How are learning disabilities diagnosed?

En Español   ☐

Learning disabilities are often identified once a child is in school. The school may use a process called "response to intervention" to help identify children with learning disabilities. Special tests are required to make a diagnosis.

Response to Intervention ⌃

Response to intervention usually involves the following[1]:

- Monitoring all students' progress closely to identify possible learning problems
- Providing children who are having problems with help on different levels, or tiers
- Moving children to tiers that provide increasing support if they do not show sufficient progress

Students who are struggling in school can also have individual evaluations. An evaluation can[2]:

- Identify whether a child has a learning disability
- Determine a child's eligibility under federal law for special education services
- Help develop an individualized education plan (IEP) that outlines help for a child who qualifies for special education services
- Establish benchmarks to measure the child's progress

A full evaluation for a learning disability includes the following[3]:

- A medical exam, including a neurological exam, to rule out other possible causes of the child's difficulties. These might include emotional disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and brain diseases.
- Reviewing the child's developmental, social, and school performance
- A discussion of family history
- Academic and psychological testing

Usually, several specialists work as a team to do the evaluation. The team may include a psychologist, a special education expert, and a speech-language pathologist. Many schools also have reading specialists who can help diagnose a reading disability.[4]

Role of School Psychologists   ⌃

School psychologists are trained in both education and psychology. They can help diagnose students with learning disabilities and help the student and his or her parents and teachers come up with plans to improve learning.[5]

Role of Speech-Language Pathologists   ⌃

All speech-language pathologists are trained to diagnose and treat speech and language disorders. A speech-language pathologist can do a language evaluation and assess the child's ability to organize his or her thoughts and possessions. The speech-language pathologist may evaluate the child's learning skills, such as understanding directions, manipulating sounds, and reading and writing.[6]

Citations

1. National Center for Learning Disabilities. (n.d.). *What is RTI?* Retrieved March 8, 2017, from http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti (http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti) ⬀

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4. Learning Disabilities Association of America. (n.d.). *Eligibility: Determining whether a child is eligible for special education services.* Retrieved March 8, 2017, from https://ldaamerica.org/info/eligibility-determining-whether-a-child-is-eligible-for-special-education-services/ (https://ldaamerica.org/info/eligibility-determining-whether-a-child-is-eligible-for-special-education-services/) ⬀ (PDF 86 KB)

5. National Association of School Psychologists. (n.d.). *Who are school psychologists?* Retrieved March 8, 2017, from http://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/who-are-school-psychologists (http://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/who-are-school-psychologists) ⬀

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