



# **SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES**

**A MUST-KNOW FOR PARENTS, TEACHERS AND  
CARE GIVERS**



**Special Attention Project (SAP)**

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CARE GIVERS***

**Special Attention Project (SAP)  
2012**

**Cover picture:** *A twelve year old boy having difficulty in writing the alphabet*

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## WHAT ARE SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES?

Specific Learning Difficulties are learning difficulties in a specific area of the child's learning; for example reading or mathematics. The child may have no particular problems in other areas: a child with a mathematics difficulty may perform well in reading.

### **EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES:**

**Dyslexia:** Difficulty in reading, writing and spelling

**Irlen Syndrome:** Has to do with difficulty in how the brain interprets printed material

**Dyspraxia:** Difficulty in movement and coordination ('clumsiness')

**Dyscalculia:** Difficulty in mathematics

**Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder:**

Inability to concentrate well, pay attention and control behaviour.

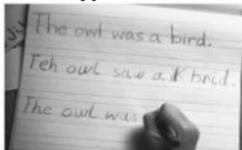
**Autism:** difficulty in relating and communicating with other people

Specific Learning Difficulties are seen in many children all over the world. Parents and teachers should learn about this so that they can help children who have these difficulties.

## **Dyslexia:** difficulty in reading, writing and spelling.

Typical signs:

- Children do not know whether to use the left or right hand to write.
- Children confuse letters that look similar: for example "m" and "w", "b" and "d".
- Children mix capital letters and small letters,
- Children reverse words like "was" –"saw"
- Children can read but not understand or can't read at all. Another example is reading "the mat sat on the cat" instead of "the cat sat on the mat"



### **What can I do to help my child?**

- Teach children to write using different techniques: writing in the sand, in the air, with the body, on paper.
- Teach children the sounds of the letters of the alphabet.
- Never ask your child to read aloud in public
- Explain things in different ways.
- Don't let them read writings that are in colours as they are difficult to read.
- When teaching to read, **show** the word (seeing), **say** the word (hearing) and let the child **trace** the word (feeling).



# Irlen Syndrome: problems with how the brain interprets text

A child with this problem can see alright but finds that words on a page seem to move, flicker, slip off or move in and out of focus, like this:



These children cannot see clearly what is written and therefore cannot read. They do not like bright/dark conditions (high contrast). They strain their eyes and have a lot of headaches when reading. They see only few letters of a page.

## What can I do to help my child?

- Do not let children read directly under very bright lights.
- Seek specialist help to get coloured overlays to help the child read well”

## **Dyspraxia:** difficulty with movement and coordination

Children with this difficulty have coordination problems and motor difficulties. They are often called 'clumsy'.



They can:

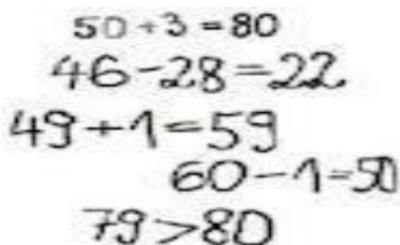
- Have poor handwriting,
- Be slow at dressing and unable to tie shoe laces
- Have difficulty to express themselves
- Have difficulty with basic tasks like sweeping and cleaning.

### **What can I do to help my child?**

- Establish consistent routines to help the child keep track of what he/she has to do;
- Always break down information/instruction in smaller bits;
- Change activities often, avoid tedious tasks;
- Let the child always repeat instructions.

## **Dyscalculia:** difficulty in mathematics

- A child with this problem may not be able to do basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.
- Not be able to do basic maths like addition, subtraction, multiplication and division
- Have difficulty learning to read time
- Have difficulty understanding directions.



Handwritten mathematical errors illustrating dyscalculia:

- $50 + 3 = 80$
- $46 - 28 = 22$
- $49 + 1 = 59$
- $60 - 1 = 50$
- $79 > 80$

### **What can I do to help my child?**

- Teach counting using simple rhymes like "One two buckle my shoe"
- Use pictures when teaching numbers;
- Teach numbers by matching the number and the quantity it represents.
- Demonstrate mathematics concepts like 'more and less'

# **Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADD/ADHD):** inability to concentrate well, pay attention and control behaviour.

