LEARNING DISABILITIES

INFORMATION PACKET

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Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the following organizations and authors used in this packet.

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(973) 642-8100
[www.parentcenterhub.org](http://www.parentcenterhub.org)

**Amanda Morin, Erich Strom, Understood Editors**
Understood.org, a program of National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
[www.understood.org](http://www.understood.org)

**Reach Out and Read, Inc. & Reading Rockets**
WETA Public Television
2775 S. Quincy St., Arlington, VA 22206
[www.readingrockets.org](http://www.readingrockets.org)

**Family Center on Technology and Disability**
1825 Connecticut Ave, NW 7th Floor Washington, DC 20009
202-884-8068, [www.fctd.info](http://www.fctd.info)

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GreatSchools
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*NICHCY lost funding in 2014, but the Center for Parent Information and Resources ([www.parentcenterhub.org](http://www.parentcenterhub.org)) has obtained and will continue to update many of NICHCY’s legacy publications.*

**Disclaimer:** While many people have reviewed this packet for accuracy, policies, procedures and information such as websites, agency names, mailing addresses and phone numbers can change at any time. It is always a good idea to request copies of current policies and rules from the agencies with whom you are working.

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**Additional Packets Available**

Additional disability information packets and guides are available. Many are also available in Spanish and Chinese.

They include:

- ADHD
- Autism
- Behavior
- Cerebral Palsy
- Down syndrome
- Mental Health
- Medical Home
- Transition from Early Intervention to Preschool

To request another packet or for more information please contact:

TEL: 415-920-5040

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Section 1: Fact Sheets and Diagnosis

General Information
Learning Disabilities (LD)

A legacy resource from NICHCY
Disability Fact Sheet 7 (FS-7)
January 2011 | Links updated, February 2014

Sara’s Story

When Sara was in the first grade, her teacher started teaching the students how to read. Sara’s parents were really surprised when Sara had a lot of trouble. She was bright and eager, so they thought that reading would come easily to her. It didn’t. She couldn’t match the letters to their sounds or combine the letters to create words.

Sara’s problems continued into second grade. She still wasn’t reading, and she was having trouble with writing, too. The school asked Sara’s mom for permission to evaluate Sara to find out what was causing her problems. Sara’s mom gave permission for the evaluation.

The school conducted an evaluation and learned that Sara has a learning disability. She started getting special help in school right away.

Sara’s still getting that special help. She works with a reading specialist and a resource room teacher every day. She’s in the fourth grade now, and she’s made real progress! She is working hard to bring her reading and writing up to grade level. With help from the school, she’ll keep learning and doing well.

What are Learning Disabilities?

Learning disability is a general term that describes specific kinds of learning problems. A learning disability can cause a person to have trouble learning and using certain skills.
The skills most often affected are: reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning, and doing math.

“Learning disabilities” is not the only term used to describe these difficulties. Others include:

- **dyslexia**—which refers to difficulties in reading;
- **dysgraphia**—which refers to difficulties in writing; and
- **dyscalcula**—which refers to difficulties in math.

All of these are considered learning disabilities.

**Learning disabilities (LD) vary from person to person.** One person with LD may not have the same kind of learning problems as another person with LD. Sara, in our example above, has trouble with reading and writing. Another person with LD may have problems with understanding math. Still another person may have trouble in both of these areas, as well as with understanding what people are saying.

Researchers think that learning disabilities are caused by differences in how a person’s brain works and how it processes information. Children with learning disabilities are not “dumb” or “lazy.” In fact, they usually have average or above average intelligence. Their brains just process information differently.

There is no “cure” for learning disabilities. They are life-long. However, children with LD can be high achievers and can be taught ways to get around the learning disability. With the right help, children with LD can and do learn successfully.

**How Common are Learning Disabilities?**

Very common! As many as 1 out of every 5 people in the United States has a learning disability. Almost 1 million children (ages 6 through 21) have some form of a learning disability and receive special education in school. In fact, one-third of all children who receive special education have a learning disability (*Twenty-Ninth Annual Report to Congress*, U.S. Department of Education, 2010).
What Are the Signs of a Learning Disability?

While there is no one “sign” that a person has a learning disability, there are certain clues. We’ve listed a few below. Most relate to elementary school tasks, because learning disabilities tend to be identified in elementary school. This is because school focuses on the very things that may be difficult for the child—reading, writing, math, listening, speaking, reasoning. A child probably won’t show all of these signs, or even most of them. However, if a child shows a number of these problems, then parents and the teacher should consider the possibility that the child has a learning disability.

When a child has a learning disability, he or she:

- may have trouble learning the alphabet, rhyming words, or connecting letters to their sounds;
- may make many mistakes when reading aloud, and repeat and pause often;
- may not understand what he or she reads;
- may have real trouble with spelling;
- may have very messy handwriting or hold a pencil awkwardly;
- may struggle to express ideas in writing;
- may learn language late and have a limited vocabulary;
- may have trouble remembering the sounds that letters make or hearing slight differences between words;
- may have trouble understanding jokes, comic strips, and sarcasm;
- may have trouble following directions;
- may mispronounce words or use a wrong word that sounds similar;
- may have trouble organizing what he or she wants to say or not be able to think of the word he or she needs for writing or conversation;
- may not follow the social rules of conversation, such as taking turns, and may stand too close to the listener;
- may confuse math symbols and misread numbers;
- may not be able to retell a story in order (what happened first, second, third); or
- may not know where to begin a task or how to go on from there.
If a child has unexpected problems learning to read, write, listen, speak, or do math, then teachers and parents may want to investigate more. The same is true if the child is struggling to do any one of these skills. The child may need to be evaluated to see if he or she has a learning disability.

About the Evaluation Process

If you are concerned that your child may have a learning disability, contact his or her school and request that the school conduct an individualized evaluation under IDEA (the nation's special education law) to see if, in fact, a learning disability is causing your child difficulties in school. To learn more about evaluation, visit:

http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/evaluation/

What if the School System Declines to Evaluate Your Child?

If the school doesn’t think that your child’s learning problems are caused by a learning disability, it may decline to evaluate your child. If this happens, there are specific actions you can take. These include:

Contact your state’s Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) for assistance. The PTI can offer you guidance and support in what to do next. Find your PTI by visiting our Find Your Parent Center (http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/) page.

