



# Specific Learning Difficulties

*A must-read for parents, teachers and care givers*



**Special Attention Project (SAP)**

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care givers*

**Special Attention Project (SAP)**

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

**[www.sapghana.com](http://www.sapghana.com)**

## Table of Contents

<b>What are Specific Learning Difficulties?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Dyslexia</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Irlen Syndrome</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Dyscalculia</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Dyspraxia</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Autism</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>How to help children with learning difficulties</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Negative effects of Specific Learning Difficulties</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>When children are helped</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Laws that protect children</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>How you can join the campaign</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Special Attention Project (SAP)</b>	<b>17</b>

## What are Specific Learning Difficulties?

- A Specific Learning Difficulty is a difficulty in a particular area of learning.
- Specific Learning Difficulties are different in each individual.
- Specific Learning Difficulties are different from over-all learning difficulties, which affect intelligence and general skills.
- A child with a Specific Learning Difficulty may have no particular problems in other areas; for example, a child with a mathematics difficulty may perform well in reading.

### Some examples of Specific Learning Difficulties:

#### **Dyslexia:**

Difficulty in reading, writing and spelling

#### **Dyscalculia:**

Difficulty in mathematics

#### **Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder:**

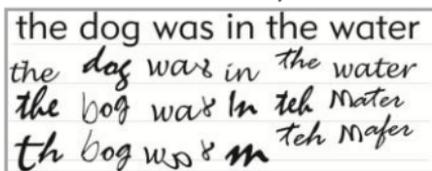
Inability to concentrate well, pay attention and control behaviour.

*Specific Learning Difficulties affect many children all over the world. Parents and teachers should learn about it so that they can help children who have these difficulties.*

## Dyslexia: difficulty in reading, writing and spelling

Typical signs:

- The child confuses letters that look similar: for example 'm' and 'w', 'b' and 'd', 'n' and 'u';
- The child reads slowly and finds it difficult to scan words;
- The child reverses words like 'was' – 'saw';
- The child spells the same word differently even in the same text.



### What can I do to help?

- Teach the child to write by using different techniques: writing in the sand, in the air, with the body, with chalk, on paper;
- Teach the child the **sounds** of the letters of the alphabet instead of the names;
- Never ask the child to read aloud in public;
- When teaching to read, **show** the word (seeing), **say** the word (hearing) and let the child **trace** the word (feeling).
- Don't let the child read text that is in colours or capital letters, as they are difficult to read. Here is a helpful link:

[http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/files/userfiles/About Us/policies/Dyslexia Style Guide.pdf](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/files/userfiles/About%20Us/policies/Dyslexia%20Style%20Guide.pdf)

# Irlen Syndrome: visual perception disorder

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:



Children with Irlen Syndrome find it difficult to read print. They are also affected by bright lights and strong colour contrasts. They easily strain their eyes and often have headache when reading. They cannot judge distance or spatial relationship well.

## What can I do to help?

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

NB Irlen Syndrome is also called 'Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome'.

## **Dyscalculia:** difficulty in mathematics

A child with this difficulty may

- Not be able to do basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division;
- Have difficulty learning the concept of time;
- Have difficulty understanding directions;
- Have difficulty with financial organisation.

$$\begin{array}{l} 50 + 3 = 80 \\ 46 - 28 = 22 \\ 49 + 1 = 59 \\ 60 - 1 = 50 \\ 79 > 80 \end{array}$$



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

- Use practical examples to explain math concepts;
- Use pictures when teaching numbers;
- Teach numbers by matching the number and the quantity it represents.

# Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity)

**Disorder:** in-attention and impulsivity with or without excessive energy levels

Children with this difficulty may:

- Find it difficult to pay attention;
- Act without thinking;
- Find it difficult to sit still or can be very dull;
- Be very playful;
- Be disorganised and impatient.



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

## What can I do to help?

- 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 and maintain a clear timetable for activities;
- 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.



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

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

They:

- Often trip over and knock into things or people;
- Often spill or drop things;
- Have difficulty with practical tasks like dressing, tying a shoe lace or sweeping;
- Often scatter and forget their belongings.



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

- Establish consistent routines and schedules to help the child keep track of what he/she has to do;
- Practice tasks like tying a shoe lace at home; if the child finds it difficult, let them wear shoes without shoe laces to school (sandals, Velcro);
- Allow extra time for assignments and activities;
- Use cards or checklists to remember which items to put in the school bag.

