

# Assistant training about Learning difficulties and Mental health among students in Aalto

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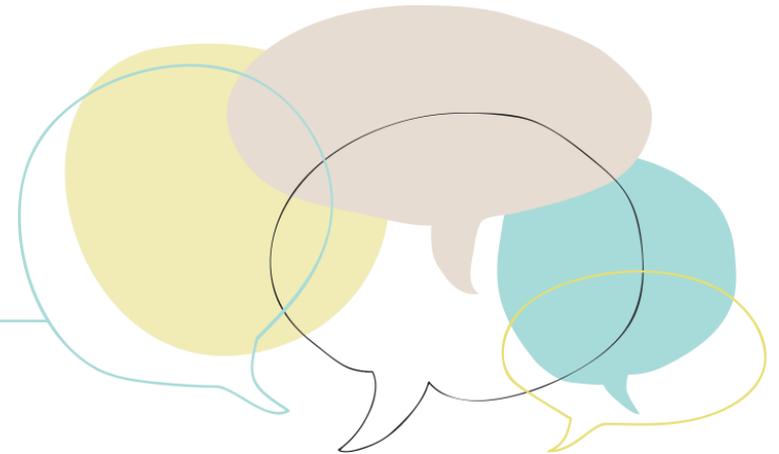
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# Learning difficulties

# Question

- **Have you met a student who has some sort of learning difficulty?**
- **Have you otherwise encountered learning difficulties?**



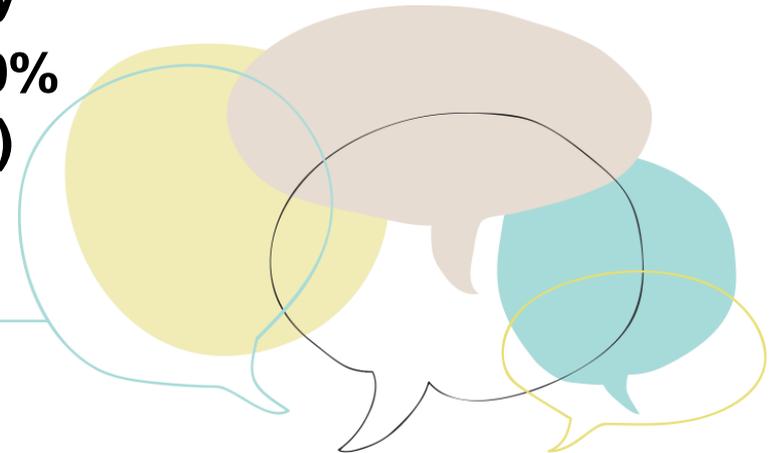
# Typical learning difficulties among university students

- Reading disorder - dyslexia
- Autism spectrum disorders (Asperger)
- ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder



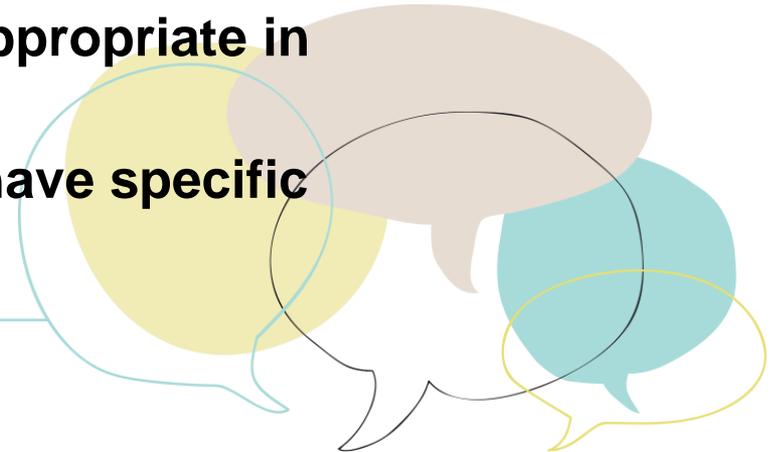
# Reading disorder - dyslexia

- Words or letters become mixed easily
- Reading takes more time and effort
- It might be more difficult to remember new things only through reading text
- It does not affect cognitive capacity
- Dyslexia rate in Finland about: 6-10% adults ([www.lukihäiriö.fi](http://www.lukihäiriö.fi), 9.10.2019)



# Autism spectrum (Asperger)

- **Abnormal functioning of the nervous system**
- **Difficulties in planning, executing and stopping an action**
- **Difficulties in perceiving relations between big picture and details (central coherence)**
- **Hard to interpret other people's communication**
- **Facial expressions and gestures inappropriate in the situation**
- **May be mathematically gifted / may have specific interests**



