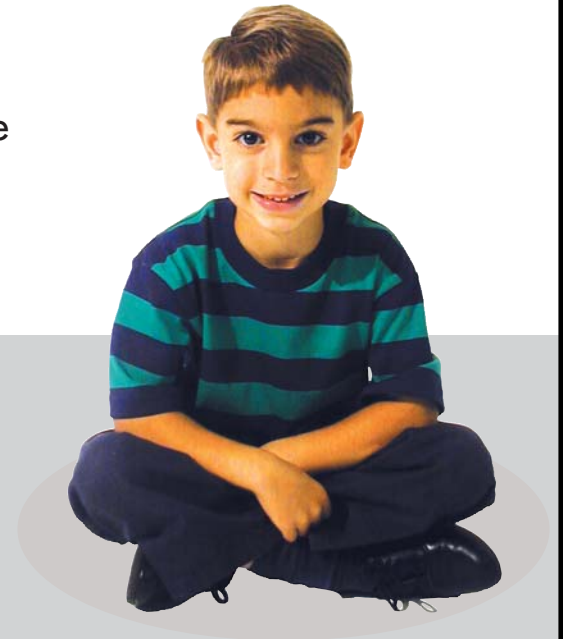


What is Nonverbal Learning Disorder?

by Lisa Priddy, M.S. CCC-SLP

Nonverbal learning disorder (NLD) is a type of learning disability. Most children with NLD have difficulty learning from their visual environment. Children with NLD tend to have difficulty in the following areas:

- motor function (balance, coordination)
- visual-spatial organization ("seeing" differences in shapes, letters, poor recall of things they have seen)
- social skills (social cues, interpreting facial expressions, body language)



Despite these weaknesses, children with NLD tend to develop early speech, vocabulary, and auditory memory skills. Many children with NLD are strong spellers until third grade when spelling lists begin to contain more words often learned by visual memory (for example: "Utah"). On the surface, children with NLD appear to have good language skills. However, as the language demands increase in the school-age years, these children have difficulty using higher level language to interact with peers and adults. Following spoken directions is often difficult because of their inability to understand abstract concepts, such as "before" and their poor visual memory skills. They have a weak understanding of non-literal language, such as idioms (for example: "She has butterflies in her stomach") and metaphors. In social situations, these children have difficulty interpreting the non-verbal social cues of those around them, such as facial expressions and body language.

Most children with NLD respond positively to supportive and highly structured learning environments. The following are suggestions for parents, therapists and teachers when working with children with NLD:

1. Most importantly, provide children with NLD with a warm and supportive learning environment to encourage positive learning experiences.
2. Break tasks into small parts and provide step-by-step directions.
3. Encourage children to repeat important information or directions aloud to ensure they understand the information presented.
4. Teach children how to recognize emotions, facial expressions, and body language. Encourage students to engage in role playing activities to "act out" certain emotions and situations.
5. Group like items together and talk about the shape, size, and color of the objects.
6. Point out the similarities and differences among common objects to improve critical thinking skills.
7. Read books aloud with children and ask them questions about the characters and setting, and encourage them to predict what will happen next in the story.
8. For children who can read, provide written outlines that are clear and not visually distracting. Written outlines reduce the frustration of taking notes or copying information from the board.

Information for this article was obtained from the following sources:

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Nonverbal Learning Disorders Association <http://www.nlda.org>

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