

Learning Disabilities Information Guide

What Is a Learning Disability?

According to the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO), learning disabilities are lifelong challenges that affect how a person learns and processes information in one or more areas (like language, visual information, or memory). These processing differences, which make it harder to learn reading, writing, or math, are caused by variations in how the brain develops and works, not by poor teaching, parenting, or lack of effort. Learning disabilities can be present from birth or may become noticeable as a child grows. They can vary widely from person to person in terms of severity. Between 5 and 10 percent of Canadians have LDs. Having a Learning Disability doesn't mean a person isn't smart or they can't learn. They just learn differently and may need different teaching approaches.

How are Learning Disabilities Defined?

The DSM-5-TR is a manual used by certain regulated health professionals that lists the official symptoms and criteria for diagnosis. It calls them Specific Learning Disorders and includes:

Dyslexia: difficulties in reading like trouble connecting letters to sounds, understanding words, slow reading, letter mix-ups (b/d, p/q), and avoidance of reading.

Dysgraphia: difficulties in writing like trouble organizing thoughts, messy writing, slow output, and avoidance of writing.

Dyscalculia: difficulties in math like struggles with number sense and math concepts, trouble with basic facts, money/time, and word problems.

TDSB Approach

At the TDSB, professionals generally use the LDAO definition. This focuses on processing skills such as language, phonological awareness, fluid reasoning, visual-spatial understanding, memory, processing speed, visual-motor integration, attention, and executive functions and how they impact achievement in school as well as other areas like emotional and social well-being.

Supporting Diverse Learners

People learn differently! Here are some ways to support diverse learners:

- Talk about differences
(<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/how-to-talk-to-your-child-about-learning-and-thinking-differences>)
- Use interests and role models
(<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/at-the-heart-of-it-30-personal-stories-about-learning-and-thinking-differences>)
- Know what's being taught (<https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en>)
- Cook, read signs, and play games
(<https://www.weareteachers.com/everyday-activities-that-count-as-learning/>)
- Learn through games and tutoring (PBS Kids: <https://pbskids.org> & TVO Mathify: <https://www.tvomathify.com>)
Add structure to learning
(<https://www.ldathome.ca/surviving-homework-an-overview/>)
- Praise effort!
(<https://sites.google.com/mindsetworks.com/mindsetworks/home>)
- Build social skills (<https://www.ldathome.ca/what-are-lds/social-skills-lds/>)
- Traits like kindness matter!
(<https://www.ldonline.org/ld-topics/self-esteem-stress-management/success-attributes-among-individuals-learning-disabilities>)

Supports and resources available include:

- The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (<https://www.ldao.ca>)
- Child Development Institute (<https://www.childdevelop.ca>)
- Free math tutoring via TVO Mathify for Grades 4+
(<https://www.tvomathify.com>)
- TDSB Psychological Services
(<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/SupportServices/Psychological-Services>)

Want To Learn More?

Watch:

- An Introduction to Learning Disabilities
(<https://ldaamerica.org/introduction-to-learning-disabilities/>)
- What It's Like To Have A Learning Disability
(<https://ldaamerica.org/what-its-like-to-have-a-learning-disability/>)

Listen:

- Hear About The Joys & Frustrations Of Supporting Kids Who Learn & Think Differently (<https://www.understood.org/podcast/in-it>)

- The Learning Disabilities Association of America podcast
(<https://ldaamerica.org/podcast/>)

Read/Learn:

- Learn More About Learning Disabilities & Mental Health
(<https://www.ldatschool.ca/learning-disabilities-and-mental-health/>)
- Learning Disability Myths
(<https://www.ldac-acta.ca/causes/for-professionals/>)