

## A Ten Minute Toolbox



# ADDITIONAL LEARNING NEEDS

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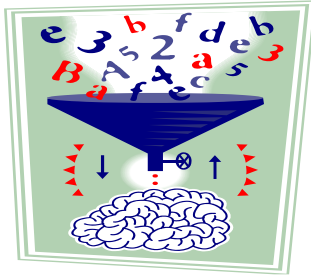
### Individual Differences

There are many reasons why children may find some aspects of schoolwork challenging. For example, they may have a late summer birthday, have suffered from glue ear related hearing loss, have moved schools frequently, or have a learning difficulty. Children who are less well prepared than their peers to make the most of school-based learning opportunities are different from one another, in the same way that there are individual differences between typically developing children. Applying a common label to a learning difficulty does not necessarily imply that all children with that label will present with the same symptoms or behaviours, or respond in the same way to interventions. A set of basic skills underpins academic progress but most children will be able to compensate for slight weaknesses and no specific interventions will be needed.

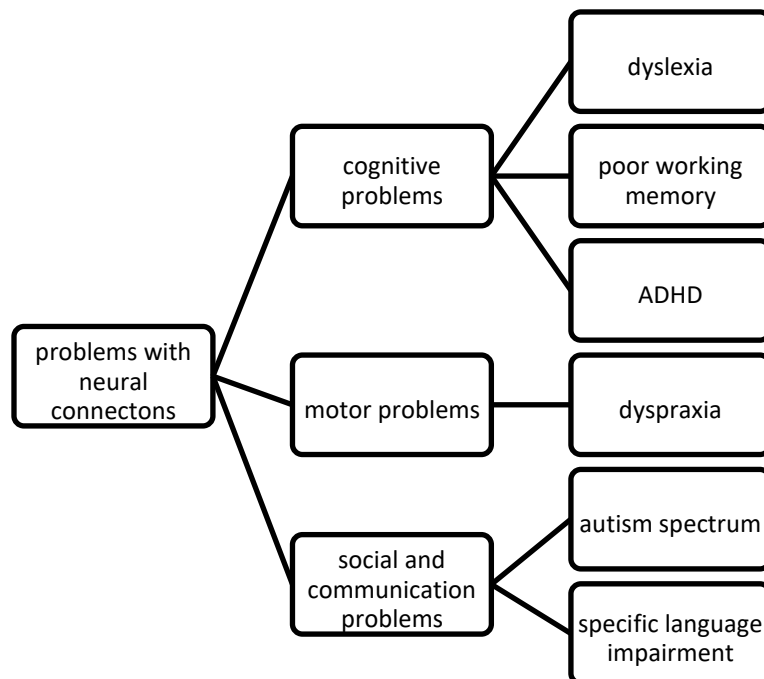
Most children requiring a little extra help with their studies will cope with sensitive differentiation. This means that the teacher will make slight adjustments to their work, perhaps by previewing tasks with them, so that they are less daunting when presented to the whole class, or by modifying independent work and providing individualised feedback. Sometimes a child's attention, concentration or other social skills and behaviours require additional support, and the teacher may make personalised adjustments to shape the development of these skills in the desired direction.



## Barriers to learning



Some barriers to learning stem from underlying neurodevelopmental problems. This means that something is not quite right with the neural connections within the brain. These faulty connections have consequences, possibly resulting in problems in a number of areas which affect an individual's academic progress. The most common, affecting cognition, language and literacy, motor development and social skills, are shown in diagrammatic form below.



Sometimes there is a large amount of overlap between the behavioural consequences of neurodevelopmental problems, so we need a differential diagnosis and a practical, treatment focused approach. This means that we will be able to concentrate on outcomes and develop plans of action informed by appropriate assessments.

## **Identifying the problem**

Common learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD and autism have specific clusters of behaviours and diagnostic criteria, but due to the amount of overlap between these learning difficulties, and differences between individuals, the label applied to the problem may depend on which professional sees the child first. Motor problems may be referred to an Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist, language and communication issues are usually referred to Speech and Language Therapists, and suspicions of autism are best referred to the Community Paediatrician. Sometimes it may take a very long time to identify the root cause of the learning difficulty, but this does not mean that interventions to tackle the consequences are delayed.

## **Specifying the problem**

A 'one size fits all' approach to intervention does not work for everyone, therefore a good understanding of the neurological basis of each difficulty will guide fine-grained specific interventions. Skilled interpretation of assessment data will enable teachers to locate as precisely as possible the source of difficulty and then design, implement and evaluate tailor made interventions.

## **School Assessments**

Teachers continually assess children's understanding of material taught during lessons. Home grown and standardised tests are used to track children's progress according to the school's assessment policy. Where a child's progress is significantly slower than expected, the class teacher will consult parents and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo), and with parents' permission, additional psychometric tests may be administered in school to examine underlying cognitive skills in greater detail to help us pinpoint the areas of difficulty. Currently we are able to provide assessments of a wide range of cognitive and academic attainment skills. These assessments are available in school by arrangement and attract an additional fee, which reflects the time taken for administration, interpretation and reporting.

Please see the other toolboxes in this series for further information on reading and spelling difficulties, social and communication difficulties, and other processing disorders.