



### Does my child need help?

Development of reading ability occurs at different rates for different children. Many parents have concerns at one time or another about whether their child's language and reading development is progressing normally, and whether they might need help.

If you are concerned about your child's reading progress, don't wait to investigate. They may require some additional support from their teacher at school and from you at home, or they may need a specialist diagnosis and intervention. Earlier identification is always better.

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

Although some students who struggle to learn to read may have a learning disability, many don't. They have not developed adequate skills due to a range of cumulative factors and are generally described as having learning difficulties.

**Early intervention** is vitally important for any child at risk of literacy or numeracy failure and there are many indicators to suggest that the essential foundation skills are not being established. In many cases, it becomes apparent prior to Year One when children are in the Foundation or Pre-primary years and beginning to learn the fundamental skills required for successful literacy and numeracy learning.

Children may have difficulties:

- Hearing the sounds in words;
- Recognising that certain words rhyme or that strings of words start with the same sound;
- Learning the names and sounds of the letters of the alphabet;
- Learning the names and values attached to numbers;
- Remembering the shape of letters and numbers and how to write them;
- Reading simple words accurately, without guessing from context or using picture cues.

Some children have difficulty remembering and repeating a short sentence or a nonsense word, while others take a long time to name things, even when it is something they are familiar with.

There are important differences between learning difficulties and learning disabilities.

Children with **learning difficulties** underachieve academically for a wide range of reasons, including factors such as: sensory impairment (weaknesses in vision or hearing); severe behavioural, psychological or emotional issues; English as a second language or dialect (ESL or ESD); high absenteeism; ineffective instruction; or, inadequate curricula. These children have the potential to achieve at age-appropriate levels once provided with programs that incorporate appropriate support and evidence-based instruction.

Children with **learning disabilities** have unexpected and persistent difficulties in specific areas of academic achievement as a result of an underlying neuro-developmental disorder, the origin of which includes an interaction of genetic, cognitive and environmental factors. One of the defining features of a specific learning disability is that the difficulty continues to exist, despite appropriate instruction and intervention.

Children with a learning disability:

- Have underlying difficulties which have a lifelong impact;
- Do not perceive or process information as efficiently or accurately as children without a learning disability;
- Often have a family member with learning difficulties;
- Do not respond to appropriate intervention in the expected way;
- Do not have an intellectual disability.

Left unidentified, without appropriate intervention, a learning disability puts a child at significant disadvantage, with little likelihood of achieving at levels close to their academic potential.

The early identification of students at risk of literacy and numeracy difficulties, along with the introduction of effective intervention and support, is the key to academic success.

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



**More information:**

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

State and Territory SPELD Associations: [www.ausepeld.org.au/state-associations/](http://www.ausepeld.org.au/state-associations/)

Dyslexia SA: [www.dyslexiasa.org.au](http://www.dyslexiasa.org.au)

Learning Difficulties Australia: [www.ldaustralia.org](http://www.ldaustralia.org)

FIVE from FIVE: [www.fivefromfive.org.au](http://www.fivefromfive.org.au)