

Learning

Barriers

Learning Difficulties

Rosh Vettveloo gives an overview on learning difficulties and explains why early intervention is crucial.



A learning difficulty can be defined as a discrepancy between a child's ability to learn and actual learning. It is related to the acquisition of reading, language or mathematics but does not involve sensory impairments. The five senses are sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste.

It is estimated that 10 to 15 % of school aged children in America, Australia, Canada and Britain face learning difficulties. In Malaysia, statistics are not yet available.

There are a few ways to measure a learning difficulty from an educational point of view. It is important to identify the three major components

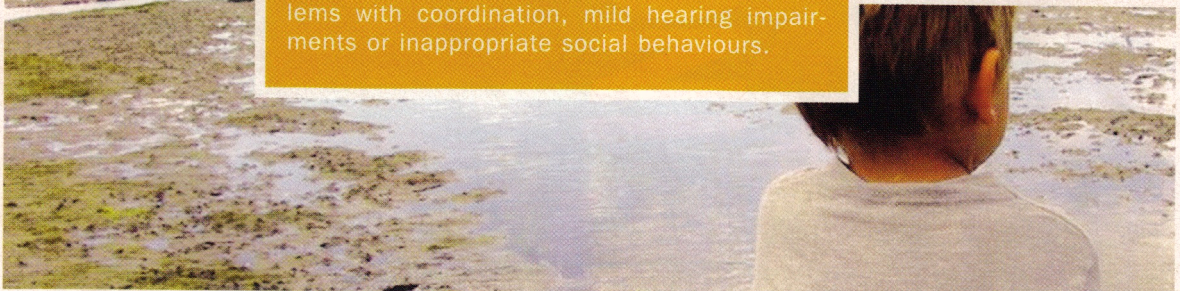
The severity of LD can be categorized into mild, moderate, severe or profound. This measurement will help determine what type of provision will be most beneficial to the child concerned.

The third component of LD is the dimension. The dimension is measured from short term to long term. For example, a child with dyslexia will have a long-term difficulty whereas a child with behaviour difficulty will have a short-term one. Once the behaviour difficulty is addressed the learning will no longer be affected.

Each child is unique and therefore, will require a detailed analysis of the specific difficulties he is facing in order for it to be dealt with. Mild



Mild problems with learning include, amongst other factors, concentration problems, problems with coordination, mild hearing impairments or inappropriate social behaviours.



of a learning difficulty - type, severity and dimension.

The type of learning difficulty can range from general to specific. It can be specific to only one part of language, for example, reading comprehension. A general example would be difficulties with mathematics as a whole.

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Early detection and intervention of a learning difficulty is truly beneficial for the child. This is so because learning difficulties are developmental in nature. The difficulty will

increase with time. As the child gets older, secondary problems will be apparent thus, making it more difficult to establish the primary cause.

Intervention in the early childhood years will benefit both the child and the family. As a child grows older, learning difficulties will be compounded with other problems too. This could include difficulties in social interaction - with peers, teachers and parents. The stress factor will be apparent at this point. All parties will constantly feel frustrated and this can lead to power struggles at home and in school.

For example, at age five, if your child can only sit at the table to do work for no more than three minutes, then he may be having an attention related difficulty. Mild to moderate learning difficulties may include problems with acquiring literacy skills as well.

If at nearly six years old, your child is not able to read simple words such as bus or pen, then, parents should seriously consider this a problem in the making. Assuming your child of the same age is unable to hold a pencil with good pencil grip, this should be attended to as well.

At the above-mentioned age, your child should be able to speak clearly and articulate well. A good yardstick to go by would be if other children and adults find it difficult to understand what your child is saying. Often, as parents, you will automatically learn to understand your child in spite of his unclear speech. This is a common phenomenon.

Remember, it is not enough for only family to comprehend what your child is saying. Effective verbal communication is vital for your child's social development. If left unattended, his over-

all development will be affected in the long term. In addition to that, his self-esteem will take a plunge as he starts going to school.

By the time a child celebrates his sixth birthday, he should be able to recognize his name in its written form, and some other common words.

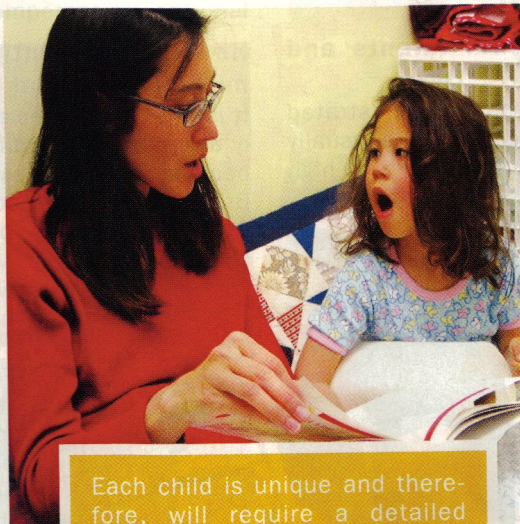
He should be able to read, write and spell. If he is not doing all of this by now, there is definitely signs of a learning difficulty at hand.

For example, the sign of a learning difficulty at this stage is a marked lack of interest with academics. Sometimes it is only a lack in the area of language development and sometimes the difficulty may include other areas such as social and emotional development too. Another common sign is if he does not enjoy playing with other children at all. At school, if he is always bullied and has no friends, you should delve deeper into the problem and find out its root cause.

Parents often have a tendency to brush off such issues. You may feel that your child may outgrow this stage or that the problem will just disappear by itself. It won't. Unless you intervene and act on it, these problems will not just suddenly go

away. In fact, it will only get worse.

Get help as soon as you suspect there is a problem. There is nothing to be ashamed about if your child has a learning difficulty. On the contrary, you should be proud to be taking steps in helping your child overcome his difficulties. It shows that you care about your child and want what's best for him. **P**



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