

OCTOBER is

Learning Disabilities Awareness Month



An Educators' Toolkit for
LD Awareness Month



Learning Disabilities (LDs) are very common and affect approximately 10% of Canadians, which means that 1 in 10 students in your classroom may have learning disabilities.

The LD@school team has developed a toolkit for educators to use during Learning Disabilities Awareness Month (#LDmonth) to help spread awareness in your school and classroom. You may choose to use one or all of the resources, share with your colleagues, students, parents or your community.

“My learning disability is what I have, it is not who I am”. Imagine the difference it would make if we focused on the strengths and abilities of our students with learning disabilities!



**Help spread awareness in your classroom
and celebrate your students' ABILITIES!**



What you will find in this toolkit:

- Why LD@school?
- Definition of the Term Learning Disability (LD)
- Myths and Facts about Learning Disabilities (LDs)
- Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
- The Importance of Student Self-Advocacy
- Student Voices
- Student Activity: My Success Story
- Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) Posters
- #LDmonth Twitter Contest
- Stay in Touch with LD@school





Why LD@school?

LD@school is the first resource of its kind dedicated to serving the needs of Ontario's educators. It is a website available in English and French that provides educators with **information, resources and research** related to teaching students with learning disabilities.

The mandate of the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) is to provide individuals with **the right to learn, the power to achieve**. With support from the Ontario Ministry of Education's Special Education/Success for All Branch, LDAO launched the LD@school resource in September 2013.

The LD@school website features over 200 evidence-based, evidence-informed and practice-informed resources that can be **put directly to use in the classroom** such as videos, podcasts, webinar recordings, articles, learning modules and student success stories. The site also features an online community where educators can share their thoughts and find answers to issues relating to teaching students with learning disabilities.

→ [Click here to access the LD@school website.](#)



Definition of the Term Learning Disability¹

In basic terms, learning disabilities (LDs) are **brain-based difficulties** that affect one or more ways that a person takes in, stores, recalls or uses verbal and nonverbal information. LDs are difficulties in processing information and they occur in spite of **average or above average** thinking and reasoning abilities.

LDs are **not caused by environmental factors** such as cultural differences or socio-economic status, although such factors can compound their impact.

LDs can interfere with **learning basic skills** such as reading, writing, and math. They can also interfere with **higher-level skills** such as organization, time management and social communication skills.

Such difficulties reflect impairments in what we call 'psychological processes'; for example:

- Phonological processing (identifying and manipulating speech sounds)
- Working memory (holding information in mind while also using the information)
- Processing speed (speed of taking in, using or pulling out information)
- Language processing (understanding and expressing information using words)
- Visual-spatial processing (perceiving or organizing visual information)
- Executive functions (planning and organizing)
- Visual-motor processing (carrying out hand-eye activities)

For more information on learning disabilities, [click here to access the LD@school page *What are LDs?*](#)



¹ Content on this page is an excerpt from:
LD@school. *What are Learning Disabilities?* Retrieved from <http://www.ldatschool.ca/learn-about-lds/>.

Activities to Extend Your Learning

Do you want to extend your knowledge on learning disabilities? Here are a few resources on our website to help you get started:

Learning Module: An Introduction to Learning Disabilities in the Classroom

This online module is intended to provide an introduction to literacy, numeracy, executive function, and social and emotional development as well as an introductory overview of Ministry documents such as PPM8 and Learning for All, as they relate to students with learning disabilities.

→ [Click here to access this learning module.](#)

An Introduction to Learning Disabilities in the Classroom

This introductory video features interviews with a superintendent, a school board psychologist, a school principal, special education resource teachers, the parent of a student with learning disabilities, and students with learning disabilities. Each participant presents a unique perspective relating to how educators can help their students with learning disabilities succeed in the classroom.

→ [Click here to watch the video, *An Introduction to Learning Disabilities in the Classroom*.](#)



Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)²

An IEP may be developed for a student who demonstrates difficulties in learning and who would be likely to benefit from a special education program and/or services appropriate for students with learning disabilities; an IEP must be developed for students who have been identified as exceptional.

