



# FACT SHEET

## THE ADULT WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND EMPLOYMENT

For many adults who have learning disabilities, the skills of searching and applying for a job, attending an interview, accepting a job offer and then keeping a job may be particularly difficult.

Many are unaware that the difficulties they encountered in school, and the problems in their jobs are due to learning disabilities.

The bright, alert demeanour of the person who has learning disabilities fosters behavioural expectations that may not be met. The disappointment that follows is equally frustrating to both employer and employee.

What are the major signs an employer should watch for?

### PERFORMANCE

#### INCONSISTENCY:

- excellent spoken vocabulary with good sentence structure but unable to write thoughts;
- able to develop a complicated set of arrangements over the telephone but becoming confused in group discussions;
- capable of following printed information, but experiencing difficulty with verbal instructions;
- understanding and identifying key elements in spoken information but unable to identify important points in print;

#### DIFFICULTY WITH TIME SPACE AND NUMBERS

- confusing up with down; left with right; getting lost easily;
- arriving late or unusually early for appointments;
- problems in preparing and following simple work schedules;
- difficulty doing accurate numerical or mathematical work, trouble with budgeting and money handling.

#### COMMUNICATIONS CONFUSION

- misinterpreting different meanings implied by tones of voice;
- inaccurately responding to non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, eye contact, body and hand gestures;
- interpreting language literally rather than understanding figures of speech.

#### CONCENTRATION PROBLEMS

- easily distracted by background noise and/or visual distractions;
- difficulty paying attention to, and sometimes understanding and remembering, oral instructions;
- a short attention span;
- ongoing problems completing assignments or tasks.

#### POOR CO-ORDINATION

- appearing clumsy, awkward, and apparently accident-prone;

- poor hand coordination;
- difficulty in listening and taking notes at the same time;
- copying inaccurately, with poor writing skills;
- showing a lack of organization in written work.

It is felt by many people that the formal identification and disclosure of the presence of a learning disability assist both the employer and the employee.

#### THE BENEFITS FOR THE EMPLOYER INCLUDE:

- a better understanding of the employee's needs,
- the ability to accommodate the learning disability without facing complaints from other employees and
- the ability to meet the requirements of employment equity legislation.

#### THE BENEFITS FOR THE EMPLOYEE INCLUDE:

- access to an appropriate job,
- improved prospects for appropriate compensatory strategies and job accommodations and
- the accompanying reduction in stress, related to covering up mistakes and hiding the presence of the learning disability.

#### WHAT ARE "JOB ACCOMMODATIONS" OR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY?

These may include but are not limited to the following:

- flexible work assignments

- access to word processors, calculators, tape recorders, voice recognition phones to permit dialing by voice;
- automatic dialers for persons with sequencing problems;
- timers to help recognize the time spent on various tasks;
- scanners that scan printed text and read it out loud.

Statistics tell us that many people with learning disabilities typically hold a job for three months. Many spend years on the merry-go-round of hiring and firing, until they give up altogether. Others settle for entry level jobs even if they have the potential and skills to progress well beyond that point.

**WHAT ARE THE EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITIES?**

- As a business person, it is in your best interest to recognize that staff turnover accounts for a great deal of lost productivity. It is more profitable to make "job accommodations" for an employee with learning disabilities than to hire a new person for a particular job.

**WHAT ARE THE EMPLOYEE'S RESPONSIBILITIES?**

- To cooperate in the development of a "job accommodation" plan that is mutually agreeable and acceptable.
- To work in a diligent and effective manner to meet job standards.

**RESOURCES FOR ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY**

Individuals and employers can get help in identifying appropriate assistive technology and/or accommodations in the

workplace by contacting the *Job Accommodations Network (JAN/CANA)* at 1-800-526-2262 or <http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/> Consultants give free professional advice in determining the best job accommodation strategies for your situation.

**ADAPTED FROM:**

- *Design for Success: An Employer's Guide to Learning Disabilities*, by E. Nichols, (1994) LDA-Ontario.
- *Tools for Transitions: A Counsellor's Guide to Learning Disabilities*, by E. Nichols, (1994) LDA-Ontario.
- *Employing People with Learning Disabilities is Good Business*, by LDAC, (1993)
- *Nobody's Perfect: An Employer's Introduction to Learning Disabilities* by E. Nichols, (1994), LDA-Ontario.

<p><b>FACT SHEET</b>  <i>Adults with Learning Disabilities and Employment</i></p> <p>Learning Disabilities Association of Canada          250 City Centre Avenue, Suite 616          Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1R 6K7          (613) 238-5721          (613) 235-5391 (fax)          email: <a href="mailto:info@ldac-acta.ca">info@ldac-acta.ca</a>          web site: <a href="http://www.ldac-acta.ca">www.ldac-acta.ca</a></p>	<p><b>DISTRIBUTED BY:</b></p> <p>Learning Disabilities Association of New Brunswick          203-403, rue Regent          Fredericton, NB E3B 3X6          Telephone : 506-459-7852          Toll Free : 1-877-544-7852          Email : <a href="mailto:ldanb_tanb@nb.aibn.com">ldanb_tanb@nb.aibn.com</a>          Website : <a href="http://www.nald.ca/ldanb">www.nald.ca/ldanb</a></p>
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