

# Non-Verbal Learning Disorder

Non-verbal learning disorder is a term that describes a group of disorders that are non-language based. Unlike learning disabilities (LDs) such as dyslexia, which is based in language, these disorders normally occur in the visual-spatial area (e.g. looking at bigger pictures, connecting concepts, and visualizing problems).

Students with non-verbal LDs tend to succeed in junior school where their strong language skills and verbal ability allow them to learn to read and write at normal levels. However, as they progress to higher grades they often struggle with connecting ideas and developing 'learning' skills. These students often have challenges with working logically through problems requiring the use of visual information (for example maps, graphs, data), moving in coordinated sequences and appropriately contributing in social situations.

## TYPES OF NON-VERBAL LDs

Non-verbal LDs can be split into different areas, rather than types. Generally, they are sorted into the following:

- **Conceptual:** difficulty grasping big concepts and problem-solving
- **Motor:** trouble with coordination and movement
- **Visual:** remembering what was heard, but not what was seen
- **Social:** difficulty understanding social cues and sharing information appropriately
- **Abstract thinking:** recalling small details comes easily but understanding larger concepts is much harder

## COMMON ISSUES WITH NON-VERBAL LDs

- **Spatial difficulties:** Students may have difficulties with their sense of direction, and estimation of size, shape, distance, and time.
- **Social isolation:** Students can be thought of as lazy, anti-social, or defiant and rude which can lead to being isolated from peers.
- **Clumsiness:** Students can appear awkward and "clumsy".
- **Task time estimation:** Students have difficulty estimating how long tasks will take and organizing them, particularly if the information is delivered in a non-verbal way.
- **Information application:** Students may have trouble seeing the "whole picture" or knowing which details are important.

## HOW WE SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH NON-VERBAL LDs

- ✓ Making the non-verbal, verbal, by talking through social subtleties, teaching rules, or labelling emotions
- ✓ Modelling explicit tasks and going through tasks by speaking aloud about the process and self-evaluation
- ✓ Developing preparation plans and checklists for school activities and changes that can be expected
- ✓ Providing clear verbal connections within academic work
- ✓ Building basic self-advocacy skills to promote social success

**“On my first day I went to class wanting to make friends, but I really did not know how. My poor social skills made it difficult for me to relate to people. I had trouble understanding humour, keeping up with conversations, and using and understanding body language. As a result, children did not want to play with me.”**



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LEARNING SPACE