

Supporting children with additional challenges



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What is a specific learning disability?

Range of difficulties experienced by children who function well in other areas.

Areas of challenge can include:

- listening
- speaking
- reading
- handwriting
- written language
- spelling and/or maths (SPELD, NZ)



What is a neurodevelopmental disorder?

A neurodevelopmental condition can interfere with **organisation, retention, or application** of specific skills or sets of information.

It may involve difficulties with:

- attention
- memory
- perception
- language
- problem-solving
- social interaction (MSD, NZ)



What are the most common conditions?

- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Dyscalculia
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism
- Auditory Processing Disorder (APD)



How are specific learning disorders and neurodevelopmental disorders diagnosed?

- Specific learning disorders come under the umbrella of neurodevelopmental disorders.
- Diagnosis occurs following a set criteria (DSM-V, APA).
- SLDs require educational, medical and/or psychological evaluations, focusing on persistent difficulties in reading, writing or mathematical reasoning skills during formal years of schooling.
- Some conditions may also be confirmed by genetic testing.



Positive approaches to supporting children at school

- Emotions and learning are closely connected.
- Emotions assist our thinking, problem solving, and ability to focus and learn.
- Children have a natural curiosity and inclination to learn
- Each child approaches learning in his/her own way.
- A positive attitude and encouragement can inspire children to stay motivated.



Neuroplasticity

- Neuroplasticity - the formation of new neural connections.
- For most of the 20th century, medical science assumed the brain was a static organ.
- In schools, children who had been labelled as slow were once assumed to progress slowly and high expectations were maintained of the early high achieving students.



Neuroplasticity and perspectives on development

- Modern neuroscience identifies a very different reality: rather than acting as a static organ, our brain changes as individuals acquire experience and knowledge.
- Neuroplasticity and its discovery has revolutionized the treatment of brain injury, mental illness and learning disabilities.



How does neuroplasticity relate to learning?

“The Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2000 went to Eric Kandel who showed that when learning occurs the brain can change its circuits and new connections can be made.

These findings have been used to remedy learning disorders that were supposedly inborn. We are not, it turns out, merely slaves of our DNA.”

Dr Norman Doidge



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Questions

1. What approaches have you applied in your classroom/school with this condition?
2. What other positive approaches can be applied?
3. Discuss how these children's emotions might influence their learning.



Emotions and Learning

“ The relationship between learning, emotion, and body state runs much deeper than many educators realize and it is interwoven with the notion of learning itself... the original purpose for which our brains evolved was to manage our physiology, to optimize our survival, and to allow us to flourish. ”

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, 2016



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