

CACHE Level 2

Certificate in Understanding Specific Learning Difficulties

AUTISM

ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

DYSLEXIA

DEVELOPMENTAL COORDINATION DISORDER

DYSCALCULIA

Workbook 2

Section 1: Understand the diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties

In this section, you will learn about diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties. You will find out about the importance of gaining a diagnosis and gaining diagnosis as early as possible, and the impact of delayed or non-diagnosis. You will look at how diagnosis is achieved and the professionals involved in diagnosis.

Importance of formal diagnosis

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 1.

Where it is suspected that an individual has Specific Learning Difficulties, they should be assessed to find out if they do have Specific Learning Difficulties and what the nature of their difficulty is.



Did you know?

Pupils with special education needs (SEN) without statements are around ten times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than pupils with no SEN; compared to pupils with a statement of SEN who are around six times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion.

Note that statements of SEN are now referred to as Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC plans).

From DfE report Permanent and Fixed Period Exclusions in England: 2012 to 2013 (published 2014) quoted on www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk.

A formal diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties is important because:

- It will identify the specific difficulties the individual is facing.
- It will help to identify barriers to progress that may arise from the difficulties.
- It supports any requests or applications for support and/or funding where this is available. For example, for exams such as GCSEs and A Levels, support such as extra time, breaks and support of a reader, scribe or prompt in the exam are only available if the individual has been formally assessed.
- It helps to ensure individuals receive the right kind of support.
- Individuals are less likely to experience anxiety, lack of confidence and lack of self-esteem as a result of their Specific Learning Difficulties.

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Arun's story

"I didn't like school before. I was always being told off for not concentrating and distracting other people and I suppose I was a bit of a nuisance. But then they assessed me and found out I had ADHD. I got help from a teaching assistant in my lessons and she helped me stick to my behaviour plan and reminded me when I started to get distracted. My teachers gave me three merits for my behaviour this week. I like school much better now."

Barriers to diagnosis

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 2 and 3.

Diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties requires an assessment by a specialist but the individual first needs to be identified as needing an assessment. Most commonly, individuals will be initially identified by parents and or teachers as having some difficulty in areas identified as indicating Specific Learning Difficulties. Children can be referred through the local authority for assessment and diagnosis or can be privately assessed. Adults may be assessed in the workplace.

Not every individual is properly diagnosed and this might be because of barriers to assessment or because the individual or their parent or guardian is reluctant to seek a diagnosis.



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Barriers to diagnosis

Barriers to achieving a diagnosis include:

- Recognition – before a diagnosis can be achieved, the individual or someone else needs to identify that they are having difficulties and that the signs may indicate a Specific Learning Difficulty. If no-one recognises there are indications, a diagnosis will never be requested. Lack of recognition may be due to lack of knowledge of the signs of Specific Learning Difficulties or due to the signs not being obvious, maybe due to health issues or cultural and language differences.

Jun's story

"It took a while for me to be diagnosed with dyslexia and dyscalculia because when I first started college in England, my English wasn't so good. My family had moved from China and, even though I had learned English before I came, it was different speaking it all the time and writing it. As I got better at it though, my college lecturers noticed I was having other difficulties and arranged an assessment. Now I'm doing well at college with the right support and hope to go on to university to do a business degree."

- Lack of support – where the signs have been identified, there may be a lack of support to gain a diagnosis. This may be from the individual themselves who may be reluctant to be diagnosed with a Specific Learning Difficulty, or from a parent, teacher or human resources representative in the workplace who are reluctant for the individual to be diagnosed or don't believe that the individual has Specific Learning Difficulties. Special needs staff in schools may be able to make an assessment of needs and identify ways to support these and unless it can be shown that individuals need further specialist support, a full assessment and diagnosis may not be made.
- Funding – a full assessment for Specific Learning Difficulties is expensive and often has to be funded from a school budget, or privately, unless the case can be made for the individual having complex needs and where there is a requirement for funding to support the individual. Funding, as always, is limited and this can sometimes be a barrier to diagnosis.