An IEP is a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student based on thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and demonstrate learning. Principals should ensure that parents, students (where appropriate), and relevant school personnel are invited to participate in the IEP development process.

Accommodations and Modifications

The IEP of students with learning disabilities may include the following special education program strategies, with the goal of providing a program that maximizes the student's ability to access the curriculum:

- Instructional, environmental, and assessment **accommodations** should be provided, as appropriate, so that the student is able to access grade-level curriculum expectations and to demonstrate learning.
- **Modification** refer to the changes made to the age-appropriate grade level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet the needs of the student. Modification of learning expectations may include the use of expectations at a different grade level and/or an increase or decrease in the number and/or complexity of expectations. Modified learning expectations that are drawn from a lower grade level will **only** be considered if the student cannot demonstrate learning with the aid of any of the approaches and/or strategies described above.
- **Alternative expectations** are based on expectations developed to help students acquire knowledge and skills that are not represented in the Ontario curriculum (e.g., expectations focused on social skills, self-advocacy, transition planning, study skills) will be developed as needed.

→ To learn more about IEPs, [click here to access the article *Accommodations, Modifications, & Alternative Skill Areas*](#).

² Content on this page is an excerpt from:
Ministry of Education of Ontario. (2014). *Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities*. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/document/education-ontario-policy-and-program-direction/policyprogram-memorandum-8>.





Assessment and Instructional Approaches

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn – Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST).

The aim of UDL is to provide access to the curriculum for *all* students, and to assist educators in designing products and environments to make them accessible to everyone, regardless of age, skills, or situation.

UDL encourages teachers to develop a class profile and then plan, from the beginning, to provide means and pedagogical materials that are tailored to draw on the strengths and meet the needs of all students and not only those with special education needs³.

UDL is based on three principles:

1. Provide multiple means of representation
2. Provide multiple means of expression
3. Provide multiple means of engagement

➔ [Click here to access the LD@school article on *Universal Design for Learning*.](#)

Tips for Implementing UDL

- Become familiar with Learning for All, K-12.
- Present information to students in a variety of formats.
- Ensure students with LDs have access to appropriate assistive technology AND use technology with all students.
- Provide a wide variety of options for your students to express what they have learned.
- Become familiar with Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12.
- Design your classroom environment to meet the needs of all students.

³ Content in this section is an excerpt from:
Ministry of Education of Ontario. (2013). *Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. Retrieved from
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/spiced/LearningforAll2013.pdf>.

Differentiated Instruction (DI)

DI is based on the idea that because students differ significantly in their *strengths, interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn*, it is necessary to adapt instruction to suit these differing characteristics. One or a number of the following elements can be differentiated in any classroom learning situation:

- the **content** of learning (what students are going to learn, and when);
- the **process** of learning (the types of tasks and activities);
- the **products** of learning (the ways in which students demonstrate learning);
- the **affect/environment** of learning (the context and environment in which students learn and demonstrate learning)⁴.

→ [Click here to access the LD@school article on *Differentiated Instruction*.](#)

Tips for Differentiating Instruction

- Know your students – engage in ongoing assessment as learning.
- Understand that your students represent a diverse group of learners.
- Become familiar with Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12.
- Differentiate instruction through flexible groupings, learning centres and independent study.
- Provide students with options of what they want to learn and how they want to learn.
- Adjust discussion questions based on Bloom's Taxonomy.
- Tier assignments based on your students' readiness levels and skills they need to acquire.
- Provide multiple means for your students to demonstrate what they have learned.

⁴ Ibid





Activities to Extend Your Learning

Here are a few resources on the LD@school website to help you in creating or updating student IEPs, with a focus on supporting and providing the appropriate accommodations students with LDs.

York Waterfall Chart: Understanding Learning Disabilities – How Processing Affects Learning

This resource, developed by the York Region District School Board, is a comprehensive tool designed for educators working with students with learning disabilities, from kindergarten to grade 12. This resource provides the starting points to think, plan and support programming in response to a student's assessed areas of strength and/or need. The waterfall chart lists various processing areas, including: phonological processing, language, visual-motor skills, memory, processing speed, attention and executive function. Additionally, the waterfall chart provides a definition, possible signs, instructional strategies, environmental strategies, assessment strategies, and possible assistive technology for each of these processing areas.

