Learning Disabilities

Following the completion of this self-paced module, please attend an in-person session for Explicit Instruction for Strategy Learning activities and more LD-specific strategies.

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OPENS WORLDS.

Tips for this Module

- The goal is to **learn**, not *finish*! Take your time and really consider the ideas & questions

- Find a quiet place with minimal distractions or consider completing with another tutor

- Read the slides out loud, more than once

- Take notes, particularly on any points you'd like to discuss during the in-person session

- Review slides for any missed quiz items

- Be a fully engaged, active learner and trust the process!

Washtenaw Literacy's Mission:
Believing that literacy is the foundation
for a sustainable community,
Washtenaw Literacy provides literacy support,
free of charge, to adults through
a network of trained tutors.

It is our **Vision** to eliminate illiteracy in Washtenaw County.

PASSION

DIVERSITY
EQUITY
INCLUSION

INTEGRITY

www.washtenawliteracy.org

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Tutor Objective

To partner with an adult in pursuing their personal goals by improving their ability to understand, speak, read, and write basic English and do math through customized, research and evidence-based tutoring.

Training Objectives

1. **Develop skills needed for tutoring adults**
   - Understand more about the nature and definition of Learning Disabilities
   - Learn two keys to working with adults with LD.

2. **Build knowledge needed to engage with agency**
   - Develop self-awareness that you will approach tutoring differently depending on your learners' LD
   - Gain an awareness that LD aren't "one size fits all."

3. **Align your perspective and expectations with the needs of adult learners**
   - Understand the importance of a customized, personal approach to create the most effective learning environment.

Guiding Principles

We provide:

- Contextualized learning (pursue learners' goals)
- Authentic materials (real-world, real-life)
- Basic skills improvement (read, write, speak, listen, calculate)
- Increased confidence (independence outside tutoring)
- Increase knowledge and success
- Time practice to mastery (guide and support)
- Differentiated instruction (fitted to the learning needs of individual adults, even within a group)

CONSIDER

Which bullet points on the previous slide resonate most with you and your experience?

Which do you feel you could brush up on to increase your effectiveness?

Which feel most important to the success of your learner(s)?

