



National
Center for
Learning
Disabilities

LD CHECKLIST: RECOGNIZE AND RESPOND

Most people have challenges with learning and behavior from time to time. During a child’s preschool years and throughout the school years, parents and educators should be on the alert for consistent and/or persistent patterns of difficulty that may signal an underlying learning disability (LD). While variations in the course of development are to be expected, unevenness or lags in the mastery of skills and behaviors, even in children as young as 4 or 5, should not be ignored. And because LD can co-occur with other disorders, it’s important to keep careful and complete records of observations and impressions. These can be shared among parents, educators, and related service providers to help them make important decisions about services and supports.

LD—sometimes called specific learning disability or specific learning disorder—is a term that describes a group of disorders that impact listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, math, and social skills. Remember: LDs don’t go away! An LD isn’t outgrown or “cured” by medication, therapy, or expert tutoring.

Although LDs are lifelong, they’re not a prescription for failure. Effective instruction and accommodations can minimize learning challenges, maximize strengths, and optimize student potential in academic settings. Early recognition of warning signs, well-targeted screening and assessment, effective intervention, and ongoing monitoring of progress are critical to helping individuals with LDs to succeed in school, in the workplace, and in life.

This checklist is designed as a tool to understand potential signs of LDs, not to diagnose LDs. The more characteristics you check, the more likely the individual described is at risk for (or shows signs of) LDs.

When filling out this checklist, think about the person’s behavior over at least the past six months. And when you’re done, if you have questions or concerns, seek assistance from school personnel or other professionals who can help determine whether a comprehensive evaluation is needed.

Gross and Fine Motor Skills				
	Preschool	Grades K-4	Grades 5-8	High School & Adult
Appears awkward and clumsy by dropping or spilling things, or knocking them over	X	X		
Has limited success with games and activities that demand changes in body position and/or hand-eye coordination		X	X	X
Has trouble with buttons, hooks, snaps, zippers, and/or learning to tie shoes	X	X		
Has trouble copying and drawing shapes and simple figures and creates artwork that lacks detail and seems immature for age	X	X		
Demonstrates poor ability to color or write "within the lines"	X	X		
Grasps pencil awkwardly, resulting in poor handwriting or trouble using utensils	X	X	X	X
Experiences difficulty using small objects or items that demand precision (e.g., Legos, puzzle pieces, tweezers, scissors)	X	X		
Language				
Demonstrates early delays in learning to speak	X			
Has difficulty modulating voice (e.g., too soft, too loud)	X	X	X	
Has trouble naming people or objects in conversation	X	X		
Has difficulty staying on topic	X	X	X	X
Inserts invented words into conversation	X	X	X	
Has difficulty retelling what has just been said and engaging in long conversations	X	X	X	
Uses vague, imprecise language and has a limited vocabulary	X	X	X	X

Language (Continued)				
	Preschool	Grades K-4	Grades 5-8	High School & Adult
Demonstrates slow and halting speech, using lots of fillers (e.g., uh, um, and, you know, so)	X	X	X	X
Uses poor grammar or misuses words in conversation (note: take into account regional and cultural factors)		X	X	X
Mispronounces words frequently	X	X	X	X
Confuses words with others that sound similar		X	X	X
Inserts malapropisms (“slips of the tongue”) into conversation (e.g., a rolling stone gathers no moths; he was a man of great statue)	X	X	X	X
Has difficulty rhyming	X	X		
Has limited interest in books or stories	X	X	X	X
Has difficulty understanding instructions or directions	X	X	X	X
Has trouble understanding idioms, proverbs, colloquialisms, humor, and/or puns (note: take into account regional and cultural factors)		X	X	X
Has difficulty with pragmatic skills (e.g., understanding the relationship between speaker and listener, staying on topic, gauging the listener’s degree of knowledge, making inferences based on a speaker’s verbal and nonverbal cues)		X	X	X

Reading				
	Preschool	Grades K-4	Grades 5-8	High School & Adult
Has difficulty recognizing the small units of sounds (phonemes) in spoken words	X	X	X	
Has difficulty tapping or clapping out the syllables in words	X	X		X
Has problems connecting letters to the sounds they make	X	X		
Has trouble blending sounds together to make words	X	X		
Has difficulty recognizing and remembering common "sight words"		X	X	
Has trouble naming letters (e.g., confuses similar looking letters and numbers)	X	X		
Confuses similar-looking words (e.g., beard/bread) while reading		X	X	X
Reverses letter order in words (e.g., saw/was) while reading and writing		X	X	
Needs to sound out words already encountered in printed text	X	X	X	X
Has weak comprehension of ideas/themes		X	X	X
Guesses at unfamiliar words rather than using word analysis skills		X	X	X
Reads slowly, with great effort and poor intonation		X	X	X
Substitutes and/or leaves out words while reading		X		
Has poor retention of new vocabulary	X	X	X	X
Dislikes and/or avoids learning letters or reading		X	X	X

