

Heads Up, Teachers: Red Flags for Possible LD

Teachers are the first line of defense in recognizing and helping preschool students manage learning disabilities. Here's what you should be looking for in six critical areas of development.

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Most children who have ADHD are not diagnosed until the elementary school grades. With [younger children](#), it is harder to distinguish normal rambunctious, inattentive, and uninhibited behavior from behavior that is abnormal and symptomatic of ADHD.

[Early identification of ADHD](#) or any related developmental problems, and early intervention, can make a huge, positive difference in the life of a child and his family. They can significantly minimize the social, behavioral, or learning difficulties the child experiences as a result of the disorder, and prevent a lot of struggle down the road.

Preschool and kindergarten teachers are in the best position to catch [early signs](#) and symptoms of a developmental delay or disability, and to identify children who are at risk for struggles in learning and school. Teachers need to be aware of symptoms — and share their observations and concerns with parents and other school specialists (such as the school's multi-disciplinary team).

A child with ADHD may have other developmental weaknesses or delays in some areas — speech-language, motor skills, or academic readiness, shown by difficulty in learning and remembering ABCs, numbers, shapes, and letter-sound associations. It is important to be aware that children with ADHD often have co-existing learning disabilities, such as dyslexia. Some warnings of LD in preschool and kindergarten include the following:

Language

1. Slow development in speaking words or sentences (“late talkers”)
2. Pronunciation problems
3. Difficulty learning new words; slow vocabulary growth
4. Difficulty finding the right word to use when speaking
5. Difficulty understanding and following simple (one-step) directions
6. Difficulty understanding questions
7. Difficulty recognizing or learning rhyming words

8. Lack of interest in storytelling
9. Immature grammar (syntax)

Emergent Literacy Skills

1. Slow speed in naming objects and colors
2. Limited phonological awareness (rhyming and syllable blending)
3. Difficulty understanding that written language is composed of phonemes (individual sounds) and letters that make up syllables and words
4. Minimal interest in print and limited print awareness
5. Difficulty recognizing and learning the letters of the alphabet
6. Difficulty learning the connection between letters and sounds

Cognition

1. Trouble memorizing the alphabet or days of the week
2. Poor memory for what should be routine (everyday procedures)
3. Difficulty with cause and effect, sequencing, and counting
4. Difficulty with basic concepts, such as size, shape, and color

Motor Skills

1. Clumsiness
2. Poor balance
3. Difficulty with fine motor skills and manipulating small objects (stringing beads, tying shoes, buttoning)
4. Awkwardness with running, jumping, or climbing (delayed gross motor skills)
5. Difficulty with or avoidance of drawing, coloring, tracing, or copying

Social Behavior

1. Trouble interacting with others, plays alone
2. Easily frustrated
3. Hard to manage, temper tantrums
4. Has difficulty following directions

Attention and Behavior

1. Distractibility and inattention
2. Impulsivity
3. Hyperactivity
4. Difficulty changing activities or handling disruptions to routines.