



# INCLUSIVE 4-H: LEARNING DISABILITIES

---

## WHAT ARE LEARNING DISABILITIES?

A learning disability is a neurological disorder that results from a difference in the way a person's brain works. Learning disabilities affect the brain's ability to store, process, and communicate information. Learning disabilities result in various areas of difficulty including language processing (reading, writing, spelling, and/or speaking), math skills, written expression, reasoning, fine motor skills, interpreting auditory and visual information, recalling, and/or organizing information. Children with learning disabilities are as smart or smarter than their peers, but they struggle to learn. Learning disabilities are a lifelong concern, but with the right support, children with learning disabilities can succeed in school and in careers.

Typical characteristics include, but are not limited to:

### ▪ Reading

- a. Confusion of similar words, difficulty using phonics, problems reading multi-syllable words
- b. Slow reading rate and/or difficulty adjusting reading speed to the reading task
- c. Problems comprehending and retaining material read, but not necessarily with material presented orally

### ▪ Writing

- a. Difficulty with vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and spelling
- b. Minimal planning, effort, and strategy use
- c. Reverses letters and/or numbers

### ▪ Mathematics

- a. Difficulties memorizing number facts and solving word problems
- b. Difficulties with time concepts (before, after, yesterday, tomorrow)
- c. Struggles in solving multi-step problems

### ▪ Socialization, Attention, Behavior

- a. May have low social status, difficulty making friends
- b. May not follow social rules of conversation
- c. Poor memory, short attention span, difficulty following directions
- d. Difficulty with fine and gross motor skills
- e. Has a hard time sequencing thoughts, events, and activities

## DYSLEXIA

There are many types of learning disabilities, but one of the most common is dyslexia. Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability in which a person has trouble understanding written words. Children with dyslexia usually also have difficulties pronouncing words, writing, and spelling. The extent of the effects of dyslexia depends on severity and effectiveness of instruction or remediation. Treatment and special instruction can help people with dyslexia learn to read and write effectively. Some common symptoms of dyslexia include:

- Trouble learning the alphabet and numbers
- Difficulty telling a story in the correct order
- Reads and writes letters in the wrong order or backwards
- Confuses math symbols
- Difficulty organizing and managing time and tasks
- Misreads information
- Reads slowly and inaccurately

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- LD Online: [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)
- Learning Disabilities Association of America: [www.lidaamerica.org](http://www.lidaamerica.org)

*Updated March 2021 by Molly Bull Childers. Reviewed by Mandie Waling, Purdue Disability Resource Center. Adapted from original resources developed by: Patricia Tatman, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Wyoming & Linda Impecoven-Lind, School of Education, Iowa State University.*

## IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Have contact information for parents or guardians and the member's doctor in accessible places. An example of this would be behind the child's nametag and in the medical forms box in the main office at 4-H events. This form should include information such as what kinds of medications the child is taking, allergies, if any adaptive devices are used, and other health conditions. Note: most learning disabilities will not require medical information.
- Visit with the member and his or her parents about the member's learning disability. Example of questions to ask include:
  - a. What support can we provide for you to get the most out of your 4-H project manuals?
  - b. Do you have any concerns with the record keeping process, and if so, what areas are you concerned about?
- Understand that some people may not feel comfortable talking about certain aspects of their condition or disability. Do not force someone to answer questions that make them uncomfortable. Remind them that any information they share is voluntary, confidential, and not required.
- Record keeping and the evaluation of record books is an important part of the 4-H program. However, for someone with a learning disability, accurately and neatly keeping records may be difficult. Allow for modifications such as typing records or having verbal interviews with a member. Try to place more effort on what the member did and learned than on the neatness of the records.
- Avoid having members read aloud if it is known that a member has dyslexia or another learning disability that affects reading.
- Explain and model how to do a task. Some individuals learn better from auditory and visual cues.
- Use more visual cues, handouts, manipulatives, and pictures. If possible, provide handouts in advance, so the child can read at his or her own pace.
- Reword or help decipher confusing written directions.
- Avoid having the child listen and write at the same time.
- Allow extra time to complete a task that may be challenging for the child.

**Visit us at [purdue.ag/inclusive4h](http://purdue.ag/inclusive4h) for more information!**



Extension - 4-H Youth  
Development

