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Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties

Welcome to this Dyslexia and Other Specific Learning Difficulties course.

We hope you find all of the information contained in this resource pack interesting and informative. This learning resource and the assessment questions have been approved by CACHE as a great way to meet the learning outcomes for this qualification. (A complete list of the learning outcomes can be found at the back of this workbook.)

This course is made up of **two** parts (A and B). This is **Part A**, which contains **three** units:

Unit 1: Understand Specific Learning Difficulties

Unit 2: Understand the effects of Specific Learning Difficulties

Unit 3: Understand the diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties

As you start to read through each page, you will be able to make notes and comments on things you have learnt or may want to revisit at a later stage. At the end of each section, you will be asked to answer the relevant assessment questions.

Once you have answered the questions, go to the next section and continue studying until all of the assessment questions have been completed.

Please make sure that you set aside enough time to read each section carefully, making notes and completing all of the activities. This will allow you to gain a better understanding of the subject content, and will help you to answer all of the assessment questions accurately.

Good luck with your study. Now let's begin!



Unit 1: Understand Specific Learning Difficulties

Welcome to Unit 1.

This unit has **two** sections. These are:

Section 1: The range and characteristics of Specific Learning Difficulties

Section 2: The nature of Specific Learning Difficulties

Section 1: The range and characteristics of Specific Learning Difficulties

This section will explore the following:

- What is meant by the term Specific Learning Difficulty
- What is meant by a range of Specific Learning Difficulties
- The characteristics of a range of Specific Learning Difficulties
- How characteristics of Autism Spectrum Condition may cause difficulties with learning
- How characteristics can vary from individual to individual
- Other conditions that may co-occur with Specific Learning Difficulties.



What is meant by the term Specific Learning Difficulty

First of all, it is important to be clear about what is meant by **Specific Learning Difficulty** (SpLD).

Specific Learning Difficulty is a term that describes differences or difficulties with particular aspects of learning. These difficulties can affect the way a person learns or processes information and their ability to work with spoken or written language. SpLDs can also affect the organisation of a person's movements. The impact on a person's life is extensive and variable, often extending way beyond reading, writing and arithmetic difficulties.

SpLDs are a group of related conditions, and people commonly have traits of more than one SpLD at the same time. They are believed to affect around 15% of the population to a certain degree.

It is important to note the word **specific**, as this tells us that these difficulties affect a **specific** range of abilities in a significant but selective way, whilst the person's general intellectual abilities are not affected. In fact, SpLDs often occur in people of above average intelligence.



The most common SpLDs are:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) / Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Dyslexia
- Developmental Coordination Disorder
- Dyscalculia.

In addition, individuals who have an **Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC)**, and are therefore on the autistic spectrum, often have co-occurring SpLDs as well.

An individual who has an SpLD will have difficulties in areas specific to them, for example they could suffer from problems with reading, writing, and remembering. The difficulties people experience are on a scale from mild to moderate through to severe. A person who is identified as having one SpLD often has traits of others to a greater or lesser degree.

Although SpLDs do not mean that the person cannot achieve academically, they can have a significant impact on education and learning. For people with SpLDs, the learning journey can be a lot harder and require much more effort.

SpLDs should be distinguished from general learning difficulties, which are identified when a child has very low general **cognitive ability** (this is the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge) and hence is likely to have problems in all areas of learning.

It is also important to note that SpLDs are independent of intellectual ability, socioeconomic background or language background.



Key Fact

SpLD is an umbrella term used to cover a range of difficulties affecting the way information is learnt and processed. A person may have more than one of these difficulties at the same time.

What is meant by a range of Specific Learning Difficulties

The range of conditions known as SpLDs are closely related, have some symptoms in common with one another, and often overlap in individuals.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) / Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

The terms **Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)** and **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** refer to the same condition and ADD is the more outdated term.

ADHD is a common behavioral disorder that starts during childhood and has symptoms that include hyperactivity, inattentiveness and impulsive behaviors. As a result of these symptoms, many adults have trouble organising themselves and managing their time.

It is suggested that between 3% to 9% of children in the UK may have ADHD, with more boys than girls being identified.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia means a 'difficulty with words' and is a relatively common SpLD that affects the ability to read, spell and write accurately and fluently. Because of the difficulties dyslexic people have in processing the sounds and words they see and hear, this can lead to memory problems and problems retrieving information from memory. Dyslexia affects approximately 10% of the population.

Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

Developmental Coordination Disorder, also known as **dyspraxia**, is a common disorder affecting children and adults. It affects the way the brain processes information. A person with DCD may also find it difficult to articulate their words and may struggle with memory, planning and carrying out everyday tasks in life. The condition is thought to be fairly common, with around 6% of school age children being affected.