# ADHD and ADD

## - difficult to concentrate

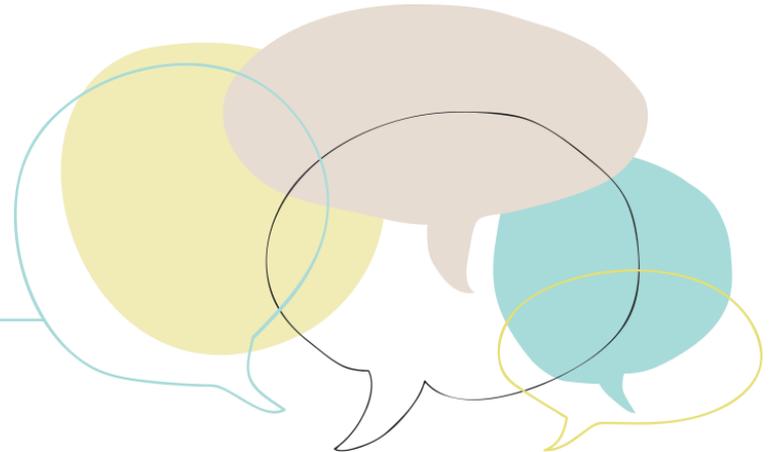
### ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- Inattention, hyperactivity, impulse

### ADD

- Inattention disorder

- About 7 % of Finns



# How to help in the class room in the "old world"?

- Speak clearly and cover one topic at time
- Tell at first the structure or main points of the session
- Materials in advance if possible
- Minimize external distractions e.g. noise
- Clear instructions
- One (sub)task at time
- Keep some breaks
- Tell about all kind of changes (e.g change of schedules or rooms) well in advance
- Possibility to choose own method of studying (e.g. in groups, in pairs, on their own)



# Supporting executive functions – *beneficial to everybody*

## Clear and structured instructions

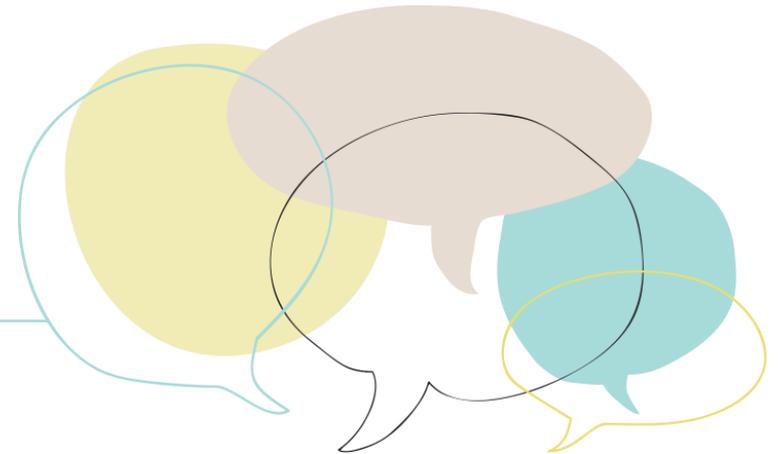
- Same instructions in different places
- Instructions divided into smaller pieces
- Monitoring performance and intervening early on in case of problems

## Support and guidance with time management

- Setting goals
- Dividing goals into concrete tasks
- Using a calendar
- Monitoring goal achievement



# How to do it in the “new normal” when everything happens online?



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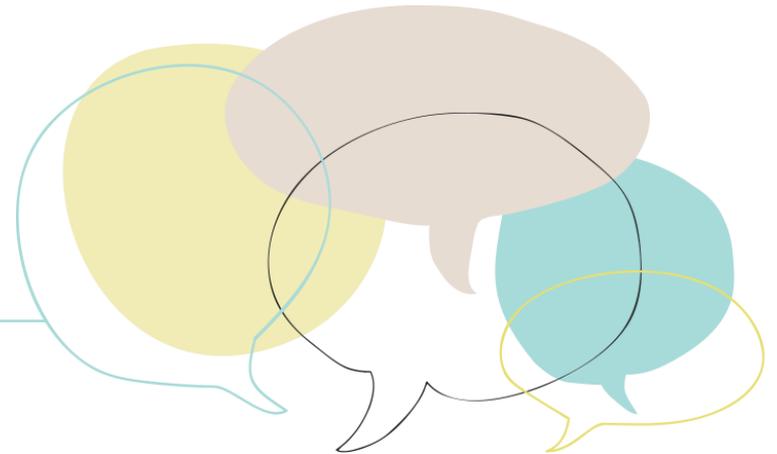
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# Mental health problems

The background features three overlapping speech bubbles. The top-left bubble is white with a yellow outline. The top-right bubble is beige with a black outline. The bottom-right bubble is light blue with a white outline. The text 'Mental health problems' is overlaid on the white bubble.