Children with this problem:

- Find it difficult to pay attention
- May act without thinking
- Find it difficult to sit still or can be very dull
- Can be very playful
- Can be disorganized and impatient

'Hyperactivity' means the child is always active, moving and talking.



## **What can I do to help my child?**

- Let the child sit near the teacher's desk to prevent distraction.
- Reduce the amount of soft drinks, chocolates and food with artificial colour.
- Set clear time for activities and stick to them
- Give one instruction at a time
- Maintain eye contact when giving the instruction.
- Provide a place for homework without distractions: for example not close to a TV or fan, and not in front of a window.
- Let a hyperactive child play sports.



**Autism:** difficulty in relating to and communicating with other people.

Children with Autism may:

- Lack interest in other people
- Not like change
- Often have difficulty learning to talk
- Like to do things always the same way
- Like to play alone
- Not use or understand gestures
- Seem to live in its own world



**What can I do to help my child?**

- Use clear routines since they don't like change
- Use pictures/drawing of activities to be done so that the child can see what comes next.
- Try and use a lot of drawings or pictures when giving instructions.
- Use rehearsals and repetition when giving instructions
- Inform them ahead of time of any change.

## HOW TO HELP CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

- Parents should see their children as friends and be willing to have discussions with them.



- Try as much as possible to know why the child is unable to learn or misbehaving. Not all behaviour is intentional!

- Don't call children names such as "kobolo", "bad," "good for nothing", "lazy", "useless", "stupid"



- Children with learning problems are neither witches nor is their situation caused by witches. **Do not brand them as witches!!!** These children are not witches



but rather they have problems with learning and they need help.

- Children with learning difficulties need your attention most!
- Be patient when teaching them and try to understand them.



***“I can learn when given extra attention!!”***

- It will only take a bit longer, but your child can grow up to be a useful member of society.
- Parents must advise teachers not to beat children who are slow learners.
- Parents must tell others about the condition of their children and how they can be helped.



## **WHEN CHILDREN ARE HELPED AT HOME AND SCHOOL:**

- Children will feel loved and have a sense of belonging. When this happens children will be focused and can stay both at home and school.
- When children are helped at home and school they learn at their own pace, they are able to do well with time.
- Children may be talented in other areas such as carpentry, masonry, spraying, painting and other useful professions for them to be responsible in the future. It is therefore the duty of parents and teachers to be able to identify the natural talents in them and harness.



## **NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES ON CHILDREN**

When a child is unable to cope with classroom work, he or she may try to engage in negative activities in order to get attention. Some of them include

- Absenteeism
- Disturbing in class
- Not participating in class work
- Fighting
- Sleeping in class
- Not paying attention in class

**Be aware that negative behaviour may mean that the child has a problem!**

## LAWS IN GHANA THAT PROTECT CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

There are laws in Ghana that protect the rights of children including those with learning difficulties. Parents and the society must know that children have the right to be in school.

These are some Acts and Conventions:

- **Children's Act (560) 1998:** This Act states the rights of all children in Ghana. This law says that the welfare of the child should always be the first concern.
- **The Disability Act (715) 2006:** This Act deals with the rights of persons with disabilities, also children. Children with disabilities should be sent to school. That includes children with learning difficulties.
- **The Education Act (778) 2008:** This Act says that the Government should provide education to all children in Ghana. If a child has a disability or special need, the school should help the child.
- **Article 38 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana** requires government to provide access to Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) to ALL children.
- **United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):** Article 22 speaks of the right of children with disabilities to receive education on an equal basis with others.





## SPECIAL ATTENTION PROJECT (SAP)

Special Attention Project (SAP) is a Ghanaian NGO for out-of-school children with Specific Learning Difficulties. SAP has a two-way approach to helping these children.

The first approach is support for children who have dropped out of school because they find it difficult to learn.



At SAP, the children are accepted and offered **individualised education** by specialised professional teachers.

The second approach is to prevent more children with learning difficulties from dropping out of school.

This is done through continued **research** on children with learning difficulties in the country.



SAP also **advocates** and creates **awareness** through the media and community campaigns on children with learning difficulties.

Finally, SAP offers **training** to teachers on how to identify and manage children with learning difficulties.



**HOW TO JOIN THE CAMPAIGN FOR  
CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING  
DIFFICULTIES**

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