

Terms You Will Hear

If you're new to the field of learning disabilities, you will be coming across a great many new terms and acronyms. This sheet is written to help you navigate those terms.

You should also know that these terms do change over time; this is common to all fields, but especially true in newer fields, when concepts are named and refined as our understanding deepens. You will notice, if you research a number of different sites, books or articles, that different terms describe similar or identical disabilities, and the same term can mean different things, depending on the country of origin.

ADHD – (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) ADHD often affects people who have LDs, and is beginning to be seen as a type of LD itself. It is also a term that changes very frequently, mostly because there are two distinct subcategories: one sort of ADHD includes hyperactivity, and the other does not. ADHD generally interferes with attention span, impulse control, and (sometimes) hyperactivity.

Auditory Processing – the way we understand information we hear. LDs affecting this process can affect the accuracy of what's heard, memory of what's heard, organization of what's heard, or figure-ground discrimination of sounds.

Cognitive – another way of talking about intelligence. Cognition means thinking.

Dysgraphia – learning disabilities that affect written expression.

Dyscalculia – learning disabilities that affect mathematics

Dyslexia – learning disabilities that affect language. Commonly misunderstood to be a condition that causes letters to appear backwards and upside down, but in reality much more complicated. The bottom line of dyslexia is now thought to be a problem with the sounds in words (phonological awareness).

Executive functions – the skills need to plan, manage, and evaluate things in everyday life as well as school and work.

Expressive / Receptive – refer to transmitting or receiving information.

Fine-motor/Gross-motor control – the ability to accurately use either fine-motor or gross-motor muscle control. Fine-motor muscle control refers to small muscles doing small things – threading a needle, holding a pen. Gross-motor muscle control are large – like dancing or jumping.

Figure-Ground Discrimination – this can refer to visual or auditory information, and describes the ability to distinguish important details from surrounding information. An example of visual figure-ground discrimination would be being able to see the words on a page and ignore a background design. Auditorily, it would be being able to pay attention to a lecture and ignore the sounds of rustling paper and people whispering.

Impulsivity – people with poor impulse control do not always think before they act, or consider the consequences of actions.

Memory (Long-Term) – memory that stores information for later use. For example, the phone number of your best friend or a family member that you have memorized is stored in your long-term memory.

Memory (Short-Term) – memory that holds information briefly while you use it.

For example, when you read a phone number and then dial it, the number is held in your short-term memory.

Memory (Working) – memory that holds an idea while you are using it - for example, your working memory holds a formula when you are working on a math problem.

Multisensory Teaching - using many senses (visual/auditory, kinesthetic-tactile) and pathways in the brain simultaneously in order to enhance memory and learning.

Nonverbal LDs – learning disabilities that affect all learning not related to language, including social skills and physical coordination. Also called NLDs or NVLDs.

Organizational Problems – can include problems with managing time, organizing tasks, and organizing space.

Processing Speed – how quickly or slowly a person is able to use, take in, or bring out information. It is not related to cognitive ability – just to speed and fluency.

Phonemic Awareness/Phonological Awareness – the ability to recognize the distinct sounds in words, which is required for further language development.

Social perception – the ability to interpret social situations, for example by ‘reading’ facial expressions, tone of voice, body language and other verbal and nonverbal cues. Individuals who have trouble using social perceptions to guide their behaviour may have social skills difficulties.

Social Skills – the skills we use in society to get along socially. For example, we learn when it is appropriate to interrupt a conversation, and how close to stand to people when we're chatting. Some LDs interfere with learning these rules, which causes social struggles – loneliness, conflict, awkwardness, etc. **Visual-Motor Integration** – the coordination of visual information with motor processes.

Visual Processing – the way we understand information from our eyes. LDs affecting this can affect the accuracy of what's seen, memory of what's seen, understand what's seen, or figure-ground discrimination. **Visual Tracking** – the way we follow a line of text on a page - can also be affected.

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