

## **When Your Child May Have a Developmental Delay or a Learning Disability**

### **Definitions**

When a child lags behind his peers, his parents and teachers wonder what the future will hold.

We use the expression “developmental delay” when it seems the child will grow out of it. Children exhibit a big variety of developmental delays. Examples include being late to say words or having trouble holding a pencil.

Although a child with a developmental delay will eventually perform as well as the other children, he will catch up faster with specific training. For example, if a three-year-old is behind in holding a pencil, then using scissors and working on puzzles will help him perfect his small motor skills faster.

Most children who need speech therapy are experiencing a developmental delay. After working with a therapist, and in time, they correct their speech problems and sound like everyone else.

We use the words “learning disability” when a child has a more permanent challenge. Many children struggle with one, 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. Complex disabilities include multiple issues. For example, a child who has ADHD may struggle to filter incoming information, maintain mental energy, and control his impulses.

Learning disabilities do not go away. Instead, children, parents and teachers need to implement strategies for success. For example, a child who has a memory disorder may use songs, dot math, mnemonic devices, and visualization skills to help him remember things.

### **Getting Started**

Sometimes, parents do not know if their child is behind. They compare their children to siblings, relatives, friends’ children and classmates, yet they realize this is a limited pool. For a document from the CDC listing typical milestones, go to:  
[https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents\\_pdfs/milestonemomentseng508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/milestonemomentseng508.pdf).

When a parent senses that his child is behind, it's hard to know whether it's a developmental delay or a more permanent disability. Let's say a child is not learning the letters as fast as his friends. It could be a developmental delay. The child might be more interested in cars and building blocks, 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. 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. This includes listening to their responses. These people can help identify weaknesses and brainstorm strategies that will work with your child.

Next steps include:

- Reach out to free local programs
- Get formal educational testing

### **Free Local Programs**

#### Ages 3 to 0: Michigan Early On

- A specialist will do a free assessment and suggest local programs and classes.
- If your home is in Rochester Community Schools, or if your child attends Eagle Creek Academy, go to [www.rochester.k12.mi.us/pages/5600/project-find](http://www.rochester.k12.mi.us/pages/5600/project-find) or call 248-726-6766.
- If your home is in another school district, go to <https://1800earlyon.org/> or call 248-209-2084.

#### Ages 3 to 5: Michigan Child Find

- A specialist will do a free assessment and suggest local programs and classes.
- If your home is in Rochester Community Schools, or if your child attends Eagle Creek Academy, go to [www.rochester.k12.mi.us/pages/5600/project-find](http://www.rochester.k12.mi.us/pages/5600/project-find) or call 248-726-3077.
- If your home is in Lake Orion Community Schools, call 248-693-5430 or go to <https://www.lakeorionschools.org/departments/special-education>.
- If your home is in another school district, contact that school district.

#### Ages 5+: Public School Special Education Department

- Each MI public school has a special education department that specializes in assessing K-12 children and writing individual learning plans.
- Get info at <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/ei-overview/#who> and [https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6598\\_88195-480506--,00.html](https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6598_88195-480506--,00.html).
- If your home is in Rochester Schools, or if your child attends Eagle Creek Academy, go to <https://www.rochester.k12.mi.us/pages/412/special-education> or call 248-726-3060.
- If your home is in Lake Orion Community Schools, call 248-693-5430 or go to <https://www.lakeorionschools.org/departments/special-education>.
- If your home is in another school district, contact that school district.

### Non-Public

- Children who attend a private school may get free assessment and services through their home school district OR through the school district where their public school is located. For example, children who attend Eagle Creek Academy may get services through Rochester Community Schools.
- If your child is not in school, is homeschooled, or attends a preschool or childcare center that is not part of a school offering Kindergarten and up, you must use your home school district.

### **Formal Educational Testing**

Sometimes, doctors or educators will suggest that you do formal educational testing.

Here are some of the formal educational tests:

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

After the formal testing period, you will receive a report which will list:

- Test results in numbers and percentages
- Test results in layman's terms (low, low average, average, high average, high)
- Very specific strengths
- Very specific weaknesses
- Strategies to use at home
- Strategies for teachers

The report may or may not name a specific diagnosis. For example, let's say a child is struggling in math, so the tester looks at his ability to:

- Count backwards
- Remember basic math facts
- Perform mental math
- Estimate

- Use place value
- Calculate
- Add and subtract

If the child performs below average on most of these behaviors, the tester may diagnose him with dyscalculia. If the child exhibits some of these behaviors, the tester may say he is showing some signs of dyscalculia, or the tester may mention specific behaviors but leave out the word "dyscalculia."

Teachers appreciate a diagnosis or a near-diagnosis, since it helps them research new strategies to use with the child. However, even without a diagnosis, an experienced teacher will be able to read the report, see the child's weaknesses, and formulate her daily lesson plans accordingly.

