

Understanding Your Child's Needs:

Cognition and Learning



Cognition and Learning Needs describe a broad range of difficulties that affect how a child learns, understands and uses information. These needs may include:

- learning at a slower rate than peers in one or more areas, even with appropriate teaching
- difficulties with specific skills (e.g. reading, spelling, maths), often known as Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) such as dyslexia, dyscalculia or dyspraxia
- more general learning difficulties, where support may be needed across many areas of learning (often called Moderate Learning Difficulties or Severe Learning Difficulties)
- Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), which may include associated physical or sensory impairments

These needs may be present from early childhood and persist into adulthood. Sometimes a formal diagnosis is made; in other cases, the key is identifying the child's strengths and challenges and putting in suitable support.

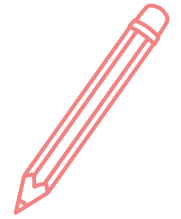


Key Legal and Policy Rights

It's useful to know what rights exist under law and policy, so you can be confident in asking for support:

- The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice outlines that children who have learning difficulties are entitled to appropriate support.
- The Children Act 1989 (s.17) sets out the duty of local authorities to safeguard the welfare of children in need, which includes providing support where necessary.
- The Care Act 2014 supports the provision of care and support for adults (including parents) with learning needs when their ability to carry out daily caring responsibilities may be affected.
- The Equality Act 2010 ensures reasonable adjustments must be made by public services (including schools/healthcare) so children and parents with learning needs are not disadvantaged.

Common Signs to Look Out For



Every child is different, but some signs that learning differences might be present include:

- difficulty remembering instructions or needing instructions repeated
- struggling to follow a sequence of tasks
- slow progress in reading, writing or maths despite extra help
- trouble understanding abstract ideas (e.g. time, measurement)
- poor organisational skills (e.g. keeping track of homework, belongings)
- difficulty keeping up with peers, fatigue or frustration when working

If you notice some of these, it may be helpful to discuss with your child's teacher or ask for assessments through the school or local services.

Ways the Local Authority and Schools Can Offer Support

Depending on the severity of the need, support may include Universal, Targeted / SEN Support and Highly Specialist interventions. Here are commonly used supports and strategies:

Level of Support	What It Might Look Like
 Universal provision	High-quality teaching that is tailored to a range of learning styles; use of visual aids; checking understanding; differentiated tasks in class.
 SEN support	Small group work or 1-to-1 support; extra time for tasks; modified or simplified instructions; use of assistive technology (e.g. read-aloud software).
 Specialist provision	Specialist learning programmes (e.g. for dyslexia or dyscalculia); specialist staff; individual education plans; possibly specialist schools or specialist units within mainstream settings.

Strategies Parents Can Use at Home



You play a vital role. Here are strategies supported by research and practice that tend to help:

1

Establish routines - Clear, predictable routines help reduce cognitive (mental) load. For example, having set times for homework, bedtime and chores. Use visual schedules or timetables to support this.

2

Break tasks down - Large tasks can be overwhelming. Break them into smaller steps, with clear instructions for each step. Use checklists to keep track.

3

Use multi-sensory learning - Learning that involves seeing, hearing and doing tends to be more effective, e.g. using physical items to represent numbers in maths, reading out loud, drawing or making diagrams.

4

Provide repetition and practice - Skills often need revisiting. Short, frequent practice sessions are often more helpful than long, infrequent ones.

5

Encourage assistive technology and tools - This could include audio books, speech-to-text software, calculators and spelling/checking tools.

6

Modify language - Use simple sentences, avoid jargon, pause between sentences and check for understanding. Giving verbal and written prompts helps.

7

Use visual supports - Visual timetables, word banks, cue cards, pictorial prompts. These reduce processing demands.

8

Positive reinforcement and praise - Celebrate progress, however small. Encouragement can build confidence and resilience.

9

Work closely with the school - Ask to see your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or equivalent. Attend meetings. Share what works at home.

10

Support wellbeing - Learning frustrations can affect self-esteem. Make sure your child has time for rest, play and things they enjoy. Emotional support, recognising their efforts and not just the outcome.

What Parents Can Expect from Local Authority/School Services



When you request or need support, these are reasonable expectations:

- Assessments to identify specific strengths and challenges. This might include educational psychologists or specialist teachers.
- Clear communication in accessible formats (plain English, visual aids, 'easy read') so parents understand what is being discussed.
- A tailored support plan, jointly agreed, including school, parents and possibly health/social care.
- Regular review of the child's progress, with adjustments as needed.
- Support not just for the child, but for the family – including parent training, advice and sometimes peer support.
- Advocacy or support to help parents engage with services, especially where understanding and communication are harder.



How You Can Make Requests and Ask for Help



If you feel your child needs more support or you need help, here are some steps:

- Talk to your child's teacher or SENDCo about your concerns. You could share specific examples of what your child finds hard.
- Ask for an assessment (for example, educational psychology, specialist teacher) if needed.
- Request a copy of the SEN/support plan; check that it includes what works for your child - you know them best.
- Check whether there are parent training or support groups in your area.
- Keep records: examples of schoolwork, home observations, what helps/doesn't help. This helps professionals understand your child.
- Request information in an accessible form if needed (e.g. simpler language, visuals, audio).



Frequently Asked Questions

Will a diagnosis always help?

A diagnosis, such as dyslexia, can sometimes open the door to specialist support and make it easier to explain your child's needs. However, what matters most is that the right help is put in place, whether or not a formal label has been given.

Is my child 'lazy' if learning requires more time?

Not at all. Children with cognition and learning needs often have to work much harder to achieve the same results as their peers. Learning differences are about how the brain processes information – they have nothing to do with effort or motivation.

Does more homework help?

Quantity isn't the answer. Short, focused tasks that are broken down into manageable steps are much more effective than long pieces of homework. Little and often tends to work best.

What about long-term outcomes?

With the right support and encouragement, many children with cognition and learning needs make strong progress and achieve well. They may go on to further education, apprenticeships, work and fulfilling independent lives. Building confidence and resilience along the way makes a big difference.

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. These resources are those which we have generally found to be of benefit to learners with SEND. However, every child's needs are different and so these resources may not be suitable for your child. It is for you to consider whether it is appropriate to use these resources with your child.