

# Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?

*Take This Self-Test*



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**ADDITUDE**

LIVING WELL WITH **ATTENTION DEFICIT**

ADDitudeMag.com

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# Does Your Child Have a Learning Disability?

## *Take This Self-Test*

*Find out if a learning disability might be causing your child's problems in school—and what you should do if it is.*

NOTE: This test is not intended to diagnose or to replace the care of a health care professional.

**BY LARRY B. SILVER, M.D.**

Thirty to 50 percent of individuals with ADHD have a learning disability (LD). The reverse is also true. Thirty to 50 percent of individuals with LD have ADHD. If a child has been diagnosed with ADHD and continues to struggle academically, even with treatment, he may have an LD.

LD is a neurologically based disorder that results in problems processing and using information. Different children have different patterns of learning strengths and weaknesses; there is no one profile that describes all children. Here is a checklist that will give you clues about whether your child has an LD.

### **Preschool**

- My child has communication problems, such as slow language development or difficulty with speech, and finds it hard to understand what is being said or to communicate his thoughts to friends, teachers, or family.
- My child has poor physical coordination and uneven motor development—delays in learning to sit, walk, color, or to use scissors.
- My child has problems with remembering information, multiple instructions, and routines.
- My child has delays in socialization, including playing with and reacting to other children.

### **Kindergarten to Fourth Grade**

- My child has problems with rapid letter recognition and with learning phonemes (individual units of sound).
- My child has trouble blending sounds and letters to sound out words or recognizing familiar words by sight.
- My child has trouble with reading comprehension, forming letters and numbers, and basic spelling and grammar.
- My child is challenged when it comes to mastering math skills and doing math calculations.
- My child has difficulty remembering facts.
- My child has trouble organizing materials (notebook, binder, papers), information, and/or concepts.
- My child loses work he has done or forgets to turn it in to the teacher.
- My child has trouble understanding oral instructions and difficulty expressing himself verbally.

### **Fifth and Sixth Grades**

- My child is challenged when it comes to reading material independently and retaining what he reads.
- My child has difficulty organizing her thoughts for written work.
- My child has difficulty learning new math concepts and successfully applying them.
- My child finds it hard to stay organized in school and loses personal belongings, papers, and assignments, or forgets to turn them in.

## **Middle School**

- My child has trouble retaining what was read (reading fluency), organizing and writing papers and answers on tests (writing fluency), and mastering more advanced math concepts.
- My child has difficulty with organization, developing learning strategies, and time management.

## **High School**

- My child has increased difficulty with reading assignments, writing papers, and understanding math concepts.
- My child has increased difficulty with organization and time planning as more independent work is expected.

## **What to Do if You Suspect LD**

If you've checked off a majority of the statements for your child's age range, discuss your concerns with the teacher. Most public schools use a three-tier model for evaluating students.

- First, the teacher observes your child. If he or she agrees with your concerns, a special education teacher will observe your child in class.
- Modified teaching strategies may be tried.
- If the special-ed teacher agrees, a formal evaluation should be done to determine if your son or daughter has an LD.

If your child's teacher does not respond to your concerns, speak with the principal. (If your child is in a private school, you are entitled to speak to the principal of the public school your child would have gone to and request help.)

The principal should set up a meeting of school professionals to discuss your child and your concerns. Ideally, this group of professionals will agree and conduct an evaluation, which might initially consist of observation and trial interventions. If the interventions aren't successful, a full battery of testing, called a psycho-educational evaluation, should be done.

You may opt to hire your own professional to do a psycho-educational evaluation. If the results confirm your concerns, this professional should meet with the special-ed team to ask that these findings be considered.

Larry Silver, M.D., is the author of *Dr. Larry Silver's Advice to Parents on AD/HD and The Misunderstood Child: Understanding and Coping with Your Child's Learning Disabilities*. He is also a clinical professor of psychiatry at Georgetown Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

## *Two Sample Letters Requesting an Initial Evaluation for Special Education Services*

### **When would I request an evaluation for special education services?**

If your child has been consistently struggling in school, his or her problems may be due to a disability. If the school thinks your child may have a disability, they will contact you to request your written permission to evaluate your child. You also have the right to ask the school to evaluate your child. The purpose of the evaluation is to see if he or she has a disability and needs special education services. This evaluation is free of charge.

