



Children and learning disabilities

*By Monica Ho Ehlers*

Health and fitness writer

Aside from being creative, insightful and bright, what did Walt Disney, Winston Churchill and Alexander Graham Bell have in common? Each one of these famous icons struggled with a learning disability yet went on to achieve great success.

A learning disability is a neurological disorder that hinders a person's capacity to process, store or produce information in an academic environment. According to the National Institutes of Health, one in seven Americans is said to have a learning issue, which amounts to about 15% of the population in the United States.

One of the greatest misconceptions is that people with learning disabilities are of below average intelligence. It's actually the opposite.

Students who are learning disabled are just as smart, if not smarter than many of their classmates. The difference is these kids, whose brains are considered to be "hardwired" differently may have a challenging time thriving in a traditional classroom setting if no plan of action is set in place.

The most common learning disabilities whether slight or severe, involve basic reading and language skills. Other disabilities include trouble with math, spelling, remembering information, or organizing thoughts.

About 80% of people with learning disabilities also have trouble reading.

Sometimes it's difficult for parents to acknowledge that their child may have a learning disability but it's very important that children receive the help that they need as soon as possible .

According to [ldonline.com](http://ldonline.com), a comprehensive website for families faced with learning disabilities and ADHD, "If these children receive appropriate help in the early grades, most of them will become skilled, independent readers. When help is delayed, it becomes harder and harder for children to catch up. Perhaps the most important reason to seek help early is to spare children the

frustration and failure they experience when they don't do well in school and don't know why. You must help your child understand that he or she simply learns differently."

Lorie M. of Burlingame observed something unusual about her son Ben at a very early age. "I thought about having him tested when he was about a year old. He didn't play with kids the way other kids did. He couldn't sit and play with a toy by himself. People told me I was crazy and that I shouldn't label him. But I could just see that something wasn't quite right."

So what do you do if you think your child may have a learning issue?

It is natural for parents to feel overwhelmed when faced with questions of where to go and what to do for a child who may be struggling with a learning disability. But there are a lot of resources available these days.

The first step is to talk to your child's teacher to see if he has noticed any issues in class or on the playground. Next, visit your pediatrician and list your concerns about your child's potential disability.

After your pediatrician rules out any issues related to your child's hearing, vision or diet your next step is to request an evaluation through your local school district.

According to the Notice of Procedural Safeguards and Parents' Rights offered by the San Mateo County Office of Education, parents, legal guardians and surrogate parents have the right to refer their children, ages 3 through 21 years old for special education services(to their local school district). Parents must be given opportunities to participate in any decision-making meeting regarding their child's special education program. This applies to all students, including those who attend private schools or are homeschooled.

Call your local school district's office and ask for the name of the person who conducts assessments for learning disabilities.

Next, address it to that person and send a certified, dated letter to your school district's main office requesting an evaluation for your child (most districts must reply or schedule an assessment within 30 business days).

Do not be discouraged if your child's testing does not warrant a diagnosis.

Lorie, who is a mother of four commented, "I have had Ben tested three times through the Burlingame School District and each time, his evaluation has fallen just short of him qualifying for any special education classes. The last time we had him tested, they told me he could definitely benefit from a social skills class but they didn't offer one."

After being denied further assistance from the school district, she was referred by Ben's doctor to a developmental pediatrician in San Mateo.

“By that time, he was already close to 4. The developmental pediatrician found that he had a developmental delay and is borderline ADHD. He also has an auditory processing delay, sensory integration delay, and a speech and language delay. It’s hard to figure out how a child like ours is supposed to go to speech and language appointments, have a tutor and social skills classes and still find time to have fun and be a kid. But we make it work,” she added.

It’s easy for children with a learning issue, be it mild or severe to slip through the cracks if they do not have an advocate. For parents, it can be a confusing and expensive process with rates for private testing ranging anywhere from \$100 to \$300 per hour. However, with the support of diligent and determined parents, kids with these issues can get the support they need to help them maintain their self-esteem while achieving lifelong success and reaching for their dreams.

For more information, checklists, resources and support for families that are dealing with learning disabilities, visit [www.ldonline.com](http://www.ldonline.com), [www.Schwablearning.org](http://www.Schwablearning.org) or [www.php.com](http://www.php.com)