Consider having your child evaluated by an independent evaluator. You may have to pay for this evaluation, or you can ask that the school pay for it. To learn more about independent evaluations, have a look at Right to Request an Independent Evaluation (http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/iee/).
Ask for mediation, or use one of IDEA’s other dispute resolution options. Parents have the right to disagree with the school's decision not to evaluate their child and be heard. To find out more about dispute resolution options, here’s a quick read, Five Options, 1-2-3 (http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/disputes-overview/).

IDEA’s Definition of “Specific Learning Disability”

Not surprisingly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) includes a definition of “specific learning disability” —as follows:

(10) Specific learning disability —(i) General. Specific learning disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

(ii) Disorders not included. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. [34 CFR §300.8(c)(10)]

IDEA also lists evaluation procedures that must be used at a minimum to identify and document that a child has a specific learning disability. These will now be discussed in brief.
Now for the confusing part! The ways in which children are identified as having a learning disability have changed over the years. Until recently, the most common approach was to use a “severe discrepancy” formula. This referred to the gap, or discrepancy, between the child’s intelligence or aptitude and his or her actual performance. However, in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, how LD is determined has been expanded. IDEA now requires that states adopt criteria that:

- must not require the use of a severe discrepancy between intellectual ability and achievement in determining whether a child has a specific learning disability;
- must permit local educational agencies (LEAs) to use a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention; and
- may permit the use of other alternative research-based procedures for determining whether a child has a specific learning disability.

Basically, what this means is that, instead of using a severe discrepancy approach to determining LD, school systems may provide the student with a research-based intervention and keep close track of the student’s performance. Analyzing the student’s response to that intervention (RTI) may then be considered by school districts in the process of identifying that a child has a learning disability.

There are also other aspects required when evaluating children for LD. These include observing the student in his or her learning environment (including the regular education setting) to document academic performance and behavior in the areas of difficulty.

This entire fact sheet could be devoted to what IDEA requires when children are evaluated for a learning disability. Instead, let us refer you to a training module on the subject. It’s quite detailed, but if you would like to know those details, read through Module 11 of NICHCY’s *Building the Legacy* curriculum on IDEA 2004. [Identification of Specific Learning Disabilities](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/partb-module11/) is available online here at the CPIR.
Moving on, let us suppose that the student has been diagnosed with a specific learning disability. What next?

What About School?

Once a child is evaluated and found eligible for special education and related services, school staff and parents meet and develop what is known as an Individualized Education Program (http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/iep-overview/), or IEP. This document is very important in the educational life of a child with learning disabilities. It describes the child’s needs and the services that the public school system will provide free of charge to address those needs.

Supports or changes in the classroom (called accommodations) help most students with LD. Common accommodations are listed in the “Tips for Teachers” section below. Accessible instructional materials (AIM) are among the most helpful to students whose LD affects their ability to read and process printed language. Thanks to IDEA 2004, there are numerous places to turn now for AIMs. We’ve listed one central source in the “Resources Especially for Teachers” section.

Assistive technology can also help many students work around their learning disabilities. Assistive technology can range from “low-tech” equipment such as tape recorders to “high-tech” tools such as reading machines (which read books aloud) and voice recognition systems (which allow the student to “write” by talking to the computer). To learn more about AT for students who have learning disabilities, visit LD Online’s Technology section, at: http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/technology

Tips and Resources for Teachers

Learn as much as you can about the different types of LD. The resources and organizations listed below can help you identify specific techniques and strategies to support the student educationally.

http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/ld/
Seize the opportunity to make an enormous difference in this student’s life! Find out and emphasize what the student’s strengths and interests are. Give the student positive feedback and lots of opportunities for practice.

Provide instruction and accommodations to address the student’s special needs. Examples:

- breaking tasks into smaller steps, and giving directions verbally and in writing;
- giving the student more time to finish schoolwork or take tests;
- letting the student with reading problems use instructional materials that are accessible to those with print disabilities;
- letting the student with listening difficulties borrow notes from a classmate or use a tape recorder; and
- letting the student with writing difficulties use a computer with specialized software that spell checks, grammar checks, or recognizes speech.

Learn about the different testing modifications that can really help a student with LD show what he or she has learned.

Teach organizational skills, study skills, and learning strategies. These help all students but are particularly helpful to those with LD.

Work with the student’s parents to create an IEP tailored to meet the student’s needs.

Establish a positive working relationship with the student’s parents. Through regular communication, exchange information about the student’s progress at school.

Resources Especially for Teachers

LD Online | For Educators
http://www.ldonline.org/educators
Tips and Resources for Parents

A child with learning disabilities may need help at home as well as in school. Here are a number of suggestions and considerations for parents.

**Learn about LD.** The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child. Take advantage of the excellent resources out there for parents (see the next section, below).

**Praise your child when he or she does well.** Children with LD are often very good at a variety of things. Find out what your child really enjoys doing, such as dancing,
playing soccer, or working with computers. Give your child plenty of opportunities to pursue his or her strengths and talents.

**Find out the ways your child learns best.** Does he or she learn by hands-on practice, looking, or listening? Help your child learn through his or her areas of strength.

**Let your son or daughter help with household chores.** These can build self-confidence and concrete skills. Keep instructions simple, break down tasks into smaller steps, and reward your child’s efforts with praise.

**Make homework a priority.** Read more about how to help your child be a success at homework in the resources listed below.

**Pay attention to your child’s mental health (and your own!).** Be open to counseling, which can help your child deal with frustration, feel better about himself or herself, and learn more about social skills.

**Talk to other parents whose children have LD.** Parents can share practical advice and emotional support. You can identify parent groups in your area by visiting many of the organizations listed below.

**Meet with school personnel and help develop an IEP to address your child’s needs.** Plan what accommodations your child needs, and don’t forget to talk about AIM or assistive technology!

**Establish a positive working relationship with your child’s teacher.** Through regular communication, exchange information about your child’s progress at home and at school.
Resources Especially for Parents

LD Online | For Parents
http://www.ldonline.org/parents

LD Online | Parenting and Family
http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/parenting

National Center for Learning Disabilities | In the Home
http://www.ncld.org/in-the-home

Learning Disabilities Association of America | For Parents
http://www.ldanatl.org/aboutld/parents/index.asp

Reading Rockets | For Parents
http://www.readingrockets.org/audience/parents

Conclusion

Learning disabilities clearly affect some of the key skills in life—reading, writing, doing math. Because many people have learning disabilities, there is a great deal of expertise and support available. Take advantage of the many organizations focused on LD. Their materials and their work are intended solely to help families, students, educators, and others understand LD and address it in ways that have long-lasting impact.
Understanding Executive Functioning Issues

By Amanda Morin

What You’ll Learn

What are executive functioning issues?
How common are executive functioning issues?
What causes executive functioning issues?
What are the symptoms of executive functioning issues?
What skills are affected by executive functioning issues?
How are executive functioning issues diagnosed?
What conditions are related to executive functioning issues?
How can professionals help with executive functioning issues?
What can be done at home for executive functioning issues?
What can make the journey easier?