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- Stigma – sometimes, individuals or parents or guardians may feel that there is a stigma attached to being labelled as having Specific Learning Difficulties so will avoid a diagnosis for this reason (stigma means something to be ashamed of). It is overwhelmingly the case, though, that individuals make much more progress having had a proper diagnosis.
- Cultural differences – cultural differences can cause barriers for different reasons. Firstly, language and behavioural differences may mask the signs of Specific Learning Difficulties making them difficult to identify (as seen in Jun's story above). Secondly, the way learning difficulties are viewed by different cultures can be a barrier. Some cultures see learning difficulties as a stigma, while others may just see it as difference. Some languages will not even have a word to describe Specific Learning Difficulties. Culture does not simply relate to different ethnicities. Different social groupings with an ethnic group, such as class differences, for example, may have different attitudes towards Specific Learning Difficulties. These attitudes may sometimes cause a reluctance to gain diagnosis or a refusal to accept that there is a difficulty.



Knowledge Activity 1: Sometimes, individuals or their families or others are reluctant to seek a diagnosis for Specific Learning Difficulties. You have seen some examples of this in the list of barriers to diagnosis. List the reasons you already know about here.

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Reluctance to seek a diagnosis

Three reasons you have already learned about why people may be reluctant to seek a diagnosis for Specific Learning Difficulties are:

- Availability of funding – where the money is not available, this may put off schools from recommending a diagnosis and individuals or parents and guardians from seeking a private diagnosis.
- Stigma – some individuals or parents and guardians may feel that by labelling an individual as having Specific Learning Difficulties, this will make the situation worse rather than better. They will be wary of seeking a diagnosis.
- Denial – in some cases – we have mentioned different cultural attitudes above – there may be a denial that such difficulties even exist. You may remember from Section 1 the common misconception that Specific Learning Difficulties do not exist but are a ‘middle-class disease’ – an excuse for stupid or badly behaved children. This attitude may also affect motivation in seeking diagnosis.

Another reason may be that the individual feels it will affect how they are treated. For example, they might think they will not be promoted at work, or may fail to get a job, or not be offered the university place they want because people don't think they are capable of it. In fact, there is legislation that protects people against this sort of discrimination, such as the Equality Act 2010.

Importance of early diagnosis

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 4 and 5.

The earlier a diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties is made, the sooner an individual can receive the support they need. This will ensure they can achieve in education and, later, in the workplace. Early support will give the individual positive strategies to cope with their learning difficulty that will help them throughout their lives.

Where there is a late diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties or there is no diagnosis, this can lead to the individual experiencing anxiety in situations where their difficulties might become obvious or may make them unable to achieve. Individuals may experience a lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem through not being able to keep up with their peers or being labelled lazy or stupid. They may avoid situations that cause them anxiety meaning they miss opportunities or become isolated. This can also lead to depression.

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Ana's story

"I never had any confidence growing up. I wasn't very academic at school and found it difficult to keep up with my peers. When I was in my 50s, a good friend convinced me to join a book club. She knew I had problems reading and said she would help me with the books by giving me a summary of the story if I wasn't able to follow it. I reluctantly joined. One of the women I met there asked me if I'd ever been assessed for dyslexia, which I hadn't. She helped me get a diagnosis and this helped me understand a lot of the problems I'd had in my life. Finding out boosted my confidence but made me sad I'd missed out so much in life because of difficulties that I could have overcome with the right support."

Diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 6.

Achieving a diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulties may not be straightforward because of the barriers previously identified. The opportunities for diagnosis will be different for different age groups. However, an independent assessment is available to anyone but the individual or their parent/guardian will have to pay for it. These are available directly through a suitable psychologist or through charity organisations supporting individuals with Specific Learning Difficulties and their families.



AUTISM SPECTRUM CONDITION

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

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