

## **Is my child's Learning Disability lifelong?**

By: Jamie Wilkinson, B.A., M.C., Counselling Practicum Student

### **Short Blurb for Preview of Article**

Your child has just been given a diagnosis of a Learning Disability (LD). Amidst the feelings of confusion and perhaps relief, you probably have a hundred questions about what this means and what to do next. One of those questions may be something similar to *is my child's LD lifelong?* Well, the quick answer is yes, LDs are life-long disorders. But given the appropriate strategies, your child can be successful throughout their life.

### **Definition of LD**

Firstly, it is important to know what the definition of an LD is to understand how it can impact a person's learning. According to the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC), "LDs refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information." It is important to note that they occur in individuals who otherwise have average to above average intelligence (i.e., thinking and reasoning abilities). LDAC outlines how LDs restrict people's ability to acquire and use one or more of the following:

- reading (e.g., decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension);
- oral language (e.g., listening, speaking, understanding);
- written language (e.g., spelling and written expression);
- mathematics (e.g., computation, problem solving);

As a result of these impacted areas, LDs can also interfere with a person's organizational skills, social perception and interaction skills, and ability to take other's perspectives .

### **Is my child's Learning Disability lifelong?**

Yes, LDs are life-long disorders. This is because LDs are linked to differences in the brain's activity or size in certain regions responsible for learning when compared to people without an LD. However, if an individual with an LD is given the appropriate support and strategies to work with their LD—especially at a young age—they can manage their specific learning needs and create a fulfilling life.

### **Assessment and Early Intervention**

To better the success for your child who has an LD, identifying and receiving a comprehensive assessment early on is always recommended. Once an assessment has been completed, you can then put an appropriate intervention plan in place where strategies can be developed to assist your child's learning at home, school, and community settings.

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According to LDAC, interventions need to be appropriate for the specific diagnosed LD, but will generally involve the following:

- specific skill instruction;
- accommodations;
- compensatory strategies; and
- self-advocacy skills.

The strategies that may work for your child will be particular to their specific LD and based on their comfortability.

Of course, the earlier the intervention the better, because of neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to change its neural pathways through learning; the brain can rewire itself to function differently from how it previously functioned in response to our ever-changing environment. Childrens' brains are especially malleable which allows for all learning to occur and shape them into adults. This is why it's so important for children with LDs to have early interventions to support their unique learning needs so they can be successful long-term. Intervening early also reduces the need for more intensive intervention for a person in later years and can prevent a negative impact to their self-esteem with repeated challenges in academics. Ultimately, early intervention is a less costly and highly effective strategy.

### **Remediation to Compensation**

Early intervention for children with LDs also allows for increased remediation of skills as possible. Remediation is about targeting foundational skills your child needs to develop in order to progress to more advanced skills and concepts. For example, remedial approaches could include breaking tasks down into smaller chunks, reteaching skills, and using different teaching approaches that may be a better fit for your child's unique way of learning. Remedial approaches tend to focus on repetition to help develop specific skills.

As your child ages and their learning demands change, they will also need to utilize compensatory measures. Compensation looks at building on your child's strengths and working around their weaknesses. Providing alternative ways for your child to access material such as audiobooks for children with reading challenges or letting a child with writing challenges use text-to-speech software are great examples. Further compensatory strategies could include adapting their learning environment (i.e., specific lighting or

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standing desks), accessing counseling, and self-advocacy coaching to help them reach their full potential.

Keep in mind that using compensatory approaches doesn't mean your child has to stop receiving remedial instruction. Finding the right balance between remediation and compensatory approaches is essential.

### **Reassessment**

As briefly mentioned earlier, a child's learning demands change as they grow and go through their school journey. In turn, the impacts of a person's LD can also change as they develop over time. This is why it is important to receive psychoeducational assessments throughout a person's academic years to ensure they have the most appropriate interventions based on their educational stage and changing learning needs.

Generally, reassessments are recommended every two to three years, but it really depends on the needs of the child. Reassessments can be especially helpful if a child is transitioning between different school stages (i.e., elementary to junior high etc.) or if the child is exhibiting new behaviours at home or at school that create new challenges.

### **Success Stories**

It is important to highlight that with the right support and finding a niche that is meaningful for them, your child can be successful in reaching their goals. There are several notable figures across history and in the present day that have LDs that have been quite successful. For example, Charles Darwin, George Washington, and Leonardo Da Vinci are all suspected to have had varying levels of dyslexia according to historical experts. Agatha Christie—one of the greatest mystery authors—reportedly had dysgraphia. Lastly, Albert Einstein was suspected of having dyscalculia.

### **Summary**

To recap, LDs are permanent disorders that will be present for your child throughout their lifetime. However, with support and the right strategies, your child can manage their unique learning needs and achieve all their desired goals.

**To learn more about LDs, please visit other articles on our website [here](#), or visit the LDAC website [here](#).**

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