Executive function is like the CEO of the brain. It’s in charge of making sure things get done from the planning stages of the job to the final deadline. When kids have issues with executive functioning, any task
that requires planning, organization, memory, time management and flexible thinking becomes a challenge. The more you know about the challenges, the better you’ll be able to help your child build her executive skills and manage the difficulties.

What are executive functioning issues?

Executive functioning issues aren’t considered a disability on their own. They’re weaknesses in a key set of mental skills. And they often appear in kids with learning and attention issues. What are executive functions? How do they impact learning and everyday living?

Executive functions consist of several mental skills that help the brain organize and act on information. These skills enable people to plan, organize, remember things, prioritize, pay attention and get started on tasks. They also help people use information and experiences from the past to solve current problems.

If your child has executive functioning issues, any task requiring these skills could be a challenge. That could include doing a load of laundry or completing a school project. Having issues with executive functioning makes it difficult to:

- Keep track of time
- Make plans
- Make sure work is finished on time
- Multitask
- Apply previously learned information to solve problems
- Analyze ideas
- Look for help or more information when it is needed

How Executive Functioning Works

Another way to understand your child’s difficulties is to see how the process of executive functioning works. Here is an example of how the process works, broken down into six steps:
1. Analyze a task. Figure out what needs to be done.
2. Plan how to handle the task.
4. Figure out how much time is needed to carry out the plan, and set aside the time.
5. Make adjustments as needed
6. Finish the task in the time allotted.

If executive functioning is working well and the task is fairly simple, the brain may go through these steps in a matter of seconds. If your child has weak executive skills, though, performing even a simple task can be challenging. Remembering a specific word may be as big a struggle as planning tomorrow’s schedule.

How common are executive functioning issues?

It’s not clear how many kids struggle with executive functioning issues. The issues aren’t uncommon, though. They often appear in kids with ADHD and dyslexia, as well as other conditions. An estimated 30 percent of people with ADHD have executive functioning issues.[1]

What causes executive functioning issues?

Scientists still aren’t sure why some children have executive functioning difficulties. Research has identified some possible links:

- **Genes and heredity**: Kids differ in how they use executive skills. But chances are high that your child uses them in the same way you do. Studies show that the differences among kids are almost completely influenced by genes.[2]

- **Brain differences**: For the most part, executive functioning is
What are the symptoms of executive functioning issues?

Executive functioning issues can produce a wide range of symptoms. Depending on which skills your child struggles with the most, and the particular task she’s doing, you might see the following signs:

- Finds it hard to figure out how to get started on a task
- Can focus on small details or the overall picture, but not both at the same time
- Has trouble figuring out how much time a task requires
- Does things either quickly and messily or slowly and incompletely
- Finds it hard to incorporate feedback into work or an activity
- Sticks with a plan, even when it’s clear that the plan isn’t working
- Has trouble paying attention and is easily distracted
- Loses a train of thought when interrupted
- Needs to be told the directions many times
- Has trouble making decisions
- Has a tough time switching gears from one activity to another
As your child’s brain continues to develop, the symptoms of executive functioning issues may change. Early intervention can help you find ways to use your child’s strengths to support weaknesses starting when she’s young. But since the brain continues to develop into young adulthood, intervention can be helpful at any age.

What skills are affected by executive functioning issues?

There are several key skills involved in executive function. But your child may not struggle with all of them to the same degree. Executive skills include:

- **Impulse control**: This is your child’s ability to stop and think before acting. Impulsivity can be a symptom of ADHD. Kids who have trouble with impulse control may blurt things out. They may do unsafe things without thinking it through. They’re likely to rush through homework without checking it. They also may quit a chore halfway through to go hang out with friends and have trouble following rules consistently.

- **Emotional control**: This is your child’s ability to manage her feelings by focusing on the end result or goal. Emotional control and impulse control are closely related. Kids who struggle with emotional control often have trouble accepting negative feedback. They also may overreact to little injustices. They may struggle to finish a task when something upsets them.

- **Flexibility**: This is your child’s ability to roll with the punches and come up with new approaches when a plan fails. Kids who are...
inflexible think in very concrete ways. They don’t see other options or solutions. They find it difficult to change course. They may get panicky and frustrated when they’re asked to do so.

- **Working memory:** This is your child’s ability to hold information in her mind and use it to complete a task. Kids who have weak working memory skills have trouble with multi-step tasks. They have a hard time remembering directions, taking notes or understanding something you’ve just explained to them. If your child has trouble with working memory, you frequently may hear, “I forgot what I was going to say.”

- **Self-monitoring:** This is your child’s ability to keep track of and evaluate her performance on regular tasks. Kids who have trouble self-monitoring lack self-awareness. They can’t tell if their strategies are working. They may not even realize they have strategies. They often don’t know how to check their work.

- **Planning and prioritizing:** This is your child’s ability come up with the steps needed to reach a goal and to decide their order of importance. Kids with weak planning and prioritizing skills may not know how to start planning a project. They may be easily overwhelmed trying to break tasks into smaller, more manageable chunks. They may have trouble seeing the main idea.

- **Task initiation:** This is your child’s ability to get started on something. Kids who struggle with this skill often have issues with planning and prioritizing too. Without having a plan for a task, it’s hard to know how to start. Kids with task initiation problems can come across as lazy or as simply procrastinating. But often they’re just so overwhelmed they freeze and do nothing.

- **Organization:** This is your child’s ability to keep track of information and things. Kids with organizational issues are constantly losing or misplacing things. They can’t find a way to get organized even when there are negative consequences to being disorganized.

If your child has any or all of these issues, it may feel upsetting to both you and her. But there are strategies you can try at home to help your child learn to work around these weaknesses. Kids with mild to
How are executive functioning issues diagnosed?

