Understood Quick Insights Series

Uncovering stigma around learning and thinking differences

Understood.org strives to shape the world for difference so every individual can thrive. As part of our mission, we work to combat the stigma around learning and thinking differences that often prevents kids from getting the support they need.

Over the past four years, Understood's research team has monitored trends around perceptions of learning and thinking differences. Building on extensive literature reviews as well as participatory and quantitative testing, we developed a new measure of stigma that combines **self-stigma, public stigma,** and **experienced stigma**. In 2025, we piloted this measure in a survey of 1,000 parents. Here, we share a few quick insights into **public stigma** perceptions around learning and thinking differences.

Key insights

- Over 40% of parents don't know that learning and thinking differences are caused by **biological variations in the brain.**
  - Instead, many parents attribute these differences to how a child is raised (49%), environmental factors (55%), or excessive screen time (41%).

- About half of parents (53%) strongly agree that learning and thinking differences **affect all aspects of life** — academic, social, physical, emotional, and behavioral.
  - But many parents don't know that learning and thinking differences can showup in other parts of kids' lives. It's not just about schoolwork.

- About half of parents (49%) strongly agree that learning and thinking differences affect individuals **beyond their school years into adulthood**.
  - But many parents still aren't aware that these differences are lifelong conditions.

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Implications

These insights highlight a critical need to increase knowledge and awareness of learning and thinking differences to fight stigma.

To shift perspectives, Understood launched **Through My Eyes**. This first-of-its-kind, free, interactive experience lets people step into the world of kids with ADHD, dyslexia, and dyscalculia. Through personal stories and expert-created resources, *Through My Eyes* helps to increase understanding and advocacy among adults and kids.

On the research side, we'll be publishing more of our insights and results from piloting this measure in the coming months. Stay tuned!

Connect with us

We're always looking to collaborate and partner with others on our research. Reach out to our team at **knowledge@understood.org** to learn more.

Methodology: An online Qualtrics survey fielded from May 5–June 9, 2025, among two sample groups: 510 parents of kids who learn and think differently, ages 5–18, and 513 parents of neurotypical kids, ages 5–18. Quotas were used within each group to ensure that samples were nationally representative for urbanicity, race, income, region, and child gender. The percentages above represent a weighted average combining both groups, to align with the estimated national average of 1 in 5 kids having learning and thinking differences. All data presented here have a confidence level of 95%.

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