

Helping an ADHD or LD Student Succeed

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There are many types of students. Some children breeze through school from kindergarten to college, while others, who are just as capable, struggle as early as preschool when asked to follow directions or memorize the alphabet. Others seem fine through the elementary grades until reading and writing demands increase; or in high school until the ability to transition quickly, organize and manage many subjects becomes critical.

These are often the stories of students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and/or a Learning Disability (LD). It is estimated that about 5% of all children and adults are diagnosed with ADHD. Some common signs of ADHD include having difficulty listening and following directions, focusing and sustaining attention, concentrating and attending to tasks and transitioning or changing activities. These may be accompanied by distractibility, a high activity level, and impulsivity with a lack of self-control exhibited over a period of time.

A learning disability affects about 10-20% of all children. Students with a learning disability have difficulty processing or remembering information that they see or hear, which can interfere with their ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. When academic achievement does not match their capabilities, a learning disability may be the reason. For example, if a child has an average intelligence it is expected that the child will read, write, and do math at their grade level.

Children with attention and learning disabilities may also have difficulty navigating the social scene. Inattention, distractibility, misunderstanding what is said and misreading visual cues may cause difficulty following the social rules of conversation, such as taking turns, understanding appropriate personal space or recognizing and interpreting humor.

Before being diagnosed with a learning disability or attention deficit disorder, many students are mislabeled as dumb or lazy. Sadly, these misconceptions are inaccurate and hurtful. In fact, students with a learning disability often have average, above average or even superior

intelligence. The reality is that they tend to work much harder than students who do not have an attention disorder or a learning disability. Therefore, it is common for these students to be fatigued by the end of the school day due to the extra energy and effort they have had to expend across the day.

So what now?

If your child is diagnosed with ADHD or LD, there are many things you as a parent can do to help your child succeed.

Environmental Accommodations

- Create a comfortable study space for your child at home to complete homework and study. This space should support his/her personal learning style, be quiet and without distractions.
- Have all needed materials such as pencils, paper and computer easily accessible and all in one place.
- Provide a lot of structure, a set routine and specific time each night for studying and completing homework.
- Assist your child with time management. Give your child frequent, positive reminders about studying and completing homework.
- Use timers for children who need a specific start and finish time for studying and completing homework.
- Incorporate frequent breaks for children who work better in smaller increments of time.
- Keep the routine consistent.
- Provide opportunities for children to participate in non-academic interests.
- Provide structured social opportunities.

Instructional Accommodations

- Assist your child with organizing his/her materials at home and at school.
- Use checklists and calendars to help keep track of assignment due dates and assignment completion.
- Use graphic organizers, color-coded folders and clearly labeled materials.
- Provide an assignment pad and a set place to keep books and supplies at home.
- Pack the book bag the night before so

materials are not left at home during early morning rush.

- Try to give your child an opportunity to learn keyboarding skills. Students who struggle with reading and written expression often have an easier time using a computer for written assignments.
- Provide outside tutoring support for students who are still struggling in a specific academic area.

Behavioral Accommodations

- Establish close, consistent, and open communication between you and the school.
- Provide consistent rewards for appropriate behavior and clearly outlined outcomes for inappropriate behavior.
- Assist your child with transitions by giving them adequate preparation about upcoming changes and talking to them about transitions.
- Prepare students for change by rehearsing new expectations.
- Model appropriate behavior. Your child learns by watching and listening to you.
- Stay positive, consistent and patient.

Students with attention and learning disabilities may have a tougher road while in school, but even with a tougher road, success is just as reachable. A child who has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and /or a Learning Disability can be as successful as a child without these disorders with remediation, interventions, compensatory strategies and appropriate accommodations. It is important to remember that your child did not ask to have ADHD or a learning disability. Your child requires your ongoing understanding, acceptance and support while believing in his/her capabilities. These disorders may make school more difficult, but with the proper support at home and at school, they can achieve real success. ♦

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