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a difficulty with numbers that means the person has problems with basic arithmetic and performing accurate calculations. The person may also have a poor memory for numbers and basic maths. They might struggle with directions and the concept of time. This condition is thought to affect between 3% to 6% of the population with different degrees of severity.

The characteristics of a range of Specific Learning Difficulties

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) / Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

ADHD is a lifelong condition that causes an individual to be inattentive, hyperactive and impulsive.

There are **three** ways in which an individual can present the characteristics of ADHD, and they are:

1. Inattentive presentation
2. Hyperactive-impulsive presentation
3. A combination of the above.

The first presentation, **inattentive**, tends to affect girls more than boys. The second presentation, **hyperactive-impulsive**, tends to affect boys more than girls. This is an important feature of the condition because it is easier to spot hyperactive and impulsive symptoms than it is to identify the inattentive type that appears in girls.

Girls with ADHD **inattentive** type are, therefore, often missed in their early years at school and this can have serious long-term consequences for their learning and development.

All of these presentations often go hand in hand with other SpLDs.

Dyslexia

This is characterised primarily by impaired cognitive skills related to reading, and is usually associated with difficulty in written language, especially spelling.

The associated difficulties are with:

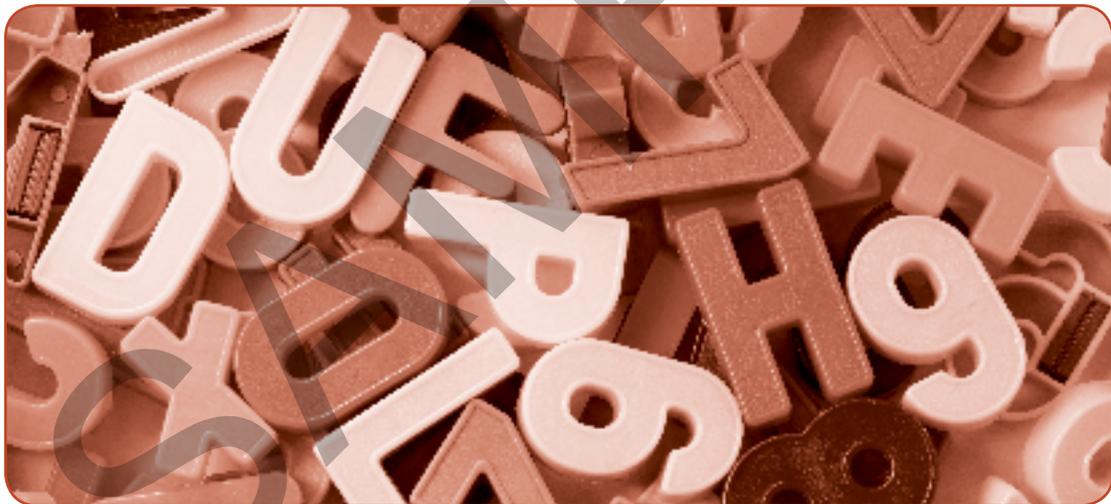
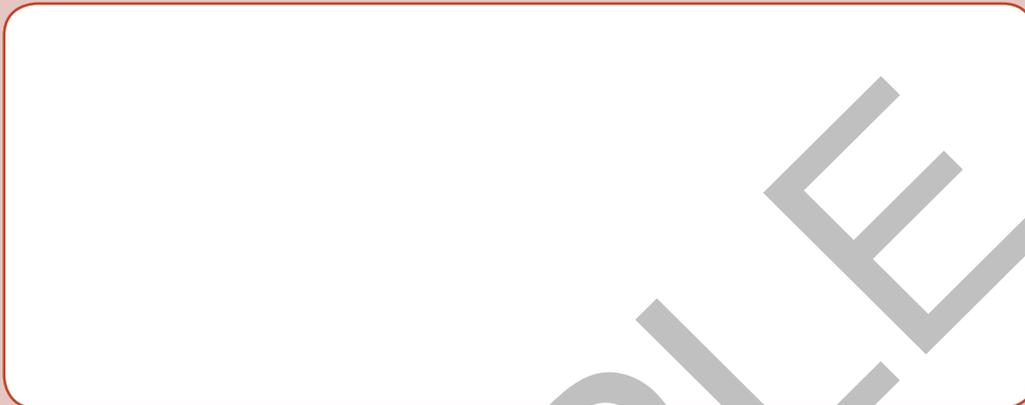
- **Phonological awareness** – this is the ability to understand that words are made up of smaller units of sound
- **Verbal memory** – this is the ability to remember a sequence of spoken information
- **Rapid naming** – the ability to quickly name objects, colours and numbers
- **Verbal processing speed** – the ability to process and write down information that is given verbally.