Executive planning is often one of the criteria for disorders like ADHD and autism. But experts haven’t decided how executive dysfunction should be defined on its own. It’s not a recognized category in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). This manual outlines the criteria and symptoms that psychologists and other professionals use to make a formal diagnosis.[4]

That doesn’t mean there isn’t a way to identify your child’s executive functioning issues. Psychologists can administer tests for executive functioning. They can give specific recommendations on how to help your child if the tests reveal an area of weakness. Understanding your child’s difficulties is a group effort. It begins with you keeping track of your child’s symptoms and behavior. Take that information with you when you visit your child’s doctor. It’s your first step on the path to understanding your child’s issues.

The doctor will probably want to know how long you’ve noticed the difficulties. Typically, children must have symptoms for at least six months before a health-care professional will recommend further steps. The process could look something like this:

**Step 1: Get a medical exam.** You and your child’s doctor will talk about what you’re seeing. The doctor typically would want to rule out medical causes. These could include seizure disorders, hearing impairments and ADHD. Some of this can be done in the office. But the doctor may send you to a specialist such as an audiologist or neurologist for more testing.

**Step 2: See a specialist.** Once your child’s doctor has ruled out medical causes, you’ll likely be referred to a licensed clinical social worker or child psychologist. This person will gather information from
your child's medical and school records. She'll talk to you and other people who know your child well. You'll likely discuss having your child evaluated further. The evaluation process may include:

- **Questionnaires or screening forms.** You, your child's caregiver or your child's teacher may be asked to fill out questionnaires about your child's skills. One tool commonly used is the Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF). It has both a parent and teacher version of 86 questions about your child's executive functioning skills. There are different versions for different ages, ranging from preschool to young adulthood. There's also a self-report form for school-age kids to fill out. These forms are compared to one another to pinpoint the areas where you, your child and her teacher see difficulties.

- **Intelligence testing.** The psychologist may have your child participate in an intelligence test like the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV). Kids under age 6 use the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI-IV). These tests provide a better picture of your child's true potential. They might show, for example, that your child has excellent verbal comprehension but has difficulty recalling information or processing it quickly.

- **A child observation and interview.** Most professionals will also want to see for themselves the way your child interacts with people and the world around her. If you're concerned that your child might be uncomfortable at the clinician's office, you can ask if the specialist can observe your child at school instead. School observations can reveal information that may not show up in a quiet office with few distractions.

**Step 3: Put it all together.** After collecting all the information, the professionals will look at all the results and go over them with you. They may not be able to give your child a formal diagnosis. But they can provide more information about the specific areas in which your child is struggling. They can suggest strategies to try at home and ways your child's school can help.
What conditions are related to executive functioning issues?

It’s unusual for a child to have difficulty with executive functioning but no other health issue. It’s far more common for a child to have executive functioning issues in addition to something else. This is what doctors refer to as comorbidity. Here are some conditions that are marked by—or sometimes misdiagnosed as—executive functioning issues:

- **Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD):** This is one of the most common childhood brain-based disorders. It affects attention, impulse control and activity level. And can have an impact on learning. Difficulty with executive functioning is a significant symptom of ADHD.[5]

- **Learning issues:** Executive functioning skills in children as young as preschoolers may predict later learning achievement, such as the ability to do math.[6] Studies have shown that children and adolescents with learning issues are more likely to experience executive functioning weaknesses compared to kids the same age who don’t have learning issues. Children who are diagnosed with both learning disabilities and ADHD are at greater risk for more severe executive dysfunction.[7]

- **Mood disorders:** Depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions can affect executive functioning.

- **Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS):** FAS is found in some children who were exposed to alcohol before birth. Many children with FAS have trouble with learning, working memory and other executive functions.[8]

- **Brain damage:** Concussions, strokes or other things that cause damage to the brain are associated with executive functioning issues, especially if the damage is in the prefrontal cortex.

- **Cancer treatments:** Executive functioning skills may be affected by chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy used to treat children for cancers such as leukemia and brain tumors.[9,10]
How can professionals help with executive functioning issues?

Children with executive functioning issues can be taught to overcome or work around their weaknesses. Here are some educational strategies and behavioral approaches that professionals may use to help your child:

Therapists and Other Specialists
Several kinds of professionals can offer strategies and support to both you and your child. Speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists and reading specialists can all help with executive functioning issues. For example, cognitive behavioral therapy can provide your child with mental tools to start self-monitoring thoughts and behavior. Therapists can also provide skills training to help your child learn appropriate ways to respond in social situations. Any of this may be done privately, or as part of a school program.

Your Child’s School
If your child is eligible for special services, you and the school can work together to create a plan of supports and accommodations. That may include visual aids, checklists and assistance during tests. Even without a diagnosed condition, your child’s school can provide academic supports. These may include:

- Response to intervention (RTI): Some schools use this program to find students who are falling behind and give them extra help. The extra help begins with small-group instruction. If your child doesn’t make progress in a small group, the program moves on to give her intensive one-on-one instruction.

- Informal accommodations: These are strategies your child’s teacher can use to make it easier for your child to learn. For instance, your child may be assigned a seat near the front of the room so it’s easier for her to pay attention.
If accommodations are being made, the school may recommend a 504 plan for your child. This is a detailed, written plan explaining what the school will do to meet your child’s needs. That might include extended time on assignments, less homework or other accommodations. If those steps don’t seem to be helping, either you or the school may request an evaluation for special education services. That evaluation will look more carefully at how your child learns and whether she qualifies for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP can provide access to more resources, including specialized teaching and assistive technology.

**Parent Advocates and Support Groups**

The school and your child’s health-care providers aren’t the only resources for support. Online parent communities like ours can help you connect with other parents whose kids have similar issues. Additionally, every state has a Parent Training and Information (PTI) and/or Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRC) sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs. Find one in your area through the Parent Technical Assistance Network’s website.[11]

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**What can be done at home for executive functioning issues?**

It may not be easy to sort out whether your child’s difficulties with executive functioning skills are related to another condition. You may be able to help your child even without her being diagnosed with a disorder. The goal is to identify your child's specific areas of difficulty and find strategies that help. Here are some things you may want to consider trying at home. Try introducing them one at a time so you can see whether it has a positive effect.

- **Make checklists.** Listing the steps involved in a task will make it easier for your child to see how to get started. It also may lessen her anxiety around planning. Checklists provide a visual reminder of where your child left off if she got distracted. You can make
checklists for everything from the tasks she has to do before school to how to make a sandwich.

