Driving and Non-Verbal Learning Disability (NLD)
ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists

Individuals with NLD have challenges with visual-spatial, motor and social skills. However, because individuals with NLD have strong verbal skills they are often overlooked for specialized driver training.

Warning signs:
- **Visual-cognitive skills** – Individuals with NLD have difficulty understanding and interpreting visual information. They may have difficulty:
  - Knowing how to react to a roadway hazard or changes in the traffic environment.
  - With navigation. For example, it may be challenging to find their way out of a large shopping mall parking lot or drive to routine destinations.
  - Recognizing how traffic flows through intersections. This may cause them to stop in the middle of intersection or drive through very slowly.

- **Social skills** – Individuals with NLD may have difficulty anticipating or interpreting the actions of other roadway users. These challenges may cause:
  - Delayed reactions to pedestrians, cyclists and other vehicles.
  - Difficulty recognizing an aggressive driver.

- **Motor skills and visual spatial** – Individuals with NLD may have difficulty with motor coordination and visual spatial skills. This may cause difficulty with:
  - Maneuvering the vehicle for parking, backing or through turns, hills and curves.
  - Adjusting speed and managing space for lane changes.

- **Executive function skills** – Individuals with NLD may have difficulty solving problems that occur on the roadway. They may have difficulty:
  - Considering all the factors when managing a roadway emergency in order to get help and be safe.
  - Generalizing what they have learned in one situation to another.
  - Anticipating the consequences of their actions.

- **Learning differences** – Driver education can be challenging for individuals with NLD because they may experience:
  - Anxiety about driving or being with other students in a car.
  - Difficulty understanding instructions. Instructions need to support NLD learning preferences: concrete and verbal description of visual information.
  - Difficulty transferring knowledge from classroom to behind-the-wheel sessions.

To locate a driver rehabilitation specialist in your area contact:

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A driver rehabilitation evaluation will examine these skills as they relate to driving. The objective is to be independent drivers that can compensate for challenges. A driver rehabilitation specialist can identify readiness to learn to drive and appropriate training methods.

This assessment should include:

- A review of medical history and medication
- Assessment of life skills
- Vision and visual spatial skills
- Activities that assess visual and cognitive processing skills for driving
- Behind-the-wheel or simulated driving activities

References:

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