Social Work or Family Resource Team for further guidance on how to apply for the LD certificate.



## What can I do to help my child?



- **Understand your child's condition:** Children with LD may require extra help and instructions that are specialized for them. Spend time studying and having conversations with your child about what works and what doesn't work for them, as they know themselves the best. This will also help you support them better and share suggestions at school. Besides studies, you may also need to help your child in work skills (organizing, planning, time management), making friends & motor skills. Stay informed about best practices, speak to other similar families, and learn from the professionals who are helping your child.
- **Reinforce learnings at home:** Supplement the learnings from professionals by reinforcing the strategies at home as well. Establish a regular predictable routine at home for studies and reading. Help your child with study at home by breaking tasks into smaller steps, giving breaks, mixing difficult tasks with easy ones. Use positive reinforcement such as praise and rewards to motivate and encourage your child.
- **Work closely with your child's school:** You may have to speak up to get the necessary support for your child at school. Embrace your role as an advocate for your child's needs and establish a positive working relationship with your child's teachers and school staff. Maintain regular communication with teachers and offer solutions more often than raise problems. Share updates about your child and ask the teacher about ways in which you can support your child's learning at home. Make sure you appreciate any good work the school or any teacher does.
- **Stay informed about alternate schooling options** so you can exercise the choice if you need to. Be open about what kind of school will work best for your child and what options are available to you. You may even consider a special school or homeschooling or opting for NIOS board. Ensuring that your child gets the necessary support and an environment in which they feel comfortable should be uppermost while taking a decision about schools, but also consider the child's preferences.
- **Dealing with negative emotions:** Learning differences combined with the challenges of growing up can make your child experience anxiety, low self-esteem, or depression. Acknowledge that it is okay to feel this way and provide outlets for expressing these emotions safely. Celebrate your child's strengths and accomplishments and help them see their LD as a difference and not a limitation. Be open to seeking counselling or any other mental health support which can help your child deal with their emotions and learn about tools to help them work through them.
- **Think life success rather than school success:** Success in life, rather than just at school, depends not on academics but on things like a healthy sense of self, ability to form healthy relationships and determination to keep trying in spite of challenges. Don't fret too much about your child's grades at school, rather work on building social and emotional skills that they need to work through challenges.

- **Take care of yourself:** It's easy to get caught up in what your child needs, while forgetting your own needs. But if you don't look after yourself, you run the risk of burning out. Get sufficient rest, take time to do activities that you enjoy (e.g. listening to music, yoga, chatting with friends, etc.). It's important to tend to your physical and emotional needs so that you're in a healthy space to support your child.
- **Connect with other families:** The most important thing you need to know is that you are not alone. Learning disabilities are not uncommon. There are many other families dealing with similar challenges. They can be a great source of helpful information, advice, and emotional support. Joining a parent support group, especially in the initial stages of your journey, is very beneficial.



## Additional Resources:

Family Resource Center (FRC) at Ummeed is a team of parents of children with disabilities, who are available to offer support to families and guide on available information and resources. Please connect with the FRC team via email: [frc@ummeed.org](mailto:frc@ummeed.org) or phone: 8591850804 :

- If you would like to talk to another parent
- If you need assistance in getting any information/resource/support /advice
- If you would like to join a parent support group that meets once a month (online or offline). We have
- both English and Hindi groups.
- If you would like to stay connected with a community of families and be updated on all Ummeed activities & events.
- If you & your child would like a space for recreation where you can participate in fun activities and socialize with other families of children with disabilities.

## Training Programs at Ummeed:

**RAISE (Rights & Approaches for Inclusive School Experiences)** is a workshop at Ummeed for parents to know the rights in the school space and enable them to build a positive partnership with schools.

Apart from this, Ummeed conducts many training programs for parents of children with disabilities. View on <https://ummeed.org/all-coursesor> ; e-mail [training@ummeed.org](mailto:training@ummeed.org) ; or send a WhatsApp message on 85912 91603 to know more.

### Developmental Disability India (DDI);

Developmental Disabilities India Youtube Channel



<https://youtube.com/@developmentaldisabilitiesindia>

### Suggested online resources:

<https://ummeed.org/resource-library/>  
[www.ldonline.org/](http://www.ldonline.org/)  
<https://ldaamerica.org/about-us>  
<https://www.understood.org/>

### Ummeed Child Development Center

Ground Floor, Mantri Pride 1-B, 1/62, N.M. Joshi Marg, Subhash Nagar, Lower Parel, Mumbai 400 011

Telephone: 022 6248 8100 / 022 2300 2006

<https://ummeed.org/>

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