- **Set time limits.** Your child may struggle to budget time for an activity and also for each step of that activity. On your checklists, consider giving a time estimate for each step. If your child doesn’t read yet, you can put some inexpensive kitchen timers around the house. Set them for the amount of time your child should be spending on everything from completing a math sheet to brushing her teeth.

- **Use planners and calendars.** Not all planners have to be on paper, which is a good thing if your child has trouble keeping track of items. You can put up a big family calendar somewhere and give your child her own colored marker. For older kids there are free or inexpensive apps and time-management software that can help.

- **Explain yourself.** Children who are inflexible thinkers or who have difficulty with emotional control don’t always take feedback well or see the point of learning new ways to do things. Try to spell out why it’s important to learn a new skill, or how it may save time and energy in the long run. And if the answer is simply, “Because that’s the way it has to be done,” don’t be afraid to say that.

- **Let your child explain, too.** Just because kids have trouble with executive functioning skills doesn’t mean their way of doing something isn’t valid. If your child’s method doesn’t make sense to you, consider taking the time to ask why before saying it has to be done differently. It may actually be an inventive approach that works for your child. The more successful strategies she comes up with herself, the better!

What can make the journey easier?

Whether you’re just starting to learn about your child’s executive functioning issues or you’re far along in the journey, this site can help.
Know your child's issues. It's important for getting effective help. If you're looking for ways to help your child academically, you can research accommodations and assistive technologies.

Get behavior advice. Explore Parenting Coach for strategies that may help with everything from organization and time management to making friends and fitting in.

Connect with other parents. You also may find it useful to share ideas with other parents of children with executive functioning issues. Connecting with parents—and hearing about their successes—may give you the boost you need to keep pushing ahead and supporting your child.

Build a support plan. Use this site to help you come up with a game plan and anticipate what lies ahead.

Stay positive. Executive functioning skills continue to develop through the teen years until about the age of 25. What’s difficult for your child now may not be as troublesome when she’s an adult. By taking steps to tackle her executive functioning issues while she’s still young, you can watch her blossom and learn how to reach her full potential.

Key Takeaways

- Executive functioning issues aren’t uncommon, and there are many ways to help your child compensate for weaknesses.

- Schools have many ways of helping kids with executive functioning issues.

- There isn’t just one right way to move forward. You can create an action plan that’s tailored to your child.
Sources


http://jco.ascopubs.org/content/22/4/706.short

http://www.parentcenternetwork.org/parentcenterlisting.html

About the Author

Amanda Morin
As a writer specializing in parenting and education, Amanda Morin draws on her experience as a teacher, early intervention specialist and mom to children with learning issues.
More by this author

Reviewed by Laura Tagliareni 19 Mar. ´14

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Children who struggle with reading often need extra help. This help usually comes from the school, but some parents choose to look outside the school for professionals who can assess, diagnose, tutor, or provide other education services.

Who you choose to work with your child is a key decision. A professional who provides a good diagnosis that reveals your child has a learning disability (LD) or ADHD, for example, can be a gateway to services that open doors to learning and a more fulfilling life for a student. A good tutor can help your child learn reading strategies or catch up in school.

You can find the names of professionals to choose from in local phone books, from a list provided by the school, or from people you know. LD OnLine also lists professionals in its Yellow Pages.

Although you definitely want to work with someone who makes you and your child feel comfortable, that’s not enough. Here are some questions to ask and points to keep in mind when deciding which professional to choose.

Are you licensed or certified?

Many professionals can suspect LD and/or ADHD, but not all of them are licensed or certified to diagnose these disorders.

When you go to a person in private practice (i.e., someone who is not employed by the school system), it’s important to determine if the professional has the needed license to be in private practice and to make the diagnosis of LD or ADHD. Most states require
the license of psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and lawyers to be in clear view in their offices.

What areas do you specialize in?

Ask the person, "What is your area of expertise?" This could include learning disabilities, ADHD, speech and hearing, legal issues, behavior modification, education, emotional concerns, family counseling, and more. Consider which experience and expertise is most appropriate for your child's situation.

What age range do you specialize in?

The person could specialize in working with preschoolers, children, adolescents, or adults. It's important to choose a professional who is used to working with children of your son's or daughter's age.

What are your fees?

Ask the person what his or her hourly rate is and how an hour is defined. Some use a 45 or 50 minute hour (this is so they have time to write notes about the session). You may also want to ask whether appointments can be broken up into smaller blocks, what happens if you miss a scheduled appointment, whether there is a sliding fee scale, and if a payment plan can be set up.

Will you accept my insurance or HMO coverage?

Not all professionals will take insurance and not all insurance will pay for the professional's fee. If money is an issue, you need to know upfront if your insurance or HMO will pay for the professional's fees and whether the professional will accept your insurance. Also ask if the office will submit bills to the insurance company or if you will need to do so.

Will I get a written report?

If you need a written report for an upcoming meeting with the school, make sure the person will be able to meet your deadline. Determine how long it usually takes to get a written report and whether the cost of the report is included in the estimated charge.

Will you coordinate with the school?

Ask if the person will go to the school for meetings if needed and how that time will be billed. Find out if the person will coordinate the work he or she is doing with your child.
with what your child's classroom teacher is doing in school.

What range of services do I need?

Think about whether you need someone to just do testing, whether you need someone who can also work with the school, and whether your child needs a few sessions or many.

What information can I gather to help with the diagnosis?

Look for your child's school records, work samples, past assessments, and teacher comments, all of which may help the professional gain information on how to assess or help your child.

How should I explain this to my child?

Ask the person for advice on how you can talk to your child about his or her need for testing, counseling, or educational intervention.

Do I want to interview more than one professional to determine the best one for my child's needs?

Yes. Unless you have a strong recommendation from a close friend or from the school, it is wise to interview more than one person before making a decision.

Related links

For more information about testing for learning disabilities, go to:

- Evaluation: What Does it Mean for Your Child?
- What Do You Do If You Suspect Your Child Has A Learning Disability?

To learn to understand and use your child's test results, go to

- Tests and Measurements for the Parent, Teacher, Advocate and Attorney

Reading Rockets (2008)
Section 2:
Strategies for Home and School

Different management approaches for the specific disability from various sources
Understanding Response to Intervention

By Amanda Morin

What You’ll Learn

What is RTI?
How does RTI work?
How do teachers track student progress?
How much support do students receive?
How is RTI related to special education?
How many schools use RTI?
What are the benefits of RTI?
Will the school give us a written intervention plan?
How can parents participate in RTI?

