Dear Alice,

I am a Columbia student who reads your page frequently. I wanted to know if there was some test that I could do to see if I have a learning disability. I have a hard time reading and understanding things, and many times must read a sentence several times to understand it. I also very frequently read things wrong (like mixing up two sentences in a book—that is, taking words from two adjacent lines and mixing them up). I also sometimes have difficulty hearing properly (I'm not sure if this is significant). And lastly, I have a hard time concentrating on one thing. I would like to find out whether I do have some sort of disability as this serves as a great deal of frustration for me.

Thank you,
Trying to Understand

Answer

Dear Trying to Understand,

First, thanks for reading Go Ask Alice! Now, on to your questions?. Learning disabilities can include many of the characteristics that you describe, and are included in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This means that, in most cases, academic, professional, and commercial institutions must provide "reasonable accommodations" to help a person with a disability perform to her/his potential.

Learning disabilities are usually identified through a series of standardized IQ (intelligence quotient) tests and psycho-educational and neuropsychological measures, as well as tests of basic academic achievement (e.g. tests of reading comprehension and reading rate). Most colleges have an office of disability services that may either administer these tests or refer students to area testing services. Most public and private schools (K-12 and post-secondary) have services for people with disabilities, including testing and rehabilitation. Additionally, you might check the phone book under "disabilities," ask your health care provider for resources, or contact the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD) [2].

If testing shows that you do have a learning disability, the school's disability services office (or local provider) should work with you to make your reading, studying, and test-taking easier and more productive. Before taking the previously mentioned tests, you might make an appointment with a counselor at your school's counseling service. While a counselor cannot determine if you have a learning disability without formal testing, an initial screening may help
you rule in or out other factors that may contribute to learning difficulties and assess the appropriateness of a formal evaluation. Talk to your health service about getting your hearing tested, as this may play a part in your inability to concentrate. Some people may have trouble hearing, while others have a different condition related to the processing of what s/he heard.

All of this may sound like a lot to do, but once you get the appropriate diagnosis and help you deserve, your frustration will diminish and the quality of your life will improve. Bravo to you for investigating your concerns and for considering the many resources available to you.

All the best in your studies,

Alice!

Category:
General Health
Miscellaneous

Related questions

What is Tourette syndrome?  
Fetal alcohol syndrome  
Can't process spoken speech ? which makes school difficult!  
Do I have Asperger's syndrome?  
Do I have dyslexia?  

Resources

Disability Services  
Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)  
Mental Health Service (CUMC)  
Published date:  
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