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### Parent's Guide to Helping a Child with Learning Disabilities and ADD Learn

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I am a special education teacher who has ADD, mother of three children with ADD, have three siblings with learning disabilities, and a Technology Grant Recipient in 2000.

One of the first things that might run through a parent's thoughts is I don't understand. I thought that my child was smart. Why can't he read, communicate, or understand math? Parents can feel some comfort in knowing that a child having ADD or a learning disability does not make him mentally retarded. Usually, the child is very intelligent. It is important to treat the child as if he or she is the smartest kid on the block and have the child identify ways to help him or herself. Sometimes, it will be very hard for the parent to treat a child this way when the child can not grasp what appears the simplest concept. However, if a parent can remember that many people, who have influenced our lives and our history, have struggled with these same disabilities, that may help. Many people that have these disabilities are highly creative and are problem solvers.

One of the worst things to do is to punish the child by removing him from extracurricular activities. These include the involvement in sports, youth organizations, and youth volunteer activities. These activities can help a child find his or her self worth. Best of all it can help the child find a reason to excel and attempt to overcome his or her disability.

Homework can be very difficult for a parent with a child with ADD or a learning disability. Parents need to recognize that a child without a disability can complete homework usually in less than an hour unless that child is in an accelerated learning environment. The child with a disability may struggle for 3 to 5 hours or even longer attempting to complete what took his peers a very short time to complete.

The first step to helping the child is an organized routine for homework. Rules need to be in place about when to start and how to do homework. Remove the majority of visual and auditory distractions so the child can think and concentrate. That means no TV, no music, no other children playing or talking in the area. Some children will need to be in a very structured environment that provides visual cues to what needs to be completed when. If the child with ADD takes medication only school, have the child immediately start the homework. It so difficult for the child to focus and organized the information when the effects of the medication start to fade. The child needs to complete the homework when the child's brain is operating at its best.

Some children work best if they are able to stay on one homework assignment without interruption. Others appear to work slower over time when a task takes a long time to complete. For these children have them work with a timer for 10 to 20 minutes on a subject and then change to another subject. Have the child rotate through until the assignments until all are complete.

#### Study Cards

Usually a review worksheet is not a good study method for children with disabilities. Instead, use index cards. Have the question on one side and the answer on the other side. Students with comprehension problems are helped if they draw a picture of the answer or the definition.

1. Review the study cards.
2. Pretest and remove all the correct answered cards
3. Study three to five of the missed cards at a time and until they are all learned.
4. Then post test.
5. Study again the missed cards until the concepts are learned.
6. Cards made on the computer that can be folded in half can be use as above. They also can be cut in half to play matching games.

### **Letter Formation**

1. Trace, copy, and write very big letters written on the newspaper
2. Trace, copy, and write big letter on paper over a wire screen with a crayon
3. Color letter shapes using paper over a wire screen with a crayon
4. Trace, copy and write from memory smaller and smaller letters.
5. It is a good idea to practice making the sound of the letter while writing it.

### **Oral Language**

1. Role play stories
2. Act out events
3. Practice new vocabulary orally instead of writing definitions, have the child tell in his own words the meaning of the words.

### **Math**

For a parent helping a child with a math disability who does not answer problems correctly on math work sheets.

Have the child rework the problem until correct. Re-teach using a problem similar to the problem that the child is working. Use real objects to demonstrate. Do not do the math assignment for the child. Communicate with the teacher, how the work was completed at home. Let the teacher know that the child was unable to work a certain number of math problems. After re-teaching the lesson, the child worked this many problems correctly. After re-teaching the lesson, a third time, using another method, the child worked this many problems correctly. Then the teacher can grade the child accordingly.

'A student having many learning problems' needs to practice the review cards daily.

Write the steps to doing a problem.

One thing that has helped some of my students with word problems is if they can identify if it is a some some more or a some some less problem, a technique from the Saxon Math Program. Then identifying the correct math operation is easier for the child. Have the child to draw, make charts, brainstorm, or other problem solving skills to determine an answer.

### **Spelling**

A parent having the child to write the spelling words over-and-over usually does not help the child to remember his or her spelling if the child has a spelling disability. The child may be able to spell the words at home but forget how to spell the words at school. In the end, it can be a waste of time for both the child and the parent, and make everyone upset.

