



Early Identification and Intervention: Why Sooner is Better

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In a world of conflicting points of view and varying opinions, there are, thankfully, a few pearls of wisdom supported by robust research.

One such pearl highlights the importance of early intervention when it comes to improving the outcomes of students with learning disabilities. In other words, if a parent or educator suspects something may not be working as it should, then there is real value in understanding the child's learning profile, identifying the possible presence of a learning disability, and providing appropriate instruction or intervention to capitalize on strengths and bolster areas of need.

Example #1: Dyslexia

Take dyslexia. There is abundant research linking reading challenges to poor school outcomes, such as low self-esteem and decreased graduation rates. In turn, intervening early can prevent a snowball effect of hurdles and obstacles later in school.

As we frequently see in our Morrissey-Compton Educational Center offices, some bright and highly motivated students can push past their core reading weaknesses and memorize words for a while, possibly up through middle or even high school. However, as demands increase in complexity, even these students can hit a wall and begin to experience unnecessary frustration in school.



A Gentle Reminder: While early intervention has its strong benefits, it is never too late to intervene and start working to improve academic skills.

Dr. Sally Shaywitz authored *Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*. In this helpful resource, she outlines clues to watch for that may indicate potential reading difficulties for a child. For example, children who struggle to learn nursery rhymes (e.g. recognizing and producing rhyming words) and pronounce words may have more difficulty working with sequences of sounds when faced

with reading words. Another clue pertains to making the leap to print. That is, children who have trouble recognizing or naming individual letters may be more challenged with learning to read. A family history of learning disabilities can be another potential predictor of the presence of a learning disability, including, but not limited to, dyslexia.

Example #2: Autism

Autism is another example of a learning challenge that, when addressed early through a variety of treatments, can markedly improve a child's developmental trajectory. In fact, new scientific knowledge is allowing for the diagnosis of autism at younger ages, giving families the opportunity to get support for their child earlier and earlier. This is critical so that when the child is school-age, he or she is better equipped to meet the social, behavioral, and academic learning demands in a school milieu.

What to Look For

In light of the fact that intervening early has such positive effects on long term outcomes, we encourage parents and educators to be mindful of red flags for learning disabilities, such as those mentioned by Dr. Shaywitz. Other red flags for preschool and early Kindergarten students can include, but are not limited to, difficulty with:

- Following directions
- Articulating ideas on par with peers
- Telling a short story
- Learning the alphabet
- Making letter-sound associations
- Using an appropriate pencil grip when drawing and writing
- Forming letters on the page and using appropriate spacing between words
- Memorizing colors, shapes, etc.
- Sequencing events, days of the week
- Basic number sense

How We Can Help

Morrissey-Compton Educational Center offers comprehensive educational evaluations to:

1. Help identify individual strengths and areas of need;
2. Rule in or rule out a potential learning disability;
3. Generate individualized recommendations for home and the classroom; and
4. Provide information regarding which evidence-based program(s) would be best suited for the child.

We conduct such evaluations with children who are in pre-Kindergarten, or who are about to start school, all the way up to college students. Even if a young child does not meet full criteria for a diagnosis at the time of the initial evaluation, families walk away with tools and programs to build skills and, ideally, prevent greater difficulties down the line.