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

Children with Autism may:

- Lack interest in other people;
- Not like change;
- Have difficulty learning to talk / talk late;
- Like to do things always the same way;
- Like to play alone;
- Not use or understand gestures;
- Seem to live in their own world.

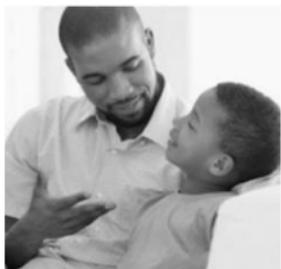


### **What can I do to help?**

- Use clear routines and rituals;
- Use pictures/drawing of activities to be done so that the child can see what comes next;
- Use rehearsals and repetition when giving instructions;
- Inform them ahead of time of any change;
- If possible, give them lead roles to improve interpersonal skills.

## How to help children with learning difficulties

- Parents should see their children as friends and be willing to talk with them.
- Try to find out why the child is unable to learn or is misbehaving. Not all behaviour is intentional!
- Don't call children names or humiliate them.
- Learning difficulties are not spiritual problems. Do not accuse children of witchcraft, but rather seek specialist help.
- Be patient when teaching or helping with homework, and keep track of learning progress.



**Children with learning difficulties need your attention most!**





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

## **What more can you do?**

- Contact a support organisation for more information and advice on Specific Learning Difficulties.
- Parents can advise teachers not to beat or insult children who have learning difficulties.
- Parents can tell others about their children and how they can be helped.
- Parents should team up with other parents and speak up for better learning help for their children in school!



## **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
- Stealing
- Not paying attention in class

A child with a learning difficulty may feel inferior to his peers and behave badly in order to prevent being bullied.

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

## When children are helped at home and school

When a child with learning difficulties receives the right help, he or she will grow up and be happy like other children.

- Children will feel loved and have a sense of belonging, despite the challenges they face.
- Children will feel confident that they too can achieve and have a meaningful life.
- Children will discover that they have talents in many areas that they can develop, for example good practical skills or communication gifts.

Many people with learning difficulties have become **famous and very successful** in their field. Examples are:



Thomas Edison  
(Inventor)



Whoopi Goldberg  
(Actress)



Richard Branson  
(Entrepreneur)

## Laws that protect children with Specific Learning Difficulties

Parents and others must know that children with disabilities have the **right to education**, like all other children. That includes children with learning difficulties.

- Ghana has ratified the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**: Article 24 says children with disabilities have the right to quality education in their own community on an equal basis with other children.
- Ghana has ratified the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**. This Convention states the rights of all children and prohibits discrimination.

There are the following laws in Ghana:

- **The Disability Act (715)**: This law says that children with disabilities should be in school and given help.
- **The Education Act (778)**: This law says that the Government should provide education to ALL children in Ghana.
- **Children's Act (560)**: This law says that the welfare of a child should always be the first concern.

There is also the **Inclusive Education Policy** of the Ghana Education Service which provides that all children with various disabilities receive help in their own schools.

# How you can join the Campaign for children with Specific Learning Difficulties

**JOIN US NOW:**

...why can't he do this work !?  
*We give him everything...  
 My husband and myself both did well  
 in school... His sister is first in class...*  
**WHY?**



An initiative of:



**SAP**  
[www.sapghana.com](http://www.sapghana.com)

## National Movement on Specific Learning Difficulties

For Parents, Teachers, Self-advocates and Professionals who are directly affected by Specific Learning Difficulties

**The Movement will:**

- \*Provide Mutual Support and Professional Advice
- \*Spread information on Specific Learning Difficulties
- \*Be a strong voice for the rights of persons with Specific Learning Difficulties



To sign up:  
 Contact Ishmael, Awareness Officer of SAP  
 020-6526444 or [social@sapghana.com](mailto:social@sapghana.com)  
[www.sapghana.com](http://www.sapghana.com)

## SAP Volunteers



Are you a Ghanaian citizen who strongly believes that social problems can be solved by citizens' actions? Woforo dua pa a

If Yes:  
 become a SAP Volunteer!



*"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others"*  
 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)

[www.sapghana.com](http://www.sapghana.com)

# Special Attention Project (SAP)



Special Attention Project (SAP) is a Ghanaian NGO for the rights of children with Specific Learning Difficulties.

SAP:

- Spreads information about Specific Learning Difficulties;
- Advocates for learning support for pupils with learning difficulties;
- Conducts research and training on Specific Learning Difficulties;
- Provides individualised education and practical support to children who have dropped out of school because of learning difficulties.



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