➔ [Click here to access *Understand Learning Disabilities – How Processing Affects Learning* on the LD@school website.](#)

Webinar Recording: IEP Development and Implementation: Considering the Student, the Environment and the Academic Domain

In this webinar recording, Dr. Rhonda Martinussen and Dr. Todd Cunningham discuss the development and implementation of a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) from various perspectives, including the need to consider the academic and social strengths of the student with a learning disability, the nature of the environment in which the student is receiving instruction, and the nature of the academic domain or task.

➔ [Click here to view the LD@school webinar, *IEP Development and implementation: Considering the Student, the Environment and the Academic Domain*.](#)

PPM 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities

This article summarizes the Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8 (PPM 8) relating to learning disabilities and specifically highlights important key aspects of the Memorandum in a comprehensive manor. Points discussed in this article include the definition of the term learning disability, recognition and identification of LDs, program planning, transition planning, and implementation. This is a great starting point to help you understand and unpack PPM 8.

➔ [Click here to access the LD@school summary of *Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities*.](#)

The Importance of Student Self-Advocacy

In order for students to successfully speak on their own behalf and advocate for their learning, they must first understand their own strengths, to develop confidence and a sense of identity. Students must also know their needs in order to navigate their school careers and advocate for the specific accommodations or modifications that they need. By providing the right kind of supports and a safe classroom environment, educators can encourage their students to speak up on their own behalf, and take risks in their learning, with the knowledge that it's okay to be different and to make mistakes.

Self-advocacy is a crucial skill for students to develop so that they can advocate for themselves, while in school and into adulthood.



Activities to Extend Your Learning

Educators have an important role in helping students to develop self-advocacy skills. But where do you start? Listed below are resources on the LD@school website that will help you understand what self-advocacy is, why it is important, and how you can encourage students to become self-advocates.

LEARNING MODULE: Fostering Advocacy for Students with LDs

This module presents the ways in which advocacy can help students with LDs to succeed in their education and provides guidance, strategies and tools for educators to help support the development of self-advocacy skills in their students.

→ [Click here to access the learning module *Fostering Advocacy for Students with LDs* on the LD@school website.](#)

VIDEO: Building Self-Advocates: A Key to Student Success

The video includes interviews with classroom teachers at elementary and secondary levels, a superintendent of special education, and a principal, who discuss a variety of strategies and tools so that students can learn what works best for them and have the confidence to ask for help, when they need it. Additionally, a number of students, of various ages, share their perspectives on strategies for self-advocacy and what has worked for them in the past.

→ [Click here to access the video *Building Self-Advocates: A Key to Student Success* on the LD@school website.](#)

A Teacher's Journey with Student Self-Advocacy

In this article, Julia Osborne recounts her journey with student self-advocacy that led to her creating student self-advocacy cards as a way of empowering her students to speak for themselves and communicate their needs. Julia describes the process of how she created this resource for her students, the lessons she's learned along the way, and shares an example of the self-advocacy cards she uses with her students.

→ [Click here to access the article *A Teacher's Journey with Student Self-Advocacy* on the LD@school website.](#)



Student Voices

The success stories featured on the LD@school website are produced to inspire educators and are great resources to share with students during LD Awareness Month. Each story comes with its own message for educators to take away and inspire innovative ways in making classrooms more equitable and inclusive learning spaces for all students, where students with learning disabilities (LDs) can achieve their full potential.

Here are a few success stories that are featured on the LD@school website:



Matthew

Hi, my name is Matthew. I'm a grade twelve student at Unionville High School. I am part of their Arts York Program. I enjoy theatre, music, dancing. I enjoy working with technology. I also happen to have a learning disability, and here are some of the things about it.

→ [Click here to read Matthew's success story.](#)



Alexis

When Alexis was first diagnosed with learning disabilities in grade two, she struggled to understand what a learning disability was and why she learned differently from other students. Today, Alexis is a student in grade 11 and she has become more comfortable with her learning disabilities; she is familiar with her learning needs and knows how to advocate for herself.

