



FACT SHEET

DEALING WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN RELATIONSHIPS

Learning disabilities may present many challenges to the individual other than the obvious. They can have a great impact on relationships and personal interactions. The effects are experienced by persons with learning disabilities and their partners. The problems can manifest themselves in a variety of situations.

A person with learning disabilities may be frustrated about the way a partner provides assistance by feeling stifled when too much is routinely provided, which may give rise to the perception that he or she is stupid or being treated like a child. Also, he or she may feel unfairly blamed for relationship problems, such as not listening or not trying hard enough, which may be due to his/her learning disabilities.

The partner without learning disabilities may experience resentment at having to continually tend to the needs of the other, while many of his/her needs may seem to go unmet.

As everyone has good and bad days, so do individuals with learning disabilities, but theirs are often much more pronounced and frequent. Their capabilities can vary widely from day to day without any predictable patterns or identifiable causes.

Since learning disabilities often are not visible, both partners may have difficulty understanding and accepting the limitations they create. No matter who has the disability, the problems must be worked out together. It is important to distinguish between difficulties which

can be overcome (using strategies and accommodations) and those which are not likely to change.

The following are some helpful tips that may be useful for partners who have learning disabilities:

1. Have a good understanding of the way in which the learning disabilities affect your ability to process information, communicate, etc.
2. Explain to your partner how the learning disabilities interfere with many aspects of everyday life.
3. Request accommodations in a direct manner without feeling guilty or giving excuses.
4. To maintain credibility with others, avoid "crying wolf."
5. Accept that some tasks may take longer.
6. Be as self-reliant as possible by finding alternatives to overburdening your partner.

These tips may be useful for the partner of a person who has a learning disability:

1. Try to recognize, specifically, how the learning disability impacts your partner's ability to: pay attention, comprehend,

conceptualize, visualize, communicate, be organized, follow conversations, interpret body language, etc.

2. Be aware that what appears to be a simple and logical way to carry out a task for you may not be the most logical way for the person with learning disabilities. Persuading the partner to "just do it this way" is not necessarily helpful. Conversely, you should accept that what seems like a roundabout method may, in fact, be the easiest way for your partner to complete the task.
3. Remember that the learning disability thought process may manifest itself in a nonlinear fashion, which may seem confusing.
4. Refrain from demanding that your partner "try harder" to correct a disability. This would be like expecting a deaf person to hear by trying harder.
5. Be aware that "symptoms" of the learning disabilities may be more apparent at the end of the day or when your partner is fatigued.

Socially constructed gender roles may compound the effects of learning

disabilities. For instance, men have traditionally been designated as breadwinners. This has not been realistic for some men with learning disabilities who have had difficulties with job stability and career advancement. A couple can reduce the stress they feel by creating more realistic expectations and redefining their roles according to each person's abilities, rather than tradition.

Although couples may feel that learning disabilities are a unique problem, they are shared by a great number of people. Due to the close interaction of a relationship, the effects of learning disabilities are often greatly magnified, thus creating additional stress for the couple. It is only with hard work and a lot of understanding that these problems may be resolved.

About the Author: Brita Miller is a board member of the Coalition for Adults with Learning Differences (CALD) and the Adult Issues Chair for the Learning Disabilities Association of California (LDA-CA). She is also a member of the California Rehabilitation Advisory Council and a member of the San Diego County Literacy Network. Source: *Linkages* Vol. 2, No. 2 National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center.

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