

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.

continued

To locate a driver rehabilitation specialist in your area contact:

ADED – The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists
 200 First Avenue NW, Suite 505 ■ Hickory, NC 28601
 (866) 672-9466 Toll Free in the US & Canada ■ E-mail: info@aded.net ■ Web: www.aded.net

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:

Monahan, M. (2012). Assessing, treating, and preparing youth with special needs for driving and community mobility. In M. J. McGuire & E. Schold-Davis (Eds.), *Driving and community mobility: Occupational therapy strategies across the lifespan* (pp. 383-410). Bethesda, MD: AOTA press.

Fact sheet contributor:

Miriam Monahan, OTD, OTR/L, CDRS, CDI

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