



In the Spotlight

**Monthly Issues of Interest Presented By
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Learning Disabilities– Like Santa Claus, “They Do Exist”

Like the commercial that plays on TV around the holidays featuring two M&M’s meeting Santa Claus and each fainting after realizing that yes indeed “they do exist”, the same could be said for learning disabilities. Almost everyone has heard the term “learning disabilities” but there is much confusion surrounding the term and many question whether they even “exist” at all. Certainly the children, adults and family members that deal with the daily challenges living with learning disabilities can present know that learning disabilities indeed exist and know all too well the impact of learning disabilities on virtually every aspect of an individual’s life. However, many find the disability hard to understand because you cannot look at a person and see their learning disability and many individuals with learning disabilities have average to above average IQs which makes others question, “what’s the problem then?”

**1 in 7 Americans has
some type of a learning
disability according to
the National Institutes
for Health**

So, just what are learning disabilities? The term "learning disabilities" is an umbrella term used to describe an array of learning disorders. An individual may have one learning disability or more than one co-occurring learning disability. A learning disability is a life-long neurological disorder that affects the manner in which individuals with potentially normal or above average intelligence select, retain and express information. Incoming or outgoing information may become scrambled as it travels between the senses and the brain. In many cases, learning disabilities interfere with the development and use of language and the ability to speak, read, write, spell or perform math calculations. Learning disabilities can impact an individual's self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization and daily living activities.

Learning disabilities are "hidden" disabilities meaning you cannot look at a person and "see" that they have a disability. Many individuals with learning disabilities have average to above-average IQs. Individuals with learning disabilities exhibit patterns of strengths and weaknesses and the disability creates deficits in particular areas. Learning disabilities are life-long. They are not outgrown and they do not disappear when a child becomes an adult or leaves school.

Learning disabilities can impact people in different ways. Some people are able to readily overcome the disability by learning compensatory strategies while others may need a higher level of supports and services.

The exact cause of learning disabilities is unknown but may include trauma during pregnancy or birth; family history of learning disabilities; prenatal or early childhood exposure to toxic chemicals in the environment such as lead paint and mercury or a combination of factors.

There is no "cure" for learning disabilities and learning disabilities cannot be treated with medication in the way ADHD can. However, many individuals who have learning disabilities learn *(Over)*

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The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State (LDANYS) was chartered by the New York State Board of Regents in 1958 and is a statewide 501c3 non-profit, parent-driven organization that advocates on behalf of children and adults who have learning disabilities. LDANYS is the New York state affiliate of the Learning Disabilities Association of America. Our regional affiliates located throughout the state provide a variety of programs and services for children and adults with learning and other developmental disabilities and their families.

For more information about our organization or about the content contained here, please contact our state office at 518-608-8992.

Learning Disabilities—Continued

strategies to compensate for their disability and with early diagnosis, appropriate accommodations and services, people with learning disabilities can have successful outcomes in life.

There are numerous definitions of learning disabilities in use today in the United States and the particular definition parents of children with learning disabilities or adults with learning disabilities need to be concerned about often depends on what their goals are.

Many government agencies use specific definitions to establish eligibility for services. For example, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (the Federal law on special education) the definition of a spe-

cific learning disability is used by schools determine whether a student should receive special education services. For adults to receive vocational rehabilitation services such as job training and job placement, the New York State vocational rehabilitation agency (known as the New York State Education Department's Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities or VESID) uses a different definition.

For more information, please contact the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State at 518-608-8992.