

ADHD & LEARNING DISABILITIES

Having a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or a Learning Disability presents challenges but with your help, your child has the potential to become successful adult.

Your physician, school counsellors, teachers and EFAP counsellors are available to provide support and information.

As involved and caring parents you are concerned about your child's behaviour, particularly in regard to succeeding in the school environment. It may have been determined or is strongly suspected that your son or daughter has Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or a Learning Disability. Although two distinct problems requiring different treatments or interventions; their similarities are significant and justify considering them together.

Children and adolescents with ADHD or a Learning Disability often develop emotional, social and family problems arising from the frustration associated with experiencing ongoing failure. The problems are not the cause of their difficulties in school, but rather the consequence of ADHD or a Learning Disability. Parents must also be aware that the problems a child with ADHD or a Learning Disability experience are not caused by a lack of intelligence.

Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder

Children and adolescents experiencing the symptoms of ADHD face tremendous difficulties adapting to structure and adhering to expectations. Their most outstanding characteristic and the basic cause of their difficulty in learning, is that they are unable to maintain attention until tasks are complete. The essential features of an ADHD diagnosis are short attention span, impulsiveness and hyperactivity. Only one of these characteristics is necessary for the diagnosis. Your child may exhibit inappropriate behaviours across a variety of situations in the home or community, but problems are most likely to be evident under structured conditions requiring sustained attention such as those found in the classroom.

Teachers have probably described your child as having an overall lack of attention, being unable to listen, failing to complete projects, displaying excessive motor activity, being easily distracted and frequently disturbing other students. A number of teachers working with your child also may have described them as frequently engaged in off-task behaviours (not doing what they are supposed to be doing).



Learning Disabilities

A child identified as having a Learning Disability demonstrates discrepancy between their level of scholastic achievement and their intellectual ability. They have significant difficulties acquiring and using the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematics. To best understand your child's difficulties it is useful to divide the learning process into four stages - **sensory storage** - recording the information in the brain; **perceptual encoding** - organizing and understanding the information; **central processing** - storing the information; and **response selection** - retrieving the information.

A learning disability specifically refers to a break down or problem in one of these four stages. The learning disabled child may demonstrate some of the same characteristics as the child with ADHD as a reaction to being unable to process information. When they are not able to process and understand the information being taught, classroom exercises will not hold their attention and off-task behaviours will result.

Emotional, Social & Family Problems

When a child with ADHD or a Learning Disability is left without an accurate diagnosis and subsequent treatment, the child becomes very frustrated and may exhibit behavioural problems. As they struggle to succeed they may present themselves as bad rather than dumb. The frustration of ongoing failure despite legitimate effort often leads to acting-out behaviour such as aggressive outbursts or to the internalization of these feelings resulting in depression and low self-esteem.

The child's problems may extend beyond difficulties with reading, writing, and math to sports and other activities with peers. Remember that when one family member is hurting, to a great extent the entire family feels the pain. It is essential to distinguish between emotional, social and family problems that are causing difficulties in school and those that are the result of ADHD or a Learning Disability that has not been diagnosed, understood and appropriately treated.

Strategies for Success

Be assertive. No one is more concerned about your child than you are. Work closely with the professionals asking questions and insisting on answers. Believe in your ability to help and your child's ability to be successful.

Seek out professional assistance. Parents require knowledge and understanding of their child's disabilities and abilities in order to best provide support. A comprehensive evaluation will include consultation with physicians, your child's teachers and the school's special education team. It may be in your family's best interests to seek counselling to resolve family concerns.

Remember that YOU are your child's only parents. You are the most knowledgeable person when it comes to knowing your child as an individual. Your child will have different physicians, therapists and teachers. Respect their areas of expertise and try not to assume the tasks which should be their responsibility.

Do not take labels too seriously. Remember, all children are different. Few children exactly fit any official description. If a label can get your child special assistance then using a label may be in your best interests. Labels can help parents, teachers and therapists organize their information, discuss the problem and consider solutions.

Understand weaknesses, be creative and make a plan. Show that you accept your child's limitations by finding alternative ways to accomplish a task or by changing the task. Get to know your child's view of themselves and the way they view the world around them. Teach your child to make a plan before starting any project or activity.

Foster success and discover excellence. Set realistic goals. If the plan is good then completion and success should be possible. If not, work with your child to solve the problem and to change the plan. Talk about new plans in light of what has been learned from each new experience. Do not be afraid to acknowledge the level of difficulty that your child is experiencing and avoid comparing your child with other children.

Celebrate abilities. Get to know your child's strengths and concentrate on acknowledging and building on them. Discover ways for your child to feel good about themselves and to look good to the rest of the family. If you believe in them and have confidence in their ability to succeed then they will learn to believe in and to have confidence in themselves.



Display, discuss, and celebrate accomplishments!

YOUR LOGO HERE

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