

Developmental Delays and Learning Disabilities

Definitions

When a child is behind his peers, his parents and teachers wonder what the future holds.

We use the expression “developmental delay” when it seems the child will grow out of it. Children exhibit delays in various areas, such as holding the pencil, producing words, interacting with friends, running fast, and so on.

We say “learning disability” when a child has a more permanent challenge. Many children struggle with a singular disability. Examples include memory problems, light sensitivity, or difficulty with abstract thinking. These disabilities do not have fancy names.

Some children struggle with more complex disabilities, such as ADHD, dyslexia, and autism. We call these complex disabilities because they include multiple issues. For example, a child who has ADHD may have trouble maintaining mental energy, filtering incoming information, and controlling his impulses.

Getting Started

When a child is very young, it is hard to determine what is happening. Let’s say a child is not learning the letters as fast as his friends. It could be a developmental delay, and he’ll catch up as he ages. It could be a singular disability such as slow processing. Or he could have a more complicated disability such as dyslexia.

Pediatricians and educators recommend that parents express their concerns and take action as soon as possible. Experience shows that we can help children even at a very young age. In fact, the Michigan motto is “Don’t worry. Don’t wait.”

The first step is to share your concerns with your child’s pediatrician and his teacher. These people can help identify strengths and weaknesses and brainstorm strategies that will work with your child.

Next steps include:

- Go online to find strategies that will work with your child
- Join parent groups to find strategies
- Reach out to local programs
- Take your child to an educational psychiatrist

Testing vs. Not Testing

Sometimes, doctors or educators will suggest having an educational psychiatrist test your child. After the testing period, you will receive a report. The report will list test results, your child's strengths, his weaknesses, strategies to use at home, and strategies for teachers. The report may or may not name a specific diagnosis. Here are some tests that educational psychiatrists use:

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/learning-disability-tests-in-public-schools-2161894>.

Sometimes, parents hesitate to get a child tested because they don't want a label on their child; they don't want the child to think of himself as a person with a label; or they don't want teachers to treat their child differently. On the other hand, testing gives us three advantages:

- A list of the child's specific strengths and weaknesses
- Strategies to use
- The peace of mind that comes from having solid information

It is important to focus on the strategies that will help. Let's say a child gets tested, and we find out he has expressive language disorder, or difficulty expressing himself. Here is a list of strategies for that: https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/inmdict/html/expressive_language_disorder.html. As this child's parents and teachers work through the suggestions, they will discover some specific strategies that really help. Those specific strategies are the true goal of educational testing.

You may do educational testing through a public school system. However, to get a more detailed report with suggestions that are more specific to your child, you may want to use a private educational psychiatrist. To find one:

- Ask your child's pediatrician.
- Call Beaumont Hospital Center for Human Development at 248-691-4744.
- Ask other parents where they have taken their children.
- Ask your school to ask other parents where they have taken their children.
- Check Eagle Creek Academy's website where we sometimes post a list of local educational psychiatrists: <https://www.eaglecreekacademy.com/office-forms.html>.

Expected Milestones

The CDC has a good list of expected milestones through age 5:

https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/milestonemomentseng508.pdf.

Michigan Early On

Michigan Early On is for children 0-3 years old. This agency works in conjunction with the public schools. They assign a specialist to talk with you, do a free assessment, and suggest local programs and classes. Go to <https://1800earlyon.org/>.

Michigan Child Find

Each public school in Michigan offers Michigan Child Find. This includes free screening and assessment for children from 0 to 25 years old. The public school may also recommend local programs and classes.

- If your child attends Eagle Creek, or if your home is in Rochester Community Schools, go to <https://www.rochester.k12.mi.us/academics/special-education>.
- If your child does not attend Eagle Creek, and your home is in Lake Orion Schools, go to <https://www.lakeorionschools.org/departments/special-education>.
- If your child does not attend Eagle Creek, and your home is in another school district, contact that school district.

Individual Learning Plan

If a public school district determines that your child should receive special services, the school district will write an Individual Learning Plan for your child. If your child attends a private school like Eagle Creek, you may still need the Individual Learning Plan to get some services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy or social work. Talk to us or your private school.

If you are considering an Individual Learning Plan for your child, you may get info at <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/ei-overview/#who> or https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6598_88195-480506--,00.html.

Oakland Schools Intermediate School District

The Oakland ISD provides assistive technology such as hearing aids, books in Braille, books in large print, teacher microphones, and voice-to-text machines. If you live in Oakland County, go to <https://www.oakland.k12.mi.us/educators/special-education>.

Organizations and Private Practices

Here is a list of organizations and private practices that offer screening, testing, counseling, parent groups and other helpful programs:

[https://oxfordschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_733753/File/OS%20-%20Oakland%20County%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Resources%20\(2\).pdf](https://oxfordschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_733753/File/OS%20-%20Oakland%20County%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Resources%20(2).pdf).

Most Important

Remember that your child is wonderful for who he or she is. Discover your child's strengths and passions and celebrate them daily.