Response to intervention (RTI) may sound complicated, but it’s based on a fairly simple idea. Early in the year, your child’s school can start looking at everyone’s skills in reading, writing and math. They can provide targeted teaching—called interventions—to help struggling students catch up. A big part of the RTI process involves closely monitoring student progress. That way the school can see which kids need more academic support.
What is RTI?

If you look inside any general education classroom, chances are good that you’d see different students struggling for different reasons. Some kids may have undiagnosed learning and attention issues. Others may be trying to pick up English as a second language. And some students might be shaky on certain skills due to frequent absences or inadequate teaching.

It’s often hard for a teacher to tell right away which students are struggling or why. RTI aims to identify struggling students early on and give them the support they need to be successful in school.

The word *intervention* is key to understanding what RTI is all about. The goal is for the school to intervene, or step in, and start helping before anyone falls really far behind. RTI isn’t a specific program or type of teaching. It’s a proactive approach to measuring students’ skills and using this data to decide which types of targeted teaching to use.

How does RTI work?

The RTI process begins with your child’s teacher assessing the skills of everyone in the class. These assessments help the school’s RTI team tell which students need instructional interventions. That’s the term for focusing on specific skills in an effort to improve them.

Interventions can be part of classroom-wide instruction. The teacher may break students into small groups tailored for different skill levels or learning styles. This is also known as differentiated instruction. Students who don’t make enough progress getting this kind of help during class may start to work on skills in small groups that meet during enrichment activities like music or art.
As part of the RTI process, schools help struggling students by using teaching interventions that researchers have studied and shown to be effective. Many research-based interventions deal with reading. But there are also some scientifically proven methods of improving writing and math skills. Some schools also use research-based behavior interventions.

How do teachers track student progress?

Another essential component of RTI is progress monitoring. The school frequently assesses your child's skills to determine whether an intervention is working.

During an intervention, your child's teacher or another member of the RTI team uses an assessment tool that research has shown to be an effective way to measure certain skills. This tool is used to assess your child's skills every week or every other week. That may sound like a lot of testing. But each assessment only takes a few minutes to complete.

For example, let's say your child's school is using curriculum-based measurement (CBM) to assess spelling skills. During each test or probe, the teacher asks your child to spell words that are at the appropriate grade level. In total, your child will only spend a couple minutes writing down these words.

After each assessment, his score is plotted on a graph. This makes it easy for the RTI team to see if he's improving at the expected rate or if he needs additional support.

How much support do students receive?
There is no single way of doing RTI, but it’s often set up as a three-tier system of support. Some school districts call this framework a multi-tier system of supports (MTSS) instead of RTI. One way to understand this tiered system is to think of it as a pyramid, with the intensity of support increasing from one level to the next.[1]

**Tier 1: The Whole Class**

In the general education classroom, the teacher measures everyone’s skills. This is known as a universal screening. The screening helps the teacher work with students in small groups based on their skill levels. All students are taught using methods that research has shown to be effective.

The school will let you know if your child is struggling and will update you on his RTI progress. In some schools, the majority of students need Tier 1 instructional support because their reading and math skills are not at grade level.

During the intervention, the RTI team monitors students’ progress to see who might need additional support. Many students respond successfully to Tier 1 support and achieve grade-level expectations.

**Tier 2: Small Group Interventions**

If your child isn’t making adequate progress in Tier 1, he’ll start to receive more targeted help. This is *in addition* to the regular classroom instruction, not a replacement for it. Tier 2 interventions take place a few times a week during electives or enrichment activities such as music or art so your child won’t miss any core instruction in the classroom.

During these extra help sessions, he’ll be taught in small groups using a different method than in Tier 1 because the first method wasn’t successful. The teacher may also ask you to work with your child at home on certain skills.

The school will monitor your child’s progress so it’s clear whether the Tier 2 intervention is helping.

**Tier 3: Intensive Interventions**
Typically, only a small percentage of the class—perhaps one or two students—will require Tier 3 support. In many schools, though, that number is much higher. If your child needs Tier 3 support, it will be tailored to his needs. Every day he’ll receive one-on-one instruction or work in very small groups. The groups may include some students who are receiving special education services and who need to work on the same skills.

Your child will continue to spend most of the day in the general education classroom. If he doesn’t make adequate progress in Tier 3, it’s likely that the school will recommend an evaluation for special education services. This can open the door to individualized teaching, assistive technology and other resources provided at no cost to you.

How is RTI related to special education?

Even though RTI isn’t a special education program, it can help general education teachers pick up on early signs of learning issues. It can also play an important role in helping schools determine who qualifies for special education services.

Federal law says that when deciding whether a student is eligible for special education, the school district can use a “process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention.”[2] That’s one of the reasons many states have started to use RTI.

If your child qualifies for special education, the interventions used during RTI can help the school decide which types of services and supports to include in his Individualized Education Program (IEP).

There are a few other key things to keep in mind about the relationship between RTI and special education:

- RTI can’t be used to reduce your child’s workload. That kind of modification may be used for some special education students, but it shouldn’t be used for general education students.
• Just because your child is getting extra help through the RTI process doesn't mean you have to wait to request a special education evaluation. You have the right to ask for that at any time. The federal Department of Education has stated very clearly that RTI cannot be used to delay or deny an evaluation.[3]

• As part of the evaluation, the school can gather information from the RTI process, such as screening, progress monitoring and instructional adequacy data. But the school still needs to follow the time frame of completing an initial evaluation within 60 days of receiving your consent.

How many schools use RTI?

According to a study published in 2013, 17 states require schools to use RTI to help determine which students are eligible for special education. [4] All states mention RTI in their regulations. And most states offer schools guidance on how to use this kind of framework to decide which students have learning disabilities that qualify for special education.

RTI is more commonly used in elementary schools. But it can be used all the way up through high school.

“The RTI process can help schools focus the use of special education resources on kids who truly need them.”

One reason advocates like RTI is because it can increase the number of students who are successful in general education classrooms. It may also reduce the number of students who are referred for special education evaluations. That’s because many students performing below grade level do not have learning disabilities.

With the right teaching methods, these students can make progress without getting accommodations or individualized teaching, which can be expensive to provide. In other words, the RTI process can help
What are the benefits of RTI?

