



Teach reading effectively in every classroom, every day

When and how to get advice

Children who struggle with learning to read in the early years of school who don't get appropriate and effective support are likely to remain at an educational disadvantage. If you are concerned that your child is not making good progress in reading, there are a number of steps you can take.

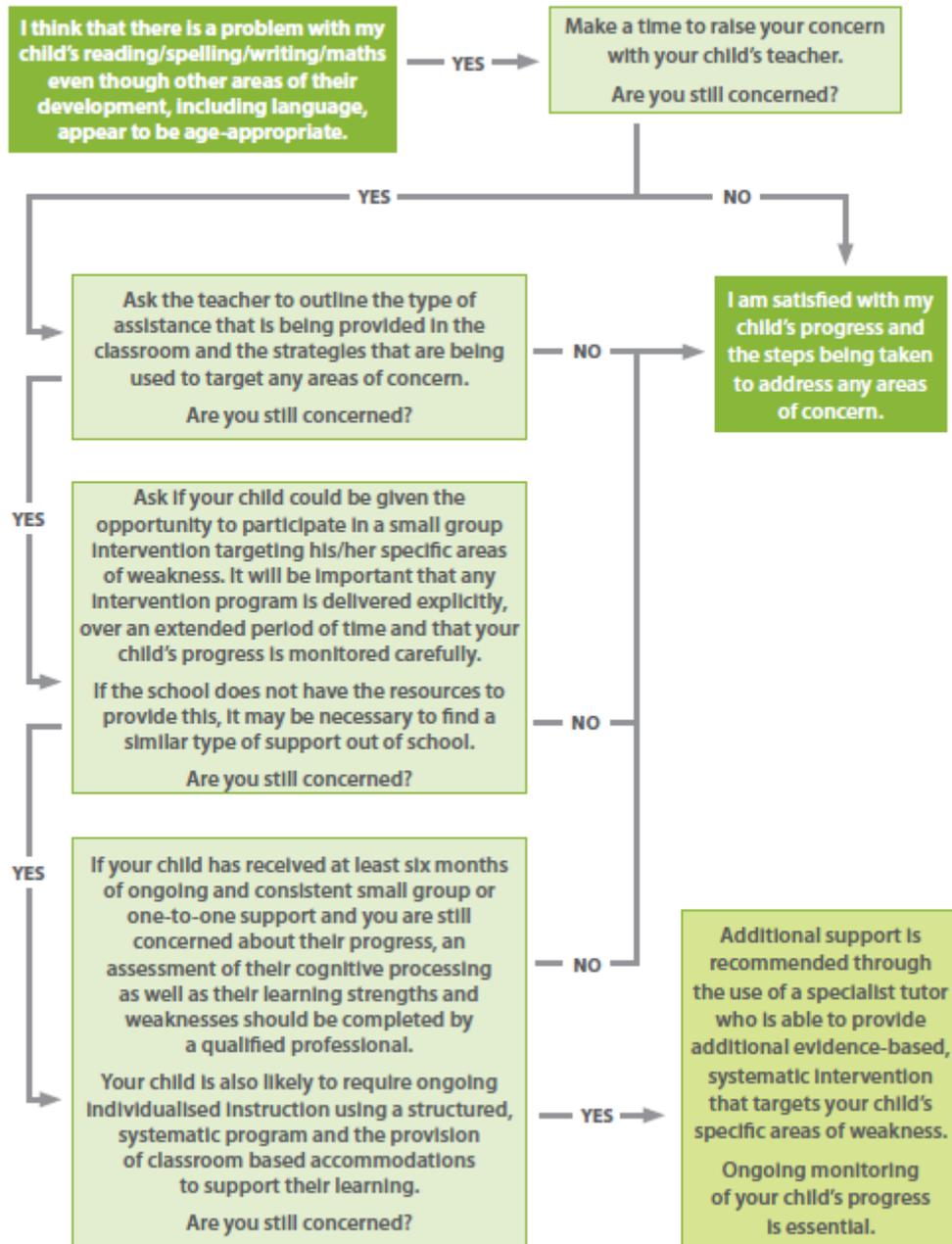
The following advice is from AUSPELD — Australian Federation of SPELD (Specific Learning Disability) Associations.

The decision to seek professional advice, and a possible assessment to determine whether or not a student has a learning disability, is a complex one. It should only occur after a number of other steps have been taken - including a period of observation and collection of relevant information.

1. A child's teacher is likely to be well-placed to observe whether there is a specific area of concern in relation to a student's progress. They will also be able to make suggestions about the appropriate strategies to adopt in the first instance – both in-school and at home.
2. Prior to a formal assessment, it is important to ensure that students are provided with well-designed instruction targeting the area in which the student is struggling. This instruction should be explicit, systematic and cumulative and needs to form the basis of an intervention that continues for at least six months. This is because one of the criteria for learning disability diagnosis is to evaluate how well a student responds to targeted intervention over an extended period of time (at least six months). Many students make rapid progress once given appropriate systematic instruction, suggesting that their difficulties are the result of gaps in their knowledge and skills, rather than a persistent and enduring learning disability.
3. The information gathered over this period will assist the practitioner conducting the assessment (in the event that one is required) both to determine an understanding of the level of functional impact the student is experiencing and to better inform decision-making in terms of ongoing intervention and support.

There are times when it becomes obvious very quickly to both the parent and the teacher that a child is experiencing significant difficulties with either the language or learning demands (or both) of the classroom and, on these occasions, it is often in the child's best interests to seek professional advice from either a speech pathologist or a psychologist as early as possible. They are unlikely to assess for a learning disability (assuming the child is only four or five years of age) but will provide a range of recommendations for both the teacher and the parent to follow and will assess whether there is evidence of longer term risk factors.

What to do next: A decision making chart for parents



Who can diagnose a specific learning disability?

While a student's teacher or tutor is able to screen for possible difficulties in any given academic domain and put in place an appropriate intervention, it is important that the final diagnostic process be undertaken by a specialist in the area. This generally involves:

- A Psychologist (preferably with educational and/or developmental training) in the identification of a specific learning disability such as Dyslexia, Language-based Dysgraphia or Dyscalculia;

- An Occupational Therapist in the diagnosis of Motor-based Dysgraphia or Developmental Coordination Disorder; and
- A Speech Pathologist for difficulties related to Specific Language Impairments or speech sound disorders.

It is important that the diagnosis is made by a practitioner who is qualified to administer the range of standardised assessment tools required to make a clinical diagnosis. In order to administer these tests, expertise in test administration and registration with a regulatory body such as the Australian Health Practitioners Registration Authority or Speech Pathology Australia is required. The diagnosis of dyslexia, or any other specific learning disability, cannot be made by someone who assesses vision, hearing, movement, neural activity or any other skill in isolation.

Source: AUSPELD, Understanding Learning Difficulties: A Guide for Parents (2015)



More information:

Australian Federation of SPELD (Specific Learning Disability) Associations: www.ausepeld.org.au

State and Territory SPELD Associations: www.ausepeld.org.au/state-associations/

Dyslexia SA: www.dyslexiasa.org.au

Learning Difficulties Australia: www.lidaustralia.org

FIVE from FIVE: www.fivefromfive.org.au