

Learning Difficulties

Learning difficulties are any difficulties that interfere with a child's ability to learn. The processes in the brain that help us to learn are called '**cognition**'. If children have a difficulty with **cognitive processes**, such as paying **attention**, **memory**, **processing** language and experiences (making sense of what they hear, see or do) or **understanding** ideas, then this will affect their learning.

If a child is not making progress with learning, then we may suspect a learning difficulty.

Other factors can affect a child's learning, such as not understanding English, being frequently absent from school, having a long term illness or experiencing some sort of personal trauma (such as family breakdown). These have to be considered first. But if none of these other factors seems to be relevant, then it may be that a learning difficulty is affecting the child's ability to learn.

There are many different types of learning difficulty and a child can have difficulty in just one area or in several:

- A **specific learning difficulty** is the name given to a difference in the way that the brain processes information, meaning that the child has difficulty learning in a particular area. **Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia** are all **specific learning difficulties**.
- **General or moderate learning difficulty** means that the child has a difficulty in learning that affects most areas. It is often difficult to tell the difference between a language difficulty and general learning difficulty because, if a child struggles with language, it will often affect their learning in other areas.
- **Global developmental delay** refers to a child's mental development being delayed, compared to children of the same age. This means that it is not just learning to read and write, for example, that will be affected, but a wide variety of skills, such as social skills, emotional maturity and language development. The child will behave like a much younger child in many areas of development.
- **Severe or profound learning difficulties** are more serious learning difficulties that would probably mean that a child needed to attend a specialist school. Children with this severity of learning difficulty may not, for example, learn to speak or be able to carry out the activities of daily life, such as eating and washing.