RTI is a fluid process. At any time during the school year, you can talk to the teacher and find out which interventions are available to help your child. (If the school doesn’t use RTI, you can still ask for extra help. But it might not be provided as extensively or as systematically as it would in a school that uses RTI.)

RTI is designed to take kids from where they are in terms of skills and help them move toward grade-level expectations. That means adjustments can be made to your child’s instruction based on his individual response to an intervention, not the response of the whole class or even a small group.

Here are some other reasons why some parents like RTI:

- Students continue to receive their core instruction in the general education classroom.

- The increasing levels of support mean that if the first intervention method doesn’t work, there are other options before special education.

- With RTI, the school isn’t taking a “wait and see” approach to your child’s learning. Your child can start to get extra help before he falls so far behind that he needs to attend summer school or repeat a grade.

- Progress monitoring means that if your child is referred for special education services, there’s already documentation about which type of instruction has not been helpful for your child.
Will the school give us a written intervention plan?

Your child's school isn’t required to give you a written intervention plan. Interestingly, all the school needs to tell you about RTI is that your child is getting extra support and that you have the right to request an evaluation for special education services at any time. However, many schools provide much more information because they know that parental involvement plays such a big role in a child's success in school.[5]

A written intervention plan can be a handy way to let you know what's happening and to inform you when your child gets more support. Some schools are already in the habit of giving parents a written intervention plan. If your child’s school doesn’t automatically give you a written plan, you can ask for one. It might include:

- A description of the skills your child is having trouble with and documentation about these weaknesses, such as assessment results or samples of your child’s work.
- A description of the research-based intervention your child is receiving.
- Details about how often the intervention will be provided and for what length of time—how many minutes per day over how many weeks.
- Details about who will be providing the intervention and in which schoolroom.
- The criteria for determining whether the intervention is successful.
- A description of how progress monitoring works and how often your child's progress will be measured.

How can parents participate in RTI?
Requesting a written intervention plan can help you take an active role in RTI. There are others ways you can be involved in the process:

- Ask the school for more information about the intervention your child is receiving, such as which studies show it is effective.

- Ask the school to give you a copy of your child's progress monitoring graph after every assessment.

- Give the intervention time to work. To know if it's helping, the school needs data. Wait at least a few weeks before you ask the school if it's time to try something different.

- Ask the school how you can help your child at home.

- If you think your child's skills aren't improving, you may want to request an evaluation for special education. Remember that you can make this request at any time.

RTI is not a replacement for special education. But it can help many struggling students make progress. The more details you have about your school's RTI process, the more you can help your child get the kind of support he needs to succeed.

Key Takeaways

- RTI is a process that aims to identify kids who are struggling in school and uses targeted teaching to help them catch up.

- RTI isn't a specific program or teaching method. It’s a systematic way of measuring progress and providing more support to kids who need it.

- You can ask for a special education evaluation even if your child is getting extra
help through RTI.

Sources


Additional Sources


About the Author

Amanda Morin

As a writer specializing in parenting and education, Amanda Morin draws on her experience as a teacher, early intervention specialist and mom to children with learning issues.

More by this author

Reviewed by Elaine M. Niefeld    Jul 11, 2014

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The Difference Between IEPs and 504 Plans

By Understood Editors

Both Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans can offer formal help for K–12 students with learning and attention issues. They’re similar in some ways but quite different in others. This chart compares them side-by-side to help you understand the differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IEP</th>
<th>504 Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Description</td>
<td>A blueprint or plan for a child’s special education experience at school.</td>
<td>A blueprint or plan for how a child will have access to learning at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What it Does</td>
<td>Provides individualized special education and related services to meet the unique needs of the child. These services are provided at no cost to parents.</td>
<td>Provides services and changes to the learning environment to meet the needs of the child as adequately as other students. As with IEPs, a 504 plan is provided at no cost to parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Law Applies</td>
<td>The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)</td>
<td>Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This is a federal special education law for children with disabilities.</td>
<td>This is a federal civil rights law to stop discrimination against people with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Is Eligible</td>
<td>To get an IEP, there are two requirements:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. A child has one or more of the 13 specific disabilities listed in IDEA. Learning and attention issues may qualify.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The disability must affect the child’s educational performance and/or ability to learn and benefit from the general education curriculum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To get a 504 plan, there are two requirements:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. A child has any disability, which can include many learning or attention issues.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The disability must interfere with the child’s ability to learn in a general education classroom. Section 504 has a broader definition of a disability than IDEA. That's why a child who doesn’t qualify for an IEP might still be able to get a 504 plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Educational Evaluation</th>
<th>Parents can ask the school district to pay for an independent educational evaluation (IEE) by an outside expert. The district doesn’t have to agree.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents can always pay for an outside evaluation themselves, but the district may not give it much weight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doesn’t allow parents to ask for an IEE. As with an IEP evaluation, parents can always pay for an outside evaluation themselves.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who Creates the Program/Plan</th>
<th>There are strict legal requirements about who participates. An IEP is created by an IEP team that must include:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The child’s parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The rules about who’s on the 504 team are less specific than they are for an IEP.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| With a few exceptions, the entire team must be present for IEP meetings. | A 504 plan is created by a team of people who are familiar with the child and who understand the evaluation data and special services options. This might include:

- The child’s parent
- General and special education teachers
- The school principal |

| **What's In the Program/Plan** | The IEP sets learning goals for a child and describes the services the school will give her. It’s a written document. Here are some of the most important things the IEP must include:

- The child’s present levels of academic and functional performance—how she is currently doing in school
- Annual education goals for the child and how the school will track her progress
- The services the child will get—this may include special education, related, supplementary and specific accommodations, supports or services for the child
- Names of who will provide each service
- Name of the person responsible for ensuring the plan is implemented |

|  | There is no standard 504 plan. Unlike an IEP, a 504 plan doesn’t have to be a written document. A 504 plan generally includes the following: |

- The child's general education teachers
- At least one special education teacher
- School psychologist or other specialist who can interpret evaluation results
- A district representative with authority over special education services
- The child’s parent
- General and special education teachers
- The school principal |
| **Parent Notice** | When the school wants to change a child’s services or placement, it has to tell parents in writing *before* the change. This is called prior written notice. Notice is also required for any IEP meetings and evaluations.