Do the following to help the child learn the spelling list:

1. First, make sure the child can read and say each word correctly.
2. Give a pretest.
3. Focus on helping the child learn the words that are missed.
4. Help the child to analyze his or her own spelling.

5. Have the child find correct and wrong patterns on the spelling pretest.
6. Talk about the correct spelling patterns. For example: the child may be able to spell "long a" with a "silent e" and all the consonants correctly.
7. Teach and practice the spelling patterns that were missed. For example, instead of the parent having the child to spell the whole word, practice just the sounds that were missed. For example: The child could practice short vowel sounds, long vowel sounds, suffixes, and prefixes.
8. Then give the child a few minutes to study on his or her own;
9. Give another spelling test.
10. As the child gets better, start giving timed test. Always be positive and mark the number of correct letters spelled for each word such as a +3 for three letters spelled correctly. Re-teach the word part the child is missing. Give time for the child to look over the word and retest again. Mark the number of words spelled correctly such as +6 for six words spelled correctly.
11. Re-test and have the child try to beat his score. Do this until the child is able to spell ten words a minute.
12. For children needing additional help, the parent may have the child write the words for pretest using his finger in shaving cream, or using a crayon with a piece a paper over a wire screen for additional stimulation
13. The parent may give additional help by holding up the number of fingers and having the child put each finger down as the child spells orally.

Doing these things with the child, will reduce the child's anxiety because the child will develop confidence in his or her ability to spell. Many times the child will perform better on the spelling test at school.

### **Reading Comprehension**

Some children have a difficult time understanding the meaning of what they read even though they have excellent word attack skills. Do the following to help child with a disability with a science, social studies lesson, or reading homework:

1. To complete the assignment, the parent and child read one paragraph at a time in an assignment.
2. They discuss the meaning of each sentence in the paragraph.
3. The child draws pictures to show exactly what was happening in the sentence or a series of sentences. The child does this through out the reading passage.
4. The parent makes sure that the child understands what the question is asking because the child may not understand the meaning of certain question words such as explain or discuss.
5. The child answers the questions based on what the child learned through drawing the pictures.

Some children get lost in the syntax of a sentence. Helping the child to understand the parts of speech and sentence structure can help. Work on increasing the vocabulary and recognizing the mean of vocabulary in a sentence.

### **Reading-Word Attack**

- Allow the child to use his fingers, a marker to keep his or her place on the page.
- Practice speed-reading. Emphasize reading like the way we talk. The goal is to build up to 100 words a minute. Remember to be positive and try to beat the next score.
- Introduce a new vowel pattern or word part weekly or daily if the child is learning
- Color code the vowel or vowels in a set of words
- Practice each learned skill daily using review cards. Parent-made-cards work fine.
- Practice blending and breaking words apart.
- Make up key words for vowel or vowel groups. Have the child draw a picture on a card for each sound. Then practice daily.
- These children usually have very good listening comprehension, but their reading comprehension may be poor because they do not know what the words are.

Until the child gains word attack skills to be an independent reader, the parent or a cassette tape will need to read science and social studies homework to the child. Remember the child is a good thinker. He needs his thinking skills challenged to be an active learner.

The techniques above may not help all children but they can help a parent find a starting place.

A special note to parents of children with disabilities: Parents please remember what is an automatic response for you, may be a lot of work for your child with disabilities. The child may have difficulty understanding what you are saying because of auditory processing problems. The child may have difficulty reading because of visual processing difficulty. The child's brain may not understand what it sees. Then some children have difficulty with their bodies and getting their bodies to do what they desire. If you and your child get upset because he or she can not work fast enough or remember well enough, the learning decreases. You will be wasting the your and the child's time. If you can make the learning experience enjoyable and focus on improvement on each skill, then helping your child will be easier. Stress can make the learning disability or ADD appear worst, so it is very important to keep the learning environment positive. When you have a child with a disability, you are given the opportunity to create, and build, a learning experience that will make a difference in your child's life. Building this experience will take a lot of hard work for both you and your child but with the right attitude, dreams can come true.

Be an active participant in your child's special education or 504 meetings even when the child is in high school. Keep all records well organized. Be careful with modifications. Too many modifications or not enough modifications can hurt a child. The goal is to help the child to be an active learner to develop coping skills that allows him or her to participate in challenging rich learning environments.

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