

CS NEWS ARTICLE

Unraveling Minds: Navigating the interconnections and differences of Anxiety, Learning Disabilities, and ADHD for Support and Success

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Anxiety is a normal emotion that everyone experiences from time to time. It's that feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease you might get before a big test, an important presentation, or a life-changing event. However, when anxiety becomes excessive and starts interfering with your daily life, it can become a mental health concern. Anxiety is related to both Learning Disabilities and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). They are different but connected aspects of mental health and thinking abilities. Understanding these connections is crucial for accessing better support.

Anxiety and Learning Disabilities

Learning Disabilities (LD) are conditions that affect how a person acquires, processes, stores, or produces information. People with Learning Disabilities may struggle with reading, writing, and/or math. The emotional needs of these students can be overlooked. Here are a few ways LD and Anxiety connect:

- *Academic Pressure:* Individuals with Learning Disabilities may experience a high amount of anxiety due to challenges with school tasks and the fear of academic failure
- *Social Impact:* Learning Disabilities can also impact social interactions, potentially leading to social anxiety. Students may fear judgment or rejection from their peers.

- *Frustration and Low Self-Esteem*: Repeated struggles with school that accompany LD can lead to frustration and lower self-esteem, creating room for anxiety to develop.

It's important to note that the relationship between Learning Disabilities and anxiety is complicated and varies from person to person. While Learning Disabilities can contribute to anxiety, it's also possible for anxiety to increase learning difficulties.

ADHD and Anxiety

ADHD is a disorder described by patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Individuals with ADHD may struggle with focus, organization, time management, and impulse control. While people with ADHD may have primary difficulties with attention, they can also experience a lot of anxiety. Here are some ways in which ADHD and anxiety connect:

- *Overthinking and Worry*: The challenges of managing ADHD symptoms may lead to overthinking and worry, leading to anxiety.
- *Our thinking brain*: ADHD impacts the ability to plan, organize, and complete tasks, which can be a source of anxiety. These difficulties can lead to a sense of inadequacy and frustration, as individuals may struggle to meet expectations or fulfill their own goals. Over time, these feelings of inadequacy can lead to anxiety, as individuals may fear failure or judgment from others.
- *Peer Relationships*: Social challenges from ADHD may contribute to social anxiety, as individuals may feel overwhelmed in social situations.

It's important to note that the relationship between Learning Disabilities, ADHD, and anxiety is complicated and varies from person to person. While Learning Disabilities and ADHD

can contribute to anxiety, it's also possible for anxiety to increase learning difficulties within Learning Disabilities and ADHD.

On another note, knowing the difference between anxiety, Learning Disabilities, and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is important for targeting the right support. Here are some of the ways they differ:

Nature of the diagnoses

- Learning Disabilities: primarily impacts academic progress in reading, writing, and/or mathematical skills.
- ADHD: primary symptoms involve patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Secondary symptoms involve a weakness in executive functioning, known as a hallmark of ADHD, affecting such areas as organization, time management, and emotional control.
- Anxiety: involves excessive worry, fear, or hesitation, with both physical and mental health symptoms. In many cases, it involves worries about future events, but it can also relate to social situations, separation from family members, or specific fears (phobias).

Academic Challenges

- Learning Disabilities: mainly impact academic achievement in areas such as reading, writing, or mathematics.
- ADHD: academic challenges related to attention, organization, and time management can affect performance across various subjects.

- Anxiety: while anxiety can affect academic performance, its focus is on excessive worry and fear rather than specific learning or attention deficits.

The Thinking Brain

- Learning Disabilities and ADHD: Both may involve challenges with planning, organization, starting and finishing tasks, and attention.
- Anxiety: Anxiety can impair decision-making processes by causing individuals to second-guess themselves or avoid making choices altogether. Fear of making the wrong decision can lead to procrastination and indecision. However, it may not be characterized by the same challenges seen in Learning Disabilities and ADHD.

Onset and Duration

- Learning Disabilities and ADHD: typically identified in childhood, with symptoms continuing into adolescence and adulthood. While there are many ways to support individuals and families, and the impact can lessen as children age and choose areas of passion and strength to work in, these diagnoses are considered to be life-long.
- Anxiety: occurs at any age and may have shorter or longer episodes. Individuals can overcome anxiety overtime with the proper tools and support.

Understanding the complicated relationships between anxiety, Learning Disabilities, and ADHD is important for getting the right supports in place. Recognizing each diagnosis's unique challenges can help provide answers to the different needs of individuals facing these challenges. With the right approach, educators, mental health professionals, and caregivers can collaborate to create environments that foster growth, resilience, and success. While each individual's priorities will differ, here are some of the key ways different supports can be put in place, with a few examples of each:

Learning Disabilities (LD):

1. Educational Help:

- Remedial instruction that matches the specific skills required
- Tools like audiobooks or extra time for tests.

2. Emotional Support:

- A growth mindset is an important support tool for students with LD because it promotes resilience, perseverance, and a belief in one's ability to learn and grow. By practicing a growth mindset, individuals with LD can overcome academic challenges, develop confidence in their abilities, and ultimately achieve success in school and other areas.

3. Personalized School Plan (an IPP):

- A plan that lists what helps the individual in school.

ADHD:

1. Behaviour Strategies:

- Strategies to stay focused and organized.
- Rewards for good behaviour.

2. Medication:

- Sometimes, doctors might prescribe medicine. There are two main types used to treat ADHD, known as stimulants and nonstimulants. Both work by increasing important chemicals, or neurotransmitters, in the brain (dopamine and norepinephrine).

3. Environmental Changes:

- An organized space with fewer distractions.
- Pictures or reminders to help remember things.

Anxiety:

1. Therapeutic support:

- Chat with someone to learn how to handle thoughts and fears. Cognitive Behavioral

Therapy (CBT) is considered the gold-standard treatment for anxiety.

- Gradual steps to face and manage fears.

2. Medication:

- Medicine might be given in some cases. For example, Selective Serotonin Reuptake

Inhibitors (SSRIs) are often used to treat anxiety disorders. They work by increasing the levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter associated with mood regulation in the brain.

3. Relaxation Techniques:

- Breathing exercises or yoga to manage stress.
- Ways to calm down when feeling anxious.

4. Friends and Family Support:

- Build a good support system.
- Share feelings with friends, family, or a counsellor.

It's important to find the best support for individual needs, making sure everyone feels encouraged and capable. Here are a few additional resources:

- Child Mind Institute: Offers resources and articles on various mental health topics, including ADHD, Learning Disabilities, and anxiety. <https://childmind.org/>
- LD Online: Offers information, articles, and resources for parents, teachers, and individuals with Learning Disabilities. <https://www.ldonline.org/>

- Centre for ADHD Awareness (CADDAC): provides resources and support to advance ADHD awareness, education and advocacy for all. <https://caddac.ca/>
- Awareness and Resources for ADHD & LD: understood.org

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