### **Testing vs. Not Testing**

Sometimes, parents hesitate to get formal educational testing, because they don't want the child to think of himself as delayed or disabled. Savvy parents and teachers can avoid this problem by communicating with each other about how to work with the child and how much to reveal to him.

Keep in mind, if a child has a learning disability, as he grows older, he will naturally compare himself to his friends and realize that he is different or has a problem. At that point, he will benefit from a clear understanding that he has a delay or disability; this is part of his wonderful self; it's not his fault; and he can use strategies to find success.

Sometimes, parents do not want their child to get tested, because they don't want the teacher to treat the child differently. Of course, no child should be embarrassed. On the other hand, if a child has a delay or disability, his teachers should be using specific (and sometimes different) strategies with him. The trick is to use these strategies with the other children as well. For example, if a child is struggling with temporal-sequential thinking, all the children could practice calculating time or organizing their schedules. In this way, the child will not stand out.

Some parents do not want to get their children to get tested, because they don't want their children to be medicated. Keep in mind:

- Doctors prescribe medicine for some children with ADHD, but not all.
- Doctors rarely prescribe medicine for other developmental delays or learning disabilities.
- No doctor or school may force a parent to medicate a child.

Formal educational testing can be quite valuable, because the final report gives us:

- 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. Let's say a child gets tested, and his parents find out he has expressive language disorder, or trouble expressing himself. Here is a list of possible strategies for this child:

[https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/inmdict/html/expressive\\_language\\_disorder.html](https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/inmdict/html/expressive_language_disorder.html).

As this child's parents and teachers work through these suggestions, they will discover some strategies that really help him. This is the goal of educational testing.

For children in upper elementary, middle school and high school, you may also want to do formal educational testing to get potential accommodations:

- Different classwork or homework
- Doing every other problem
- Tests read aloud
- Tests taken over several days
- Word banks for "fill in the blank" tests
- Extended due dates
- Shorter papers
- Copies of another student's notes or a teacher's PowerPoints
- Time and a half on classroom tests, standardized tests, ACT, SAT
- Separate, quiet space for classroom tests, standardized tests, ACT, SAT

Most teachers work with parents to create a list of acceptable accommodations for their child. If the school does not initiate this conversation early on, you should.

### **Where to Get Formal Educational Testing**

Child Find or your public school's special education department may offer free formal educational testing. Keep in mind:

- These organizations screen children. During the screening, they decide which formal tests to do (if any). They may deny your child free formal testing.
- The child's results will stay with him throughout his time in that school district.
- The child's results may follow him to his next school.
- The report may include a less detailed list of strengths and weaknesses.
- The report may include a vague list of suggested strategies.

You may also get formal educational testing through a private educational psychiatrist. In this case:

- It costs money. Your insurance may or may not cover it.

- You and the psychiatrist will decide together which tests are necessary.
- You completely control who has access to the test results.
- The report will probably include a more detailed explanation of your child's strengths and weaknesses.
- The report will probably include a longer list of suggested strategies, and they will probably be more specific to your child.
- You may have the opportunity to add suggested strategies to the list.
- Some testers will give you a second report written specifically for the school.

To find a private educational psychiatrist:

- Ask your child's pediatrician.
- Call Beaumont Hospital Center for Human Development at 248-691-4744.
- Search at:  
<https://www.wbsd.org/cms/lib/MI01909003/Centricity/Domain/1208/Family%20Teacher%20Resource%20List%20As%20of%20August%202017.pdf>
- Go to [www.eaglecreekacademy.com](http://www.eaglecreekacademy.com) or [www.myalpineacademy.com](http://www.myalpineacademy.com), login to the parent page, and look at the document called "Doctors & Tutors I."
- Ask your school to ask other parents where they have taken their children.

### **Oakland Schools Intermediate School District**

The Oakland ISD provides assistive technology, including audio recordings, hearing aids, books in Braille, books in large print, teacher microphones, and voice-to-text machines, to children who live or go to school in Oakland County. Call 248-209-2314 or 248-209-2533, or go to <https://www.oakland.k12.mi.us/educators/special-education>.

### **Organizations and Private Practices**

Dozens of organizations and private practices offer screening, testing, counseling, parent groups, and other helpful programs. Here are some options:

- [http://oxfordschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_733753/File/OS%20-%20Oakland%20County%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Resources%20\(2\).pdf](http://oxfordschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_733753/File/OS%20-%20Oakland%20County%20Guide%20to%20Community%20Resources%20(2).pdf)
- <https://www.wbsd.org/cms/lib/MI01909003/Centricity/Domain/1208/Family%20Teacher%20Resource%20List%20As%20of%20August%202017.pdf>

### **Most Important**

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