# Question

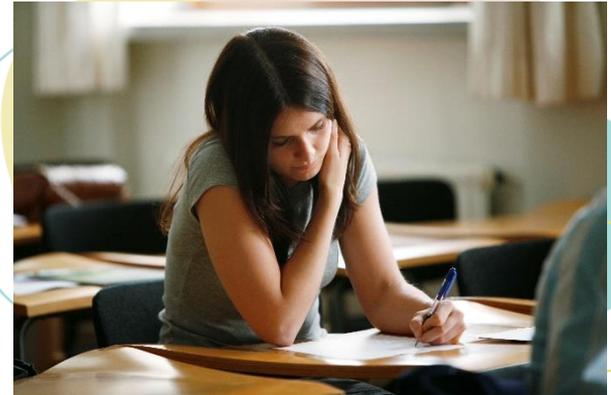
- **Imagine that after the first lesson there is a shy girl who is waiting for everybody else to leave the classroom. Then she mumbles that she suffers from panic disorder and sometimes she feels very uncomfortable in the class room.**
- **What would you do?**



# Mental health problems are the biggest health issue among students (FSHS)

- Students who have problems with mental health *need special care*.
- They are often gifted and get by, but their ability to study is *temporarily* compromised.
- Typical problems: depression, anxiety, panic disorder, eating disorders, addiction problems, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, crisis and traumas, sleeping problems

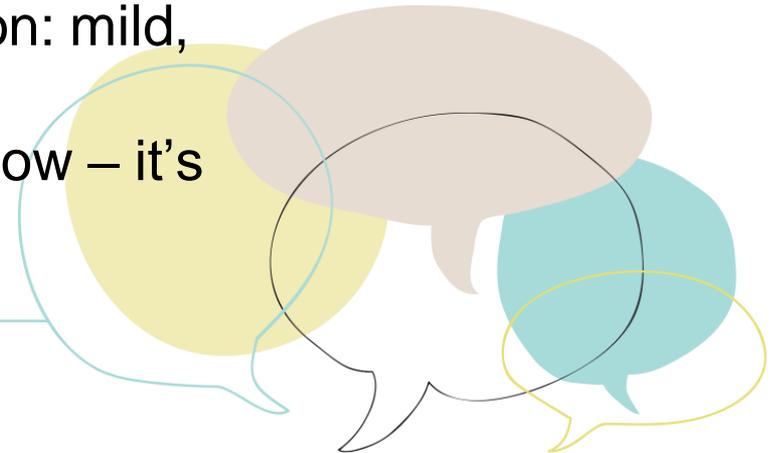
(FSHS = Finnish Student Health Service)



# Depression - What's going on?

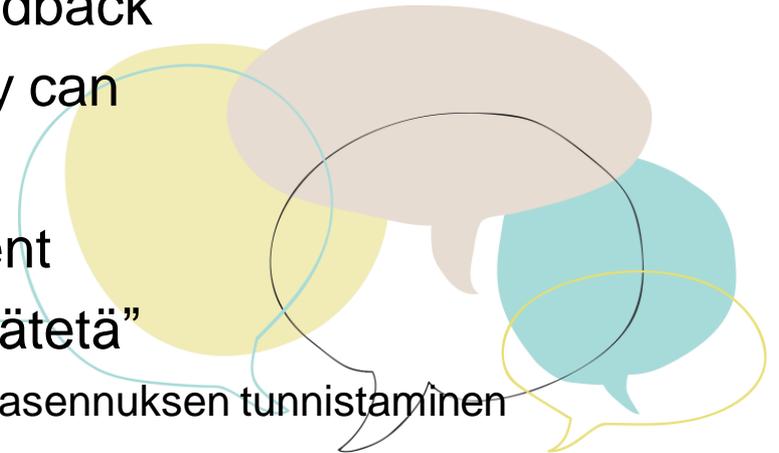
## Main symptoms:

- Depressed mood
- Inability to feel interested in things or to feel pleasure
- Inability to enjoy life
- Strengthlessness, feeling tired, being less active
- There are different levels of depression: mild, moderate and severe
- In severe depression performance is low – it's hard to get out of bed



# How can I support a depressed student?

- Confidential, open, safe and more easygoing atmosphere
- Encountering students individually
- Encouraging and supporting students
- Being available, listening and supporting
- Unambiguity and predictability of teaching
- Positive, constructive and realistic feedback
- Emphasizing what the student already can
- Student-teacher cooperation
- Encouraging to support a fellow student
- “No man is left behind” = ”Kaveria-ei-jätetä”



# Stress related anxiety, exhaustion

## What is it?

- Prolonged stress or significant life changes can cause anxiety symptoms
- Prolonged study-related stress can lead into a burnout in studies
- Fatigue, cynicism, feeling of inadequacy



# Stress related anxiety, exhaustion - How can we help?

- Goals and demands must be in right proportion to student's strengths and to the support available
  - Supporting the development of studying skills
  - Guidance, conversation about goals
- Schedule that enables sufficient recovery (breaks, free days)
- Temporarily slower study pace



# Aalto Psychologist's Services

## Individual meetings

- Topics e.g. motivation, study skills, self-regulation, stress control, well-being and study ability
- Requests for appointments via email: [opintopsykologi@aalto.fi](mailto:opintopsykologi@aalto.fi)
- 1-5 meetings (45 min), free of charge
- Confidential

## Workshops

- Small groups, 3-8 sessions
- Themes e.g. Mindfulness, Power of imperfection

**Study skills –website in Into**

**Self-study materials in MyCourses**

