

LDAO Public Policy Manual 2002

Section B: Prevention and Research

The policies in this section relate to research into the causes of learning disabilities and dissemination of information aimed at preventing, to the greatest extent possible, the occurrence of learning disabilities. Policies also address prevention of the secondary and tertiary consequences of learning disabilities.

The Learning Disabilities Association was involved in a research project called Promoting Early Intervention. As part of this project, LDAO has:

- developed a new definition of learning disabilities,
- identified a screening process for kindergarten age children,
- piloted a series of interventions for children who are seen as being at risk for school failure,
- introduced a revised assessment protocol for diagnosing learning disabilities in accordance with the new definition,
- developed and piloted a series of programming initiatives for the primary grades,
- made recommendations to all parties involved in the training of teachers in the pre- and in-service programmes, AQ courses and the accreditation and recertification process by the Ontario College of Teachers,
- and promoted much greater public awareness of the field of learning disabilities.

Some of the materials developed through this project have been included in this manual. Others are available on the LDAO website, www.ldao.on.ca or may be obtained directly from the LDAO office or the Association's local chapters.

Policies

B1 Primary Prevention of Learning Disabilities

B2 Strategies for Primary Prevention of Learning Disabilities

B3 Secondary Prevention - Reducing the Impact of Learning Disabilities

B4 Tertiary Prevention - Accommodation of residual problems arising or resulting from having learning disabilities

B5 Research

B6 Access to Information

B7 Evaluation of Information

Policy B1 – Primary Prevention of Learning Disabilities

LDAO advocates that relevant and up to date information about the prevention of learning disabilities be provided to professionals and the community at large.

Rationale

The possible adverse consequences of learning disabilities are significant, both to the individual and to society. Where possible, it is better to prevent their occurrence than deal with these adverse consequences. Although the exact cause or causes of learning disabilities are not known, factors which may result in the development of a learning disability and which may be avoided include:

- poor prenatal care and nutrition
- exposure to toxic substances prenatally or in early childhood
- recurring middle ear infections between birth and the age of three (the sensitive period for language development)
- parental overuse of alcohol prior to and/or during pregnancy
- drug abuse prior to and/or during pregnancy
- heavy smoking during pregnancy
- severe allergies left untreated
- head injuries
- encephalitis and meningitis

It is important, therefore, that the community, and in particular parents, be aware of the possible consequences of these factors.

References

“Please Doctor...if someone should mention learning disabilities: a handbook for physicians”; Resnick, M. and Mahoney, W., LDAC, 1986
“Making good choices for you and your baby”; LDAO, 1989
LDAO mission statement
Prevention policy statements, LDAC Policy Manual, 1994

Policy B2 – Strategies for Primary Prevention of Learning Disabilities

LDAO advocates that parent education programs be provided to advise parents of what constitutes good care of their children to assist in the prevention of learning disabilities. LDAO further advocates that specialized pre-, peri- and post-natal support programs be provided for parents who are considered at particular risk of having a child with a learning disability.

Rationale

Good care before and during birth and during infancy is the best means of preventing those learning disabilities which are the result of environmental factors. Parents and professionals working with parents, infants and young children must be aware of the possible development of learning disabilities and what factors may assist in their prevention. Such measures include:

- good nutrition during pregnancy
- good nutrition provided to the child post-natally

- an awareness of what substances can cause problems (for example, lead and several other heavy metals, weed killers, some cleaning fluids, tobacco smoke, some solvents and cleaning fluids)
- avoidance of smoking, alcohol and non-prescription drugs during pregnancy and breast-feeding
- an understanding of what symptoms indicate potential trouble, which call for immediate medical intervention, and which are not as serious

A woman considering having a child should be made aware of these risks before she becomes pregnant.

References

“Please Doctor...if someone should mention learning disabilities: a handbook for physicians”; Resnick, M and Mahoney, W, LDAC, 1986

“Making good choices for you and your baby”; LDAO, 1989

Prevention policy statements, LDAC Policy Manual, 1994

Supporting document for the new definition of learning disabilities, LDAO, 2001: See Appendix G or hotlink to: www.ldao.on.ca/pei/defsupp/index.html

Policy B3 – Secondary Prevention-Reducing the Impact of Learning Disabilities

LDAO advocates that all persons with learning disabilities have available to them appropriate special education programs and services, social skills, life skills and employment preparation programs and self-esteem counselling to prevent the secondary effects of learning disabilities.

Rationale

Secondary prevention is defined as prevention of the negative effects of having learning disabilities on the daily life of the individual, including:

- illiteracy and innumeracy
- poor social skills
- lack of marketable skills resulting in unemployment or underemployment
- disorganization or poor impulse control
- low self-esteem
- poverty
- inadequate life skills
- secondary emotional problems such as depression or threatened or attempted suicide
- poor understanding of their learning disabilities

All aspects and consequences of a learning disability must be addressed. Remediation of the academic difficulties resulting from having a learning disability does not negate the importance of teaching other transferable skills needed to function in society. Conversely,

sociological or philosophical considerations are not an excuse to ignore the individual's academic needs.

References

Brief to the Interministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities, LDAO, 1990
Report of the Interministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities, LDAO, 1992
Response to the consultation on the Social Assistance Reform Act, LDAO, 1997
Response to the consultation on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, LDAO, 1998 and 2001
Promoting Early Intervention materials, LDAO, 2001
Response to the ISA profile consultation, LDAO, 2001

Policy B4 – Tertiary Prevention – Accommodation of residual problems arising or resulting from having learning disabilities

LDAO endorses the provisions of the OHRC and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which mandate the accommodation of individuals with learning disabilities. LDAO advocates that this requirement be strictly enforced to enable an individual who has learning disabilities to function in society to the greatest extent possible.