What are some different ways we describe individuals who struggle with learning?
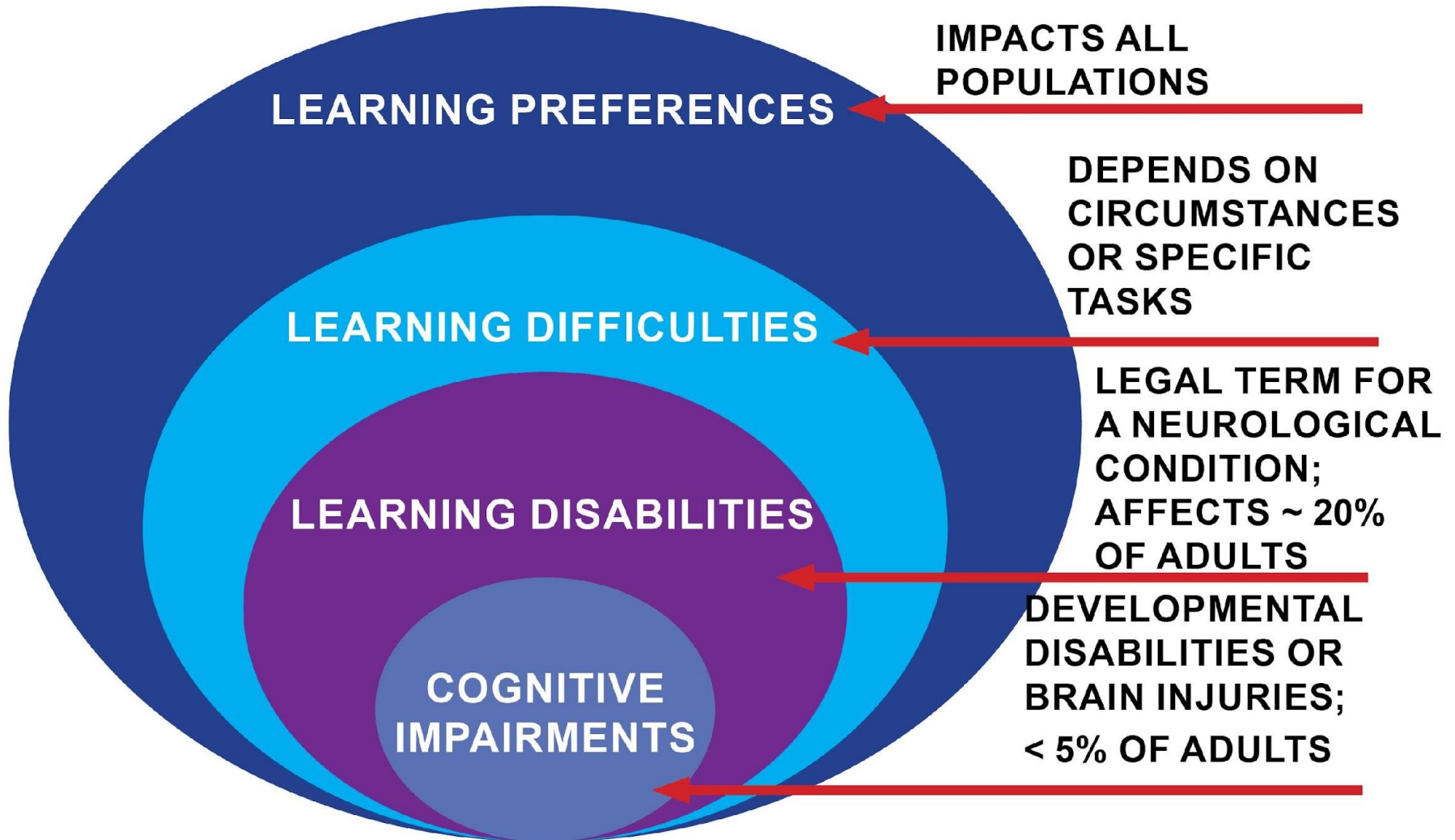
What's in a Name?

Individuals who struggle with learning may be described as having:

- Learning differences

- Learning difficulties

- Learning challenges

- Learning disorders

We use many different terms, such as those listed above, that are less stigmatizing than "learning disabilities." These terms describe individuals who struggle with learning, and many prefer to use the descriptor "learning differences" rather than labeling an individual as having "learning disabilities." The purpose of this session is to clarify what it means to have LD as opposed to a learning difficulty, difference, or challenge. Having a Learning Disability means something very specific that we'll discuss later in this module.

Learning Differences

LEARNING PREFERENCES — IMPACTS ALL POPULATIONS

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES — DEPENDS ON CIRCUMSTANCES OR SPECIFIC TASKS

LEARNING DISABILITIES — LEGAL TERM FOR A NEUROLOGICAL CONDITION; AFFECTS ~ 20% OF ADULTS

COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS — DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES OR BRAIN INJURIES; < 5% OF ADULTS

Learning Differences

Learning Preferences are conditions of learning one finds helpful. They are the largest circle because they affect everyone—ways of learning that are helpful but not necessary. *Some learn better in the morning or with a lecture; others prefer learning through stories vs. graphs.*

Learning Difficulties arise when a specific task or circumstance inhibits an individual's ability to learn. *Some are good at math but can't focus on reading a novel; others may understand concepts but struggle to memorize dates.*

Learning Disabilities is a legal term for a neurological condition that makes one or more of the processes associated with learning extremely difficult. These individuals have legal rights and are protected by laws designed to level the playing field. They have an average or above-average IQ. Examples of learning disabilities include dyslexia (reading based), dysgraphia (writing based), and dyscalculia (numbers based).

Cognitive Impairments occur in individuals with developmental disabilities or those with brain injuries. Cognitive impairments may cause difficulties with short-term memory, expression, and attention span. Learners will typically progress slower.

What About ADHD?

