

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities (NVLD)

This is general information for your knowledge and understanding of ways you can support students with learning disabilities. It is important to remember that NVLD affects all people differently. Speak with the student and family to understand how NVLD affects the student and their learning and environmental needs. It is not Tutor Doctor's role to suggest a learning disability is present in a student, diagnose learning disabilities, suggest a course of action with the school, or to suggest treatment for learning disabilities.

What are Nonverbal Learning Disabilities?

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities are neurological disabilities that impact abstract thinking, spatial relationships, and social skills. Students with NVLD are often able to speak in an age-appropriate way and may have a better vocabulary than their peers, but because nothing “sounds” wrong, NVLD often goes undiagnosed or misdiagnosed for long periods of time. Students may also develop excellent rote memory (where they can memorize and relay information with ease) as a coping mechanism. As a result, students may not be found to have an NVLD until much later in their education than with other learning disabilities. There also isn't much awareness of NVLD so there are few educational resources and students with an NVLD are often labeled as having “behavior problems.” Students with NVLD frequently have had some sort of “trauma” to the brain in early childhood (including exposure to radiation, such as in the treatment of cancers, moderate or severe head injury, hydrocephalus, and removal of tissue in the right-hemisphere) and the disorder can affect all understanding and adaptive learning.

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities are also called **Right-Hemisphere Learning Disorders**

What do Nonverbal Learning Disabilities impact?

Visual Processing Disorder can affect:

- **Social skills:**
 - Understanding of nonverbal communication such as body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions
 - Understanding of social norms and cues
 - Understanding what is considered appropriate speech
 - Understanding what is considered appropriate physical distance from others (often stand too close)
- **Conceptual skills:**
 - Problem- solving
 - Sorting through information and seeing the big picture
 - Grasping large concepts
 - Cause and effect relationships
 - Abstract thinking
- **Motor skills:**
 - **Gross motor skills:** the ability to make controlled movements with the large muscles in the arms, legs, and torso.
 - Climbing, skipping or jumping
 - Balance
 - Coordination
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- Body awareness: where their body and body parts are in relation to themselves, others, and objects
- Physical reaction time
- **Fine motor skills:** the ability to make controlled movements with the small muscles in the hands, wrists, and fingers.
 - Holding a pen or pencil
 - Writing neatly, drawing pictures, or coloring inside the lines
 - Holding and using scissors, rulers, and other tools
 - The formation of letters
- **Visual Spatial Skills:**
 - Visualizing information
 - Visual processing
 - Spatial relations
- Reading comprehension
- Math skills
- The ability to adjust to changes and new situations

Strategies for Supporting Students Who Have Nonverbal Learning Disabilities:

- Be aware of what you say. Students with NVLD often have trouble understanding tone of voice and sarcasm and take instructions literally.
- Set a tutoring session routine to help the student feel comfortable with the new experience of being tutored.
- Give warnings before changing activity and avoid abrupt changes. For example, let the student know that in five minutes you will be moving onto a multiplication activity or that you will read a book together.
- Reduce visual and auditory distractions and stimulation. Students with NVLD can become overwhelmed by too much sensory input.
- Understand the student's cues and take a calming break if they are becoming overwhelmed.
- Do writing warmup exercises before writing and as a break during writing, such as squeezing a stress ball, shaking your hands quickly, or making a tight fist then stretching your fingers out.
- Chunking- break large tasks and assignments into steps.
- Use concept maps to outline the connections between information and help the student see the big picture.
- Encourage proper pencil grip and posture while writing.
- Try different types of pens and pencils to see what works best.
- Try using different pencil grips to help the student hold a pencil properly.