

Evaluation and Consideration of Exclusionary Factors for SLD Identification

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An evaluation of specific learning disability (SLD) requires an evaluation and consideration of factors, other than a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes that may be the primary cause of a student's academic skill weaknesses and learning difficulties. These factors include (but are not limited to), vision/ hearing¹, or motor disabilities, intellectual disability (ID), social/emotional or psychological disturbance, environmental or economic disadvantage, cultural and linguistic factors (e.g., limited English proficiency), insufficient instruction or opportunity to learn and physical/health factors. These factors may be evaluated via behavior rating scales, parent and teacher interviews, classroom observations, attendance records, social and developmental history, family history, vision/hearing exams¹, medical records, prior evaluations, and interviews with current or past counselors, psychiatrists, and paraprofessionals who have worked with the student. Noteworthy is the fact that students with (and without) SLD often have one or more factors (listed below) that **contribute** to academic and learning difficulties. However, the practitioner must rule out any of these factors as being the **primary** reason for a student's academic and learning difficulties to maintain SLD as a viable classification/diagnosis.

Vision (Check All that Apply):

- ☐ Vision test recent (within 1 year)
- ☐ Vision test recent (> 1 year)
- ☐ Passed
- ☐ Failed
- ☐ Wears Glasses

- ☐ History of visual disorder
- ☐ Diagnosed visual disorder/disturbance

Specify: _____

- ☐ Vision difficulties suspected or observed
(e.g., difficulty with far or near point copying, misaligned numbers in written math work, squinting or rubbing eyes during visual tasks such as reading, computers)

Additional Notes:

Hearing (Check All that Apply)²:

- ☐ Hearing test recent (within 1 year)
- ☐ Hearing test outdated (> 1 year)
- ☐ Passed
- ☐ Failed
- ☐ Uses Hearing Aids

- ☐ History of auditory disorder/disturbance
- ☐ Diagnosed auditory disorder/disturbance

Specify: _____

- ☐ Hearing difficulties suggested in the referral
(e.g., frequent requests for repetition of auditory information, misarticulated words, attempts to self-accommodate by moving closer to sound source, obvious attempts to speech read)

Additional Notes:

Motor Functioning (Check All that Apply):

- ☐ Fine Motor Delay/Difficulty
- ☐ Gross Motor Delay/Difficulty
- ☐ Improper pencil grip.
Specify: _____
- ☐ Assistive devices/aids used
(e.g., weighted pens, pencil grip, slant board, etc.)

- ☐ History of motor disorder
- ☐ Diagnosed motor disorder

Specify: _____

- ☐ Motor difficulties suggested in the referral
(e.g., illegible writing; issues with letter or number formation, size, spacing; difficulty with fine motor tasks such as using scissors, folding paper)

Additional Notes:

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Cognitive and Adaptive Functioning (Check All that Apply):

- ☐ Significantly "subaverage intellectual functioning" (e.g., IQ score of 75 or below)
- ☐ Pervasive cognitive deficits (e.g., weaknesses or deficits in many cognitive areas, including *Gf* **and** *Gc*)
- ☐ Deficits in adaptive functioning (e.g., social, communication, self-care)

Areas of significant adaptive skill weaknesses (check all that

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Motor Skill | <input type="checkbox"/> Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> Socialization |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Daily Living Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Behavior/Emotional Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Additional Notes:

Social-Emotional/Psychological Factors (Check All that Apply):

- ☐ Diagnosed psychological disorder. Specify: _____
- ☐ Date(s) of Diagnosis: _____
- ☐ Family history significant for psychological difficulties
- ☐ Disorder presently treated - specify treatment modality (e.g., counseling, medication): _____
- ☐ Reported difficulties with social/emotional functioning (e.g., social phobia, anxiety, depression)
- ☐ Social-Emotional/Psychological issues suspected or suggested by referral
- ☐ Home-School Adjustment Difficulties
- ☐ Lack of Motivation/Effort
- ☐ Emotional Stress
- ☐ Autism
- ☐ Present Medications (type, dosage, frequency, duration): _____
- ☐ Prior Medication Use (type, dosage, frequency, duration): _____
- ☐ Hospitalization for psychological difficulties. Specify dates: _____
- ☐ Deficits in social, emotional, or behavioral [SEB] functioning (e.g., as assessed by standardized rating scales)

Significant scores from SEB measures: _____

Additional Notes:

Environmental/Economic Factors (Check All that Apply):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limited access to educational materials in the home | <input type="checkbox"/> History of educational neglect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caregivers unable to provide instructional support | <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent transitions (e.g., shared custody) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic considerations precluded treatment of identified issues (e.g., filling a prescription, replacing broken glasses, tutoring) | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental space issues (e.g., no space for |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary Crisis Situation | |

