

What is a Specific Learning Disorder?

Specific Learning Disorder (SLD) is a classification of learning-related disorders that can affect an individual’s ability to acquire, retain, understand, or apply verbal and/or nonverbal information, despite adequate educational instruction and interventions. Individuals with a specific learning disorder may have neurological impairments that impact Reading, Written Expression, and/or Mathematics.

Specific Learning Disorder with impairment in:

Reading: word reading accuracy, reading rate or fluency, and/or reading comprehension. *Dyslexia* is commonly used to refer to these impairments, as well as decoding and spelling abilities.

Written Expression: spelling accuracy, grammar and punctuation accuracy, and/or clarity or organization of written expression. Commonly referred to as *Dysgraphia*.

Mathematics: number sense, memorization of arithmetic facts, accurate or fluent calculation, and/or accurate math reasoning. Commonly referred to as *Dyscalculia*.

What is the cause of a specific learning disorder?

Low intelligence does not cause a specific learning disorder. Individuals with a specific learning disorder have difficulty acquiring academic skills in a specific domain that are expected for their age, intellectual ability, experience, and education. It results from genetic and/or neurobiological factors that alter underlying neurological processes responsible for learning. This disorder is **not** a result of poor vision/hearing, socio-economic factors, cultural or ethnic differences, lack of motivation, or ineffective teaching.

How is a specific learning disorder diagnosed?

Comprehensive culturally responsive assessment that considers ethnic and linguistic background, experiences, and expected functioning within the community and cultural setting		
WHAT	WHO	WITH
Academic and neuropsychological evaluations of educational progress and learning/information processing	Psychologist	Areas of impairment (Reading, Written Expression, Mathematics) and severity level
HOW: Observations, information from home and school settings, and standardized tests		
NO SINGLE TEST OR QUESTIONNAIRE CAN DIAGNOSE SLD		

Academic evaluations focus on reading, writing, or mathematics skills.

Neuropsychological evaluations include reasoning, learning, memory, visual and auditory processing, listening comprehension, verbal expression, and executive functioning. A specific learning disorder diagnosis must state the particular areas of impairment in the diagnostic statement.

Diagnosis of SLD replaces the terms *Dyslexia*, *Dysgraphia*, and *Dyscalculia* but describe the same disorder.

Adapted from: Child Mind Institute <https://childmind.org/guide/specific-learning-disorder/>
 American Psychiatric Association (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.)
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7082241/>
https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/learn_disabilities/module2.pdf



What is the treatment for a specific learning disorder?

A specific learning disorder is a life-long disability; however, research shows that individuals can benefit from specialized classroom supports and interventions that target areas of impairment. Supports should begin as soon as difficulties with academic tasks emerge, even without an official diagnosis.

How are children and youth with a specific learning disorder supported at school?

<p>Multi-Sensory Methods of Teaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who struggle with learning tasks can benefit from teaching methods that use multiple modalities, such as written and verbal instruction and hands-on activities during learning. See https://bit.ly/3cjGmLW
<p>Differentiated Instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design classroom instruction based on a wide range of student learning preferences, learning styles, and skills and strengths to promote inclusivity. See https://u.org/3rnJg6l
<p>Compensation Versus Skill Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a school team, determine the appropriate balance between providing direct instruction for skill development in the areas of weakness and providing adaptations to compensate for the identified learning struggles.
<p>Assistive Technology</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistive technology can increase student learning efficiency, and improve content learning. The selection of appropriate assistive technologies should be based on student learning needs ranging from low tech (e.g., sticky notes) to high tech (e.g., word processors). See https://www.atselect.org/
<p>Direct Instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students may require explicit instruction that involves modelling the overt steps and cognitive strategies to complete an academic task (e.g., creating visual imagery, paraphrasing, or activating prior knowledge).
<p>Rehearsal and Practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehearsing and practicing new information can create and strengthen neural pathways in the brain essential to the learning process. This process should be deliberate and goal-directed, rather than strictly rote memorization. See https://bit.ly/3riIQOP
<p>Behavioural and Emotional Needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic struggles can lead to feelings of frustration, low self-esteem, or acting out. Behavioural and emotional supports should also be included in student daily routines. See https://bit.ly/3IU1vB