

Q. What is a mild general learning disability?

A. The World Health Organisation classifies general learning disabilities into mild, moderate, severe and profound. The definitions of the degrees of disability are usually expressed in terms of IQ, behavioural competence and/or the need for special service. Children with mild general learning disabilities (MLD) typically have verbal and performance IQ scores in the 50-70 range, i.e., two to three standard deviations below the population mean. They often have significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills. Specific cognitive deficits often exist in such areas as memory, attention or language.

Q. What are some characteristics of a mild general learning disability?

A. One of the most common learning characteristics of children with mild general learning disabilities is that they have difficulty mastering academic content. In addition, these students frequently have difficulty with social behaviours and in finding appropriate work once their formal education is completed. Often individuals with MLD will display one or more of the following characteristics:

- Delayed conceptual development
- Limited ability to abstract and generalise
- Difficulties with memory
- Slow speech and language development
- Limited social skills
- Inappropriate or immature personal behaviour
- Limited attention span and poor retention ability
- Decreased motivation
- Poor self-concept
- Low self-esteem
- General clumsiness
- Lack of coordination and of gross and fine motor skills
- Emotional disturbance
- A minority may also have varying degrees of hearing or visual impairment

Q. What can be done to help someone with a mild general learning disability?

A. It is important to recognise as soon as possible that a child is learning and developing slowly. It is only when the problem is recognised that the child and their family can be offered the help and support they need. Once the individual is assessed, a psychologist can advise on the most appropriate environment to meet their needs. A team comprising a teacher, a psychologist, parents, and any related service providers can develop an Individual Education Plan to meet the individual needs of the student. This will ensure the timely identification of areas of difficulty and the taking of such remedial action as may be required so that each student can be enabled to develop to their full potential. As an essential part of preparation for adult life, students with MLD should also be offered programmes with an emphasis on pre-vocational and life skills. Other activities which foster social and personal development such as physical education, sport and leisure activities, arts and crafts should also be emphasised. Students with MLD also need stable relationships and support from a variety of adults as well as being integrated into the community.

Related Links

[National Association for the Mentally Handicapped of Ireland \(NAMHI\)](#)

[Mencap](#) (UK)

[The ARC](#) (US)

[Down's Syndrome Association](#) (UK)

[Down Syndrome Information Network](#) (US)