



Mental Health America of Franklin County

2323 W. Fifth Ave. Suite 160, Columbus, OH 43204

Telephone: (614) 221-1441 Fax: (614) 221-1491

info@mhafc.org

www.mhafc.org

Children's Mental Health: Learning Disabilities

How Common Are Learning Disabilities?

Parents are often worried and disappointed when their child has problems learning in school. There are many reasons for failure in school; a common one is a specific learning disability. A child with a learning disability is usually bright and initially tries very hard to follow instructions, concentrate, and "be good" at home and in school. Yet despite this effort he or she is not mastering school tasks and falls behind. Some learning disabled children also have trouble sitting still or paying attention. **Learning disabilities affect as many as 15 percent of otherwise able schoolchildren.**

What Causes Learning Disabilities?

It is believed that learning disabilities are caused by a difficulty with the nervous system that affects receiving, processing, or communicating information. Some learning disabled children are also hyperactive, easily distracted, and have a short attention span.

Early Detection and Treatment is Important

Child and adolescent psychiatrists point out that learning disabilities are treatable, but if not detected and treated early, they can have a serious "snowballing" effect. For instance, a child who does not learn addition in elementary school cannot understand algebra in high school. The child, trying very hard to learn, becomes more and more frustrated, and develops emotional problems such as low self-esteem in the face of repeated failure. Some learning disabled children misbehave in school because they would rather be seen as "bad" than "stupid."

Warning Signs

Parents should be aware of the most frequent signals of learning disabilities.

Does your child:

- Have difficulty understanding and following instructions.
- Have trouble remembering what someone just told him or her.
- Fail to master reading, writing, and/or math skills, and thus fails schoolwork.
- Have difficulty distinguishing right from left, for example, confusing 25 with 52, "b" with "d," or "on" with "no."
- Lack coordination in walking, sports, or small activities such as holding a pencil or tying a shoelace.

- Easily lose or misplace homework, schoolbooks, or other items.
- Not understand the concept of time; is confused by "yesterday," "today," and "tomorrow."

Work With A Mental Health Professional

Such problems deserve a comprehensive evaluation by an expert who can assess all of the different issues affecting the child. A child and adolescent psychiatrist can help coordinate the evaluation and work with school professionals and others to evaluate and test your child to determine if a learning disability exists. After talking with the child and family and reviewing the educational testing and consulting with the school, the child and adolescent psychiatrist will make recommendations on appropriate school placement, the need for special help such as special educational therapy or speech-language therapy, and help parents assisting their child in maximizing his or her learning potential.

Treatment for Learning Disabilities

Sometimes individual or family psychotherapy ("talking" about your child's problems) will be recommended. Psychotherapy may help to strengthen your child's self-confidence; which is vital for healthy development. Therapy also helps parents and other family members better understand and cope with the realities of living with a child with learning disabilities. Medication may be prescribed for hyperactivity or distractibility.

Mental Health America of Franklin County is a private, not-for-profit organization, established in 1956. We help people navigate the mental health system. We are dedicated to promoting mental health in Franklin County through advocacy, education, and support services. Our programs include: information and referral to community mental health and alcohol/drug services; free support groups for people with mental illness and their families; an Ombudsman program that assists clients in navigating the mental health and alcohol/drug system; mental health screenings in English and Spanish; Pro Bono Counseling Program where underinsured and uninsured individuals can receive free counseling; community and professional mental health education including Get Connected; maternal mental health support and advocacy (POEM); and a quarterly newsletter featuring legislative updates and new happenings at MHAFC. We receive funding from the Franklin County ADAMH Board, United Way of Central Ohio, individuals, foundations, and corporations. To become a member or find out more information, please visit us online at www.mhafc.org.