Rationale

Tertiary (“third stage”) prevention involves coping and compensatory strategies and accommodations that seek to enable an individual who has learning disabilities to address the ongoing effects of learning disabilities, after second-stage interventions such as special education programs have achieved as much progress as possible. Such strategies are intended to ensure:

- equitable access to education and training programs
- acceptance by post secondary educational institutions, training and professional licensing facilities that people with learning disabilities must be accommodated to achieve existing standards, albeit in alternative ways
- acceptance by employers of the right of people with learning disabilities to use coping and/or compensatory strategies and assistive devices to perform their jobs
- access to support services, including mental health services, literacy and employment programs, and where necessary, social assistance and disability-based funding supports
- recognition by the justice and corrections systems of the nature of learning disabilities and the role they may play in bringing an individual into conflict with the law and access to appropriate programming designed to reduce the likelihood of subsequent offence

References

Ontario Human Rights Code, 1981
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982
Guidelines for Assessing Accommodation Requirements for Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Citizenship, 1989
Eaton v Brant County Board of Education, Supreme Court of Canada, 1996

Eldridge et al v British Columbia (Attorney General), Supreme Court of Canada, 1997
Submission to Standing Committee on Human Resources Development, LDAC, 1994
Letter to MCSS regarding Definition of Disability for Social Assistance, LDAO, 1995
Response to Bill 173 (Long term care), LDAO, 1995
Letter to Minister of Justice regarding the Young Offenders Act, LDAO, 1995
Response to Accreditation of College Programs, LDAO, 1996
Response to Common Curriculum, LDAO, 1997
Response to the consultation on the Social Assistance Reform Act, LDAO, 1997
Response to the consultation on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, LDAO, 1998 and 2001
Promoting Early Intervention materials, LDAO, 2001
Supporting document to the new definition of learning disabilities, LDAO, 2001: See Appendix G or hotlink to: www.ldao.on.ca/pei/defsupp/index.html

Policy B5 – Research

LDAO advocates that additional and better research into the causes, methods of identification and consequences to the individual of learning disabilities and effective strategies for remediation, rehabilitation, accommodation of learning disabilities be undertaken. Funding for such research should be a government priority.

Rationale

Learning disabilities is still a new area of research when compared to many other exceptionalities and disabilities. As a result, knowledge about and understanding of learning disabilities is very limited. This in turn makes it difficult to ensure that individuals with learning disabilities receive the necessary and appropriate intervention. Therefore, LDAO advocates:

- genetic research to determine which, if any, forms of learning disability have an inherited component, and if so, what can be done to prevent or reduce the incidence and/or impact of these learning disabilities
- research on appropriate interventions; for example, studying the various forms of special education and programming strategies to determine their effectiveness and to ascertain whether certain forms are more or less effective in relation to specific learning disabilities or at different stages of an individual's development
- research on the correlation between certain illnesses and the occurrence of learning disabilities as a means of enhancing prevention; for example, the role of early, severe middle ear infections in the development of language learning disabilities
- research in the area of mental health to consider which therapies are effective in the secondary prevention of learning disabilities (the adverse consequences on the individual in his or her daily life)

References

Ontario Child Health Study; Offord, D., 1984
Integra Study of the Psycho-Social Needs of Children and Youth with Learning Disabilities, 1985

Report of the Interministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities, 1992
LDAO mission statement
Promoting Early Intervention materials, LDAO, 2001

Policy B6 – Access to Information

LDAO advocates that information about learning disabilities and any available successful interventions be made available to the general public.

Rationale

Informing the public about learning disabilities is of fundamental importance. Individuals with learning disabilities are best served when their families, friends and those with whom they come into contact (for example, educators, coaches, prospective and actual employers) are knowledgeable about learning disabilities and their consequences.

For this reason, LDAO gathers and makes available information to the public through its national and provincial office, its chapters and satellites around Ontario and through regular public information campaigns.

References

LDAO mission statement and by-laws
Report of the Interministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities, 1992
Response to the consultation on revision to the IPRC process, LDAO, 1995
Response to the consultation on Bill 160, LDAO, 1997
Response to the consultation on the Social Assistance Reform Act, LDAO, 1997
Response to the consultation on the Ontarians with Disabilities Act, LDAO, 1998 and 2001
Promoting Early Intervention materials, 2001

Policy B7 – Evaluation of Information

LDAO advocates a scientific approach to the development and evaluation of interventions, therapies and programs for individuals with learning disabilities. The scientific basis for a given intervention, therapy or program should be made available to consumers to facilitate informed decisions.

Rationale

There are numerous interventions recommended for helping or “curing” learning disabilities which have little or no research available to support their validity; rather, these interventions are endorsed by those using them solely on the basis of their experience. It is important to distinguish between proven fact and unproven opinion or unverified observation in determining whether or not to try a given intervention. In this context, “scientific approach” is defined as the obtaining of information by appropriately qualified professionals from one or more research studies based on the “double-blind system” where one group receives the treatment being studied and the other control group receives a placebo. The findings of any such study must be able to be replicated by other researchers in other studies before they can be accepted as reliable.

LDAO does not endorse any treatment or intervention method for learning disabilities. However, it is part of LDAO's mandate to be informed about interventions and to disseminate such information in a factual manner to all those who may benefit from such information. Parents of children with learning disabilities, consumers and others are urged to use caution before deciding to invest time and money in any new or controversial therapy or treatment method.

References

"Please Doctor! ...if someone should mention learning disabilities: a handbook for physicians";
Resnick, M. and Mahoney, W., LDAC, 1986
Promoting Early Intervention materials, LDAO, 2001