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THE ADULT WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Many adults with learning disabilities are not aware that the difficulties they encountered in school, and the problems in their relationships or their jobs, are due to learning disabilities.

It was once believed that learning disabilities was a childhood disorder. We now know that this is not true - learning disabilities are lifelong and can affect friendships, school, work, self-esteem, and daily life.

Many adults with learning disabilities lead very productive and successful lives. But for many, success is not easy. Even though they have average or above average intelligence, some adults with learning disabilities are conditioned to believe that they are stupid and lazy. Their defeated efforts often result in frustrations, disappointment, low self-esteem and failure.

WHAT IS A LEARNING DISABILITY?

A learning disability is a disorder that affects people's ability to either interpret what they see and hear or to link information from different parts of the brain. Although the individual with a learning disability has an average or above-

average IQ, the disability becomes evident in both academic and social situations. Learning disabilities may be divided into five categories:

- 1 Visual Problems:** poor visual memory, reversals in writing
- 2 Auditory Problems:** poor auditory memory, speech problems
- 3 Motor Problems:** poor hand-eye coordination
- 4 Organizational Problems:** poor ability in organizing time or space
- 5 Conceptual Problems:** poor social skills and peer relations, difficulty correctly interpreting non-verbal language.

Learning disabilities need not prevent an individual from leading a productive and happy life. Individuals with learning disabilities can be found in all walks of life. Success may depend on many factors - severity of disability, early identification, remediation, career choice, support from family, friends and employers, etc.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE A LEARNING DISABILITY?

You are not alone!! Learning disabilities affect approximately 10 per cent of the population. This means more than 3 million Canadians.

COMMON SIGNS AND CHARACTERISTICS

No individual will manifest all of the difficulties listed below.

- Difficulty reading, writing, spelling.
- Inability to complete a job application form.
- Cannot follow written direction and/or remember several verbal directions.
- Problems putting thoughts down on paper.
- Feelings of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.
- Difficulty finding or keeping a job.
- Difficulty budgeting and managing money.
- Time management difficulties.
- Short attention span, restlessness or hyperactivity.
- Difficulty in remembering and following the sequence of instructions.
- Difficulty in understanding appropriate social behaviour.

(Common Signs -
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- Poor coordination and spatial disorientation.
- Difficulty with problem solving strategies.

It is important to note that these characteristics are often balanced by the presence of significant strengths and creativity.

USING SUCCESSFUL COPING STRATEGIES

Coping strategies are methods, systems, or tricks people use to help themselves accomplish what they want/need to do.

Examples include:

- Identifying and recognizing strengths and weaknesses.
- Setting realistic goals based on abilities.
- Using technology to compensate for weaknesses (word processor, spell checker, calculator, books on tape, etc.).

- Accepting the disability and knowing that it's quite OK.
- Being flexible - finding other ways of getting information.
- Joining activity-centered groups to make friends.
- Breaking down large tasks into small ones.
- Identifying deadlines for small manageable tasks.
- Making to-do lists with deadlines.
- Prioritizing rather than procrastinating.

IF THESE ARE NOT ENOUGH!

If solid coping skills and compensatory strategies are not developed, the learning disability may continue to interfere with work, education, social relations and basic daily activities. Some suggestions are:

- Being assessed by a professional trained in learning disabilities

(neuro-psychologist, educational psychologist, etc.).

- Finding other adults with learning disabilities for sharing strategies, information and support.
- Seeking counselling from a professional with knowledge about learning disabilities.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Having a learning disability is a life-long condition.
- You are not alone.
- Support and information is available.
- Celebrate your uniqueness.
- Remember, it is never too late to ask for help!
- Never give up!

For more information, please contact the address below!

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