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By Dr. Carola Ruiz

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<https://www.acu.edu.au/advancing-literacy>

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

University researchers around Australia are investigating children's mental health and language and literacy skills during the transition to high school. Do you know a child in Year 6 (with/without reading or language difficulties) and their parent/caregiver?

[Find out more](#) and [register here](#).

Researchers at Macquarie University are investigating social support and emotional wellbeing in high school students with reading difficulties such as dyslexia. Eligible teens who complete the online survey will receive a \$20 voucher.

[Learn more and register here](#).

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR CHILD OR STUDENT MIGHT HAVE A MATHS LEARNING DIFFICULTY?

BY DR. CAROLA RUIZ, UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DEL URUGUAY

Some children struggle with maths in the early years, but when difficulties are persistent, they may point to a specific learning disorder known as maths learning difficulty or **dyscalculia**. While specific learning disorders are typically diagnosed by psychologists, this article explains some of the early signs to look out for and why spotting them early can make a big difference.

[Read the full article here.](#)

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MYTH:

"All people with dyslexia move around letters in words when reading."

FACTS:

- No; letter position mistakes, like reading DAIRY as "diary", are commonly made, even among typically developing readers.
- Some dyslexics make more of these errors than is typical, but this is not true of all dyslexics.
- If you are concerned that a student, dyslexic or not, may have a specific difficulty in assigning positions to letters, [this test may be a helpful resource](#).

How do you know if your child or student might have a maths learning difficulty?

By Dr. Carola Ruiz, Universidad Católica del Uruguay

Some children struggle with maths in the early years, but when difficulties are persistent, they may point to a specific learning disorder known as maths learning difficulty or dyscalculia. While specific learning disorders are typically diagnosed by psychologists, this article explains some of the early signs to look out for and why spotting them early can make a big difference.

What do we mean by maths learning difficulty?

A maths learning difficulty is a specific learning disorder that impacts the accuracy and speed with which people process numerical information, calculate, and/or reason mathematically. It can persist into adulthood and has a neurobiological origin, that is, the parts of the brain that are meant to process numbers do not function as expected.

Even though it has been more than 50 years since the first cases of maths learning difficulties were reported, there are still many active debates about terminology, causes, subtypes, symptoms, and treatments. Nevertheless, a lot of knowledge has accumulated, leading to agreement about the importance of early identification of children at risk of developing maths learning difficulties. Early identification increases the likelihood of earlier intervention and accommodations. Early action promotes better outcomes, which in this case translates to more successful maths learners. So, what should you look out for when children start learning maths?

What are some early signs of a maths learning difficulty?

There are some things that we can be on the lookout for, as these are common early signs that a child might be at risk of developing a maths learning difficulty. For younger children, at the very beginning of formal schooling, we might watch out for those struggling to:

- distinguish between numbers and other symbols
- learn number symbols and words
- compare more and less when faced with sets of objects
- count the number of objects in a set (i.e., assigning the correct numeral to each object and/or determining the total number of objects in a set).

For older children, who are already in the first grades of primary school, we might also watch out for those struggling to:

- learn multi-digit numbers
- determine the larger of two numbers
- understand place value (e.g., that the 5 in 351 indicates 5 tens)
- solve calculations
- retrieve from memory the results of simple number facts (e.g., $2+2$, $10-5$) when they have had opportunities to practise them.

More generally, any response that suggests a child does not understand the value of numbers or how numbers work might be a sign of difficulties. Regardless of age, it is important to consider the accuracy and speed of children's responses, as speed represents the effort the child has to exert when completing a task. Excessive effort, worry as well as avoidance of maths tasks can be signs of possible maths learning difficulties.

Most importantly, the presence of one or more of these signs does not necessarily mean that the child has a learning difficulty in maths. If you are worried, it is always a good idea to seek more information and ask for others' opinions within the school. If needed, consider having an in-depth, specialised assessment to confirm.

Learn more information here:

- [Dyscalculia headlines](#) (includes a podcast)
- [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org/)
- [Dyscalculia Network](#) (includes a podcast)
- Haberstroh, S., & Schulte-Körne, G. (2019). The diagnosis and treatment of dyscalculia. *Deutsches Arzteblatt International*, 116(7), 107–114. <https://doi.org/10.3238/arztebl.2019.0107>
- Mazzocco M., M., Murphy M., M., Brown E., Rinne L., & Herold K., H. (2013) Persistent consequences of atypical early number concepts. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00486>