R

Further Research: Phonological awareness

For more information about phonological awareness and how children learn reading skills, use the link provided below to watch a video entitled Decodable Words vs Sight Words.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvhC-4w9TKY>



Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)

DCD causes the brain to be inefficient in passing messages around the body. This can result in poorly coordinated movements, problems with planning, and difficulties in processing language and thoughts.

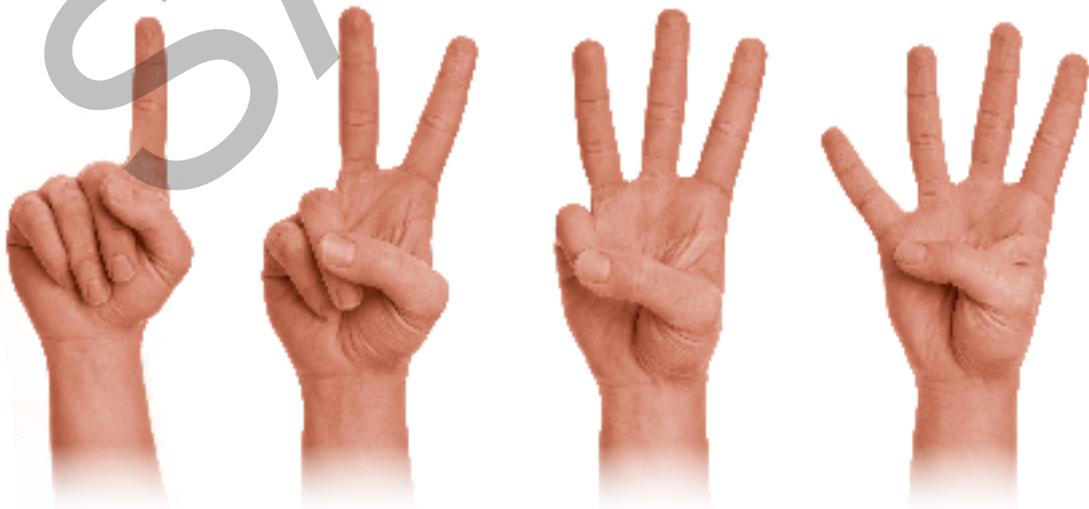
Single movements or tasks may be done well, but it is harder for the individual to coordinate several different movements or tasks, especially when there is a time pressure.

Dyscalculia

People with the SpLD known as dyscalculia have a difficulty with arithmetic, counting and generally mastering basic numeracy skills.

Although each SpLD has its own characteristics, as has previously been explained, there are many similar characteristics shared by all SpLDs. These include:

- Individuals having good and bad days
- Difficulty processing sensory input, such as sounds and sights
- Poor short-term memory
- Poor working memory
- Difficulty with managing time
- Hypersensitivity to the environment
- Difficulties with sequencing
- Lack of rhythm
- Difficulties with balance
- Difficulties with listening when with multiple speakers
- An inclination to avoid new or unpredictable situations
- Difficulty sleeping
- Low self-esteem.



How characteristics of Autism Spectrum Condition may cause difficulties with learning

Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) is a spectrum of difficulties that affect how a person communicates with, and relates to, other people. It affects around 1% of the population. It includes:

- Autism
- Asperger's syndrome
- High-functioning Autism (HFA).

Just as more than one SpLD can occur in the same person at the same time, some people with ASC may also have symptoms of SpLDs. Most commonly this is in relation to Asperger's syndrome.

Q. What is a spectrum?

A. A spectrum is a group or category of behaviours with certain key features, but with important differences within it that range from mild to severe. In the case of autism, the term spectrum describes the range of people with symptoms affecting their communication, social interaction and social imagination, and recognises that these symptoms differ significantly in how individuals experience them.

People with ASC have problems of inflexibility and restrictiveness when engaging in activities and interests. These problems can affect:

- Social and interactive skills
- Personal relationships
- The range of activities that they engage with
- The environments that they can cope with
- Their emotions.

ASC, or simply **autism**, is widely understood to be a social disorder or disability. Its features include limited social, emotional and communication skills, and a tendency to engage in obsessive and repetitive behaviour. Other features may include cognitive delays, rigid behaviour and Sensory Processing Disorder.

Asperger's syndrome

This is a considerably **milder** type of ASC, although it is still relatively challenging to diagnose. People with Asperger's syndrome are generally as similar to people in the 'mainstream' of society as they are to those with autism. As a consequence of this, there are likely to be many individuals with Asperger's syndrome who may have the condition but are unlikely to ever be medically diagnosed.

Asperger's syndrome is generally seen as lacking the language and developmental delays of other autism disorders, although individuals differ widely in the extent to which the condition is disabling in practical terms.