→ [Click here to read Alexis's success story.](#)



Abigail

I discovered I was dyslexic at the end of the third grade. In the first and second grade I felt different than everyone else in my class. I didn't understand why. Once I was told I was dyslexic and given an explanation of what it is, I was happy because now I could be helped!

→ [Click here to read Abigail's success story.](#)

→ More success stories :

- [VIDEO: Tory's Success Story – How Educators Helped Me Succeed](#)
- [VIDEO: They didn't know how to help – How my LDs made me a better educator](#)
- [The Elephant in the Classroom](#)
- [Success Story: Danya](#)
- [Success Story: Aaron Bailey](#)

Student Activity: My Success Story

Do you and/or your students enjoy reading the LD@school success stories on our website? Why not create your own! LD@school can send you the questions that we ask students, educators, and parents or guardians to create our success stories; you may use these questions or develop your own. To create success stories, you may choose to incorporate multiple perspectives or you can choose to focus solely on the perspective of the student. Conferencing with your students in preparation for the success story will assist with their understanding of their strengths as a learner.

You may wish to give students the option of creating their success story in different forms of media to capitalize on their strengths. For example, students may wish to create their success story by using a graphic organizer, creating a video or audio clip, using visuals, or developing a written piece of work.

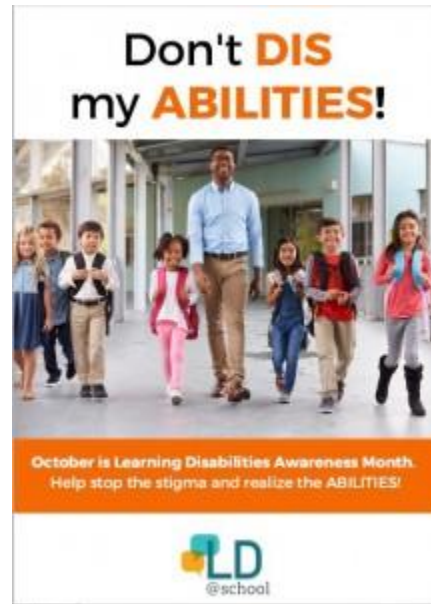
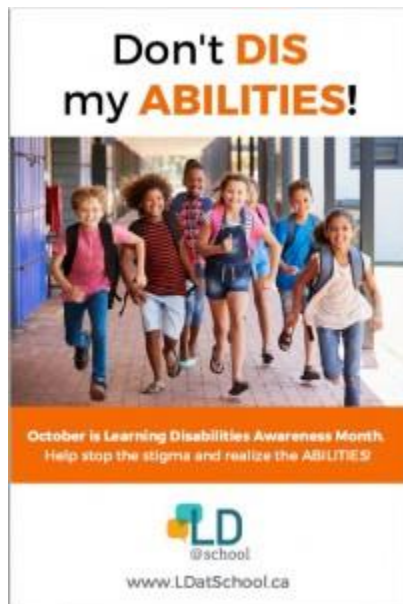
Please note: parents must be informed and be supportive of your student(s) creating a success story before you begin. Parents would enjoy reading the success stories on the LD@school website so please do share!

If you would like to receive more information on student success to stories, obtain sample questions and the media release form, or to share your students' success stories with LD@school, [click here to send us an email to info@LDatschool.ca](mailto:info@LDatschool.ca). We're always looking to highlight student successes and inspire educators to try new strategies to help their students succeed at school.



Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario Awareness Month Posters

Our parent company, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO), has developed four posters for LD Awareness Month. Thumbnails of the posters can be viewed below. You can download and print these posters to use in the school or classroom, share with students, parents, and your community.



→ [Click here to access the LD@school website for downloadable versions of the Awareness Month posters.](#)



STAY IN TOUCH WITH LD@SCHOOL!

Do you want to find out about the newest resources posted on LD@school and be made aware of upcoming events, such as FREE webinars?

**[CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP FOR OUR
MONTHLY SUBSCRIBER EMAIL!](#)**



Stay informed and ahead of the latest information and professional resources to best support students with learning disabilities in Ontario.