

EXPLAINING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

As many as 80% of children with Neurofibromatosis Type 1 (Nf1) will have some sort of learning difficulty.

A learning difficulty can be thought of as a short circuit problem, or dysfunction in one or more channels in the brain.

These channels are used for getting information into the brain (input), processing that information, or communicating information (output). Dysfunction in any brain channels can make it harder for a child to achieve their full potential.

Children with Nf1 may have difficulty with reading, writing, math, memory and staying focused in the classroom.

Children with Nf1 who have trouble getting information into the brain have a perceptual disability.

These children may reverse letters, have problems with positioning objects in space, or have difficulties distinguishing subtle differences between similar sounds.

In addition, they may misunderstand social cues and body language. They can end up feeling confused, anxious and/or frustrated, and this can impact negatively on their school performance and social interactions.

Children with Nf1 can also have trouble processing information once it gets into the brain, and their brains may have difficulty making sense of the information they receive. These integration problems can include problems putting things in an order that makes sense, figuring out the meaning of symbols and words, and organising new information.

Additionally, children with Nf1, particularly boys, may have difficulty communicating what they have learned. This is a problem with language and motor output. Children with this type of language problem can talk on and on, often with a great deal of intelligence and expression, about a wide range of topics, and then freeze when asked a specific question.

Children with motor output problems are often regarded as clumsy or uncoordinated. Typically, these children have difficulty with gym activities or with the fine motor coordination skills needed for writing, colouring, scissor work etc.

Referral to Occupational Therapy can be very helpful.