

Is My Child a Reluctant Reader or Is There More to the Story?

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Many children in schools today are classified as “reluctant readers.” This term is a general term referring to a child who has some barrier to becoming a successful reader. The reasons for this vary from lack of interest in reading, not being a good reader, or possibly having a learning difficulty that may be hindering their ability to read.

Dealing with a reluctant reader can be challenging for parents and teachers, however there are a variety of strategies and techniques available to help encourage children to overcome their reluctance and to become readers. Be careful not to assume your child has a learning disability just because they are a poor reader.

So, what do you do if you think if your child may fall into the category of having a learning disability?

Parents, as advocates for their children need to be aware of their child’s abilities and struggles and when then sense that there is a problem, they must spring into action to figure out what is really going on.

What are the signs of a learning disability?

Many of the signs and risk factors can be caught early in a child’s life. Parents should be aware of factors that may have affected the child before birth such as family history, substance abuse, or prenatal injury. As children grow, they reach developmental milestones which should be tracked by a pediatrician to be sure they are on target as their growth progresses and any signs of delay are caught early.

Once they are in school, a child’s teacher should stay on top of their growth, development, and learning. They might be the first person to recognize gaps in learning. Talking to the teacher about concerns you may have, or difficulties you see your student having is crucial to catching reading problems early on.

Go with your gut. If you truly feel like there is a problem and the teacher does not see it, keep on it until you find someone who will listen.

The elementary school counselor is another great resource that can talk to you and your child. Counselors can provide guidance and give information about assessments that might be given to your student to help discover how to best help them.

In many cases, modifications can be made to help the child without having to go as far as formalized testing. Some great web sites to visit to learn more about this process are:

- ◆ National Center for Learning Disabilities <http://www.nclld.org/>
- ◆ SPELD <http://www.speldvic.org.au/index.html>
- ◆ LD Online <http://www.ldonline.org/>
- ◆ Reading Is Fundamental <http://www.rif.org/>
- ◆ Internet Special Education Resources <http://www.iser.com/index.shtml>

As a parent, you must keep your eyes peeled for signs that things are not right with your student's learning process. Since each child is different, comparing to other students the same age is not always the best resource, so be careful when talking to other parents and comparing ability levels of children. The signs vary from age to age, however these are some basic things to look for, as red flags of a potential problem in a student's learning habits:

- Speaks later than most children and may have pronunciation problems
- Unable to read text that is appropriate for their grade-level;
- Has difficulty following directions, even with help;
- Has poor memory and difficulty communicating with people;
- Cannot repeat information or copy items directly from another source;
- Trouble interacting with peers;
- Makes consistent reading and spelling errors;
- Has problems with keeping attention or maintaining appropriate behavior

LD Online, as well as many other websites have more complete lists of common signs, broken down by specific age.

Unfortunately, for many of the children experiencing reading problems, these issues will last throughout their school years. Approximately 75 percent of the US students identified with reading problems in the third grade are still reading disabled in the ninth grade.ⁱ

It is imperative that parents help find reading difficulties early and do whatever it takes to find tools for their child to use to allow them to overcome their reading difficulty and be a success in school.

I think there's a problem, now what?

So you've seen the struggles and noticed some signs and are truly starting to feel that there is a problem with your child's learning. Be sure to document everything every struggle you see in your child's life and study habits. Keep a record of the strategies you have tried to help them.

Early intervention is the best way to encourage your child's future success. So, speak up as soon as you notice warning signs.

Meet with your child's teacher as soon as possible to compare notes and find out what they are seeing at school. The teacher should be able to suggest strategies for use at home as well as refer your child for further testing and evaluation if a learning disability is suspected.

If it is decided that further testing is necessary, finding help from professionals, and maintaining good communication with these professionals is an important step.

There is no "one size fits all" measurement tool to discover learning disabilities, so it is important to do your research and talk openly and often with school professionals.

There are some online assessments available such as [Mindplay](#) that you have your child complete to assess their reading level. Some sites like [Let's Go Learn](#) offer online assessments for a fee. Be aware that these types of tests should not be used as a single measure for making a diagnosis of learning disability.

If you feel that a source outside the school is necessary, many companies have opened up private testing and tutoring facilities and this may be another option to help your child. Research each carefully to make sure it has what you need because some offer tutoring but don't cater for kids with learning difficulties like dyslexia – so ask questions!

Your child's pediatrician is another great resource for you to communicate with throughout this process as they understand child development and can help you see if your child is showing any signs of delay.

What do I do with my child's learning disability?

If your child is diagnosed with a learning disability such as dyslexia or attention deficit disorder, your job as the parent is to become the student. Strive to learn as much as you can about your child's diagnosis so you can continue to be their number one supporter and help them learn to overcome their difficulties and be a success in school.

Many, many students are diagnosed with learning disabilities, learn how to apply coping strategies and techniques, and go on to be thriving students and equally successful adults.

ⁱ Shaywitz et al. 1992, *Journal of Educational Psychology*; Francis et al. 1996, *Journal of Educational Psychology*.

Website Links

Mindplay <http://www.test4free.com/assess.asp>

Let's Go Learn <http://www.letsgolearn.com/>

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