

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

The concept of learned helplessness was introduced by Seligman (1975) to explain the response students have when exposed to a number of trials in which they are unable to influence the outcome. When they are unable to reach their goal, they give up and respond passively. Although learned helplessness or the perceived inability to influence a situation may be situation-specific, it often generalises to other learning situations. For example, when a student with severe reading problems meets with continued failure, he responds as though he is 'helpless'. Unfortunately this feeling generalises across other tasks and the student perceives himself as helpless in **all** academic tasks. Here are a few suggested strategies to reduce the effect of learned helplessness:

1. **Provide constant encouragement.** Because they experience continued failure, many students are discouraged from attempting tasks they are capable of performing.
2. **Highlight** academic tasks and social activities in which the student experiences success.
3. Discuss **your own** failures or difficulties and express what you do to cope with these. Be sure to provide examples of when you persist and examples of when you give up and the importance of each.
4. From time to time, structure your classes' learning and social activities to **reduce failure.**
5. Teach students to use procedures and techniques to monitor their **own** gains in academic areas.