If your child has been identified by your doctor or other professionals as having a disability, you will want to include this information in your letter to the school. You should also provide copies of any reports you have received that explain your child's condition. If you decide to write the school and ask that your child be evaluated, here are two examples of what you can say.

## Sample Letter 1: Requesting an Initial Evaluation

*Today's Date (include month, day, and year)*

*Your Name*

*Street Address*

*City, State, Zip Code*

*Daytime telephone number*

*Name of Principal or Special Education Administrator*

*Name of School*

*Street Address*

*City, State, Zip Code*

Dear *(Principal's or Administrator's name)*,

I am writing to request that my son/daughter, *(child's name)*, be evaluated for special education services. I am worried that *(child's name)* is not doing well in school and believe he/she may need special services in order to learn.

*(Child's name)* is in the ( \_ ) grade at *(name of school)*. *(Teacher's name)* is his/her teacher.

Specifically, I am worried because *(child's name)* does/does not *(give a few direct examples of your child's problems at school)*. We have tried the following to help *(child's name)*: (If you or the school have done anything extra to help your child, briefly state it here).

I understand that I have to give written permission in order for *(child's name)* to be evaluated. Before the evaluation begins, I have some questions about the process that I need to have answered *(list any questions you may have)*.

I would be happy to talk with you about *(child's name)*. You can send me information or call me during the day at *(daytime telephone number)*.

Thank you for your prompt attention to my request.

Sincerely,

*(Your name)*

cc: *your child's principal (if letter is addressed to an administrator)*  
*your child's teacher(s)*

From the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY).  
www.nichcy.org

## **Sample Letter 2: Requesting Evaluation**

*Your Name*  
*Your Street Address*  
*Your City and State*  
*Your Phone Number*  
*Date*

*Principal's Name*  
*School Name*  
*School Address*

Reference: *Student's Name*  
DOB: *Student's date of birth*  
School: *Name of School and enrolled grade*

Dear XXXXXXXX:

I am writing to you because my child is experiencing difficulties in school.

My child is having difficulties with XXX (*provide detailed information on problems, including specifics such as grades, test scores, teacher comments, observations, reports from doctors, etc.*).

For these reasons, I believe that it is crucial for *CHILD'S NAME* to be evaluated. I understand that you will send me an evaluation plan explaining the tests that may be given to my child. Once you receive my approval for the evaluation, would you please let me know when the evaluation will be scheduled?

I would also appreciate any other information you have regarding the evaluation, how eligibility is determined, and the general Individualized Education Program (IEP) process.

If you need more information, please call me at home (your home phone) or at work (your work phone).

Thank you very much for your kind assistance. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

*Your name*  
*Your contact information*

From The National Center for Learning Disabilities, [www.nclld.org](http://www.nclld.org).



## *For more information on learning disabilities:*

- 1.** *ADDitude* magazine, School and Learning Channel:  
[www.additudemag.com/channel/adhd-learning-disabilities/index.html](http://www.additudemag.com/channel/adhd-learning-disabilities/index.html)
- 2.** The website of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry:  
[www.aacap.org/page.ww?name=Children+with+Learning+Disabilities&section=Facts+for+Families](http://www.aacap.org/page/ww?name=Children+with+Learning+Disabilities&section=Facts+for+Families)
- 3.** The National Center for Learning Disabilities:  
[www.ncl.org](http://www.ncl.org)  
or take the “Interactive LD Checklist”:  
[www.ncl.org/learning-disability-resources/checklists-worksheets/interactive-ld-checklist](http://www.ncl.org/learning-disability-resources/checklists-worksheets/interactive-ld-checklist)
- 4.** Learning Disabilities Association of America:  
[www.ldanatl.org](http://www.ldanatl.org)

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