

How early can my child be assessed for a learning disability?



Generally, LDA does not assess young children (less than 8 years of age) for the purpose of diagnosing a disability, but rather to assess children's academic strengths and weaknesses. A profile of a child's academic strengths and weaknesses helps parents and teachers take preventative measures by implementing proven interventions, without the necessity of determining a disability. Using this approach, we can account for varying levels of development, provide interventions, and document for future consideration any manifestations of a disability that we may observe.

The most common predictors of a learning disability include but are not limited to:

- Family history of learning problems or learning disabilities.
- Difficulty in matching letters with their sounds despite extensive exposure.
- Difficulty sounding out words despite multiple exposures and practice.
- Poorly formed letters, difficulty in remembering how to form letters, or extensive time needed to write a letter despite extensive practice.
- Difficulty in learning to tell time or understanding the concept of space and where one's body is within a given space beyond what is developmentally acceptable.

LDA does not recommend diagnosing children less than eight years of age.

There are several reasons:

- LDA's goal is to provide data to parents and educators that can be used to implement an effective curriculum for the child who is experiencing academic difficulty. When there are early signs of a learning difficulty, the most important step a parent can take is expose the child to systematic, intensive, and proven instruction. Often this can be done without a formal diagnosis. We believe that a diagnosis of a disability should be reserved for accessing special education services.
- Caution needs to be exercised when assessing academic readiness because the amount of formal academic exposure varies significantly in this age group. For example, some children attend early childhood, preschool, and kindergarten classes, other children attend only kindergarten, and for some children, first grade is their initial experience in a formal school setting. Parents and teachers sometimes have not had enough time to observe the child in a classroom setting before referral for assessment takes place.
- Because children mature at different rates, parents and teachers need to observe how the child performs relative to their peer group and determine if the learning difficulty is outside the bounds of developmentally expected ranges.
- The standardized instruments that LDA uses for determining achievement and intellectual levels are not precise at very young ages, a definitive diagnosis must include attendance and academic historical records.

If I suspect my child has a learning difficulty, what should I do?



LDA has developed an early reading profile (ERP) that will help to indicate whether young children ages 5 to 9 are at risk for future reading difficulties. The purpose of the ERP is to determine your child's reading strengths and weaknesses. It is intended to guide instruction and/or tutoring in the area of reading. The ERP is not intended to be used as a diagnostic assessment for determining special education assessment. Our team will assist you in learning what to do to help your child learn to read. If your child's problem is not in the area of reading, you may wish to consult with a specialist in the area you are most concerned with. For example, a child who is having difficulty in understanding language or expressing him/herself should be seen by a speech pathologist. A child who is having difficulty with motor coordination should be seen by an occupational therapist.

Where can I get more information?

- LDA of Minnesota: Call 952-922-8374 to find out more about our services. Or visit <http://www.ldaminnesota.org>
- LDA of America: <http://www.ldaamerica.org>
- Learning Disabilities On Line: <http://www.ldonline.org>
- National Center for Learning Disabilities: <http://www.nclld.org>
- Shaywitz, Sally MD. (2003). *Overcoming Dyslexia*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York

LDA of Minnesota

For more than 36 years, **Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota** has been serving the needs of people of all ages at risk for learning disabilities or related learning difficulties by maximizing their potential so that they may lead more productive and fulfilled lives. Services include educational assessments, one-to-one and small group tutoring, consultations, family literacy activities, school-to-work transition programming, professional training, public education, and high-quality educational products.

LDA of Minnesota is the state affiliate of LDA of America, a non-profit organization of volunteers dedicated to identifying causes, promoting prevention of learning disabilities, and enhancing the quality of life for all individuals with learning disabilities and their families by encouraging effective identification and intervention, fostering research, and protecting their rights under law.