People with Asperger's syndrome may also have motor (movement) coordination difficulties similar to those seen in DCD (dyspraxia). The person may be diagnosed as having both of these conditions.

In common with many people who have an SpLD, due to the wide variety of types of SpLDs and autism, it may not be immediately obvious that some people are living with these conditions, as their behaviour may not differ significantly from the behaviour of individuals without the conditions.



Autism, however, has a practical impact on the individual in terms of:

- How they are perceived
- Their experience of the environment and of other people
- Their ability to function and access benefits from services and activities in the wider community and in society as a whole.

Children with ASC may have significant problems with their social interactions and language difficulties. They may also display behavioural issues, such as repetitive patterns of behaviour and interests.

High-functioning Autism (HFA)

High-functioning Autism is difficult to distinguish from Asperger's syndrome, and is more difficult still for medical professionals to diagnose in practice.

Individuals with HFA may exhibit some of the features of ASC, such as limited social skills, obsessive interests and emotional responses, which may in some cases seem inappropriate to other people.

However, they are likely to be significantly more intelligent than average, and are much more likely to occupy professional positions such as those in education, ICT and industry.

The presentation and experience of ASC differs greatly from individual to individual, but most theorists recognise that all people with the condition experience difficulties or delays in three major areas, known as the **triad of impairments**.

These **three** areas are:

- Communication
- Social development
- Repetitive or obsessive behaviour.



Key Fact

Specific Learning Difficulties and autism can occur together in the same person. An individual who is autistic might also have SpLDs.

How characteristics can vary from individual to individual

The difficulties experienced by people with SpLDs vary in severity and significance, and appear across all ranges of ability. This explains why the impact of SpLDs varies very much from person to person, and why individuals differ widely in terms of how their symptoms are presented.

Many people with an SpLD remain unidentified due to the wide variation and complexity of signs and symptoms.

Some children may experience difficulties in a variety of areas while others may have problems only with certain specific activities. Whilst there are some common patterns of behaviour and ability, there will also be a range of different effects for each individual.

The symptoms of SpLDs presented will vary according to:

- The number of different learning difficulties an individual may experience
- Their ability
- Their background
- Their opportunities.

ADHD is one of the most common childhood disorders that can vary from person to person.



Key Fact

One of the important factors in relation to understanding the needs of people with SpLDs is that they are individuals who may share common difficulties and strengths, but are all different and every person should be treated as an individual.

Source: <http://www.bradfordvts.co.uk/wp-content/onlineresources/0307teachinglearning/difficultrainee/dyslexia%20and%20dyspraxia.pdf>

“Because of the high level of co-occurrence between different SpLDs, it is important to understand that each profile is unique to the individual and can appear in a variety of ways. The effects of an SpLD are manifested differently for different students and range from mild to severe. It may be difficult to diagnose, to determine impact, and to accommodate.”

Source: The British Dyslexia Association, <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/educator/what-are-specific-learning-difficulties>

Other conditions that may co-occur with Specific Learning Difficulties

It has already been established that SpLDs commonly co-occur alongside one another, but it is important to understand that the impact of the conditions on each person is individual and different; the symptoms and difficulties show themselves in a variety of ways. Effects range from mild to severe in different people.

However, the exact degree of co-occurrence in any individual is hard to measure precisely because of the overlap of common characteristics.

People with SpLDs are particularly vulnerable to stress compared to the rest of the population. As a result of stress and anxiety, the difficulties they face become even more pronounced and this in turn leads to low self-esteem and a loss of confidence.

Anxiety is a common and reoccurring theme amongst people with SpLDs; a Dyspraxia Foundation survey in 2014 found that 40% of young people with Dyspraxia/DCD aged 13 to 19 years felt anxious 'all the time'.

Source: *Teaching for Neurodiversity: A Guide to Specific Learning Difficulties*

Anxiety and stress can lead to poor sleeping patterns and ultimately sleep disorders.



Key Fact

It is very common for people to have more than one co-occurring SpLD. Other conditions that co-occur include stress, anxiety and sleep disorders.

Let's Summarise!

Take a few moments to answer the following questions to help you summarise what you have learnt in this section. This will help you answer the upcoming assessment questions.

1. What is meant by the term Specific Learning Difficulty?

2. Name three different SpLDs and give a characteristic of each one.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

3. How is ASC related to SpLDs?

4. Each SpLD will have the same characteristics for every person.

True

False

5. What other conditions might commonly occur alongside SpLDs?

Check your answers by looking back over this section.

**CONGRATULATIONS, YOU HAVE NOW COMPLETED SECTION 1.
PLEASE NOW GO TO YOUR ASSESSMENTS AND ANSWER
QUESTIONS Q1 TO Q6.**