While it can affect the way learners learn and process information and often occurs with learning disabilities, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) falls under the umbrella of mental health conditions, so is not technically considered a learning disability on its own. **ADHD is often undiagnosed in adults.**

ADHD impacts executive function, which is a set of mental skills that helps individuals organize, plan, remember details, and direct focus. For many people, this leads to challenges with starting or sticking with studies.

ADHD can make it harder to concentrate, learn new skills, or retain information.

Some research suggests that around 45% of students with ADHD also have a learning disability, and these two conditions may interact to make learning more challenging.

Many adult learners struggle with ADHD, so can benefit from:

Break up lessons into **small chunks with frequent breaks**

Focus on **repetition without boredom**

Prepare **visual cues** for strategies and keep them out during sessions.

Think about the circumstances below. Do they represent a *Learning Preference, Difficulty, Disability,* or *Impairment*?
(write your answers before viewing the next slide)

a. A closed-head injury due to a car accident

b. Great at math, horrible at spelling

c. ADHD

d. Needs to meet in the morning

e. Auditory learner

f. Developmentally Disabled

g. Can't focus when the room is too hot

h. A stroke makes speaking very difficult

i. Dyslexia

j. Learns better by doing than by listening

Answers

a. **A closed-head injury**   **Cognitive Impairment**

b. **Great at math, horrible at spelling** **Learning Difficulty**

c. **ADHD**   **Learning Difficulty**

d. **Needs to meet in the morning** **Learning Preference**

e. **Auditory learner**   **Learning Preference**

f. **Developmentally Disabled** **Cognitive Impairment**

g. **Can't focus when the room is too hot** **Learning Difficulty**

h. **A stroke makes speaking difficult** **Cognitive Impairment**

i. **Dyslexia**   **Learning Disability**

j. **Learns better by doing than listening** **Learning Preference**

No matter what challenges your learners face, individual, research-based strategies will help them pursue their goals.

OPENS WORLDS.

Self Assessment STOP

Please spend 5 minutes thinking about the questions below and how they impact your tutoring.

Why do you think it's important to understand the difference between the types of learning challenges?

How may a learner's learning challenges affect your tutoring sessions?

How do you personally feel about tutoring someone with a learning disability? How about a cognitive impairment? How will that change your expectations as a tutor?

LD: Hidden Disability

Unlike physical disabilities, LD are *"hidden"* disabilities. They do not become apparent until individuals attempt tasks that are affected by their LD. As long as the individual can avoid tasks such as reading, writing, or math problem solving, the disability is not apparent.

Because of this, there has been and continues to be controversy and debate over how to define LD.

LD are also often undiagnosed, so learners are aware that they struggle in academics more than their peers, but may not know why. Adults have had a lifetime to compensate and mask their LD and will have ways of handling situations that work for them. It's crucial to recognize and honor their success.

LD: Definition and Debate

The best and most current guidance we have on the definition of LD is based on work done by the U.S. Department of Education. In 1999, the Office of Special Education Programs within the department began what was called the SLD [Specific Learning Disabilities] Initiative. A group of 10 organizations was convened, representing parents, state and local practitioners, researchers and policy developers, to develop consensus statements about the nature of LD. This initiative involved a series of meetings and papers, and the development of a research-to-practice document. **The group provided an overall statement that defines LD.**

Consensus Statements

1. LDs Are Real

2. LDs Are Brain-based

3. LDs Are Specific to Individuals

4. LDs Occur Across the Life Span

5. Can occur with other disabling conditions, but are not caused by them

6. Occur across ethnic, cultural, language, and economic groups

Research-Based Facts About Learning Disabilities:

1. LDs Are Real

Functional MRIs show that LDs are valid, but since they're hidden disabilities they're difficult to identify, understand, and accept as "real." Someone with a reading disability will appear normal until asked to read independently, when the hidden disability becomes apparent. Compare that with someone with a physical disability, which is apparent immediately. Accommodations and limitations are expected and more easily understood with physical disabilities.

LDs are disabilities requiring accommodations, not an illness/disease to be fixed.