Additional Notes:

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Cultural/Linguistic Factors (Check All that Apply)³:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limited Number of Years in the U.S. Specify: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Language(s) Other than English Spoken in Home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No History of Early or Developmental Problems in the Primary Language (L1) | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of or Limited Instruction in Primary Language
Specify # of Years: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Current Primary Language Proficiency:
(Date: _____ Score: _____) | <input type="checkbox"/> Current English Language Proficiency:
(Date: _____ Score: _____) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acculturative Knowledge Development
(Check one: <input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate <input type="checkbox"/> Low) | <input type="checkbox"/> Parental Educational and Socio-Economic Level
(Check one: <input type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate <input type="checkbox"/> Low) |

Additional Notes:

Physical/Health Factors (Check All that Apply):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limited access to healthcare | <input type="checkbox"/> Minimal documentation of health history/status |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic health condition. Specify: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Migraines |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary health condition (date/duration): _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitalization. Dates: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History of Medical Condition (date diagnosed): _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Repeated visits to the school nurse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Treatments. Specify: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Repeated visits to a physician |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medication (type, dosage, frequency, duration): _____ | |

Additional Notes:

Instructional Factors (Check All that Apply):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interrupted schooling (e.g., mid-year school move). Specify reasons: _____ | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New teacher (past 6 months) | <input type="checkbox"/> Retained or advanced a grade(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nontraditional curriculum (e.g., homeschooled) | <input type="checkbox"/> Accelerated curriculum (e.g., AP classes) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive # Absences: _____ | |

Additional Notes:

Determination of Primary and Contributory Causes of Academic Weaknesses and Learning Difficulties (Check One):

- ☐ Based on the available data, it is reasonable to conclude that one or more factors is *primarily* responsible for the student's
Specify: _____
- ☐ Based on the available data, it is reasonable to conclude that one or more factors *contributes* to the student's observed learning difficulties.
Specify: _____
- ☐ **No** factors listed here appear to be the primary cause of the student's academic weaknesses and learning difficulties

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Footnotes:

¹For vision and hearing disorders, it is important to understand the nature of the disorder, its expected impact on achievement, and the time of diagnosis. It is also important to understand what was happening instructionally at the time the disorder was suspected and/or diagnosed. With regard to hearing, even mild loss can impact initial receptive and expressive skills as well as academic skill acquisition. When loss is suspected, the practitioner should consult professional literature to further understand the potential impact of a documented hearing issue (see American Speech-Language-Hearing Association guidelines www.asha.org).

With regard to vision, refractive error (i.e., hyperopia and anisometropia), accommodative and vergence dysfunctions, and eye movement disorders are associated with learning difficulties whereas others vision problems are not (e.g., constant strabismus and amblyopia). As such, when a vision disorder is documented or suspected, the practitioner should consult professional literature to further understand the impact of the visual disorder (e.g., see American Optometric Association www.aoa.org).

²When there is a history of hearing difficulties and a learning disability diagnosis is being considered, hearing testing should be recent (i.e., conducted within the past 6 months).

³When evaluating the impact of language and cultural factors on a student's functioning, the practitioner should consider whether and to what extent other individuals with similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds as the referred student are progressing and responding to instruction in the present curriculum (e.g., if an LEP student is not demonstrating academic progress or is not performing as expected on a class- or district-wide assessment when compared to his/her peers who possess a similar level of English proficiency and acculturative knowledge, it is unlikely that cultural and linguistic differences are the sole or primary factors for the referred student's low performance). In addition, it is important to note that as the number of cultural and linguistic differences in a student's background increase, the greater the likelihood that poor academic performance is attributable primarily to such differences rather than a disability.

End Note: All 50 US states specify eight exclusionary criteria. Namely, learning difficulties cannot be primarily attributed to, (1) visual impairment; (2) hearing impairment; (3) motor impairment; (4) intellectual disability; (5) emotional disturbance; (6) environmental disadvantage; (7) economic disadvantage; and (8) cultural difference. Noteworthy is the fact that certain states have adopted additional exclusionary criteria including *autism*, (CA, MI, VT, and WI), *emotional stress* (LA and VT), *home or school adjustment difficulties* (LA and VT), *lack of motivation* (LA and TN), and *temporary crisis situation* (LA, TN, and VT). The present authors have integrated these additional criteria under "social-emotional/psychological factors" and "environmental/economic factors" and have added two additional categories, namely, "instructional factors" and "physical/health factors" to this form.