Written Language				
	Preschool	Grades K-4	Grades 5-8	High School & Adult
Dislikes and avoids writing and copying	X	X	X	X
Demonstrates delays in learning to copy and write	X	X		
Has messy and incomplete writing, with many cross-outs and erasures		X	X	X
Has difficulty remembering shapes of letters and numerals	X	X		
Frequently reverses or misdraws letters, numbers, and symbols	X	X		
Uses uneven spacing between letters and words, and has trouble staying "on the line"		X	X	X
Copies inaccurately (e.g., confuses similar-looking letters and numbers)		X	X	X
Spells poorly and inconsistently (e.g., the same word appears differently other places in the same document)		X	X	X
Has difficulty proofreading and self-correcting written or printed work		X	X	X
Fails to develop ideas in writing (e.g., written work is incomplete, too brief or disorganized)			X	X
Attention				
Fails to pay close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities			X	X
Has difficulty sustaining attention in play activities and work tasks	X	X	X	X
Does not appear to listen when spoken to directly		X	X	X
Does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace		X	X	X

Attention (Continued)				
	Preschool	Grades K-4	Grades 5-8	High School & Adult
Has difficulty organizing tasks and activities		X	X	X
Avoids, dislikes, and/or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort (e.g., homework, organizing work tasks)	X	X	X	X
Consistently loses things that are necessary for tasks/activities (e.g., toys, school assignments, pencils, books, or tools)		X	X	X
Is easily distracted by sounds, motion, or other stimuli		X	X	X
Is forgetful in daily/routine activities		X	X	X
Math				
Has difficulty with simple counting and one-to-one correspondence between number symbols and objects	X	X		
Has difficulty recognizing quantities without counting	X	X	X	X
Has difficulty learning to calculate and memorize basic addition, subtraction, and multiplication facts		X	X	X
Has difficulty learning and performing strategic counting activities (e.g., by 2, 5, 10, 100)		X	X	X
Has trouble positioning numbers in the correct places (e.g., one on top of the other), resulting in computation errors		X	X	X
Has difficulty estimating (e.g., quantity, value)	X	X	X	X
Has difficulty with comparisons (e.g., less than, greater than)	X	X	X	X
Has trouble telling time (on either a digital or analog clock)	X	X	X	
Has trouble learning and applying formulas and rules for calculation and problem solving			X	X
Has trouble reading and interpreting graphs and charts			X	X

Social/Emotional				
	Preschool	Grades K-4	Grades 5-8	High School & Adult
Does not pick up on other people's moods/feelings (e.g., may say the wrong thing at the wrong time)		X	X	X
May not detect or respond appropriately to teasing		X	X	X
Has difficulty "joining in" and maintaining positive social status in a peer group	X	X	X	X
Has trouble knowing how to share/express feelings			X	X
Has difficulty with self-control when frustrated	X	X		
Has difficulty dealing with group pressure, embarrassment, and unexpected challenges		X	X	X
Has trouble setting realistic social goals			X	X
Has trouble evaluating personal social strengths and challenges			X	X
Has doubts about abilities and is prone to attribute successes to luck or outside influences rather than hard work			X	X
Other				
Confuses left and right		X	X	X
Has a poor sense of direction; is slow to learn the way around a new place; is easily lost or confused in unfamiliar surroundings		X	X	X
Finds it hard to judge speed and distance (e.g., playing sports, driving a car)	X	X	X	X
Has trouble reading maps			X	X
Is disorganized and poor at planning			X	X

Other (Continued)				
	Preschool	Grades K-4	Grades 5-8	High School & Adult
Often loses things		X	X	X
Is slow to learn new games and master puzzles			X	X
Has difficulty listening and taking notes at the same time		X	X	X
Performs inconsistently on tasks from one day to the next			X	X
Has difficulty generalizing (applying) skills from one situation to another		X	X	X

MORE RESOURCES

This printable checklist is just one of a series of resources that NCLD created as part of The LD Checklist: Recognize and Respond tool. This includes:

- **[The LD Checklist: Recognize and Respond](#)**: This interactive tool builds upon the most recent research so parents and other caregivers can determine whether a child is at risk for, or shows signs of, having learning disabilities. The more characteristics checked, the more important it is to seek clarification about the presence of underlying learning disabilities.
- **[The Importance of Early Screening](#)**: This resource provides information on what a screening is and why screening for learning difficulties is important.
- **[Parent Guide: Questions to Ask Pediatricians If Your Child Is Struggling](#)**
- **[Parent Guide: Questions to Ask Educators If Your Child Is Struggling](#)**
- **[Resources From Our Partners](#)**: In collaboration with researchers, neuroscientists, and other experts, we've created a collection of high-quality resources that is easy to use and helpful to a range of care providers.

To access all of the resources, visit www.nclld.org/LDChecklist.

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For more information, visit www.nclld.org or contact NCLD via email: info@nclld.org

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