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IDENTIFYING LEARNING PROBLEMS

Children with learning problems find it difficult to read and spell, despite extra support in the afternoons. They may experience difficulties with language (speaking, reading and writing) and / or mathematical calculations. Even gifted learners may have learning problems.

WHAT ARE SIGNS OF A LEARNING PROBLEM?

- Children with a learning problem may find letters confusing and may reverse letters like b and d.
- They experience difficulty in indentifying letter sounds in words they hear and may not know when to use f or v in a word.
- They often omit words or a syllable in a word when reading or they may exchange one word for another.
- Children with a learning problem may reverse letters: *was* for *saw*.
- Children with a learning problem may want to write with left and right hands without crossing the midline of their body. They confuse right and left and may try to read or write from the wrong direction.
- They may exhibit difficulty with attention and / hyperactivity.
- Poor memory skills may cause difficulty when they have to remember more than one instruction.
- Children with learning problems may have difficulty planning and organizing events and find it hard to perform different tasks in a specific order.
- Children with learning problems may make poor decisions and exhibit difficulties when they have to solve a problem.
- These children may find it difficult to learn new words and their vocabulary may be limited. They may struggle to pronounce words correctly which make it difficult for others to understand them.
- Their work progress tends to be slow and they don't finish work on time. Poor motor coordination and spatial relation skills may cause paper work to be untidy and illegible.
- Children with learning problems find it hard to predict the consequences of their behaviour. They may have difficulty regulating their own feelings and behaviour regarding the way they perceive the actions of other people. It impacts on the way they relate to other people. They don't always realize when others are sincere, sarcastic or deceptive.

WHAT IF I SUSPECT A LEARNING PROBLEM?

A psychologist may do a scholastic evaluation to determine the kind of learning problem. She may also contact parents and teachers and give practical guidance. A speech therapist or occupational therapist or remedial teacher may also be involved as part of a multi-professional team. Recommendations can be made concerning the correct school placement for the specific child, classroom management, homework, and help during exams. Usually the psychologist uses a holistic approach that takes into account all aspects of the specific child's life, e.g. family life, physical-, emotional-, and social- wellbeing. Children with learning problems are sometimes bullied by other children and the psychologist may assist the child, peers and even the teacher in this regard.

SOURCE USED:

DEDNAM, A. 2005. Learning impairment. (In: Addressing Barriers to Learning: A South-African Perspective. Ed. Emmerentia Landsberg. p. 363-379).