**Learning Disabilities**

***What are learning disabilities?***

A learning disability can be described as a distinct and unexplained gap between a person’s level of expected achievement and their performance. Learning disabilities (LD) affect every person differently and they present differently at various stages of development. LD’s can range from mild to severe and it is not uncommon for people to have more than one learning disability. LD’s can affect a person’s ability in the areas of:

* Listening
* Speaking
* Reading
* Writing
* Spelling
* Reasoning
* Mathematics

***How common are Learning Disabilities?***

Approximately 2.4 million school-aged children in the US are identified as having specific learning disabilities and receive some kind of special education.

***Characteristics of Learning Disabilities include:***

* Mistakes when reading out loud
* Trouble expressing ideas in writing
* Limited vocabulary
* Taking longer to complete tasks
* Easily frustrated
* Low self-esteem
* Trouble with written expression, math calculation, and reading comprehension

*Some prominent learning disabilities include:*

* Dyslexia- difficulty processing language (reading, writing, and spelling)
* Dyscalculia- difficulty with math skills
* Dysgraphia- difficulty with written expression
* Dyspraxia- difficulty with fine motor skills
* Auditory processing disorder- difficulty interpreting auditory information
* Visual processing disorder- difficulty interpreting visual information

***Tips for Mentors:***

* Talk to your mentee’s family to learn more about their specific learning disabilities
* Take your mentee’s learning disabilities into consideration when planning activities
* Create structure, consistency, and organization
* Find out how your mentee learns best
* Be understanding! It may take longer for them to complete tasks- allow sufficient time for your mentee to process and respond to the given task
* Use both auditory and visual communication when explaining a new activity or giving directions
* Try to understand your mentee’s disability and work with them

***Sources:***

1. National Center for Learning Disabilities <http://www.ncld.org/>
2. Learning Disabilities Online <http://www.ldonline.org/>
3. Learning Disabilities Association of America <http://www.ldanatl.org/>