

**\*\*YOUR GIFT****Blessing in disguise**

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**Famous slow learners**

People with learning difficulties include the world's greatest scientists, musicians, artists, athletes and actors. Here are a few:

Albert Einstein, scientist  
Galileo, physicist  
Wright Brothers, inventors of the airplane  
Leonardo Da Vinci, artist who painted the controversial Mona Lisa  
John F Kennedy, 35th US President  
Cher, singer  
Whoopi Goldberg, comedian  
Thomas Edison, inventor of the light bulb  
Mozart, Western classical composer  
Beethoven, Western classical composer  
John Lennon, singer-songwriter, The Beatles  
Sylvester Stallone, Hollywood actor renowned for his role in Rocky  
George Bernard Shaw, Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature  
Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone  
Louis Pasteur, scientist who discovered pasteurisation

**She's always in step**

When 14 year-old Sara Shaikh steps on stage, everyone is spell bound. Her feet are perfectly in tune with the music, her facial expressions animated, and movement graceful. It's hard to imagine why anyone would call a person who has mastered such complex manoeuvres, a "slow learner". It's only when her mother Nishat Shaikh recounts the brain-damaging road accident that left the otherwise-bright Sara unable to converse, read or write, that you realise her long journey. "The accident affected her IQ. Her teachers and principal at King George School, Dadar were cooperative.

But when we moved to Mira Road and enrolled her in a local school, things went wrong." They ignored Sara, thinking the child's difficulty would "vanish" if they did not pay attention. On an educationist's recommendation, Nishat took her to Child Reach, an organisation of parents and teachers working with kids with learning difficulties. The advanced teaching techniques made Sara's learning curve jump so much that she is now preparing for her SSG (National Open School or NOS). "I want to become an air hostess," she says confidently. Why, you ask her, and she says, "Because I want to fly... for free!"

**Does my child have LD?**

Telltale signs to look out for

**LANGUAGE/MATH:** Slow learning of the correspondence of sound to letter; consistent errors in reading or spelling; difficulty remembering basic sight words; inability to retell a story in sequence; trouble learning to tell time or count money; confusion of math signs (+, -, x, /, =), transposition of number sequences; trouble memorising math facts; trouble with place value; difficulty remembering the steps of mathematic operations such as long division

**MOTOR SKILLS:** Poor coordination or awkwardness; difficulty copying from chalkboard; poor handwriting

**ATTENTION/ORGANISATION:** Difficulty concentrating, difficulty finishing work on time; inability to follow multiple directions; unusual sloppiness, carelessness; poor concept of direction (left, right); rejection of new concepts, or changes in routine

**SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:** Difficulty understanding facial expressions or gestures; difficulty understanding social situations; tendency to misinterpret behaviour of peers and/or adults; apparent lack of common sense

**Types of LDs**

\* **Aphasia:** A communication difficulty that does not affect overall intelligence. Aphasia interferes with the ability to speak or understand speech and often causes difficulty with reading or writing.

\* **Autism Spectrum Disorder:** A broad category characterised by lack of social responsiveness, including touch and eye contact. Language skills may be poor and there is a tendency for repetitive motion like spinning and flapping.

\* **ADHD:** Difficulty to focus and concentrate. It reduces attention span, makes directions difficult to follow and fosters impulsive behaviour that is unresponsive to discipline.

\* **Dyslexia:** Difficulty with word recognition, spelling and decoding, which could lead to trouble understanding, reading or writing words, sentences or paragraphs. Although letter and word reversals are common symptoms, they are not diagnostic.

**HIGH ON SONG:**  
Ageless singer Cher is dyslexic  
PIC/REUTERS



Counsellor and special educator Bela Raja's *Children With Learning Difficulties* is available at all Crossword Bookstore outlets for Rs 295. In a clear and simple style, Bela unwraps the myths surrounding LD, Bela shares her experiences and suggests fun ways for parents and teachers to tutor kids with learning difficulties

**Fun ways in which you can teach your child to read****[1] Not so boring board games**

Roll the dice and put a home-made game into action.

You need: Poster board, dice, markers

Directions: You can create an original board game by drawing stepping stones or a path of squares from "Start" to "Finish" on a poster board. Next, write fun action items in some of the spaces, like "make a funny face," "hop on one foot," "bark like a dog," or "wiggle your nose." Then, draw numbers, letters, words, and symbols (stars, triangles, hearts) in the other spaces. With your child, write rules for the game, such as "Turn around once before you roll the dice" or "If you land on a square with a star, move backwards two spaces."

**[2] Vocabulary Squares**

Create building blocks for a better vocabulary.

You need: Construction paper, scissor, pencil, 3"X5" index cards

Directions: Take 15 index cards or cut out small squares from construction paper and write a noun, adjective, adverb, verb, or a connecting

word (for instance, she, happy, gently, went, and) on each one. If you have different coloured paper, use a specific colour for each type of word (yellow for nouns, purple for verbs). Give your child some blank cards and ask her to construct sentences with the words provided. Have her use the blank cards to add words. As your child gets older, the words can become more complex. For younger children, cut out pictures and glue them to each card.

**[3] Dictionary game**

You need: Writing material, children's dictionary, pen or pencil

Directions: In a group, have one person choose a word out of the dictionary without telling anyone the definition. Start with the "A" section. Have everyone else in the group either guess out loud, write down or illustrate what they think the mystery word means and then share the answers to see who comes closest to guessing the actual definition of the mystery word. Take turns looking up words, moving through each

letter of the alphabet.

**[4] Reporting live**

You need: Newspapers and magazines

Directions: Pick a special "news night" in your household and review the newspaper with your child. If your newspaper has a weekly feature for children, focus your efforts there; otherwise,

might. He can involve other family members as interview subjects or even use props. You can create a "microphone" by wrapping some construction paper around the cardboard tube from a roll of paper towels and then attaching a big ball of tin foil on top.

**[5] Flashcards**

You need: 3"X5" index cards, magazine photos, tape or glue and pen

Directions: Make your own flashcards to help improve your child's reading vocabulary. Buy index cards or cut sheets of paper into large squares. Choose words your child is having particular problems with and print them on the fronts of the cards. On the backs, write the definition of each word. Have your child read the word on the front, but be prepared to turn it over to provide help if needed.

**Approach:**

**CHILD REACH:** Non profit school at Santacruz for slow learners and kids with LD, founded by parents and special educators. (Tel: 55748796)

**NALANDA INSTITUTE:** Independent trust that provides assessment, counselling and consultancy for children with learning difficulties. Located at Byculla, the institute is also a centre of excellence in the field of special education related to Learning Disabilities. (Tel: 302 1493/1497)

**UMMEED:** Non-profit organisation set up with the objective of helping children with developmental and learning difficulties. (Tel: 23632258, 23632932)

focus on sections of interest to your child (sports, entertainment, even the comics section). Ask your child to read the article and then report back to you as a real television reporter

From *25 Ways To Encourage Reading* by Schwab Learning. To download more such games for free, log on to [www.schwablearning.org](http://www.schwablearning.org)