



Specific Learning Disability (SLD) Fact Sheet



DEFINITION

Specific learning disability (SLD) means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (34 C.F.R. 300.8 (c) (10)).

As specified in W. Va. Code §18-20-10:

1. Dyslexia is an alternative term used to refer to a pattern of learning difficulties characterized by problems with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding and poor spelling abilities.
2. Dyscalculia is an alternative term used to refer to a pattern of learning difficulties characterized by problems with numerical information, learning arithmetic facts and performing accurate or fluent calculations.

DESCRIPTION

- » Specific Learning disabilities vary from person to person. One person with SLD may not have the same kind of learning problems as another person with SLD. Researchers think that learning disabilities are caused by differences in how a person's brain works and how it processes information.
- » Children with specific learning disabilities are not "dumb" or "lazy." Their brains just process information differently.
- » Many people with SLD have average or above-average intelligence, but still struggle to acquire skills that impact their performance in school, at home, in the community, and in the workplace.
- » Specific learning disabilities are lifelong, and the sooner they are recognized and identified, the sooner steps can be taken to overcome the challenges they present.

INCIDENCE

- » Specific learning disability is the largest disability category in West Virginia with nearly 6.5 percent of enrolled students ages 5 (in kindergarten) through 21 identified (*WV October Enrollment SY23*).
- » Approximately 33 percent of students with disabilities ages 5 (in kindergarten) through 21 in WV receive special education services for SLD (*WV December Child Count SY23*).
- » In 2021–22, approximately 7.3 million students in the United States ages 3–21 received special education and/or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) — about 15 percent of all public school students.
 - Among students receiving special education and/or related services, the most common category of disability was specific learning disabilities — about 32 percent (*NCES, 2023*).

POSSIBLE SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

- » Having a really hard time learning the alphabet and letter sounds.
- » Finding reading very difficult, like sounding out words or recognizing common words.
- » Making unusual reading errors (e.g., “big” for “got”)
- » Reading slowly and having to work really hard at it.
- » Not liking to read or not being interested in books.
- » Making spelling mistakes often, even with easy words.
- » Finding it tough to remember things in order, like days of the week or months.
- » Having trouble following directions with more than a few steps.
- » Having messy handwriting and finding it hard to get ideas on paper.
- » Having a really hard time understanding numbers and learning to count.
- » Finding it very difficult to remember math facts (e.g., $2+3=5$, $3-2=1$)
- » Getting confused with numbers and how they look.
- » Mixing up numbers or writing them in the wrong order.
- » Finding math symbols (like + and -) confusing.
- » Having trouble understanding time, like days of the week or telling time on a clock.
- » Taking a very long time to do simple math problems.
- » Finding it tough to see or understand patterns (e.g., shortest to tallest)
- » Problems with understanding math concepts (e.g., less than, greater than)
- » Feeling very worried and not finishing math activities and homework.
- » Having trouble organizing numbers when doing math problems.

TEACHING TIPS AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Remember that each student with SLD is unique, so it’s important to adapt these strategies to fit their individual needs and preferences. Communication between parents, teachers, and the student is key to finding the most effective approaches.

| FOR PARENTS | FOR TEACHERS |
|---|--|
| <p>Create a Supportive Environment: Provide a calm and organized space for studying, free from distractions.</p> <p>Break Tasks into Steps: Help your child break down assignments and tasks into smaller, manageable steps.</p> <p>Encourage Reading: Choose books that match your child’s reading level and interests to promote a positive reading experience.</p> <p>Practice Real-World Math: Incorporate math into daily activities like cooking, shopping, or measuring to make it more relatable.</p> <p>Use Technology: Explore educational apps and software that cater to individual learning needs.</p> <p>Provide Clear Instructions: Use simple, clear instructions, and ask your child to repeat them back to ensure understanding.</p> <p>Celebrate Progress: Recognize and celebrate small achievements to boost your child’s confidence.</p> | <p>Differentiated Instruction: Tailor your teaching methods to cater to various learning styles and strengths.</p> <p>Break Down Lessons: Divide lessons into smaller parts and offer frequent breaks to avoid frustration.</p> <p>Use Multisensory Techniques: Engage multiple senses, such as touch, sight, and sound, to reinforce learning.</p> <p>Highlight Key Information: Emphasize important points using color-coding, underlining, or bold text.</p> <p>Provide Clear Directions: Use simple language and offer step-by-step instructions for tasks and assignments.</p> <p>Encourage Peer Support: Pair students to work collaboratively, encouraging learning from peers.</p> <p>Frequent Check-ins: Regularly check for understanding and offer opportunities for questions and clarifications.</p> |

Learn More about Specific Learning Disabilities

- » WVDE – Specific Learning Disabilities | <https://wvde.us/special-education/resources-sp-page/specific-learning-disabilities/>
- » Understood: What are learning disabilities? | <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/what-are-learning-disabilities>
- » National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) | <https://www.nclld.org/>
- » Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) | <https://ldaamerica.org/>
- » American Speech-Language-Hearing Association: IDEA – Specific Learning Disabilities | <https://www.asha.org/advocacy/idea/04-law-specific-ld/>