Consensus: LDs Are Brain-based

Research-Based Facts About Learning Disabilities:

2. LDs Are Brain-based

LDs are a part of someone's neurological make-up. They are specific and can encompass one or more ability areas (e.g. reading or math), but not necessarily all ability areas--they're not simply a delay in development. LDs are not eliminated by changes in the environment (like increased literacy tutoring), though a person can learn to effectively manage LDs.

LDs can't be eliminated, but using research-based strategies in tutoring will help minimize the impact of the LD on your learner's life.

Research-Based Facts About Learning Disabilities:

3. LDs Are Specific to Individuals

There is neither one type of learning disability nor one profile for adults with LD; there are many different patterns of difficulties. People with LD have specific weaknesses but also many specific strengths.

Tutoring should help individuals with LD focus on their strengths to compensate for their specific weaknesses.

Examples

- An individual may be a slow and labored reader but may comprehend written material well if it is read out loud.

- An individual may be able to read well at the word level but have great difficulty comprehending what s/he has read. Just being able to read individual words is not enough to comprehend text.

- An individual may read well but have great difficulty with math computations.

Each of these individuals exhibits profiles that may indicate learning disabilities because of the marked performance difference in specific areas of functioning.

Definition of LD Review: True or False?

Please write down your answers for each before moving to the next slide.

1. If my learner works hard enough, he can fix his learning disability.

2. If my learner can dictate an amazing story, she should be able to write it down.

3. If my learner reads really well and can do math problems, he should have no difficulty with story problems.

4. Everyone with dyslexia mixes up their Ds and Bs.

5. My learner is a great reader but needs to write for work, so we should focus solely on writing in our tutoring sessions.

All False!

1. LDs can be accommodated and their impact minimized, but they can't be "fixed."

2. If the learner has a Written Expression Disability, the act of writing may be incredibly difficult without accommodations.

3. If the learner has a specific LD that inhibits mathematical problem solving, they may need extra help with solution strategies.

4. Some do; some can't remember sight words; dyslexia presents in many different ways.

5. Focus on your learner's strengths! Use their strengths to work on their weaknesses so they can have success with every tutoring session.

Research-Based Facts About Learning Disabilities:

4. LDs Occur Across the Life Span

LD may be uncovered at different stages of a person's life depending on many factors (an LD in a 7-year-old looks different from that in the same person as an adult). A person can learn to deal with their LD but it won't go away. Learning problems apparent in school persist throughout life; only the environment changes. Some environments can minimize the influence of the disability, while others can highlight areas of need. A person may learn to compensate for LD, but that area will remain a relative challenge.

For adults with LD, matching strengths and weaknesses with appropriate learning and employment environments is crucial.

Consensus: LDs can Co-occur

Research-Based Facts About Learning Disabilities:

5. Can occur with other disabling conditions, but are not caused by them

LDs may occur with other conditions (depression, physical impairments, ADHD) but these are not the *cause* of the LD. This can make identifying LD more difficult; many people who struggle with learning for another reason may display similar characteristics to those with LD (e.g., a person who had poor schooling may present the same reading needs as those whose reading challenges are caused by LD).

Whatever your learner's condition, focusing on their individual goals and strengths will help them succeed.

Consensus: LDs Affect All Populations

Research-Based Facts About Learning Disabilities:

6. Occur across ethnic, cultural, language, and economic groups

LDs occur across all groups in countries and cultures throughout the world. There is a concern that identification is culturally-biased and in K-12 education, minority groups with LD are overrepresented. This can be due to a lack of culturally appropriate tests, procedures, and teacher recommendations.

LDs are not unique to our culture.

Definition of LD Review: Is It LD?

Please take a few minutes and write your answers before continuing to the next slide.

STOP

Which of the following conditions may be a sign of a Learning Disability?

- Lapses in attention
- Inability to reason
- Difficulty processing information
- Trouble with remembering
- Challenges in communicating

- Horrible spelling
- Lack of physical coordination
- Social incompetence
- Emotional immaturity
- Illegible penmanship
- Inability to describe a TV show

Answer: All of them

When individuals have LDs, their brains are wired differently and they receive and process information in a different way.

LDs make basic academic skills more difficult, but can also affect the ability to organize and recall information, listen, and speak. They can impact short- and long-term memory and timing.

