

## UNDERSTANDING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

The term 'learning difficulty' describes a child who may have trouble learning for many different reasons. It may be the result of difficulties or traits that a child is born with (student-related causes) or due to social or environmental factors.

### Student-related causes of learning difficulties

- Sensory impairments. This is when a child has difficulty seeing, hearing, or using their other senses
- Behavioural and attentional causes. Some children may be disruptive or be easily distracted. This impacts their ability to learn.
- Delayed development. Some children learn concepts and pick up basic skills more slowly than others due to delayed development.
- Social-emotional causes. This is when a child finds it difficult to manage their emotions and engage in positive ways with their teacher or peers. Children with these difficulties may not have effective coping strategies when dealing with stress.
- Specific differences in the brain that affect an individual's ability to process information. For example, short-term memory.

### Social and environmental causes

- A history of disrupted learning. This could be due to ongoing health issues, extended or regular absences, or family issues including relocating.
- Individual and/or family trauma.
- Limited exposure to early language and literacy.
- A family history of specific learning disabilities (for example, dyslexia).

These two types of causes are not always separate. Student-related causes can often interact or occur with social and environmental causes and contribute to a child's learning difficulty.

### The difference between a learning difficulty and a learning disability

Learning difficulties can be caused by many things, such as a history of interrupted learning, health issues, or absence. This can lead to a delay in a child's progress at school. When provided with extra support and targeted instruction, children with these types of learning difficulties are likely to improve quickly.

Specific learning disabilities like dyslexia are a category of learning difficulty that are caused by differences in the brain. Because of this, children with learning disabilities often find activities like reading or doing simple sums challenging.

Even with extra support and targeted instruction, these problems are likely to continue throughout their lives, which may not be the case with other types of learning difficulties. Children with learning disabilities also tend to respond more slowly to targeted intervention.

Learning disabilities are lifelong and can affect all types of children, regardless of background, school environment, or socioeconomic status.

Children with learning difficulties may enjoy or find learning in other areas outside of school easier. For example, they might know about animals and how to take care of pets, how to fix things, play sport or music, or even video games, skilfully.

There are ways that you and your child's teacher can support them in their learning. All children, regardless of whether they have learning difficulties or not, have the potential to thrive and be happy at school.

### Support and advice about learning difficulties

If your child has learning difficulties, there are support organisations and services to help you and your family. You can also talk to your school about other supports that may be available.

- Learning Difficulties Australia ([www.ldaustralia.org/](http://www.ldaustralia.org/)) – provides information, advice and advocacy services.
- SPELD ([www.speldvic.org.au/](http://www.speldvic.org.au/)) – provides information, advice and advocacy services related to learning difficulties.
- Association for Children with a Disability ([www.acd.org.au](http://www.acd.org.au)) – helps families find support and advocacy services.
- Better Health Channel ([www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)) – health and medical information in Victoria.
- Parents Victoria ([parentsvictoria.asn.au/](http://parentsvictoria.asn.au/)) – provides information and advice for parents.
- Raising Children Network ([raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au)) – information and advice for parents in Australia.

Reference: Victorian Department of Education: [www.vic.gov.au/understanding-learning-difficulties](http://www.vic.gov.au/understanding-learning-difficulties)