

Learning Disorders

Division of Developmental and Behavioral Health
Children's Mercy Kansas City

What is a learning disorder?

- Problems in learning reading, writing, and/or math.
- A person may have difficulties in one or multiple areas.
- Learning disorders are differences in brain-based understanding of information.
- A learning disorder is life-long. Best treatment is research supported intervention and school-based supports.

Specific learning disorders

You may hear different names used when talking about a learning disorder. For the most part, these names are referring to the same issue. Common names for learning disorders are:

Reading: dyslexia, Specific Learning Disorder in Reading, learning disability in reading, reading disorder

- *Difficulties with*: learning letters or the alphabet, letter sounds, rhyming, changing sounds in a word, pronouncing nonsense words, word reading, reading fluency, comprehension
- *Treatment*: structured literacy intervention and school-based supports

Math: dyscalculia, Specific Learning Disorder in Mathematics, learning disability in math

- *Difficulties with*: learning numbers, counting, knowing which number is larger/smaller, math facts, compensatory strategies (counting on fingers) beyond expected, money skills, estimation
- *Treatment*: multisensory instruction and school-based supports

Writing: dysgraphia, Specific Learning Disorder in Written Expression, or learning disability in writing

- Difficulties with: cannot get ideas onto paper (may be able to tell you a full sentence but writes down a 2-3 word sentence), errors in capitalization/punctuation/grammar, poor clarity or organization of writing, spelling errors
- *Treatment*: multisensory and school-based supports

Kansas vs Missouri schools label for learning disability

Kansas uses a Response to Intervention model to identify children who are behind grade-level and provide increasing support to see if they improve or need more support.

Missouri uses an IQ-Achievement Discrepancy model to evaluate if there is a notable difference between a child's intelligence (IQ) and academic performance that may require more support.

If you suspect your child has a learning disorder:

- Request an evaluation for special education services through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP):

- Write a letter and include the date of request.
- Include data related to your concerns: academic performance, standardized testing, intervention or support implemented previously.
- Find examples online:
 - Google “sample IEP letter”
 - www.parentcenterhub.org/evaluation-2/
- If your child does not attend public school, consider a private evaluation for learning disorder by a psychologist or speech language pathologist (dyslexia only).

A note about retention:

For children first grade and beyond: Grade retention is *not* recommended. Retaining students who fail to meet grade level standards has been found to have limited empirical support (National Association of School Psychologists Position Statement, 2011). Instead, it is recommended that educational planning incorporate evidence-based intervention to intensively support the student via special education, including small group and/or individualized academic instruction and appropriate accommodation to address areas of need.

Learn More

- Learn about your child’s educational rights. The more knowledge you have about your child’s rights under the two education laws, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the better to maximize his or her success.
- Each state has a parent technical assistance center that can help you learn more about your child’s rights:
 - *Missouri:* MPACT (missouriparentsact.org)
 - *Kansas:* Families Together (famielstoegetherinc.org), KPIRC (ksdetasn.org/kpirc)

Resources

- understood.org
- dyslexiaida.org
- ksmo.dyslexiaida.org
- readsource.com