People with learning disabilities usually have average or above average intelligence, yet there is a discrepancy between their achievements and their potential.

With the right support and interventions, they are able to close that gap and demonstrate their skills.

1. Promote learner independence

- Design lessons around everyday needs

- Include learners in decisions and planning

- Be sure learners know you are working on their goals at all times

Two Keys for Adults with LD

2. Use LD-appropriate instruction

- Make learning fun (use materials of interest and value to the learner)
- Teach important skills connected to learners' lives, interests, and needs
- Demonstrate what it is that they will be learning and explain why it's important for them personally
- Make learning manageable (work in small bits, not huge concepts)
- Offer guided, scaffolded practice
  - Build on what your learner already knows
  - Practice to mastery before moving to the next level

Keys for Adults with LD

- You don't need to "diagnose" the disability. It doesn't change the tutoring method.

- Adult learners bring previous experience and knowledge to every lesson--always build on their prior knowledge to increase their confidence and help them make connections.

- It's more important to teach fewer (but crucial) skills to mastery rather than trying to teach a wide range of skills.

- Explaining how skills will be used increases motivation and clarifies expectations.

- Guided, scaffolded practice means lots of practice where the tutor is guiding the learner and gradually increasing the difficulty as mastery is achieved.

During Your Tutoring Session: REVIEW

Please take a few minutes to write your answers before reading the next slide.

STOP

1. Name three things you can do to promote learner independence.

2. Do you need to fully understand your learner's specific disability in order to effectively tutor?

3. What should you do if your learner's goals are seemingly beyond their capabilities?

4. Why is it important to explain how a specific skill will be used?

5. What is the most important consideration when choosing materials?

During Your Tutoring Sessions
To promote learner independence:

- Involve learners in discussion about how they learn best
- Continually ask for input on what they need and want out of tutoring
- Introduce strategies they can use on their own
- Practice accommodations during your lessons
- Highlight learners' strengths
- Provide choices throughout your lessons
- Encourage learners to set their own goals and monitor their progress
- Once goals are set, discuss specific steps to reach them
- Have learners identify strategies they can use to accomplish a task
- Ask learner to evaluate the effectiveness of a lesson to help plan the next one
- Have learner describe what s/he should do differently next time
- Ask learner to share how they did a task and what worked for them.

During Your Tutoring Sessions ANSWERS

1. See previous slide

2. You don't need to "diagnose" the disability. It doesn't change the tutoring method.

3. Remember your tutoring mission is to help learners PURSUE their goals—not reach them! Break their long-term goals into small, manageable lessons and explain how the skill you're working on is relevant to their larger goal.

4. Increases motivation and makes the lesson relevant to your learner's goals.

5. Materials must interest learners and be relevant to their goals. You can always modify passages to suit the learner's level.

Strategies to Promote Learner Independence

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- Our primary goal as tutors is to give our learners tools to use outside our tutoring sessions; to offer them strategies they can use in their lives.

- Teaching learners strategies they can practice and master during tutoring sessions, then use on their own, will help them minimize the impacts of their Learning Disabilities so they can find success in their personal, academic, and professional lives.

- There are dozens of strategies learners can add to their "toolbox" and use in their everyday lives.

Strategies to Promote Learner Independence

- When a tutor uses the principles of Explicit Instruction to teach strategies, the focus is clearly on teaching how to use a specific strategy in context to learn and complete important tasks.

- Explicit Instruction is a proven, effective tool for working with adults with LD. It responds to their needs to learn skills and strategies to help them be more confident and independent learners.

PRACTICE and SHARE

Please visit

and share your thoughts with other tutors.

- Debrief of Online Content

  - What are some important facts about Learning Disabilities?

  - What are two keys to working with adults with LD?

- Reflection

  - Why is it important for adults with LD to develop strategies?

Great tutoring requires:

- **great content** (stimulating activities, appropriate challenge, relevant information)

- **great facilitation** (scaffolding activities, cooperative learning, trusting your learner)

Great tutoring is repetition without boredom.

THANK YOU for being a great tutor!