



# Homework Struggles & Learning Difficulties

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What is a specific  
learning disorder?

And what do we mean  
by executive  
functioning?

# What is a Specific Learning Disorder?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines a “specific learning disability” (SLD) as “a disorder in 1 or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written. The disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.”

In very simple terms, a learning disability results from differences in the way a person's brain has developed such that the child is performing significantly below what is expected of his or her age academically.

# Specific Learning Disorder Diagnosis:



## SLD in Reading:

- Word reading accuracy
- Reading rate or fluency
- Reading comprehension.
- *Dyslexia* is an alternative term used to refer to a pattern of learning difficulties categorized by problems with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding, and poor spelling.

## SLD in Written Expression:

- Spelling
- Grammar and punctuation
- Clarity or organization of written expression

## SLD in Math:

- Number Sense
- Memorizing math facts
- Accurate or fluent calculation
- Accurate math reasoning



# Common Concerns in Preschoolers:



- Speaks later than most children
- Pronunciation or articulation problems
- Slow vocabulary growth and often unable to find the right word when speaking
- Trouble learning numbers, alphabet, days of the week, colors, shapes
- Restless and easily distracted
- Difficulty following directions or routines

# Common Concerns: Grades K-4

- Slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds; weaker phonemic awareness
- Confuses basic words
- Poor self-expression
- Makes consistent reading and spelling errors including letter reversals (*b/d*), inversions (*m/w*), transpositions (*felt/left*), and substitutions (*house/home*)
- Slow completion of work or learning new material
- Difficulty learning new vocabulary
- Transposes number sequences (*851/158*) and confuses arithmetic signs
- Problems understanding basic arithmetic concepts and remembering math facts

# Common Concerns: Grades 5-8

- Reverses letter sequences while reading (*soiled/solid, left/felt*) or places letters or words in incorrect sequence while writing
- Slow to learn prefixes, suffixes, root words, and other spelling strategies
- Avoids reading and writing assignments
- Slow or poor recall of facts
- Problems with grammar
- Leaving words unfinished or omitting them when writing sentences
- Messiness in writing out math problems on paper
- Trouble recognizing logical information sequences
- Trouble with math word problems

# Common Concerns: High School

- Continues to spell incorrectly, frequently spells the same word differently in a single piece of writing
- Avoids reading, writing, or math related tasks
- Trouble summarizing information he/she reads or hears
- Trouble with open-ended questions on tests
- Weak memory skills
- Works slowly
- Poor grasp of abstract concepts
- Either pays too little attention to details or focuses on them too much
- Misreads information
- Trouble writing down thoughts in a logical sequence

# Common Myths:



- ◆ An SLD is a reflection of IQ or how smart one is
- ◆ SLDs are due to poor instruction or support at home/school
- ◆ Children diagnosed with an SLD are lazy
- ◆ An SLD can go away if one works hard enough

# Executive Functioning:



Executive Functioning (EF) is an umbrella term for the neurologically-based skills that involve mental control and self-regulation.

Essentially, these skillsets all have to do with managing and organizing oneself in order to achieve a goal.



# A List of Executive Functions (EF):

- Inhibition
- Cognitive Flexibility (shifting between task demands)
- Emotional Control
- Task Initiation
- Planning and Organization
- Working Memory
- Self-Monitoring



# How might weaknesses in EF impact school performance?

When given a multi-step project or assignment:

- Receive the information to know what your assignment entails
- Remember the assignment, requirements, and due date
- Plan enough time to complete the assignment or project
- Start and complete work in an appropriate order
- Make sure you are aware that you are completing all parts of assignments, without errors or omissions
- Tolerate interruptions and distractions during work
- Bring the assignment back to school on time and hand it in to the right teacher at the right time

# When to seek help?

- Long history of observed problems with marked deterioration as workload increases
- Significant disinterest in school or low motivation
- Need for significant supports to maintain grades
- Inconsistent grades
- Poor attention



# Types of Evaluations:

## Psycho-Educational

- Targets learning and academic achievement. These batteries include a test of cognitive functioning (IQ) and assess math, reading, writing, and language abilities.

## Neuropsychological

- More comprehensive testing that assesses cognitive functioning, academics, detailed analysis of memory, attention, behavior/mood, and executive functioning.