Parents also have “stay put” rights to keep services in place while there’s a dispute. |
<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Consent</strong></td>
<td>A parent must consent in writing for the school to evaluate a child. Parents must also consent in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing before the school can provide services in an IEP.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Often It's Reviewed and Revised</td>
<td>The IEP team must review the IEP at least once a year. The student must be reevaluated every three years to determine whether services are still needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| How to Resolve Disputes | IDEA gives parents several specific ways to resolve disputes (usually in this order):  
- Mediation  
- Due process complaint  
- Resolution session  
- Civil lawsuit  
- State complaint  
- Lawsuit | Section 504 gives parents several options for resolving disagreements with the school:  
- Mediation  
- Alternative dispute resolution  
- Impartial hearing  
- Complaint to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR)  
- Lawsuit |
| Funding/Costs | Students receive these services at no charge. States receive additional funding for eligible students. | Students receive these services at no charge. States do not receive extra funding for eligible students. But the federal government can take funding away from programs (including schools) that don't comply. IDEA funds can't be used to serve students with 504 plans. |
Knowing which laws do what is a big part of understanding the difference between an IEP and a 504 plan. Explore more details about your child’s legal rights.

About the Author

Understood Editors

More by this author

Reviewed by Andrew M.I. Lee 27 Jun. `14

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Common Modifications and Accommodations

By Erich Strom

There are many ways teachers can help children with learning and attention issues succeed in school. Here are some common accommodations and modifications to discuss with the school as possible options for your child.

Presentation accommodations allow a student to:

- Listen to audio recordings instead of reading text
- Learn content from audiobooks, movies, videos and digital media instead of reading print versions
- Work with fewer items per page or line and/or materials in a larger print size
- Have a designated reader
- Hear instructions orally
- Record a lesson, instead of taking notes
- Have another student share class notes with him
- Be given an outline of a lesson
- Use visual presentations of verbal material, such as word webs and visual organizers
- Be given a written list of instructions
**Response accommodations** allow a student to:

- Give responses in a form (oral or written) that’s easier for him
- Dictate answers to a scribe
- Capture responses on an audio recorder
- Use a spelling dictionary or electronic spell-checker
- Use a word processor to type notes or give responses in class
- Use a calculator or table of “math facts”

**Setting accommodations** allow a student to:

- Work or take a test in a different setting, such as a quiet room with few distractions
- Sit where he learns best (for example, near the teacher)
- Use special lighting or acoustics
- Take a test in small group setting
- Use sensory tools such as an exercise band that can be looped around a chair’s legs (so fidgety kids can kick it and quietly get their energy out)

**Timing accommodations** allow a student to:

- Take more time to complete a task or a test
- Have extra time to process oral information and directions
- Take frequent breaks, such as after completing a task

**Scheduling accommodations** allow a student to:

- Take more time to complete a project
- Take a test in several timed sessions or over several days
- Take sections of a test in a different order
- Take a test at a specific time of day
Organization skills accommodations allow a student to:

- Use an alarm to help with time management
- Mark texts with a highlighter
- Have help coordinating assignments in a book or planner
- Receive study skills instruction

Assignment modifications allow a student to:

- Complete fewer or different homework problems than peers
- Write shorter papers
- Answer fewer or different test questions
- Create alternate projects or assignments

Curriculum modifications allow a student to:

- Learn different material (such as continuing to work on multiplication while classmates move on to fractions)
- Get graded or assessed using a different standard than the one for classmates
- Be excused from particular projects

About the Author

Erich Strom

More by this author

Reviewed by Donna Volpitta 03 Jan. ´14
Accommodations and Modifications: How They’re Different

By Erich Strom

If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan, you’ll likely hear the terms “accommodation” and “modification” from the IEP or 504 team. While they sound similar, they serve different purposes. Accommodations change how a student learns the material. A modification changes what a student is taught or expected to learn.

Here are examples to help explain the differences between them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodations</th>
<th>Modifications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom instruction</td>
<td>Kids who are far behind their peers may need changes, or modifications, to the curriculum. For example, a student could be assigned shorter or easier reading assignments. Kids who receive modifications are not expected to learn the same material as their classmates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodations can help kids learn the same material and meet the same expectations as their classmates. If a student has reading issues, for example, she might listen to an audio recording of a text. There are different types of classroom accommodations, including presentation (like listening to an audio recording of a text)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom tests</strong></td>
<td>Testing <strong>accommodations</strong> can be different from those used for instruction. For example, using a spell-checker might help a student with writing difficulties take notes during class but wouldn't be appropriate during a weekly spelling test. However, this student might benefit from extra time to complete the spelling test or using typing technology if the physical act of writing is difficult.</td>
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<td><strong>Standardized testing</strong></td>
<td>Statewide assessments allow certain <strong>accommodations</strong> like extra time or taking a computerized exam. Ideally these are the same accommodations a child uses to take class tests.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gym, music and art class</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accommodations</strong> for “special” classes like gym, music and art can be helpful. These are similar to</td>
</tr>
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</table>
accommodations for classroom instruction. Kids might get extra time to complete assignments or be allowed to complete them in a different format.

child, modifications to that assignment are made. The gym teacher might modify the number of laps a student needs to run; the music teacher might not require a child to participate in the final performance. In some cases, students are even excused from certain classes in order to make time for one-on-one time with a specialist.

Keep in mind that accommodations don’t always have to be formalized through an IEP or 504 plan. Sometimes teachers can provide informal accommodations. If your child doesn’t have an IEP or 504 plan, here are some examples of informal supports you can request.

About the Author

Erich Strom

More by this author

Reviewed by Donna Volpitta 20 Dec. ‘13

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What Is Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology is any kind of technology that can be used to enhance the functional independence of a person with a disability. Often, for people with disabilities, accomplishing daily tasks such as talking with friends, going to school and work, or participating in recreational activities is a challenge. Assistive Technology (AT) devices are tools to help to overcome those challenges and enable people living with disabilities to enhance their quality of life and lead more independent lives.

Assistive technology can be anything from a simple (low-tech) device such as a magnifying glass, to a complex (high-tech) device, such as a computerized communication system. It can be big — an automated van lift for a wheelchair — or small — a Velcro attached grip attached to a pen or fork for example, for eating and writing. Assistive technology can also be a substitute — such as an augmentative communication device that provides vocal output for a child who cannot communicate with her voice.

Meeting Challenges with Assistive Technology

Assistive technology helps to level the playing field for individuals with disabilities by providing them a way to fully engage in life's activities. An individual may use assistive technology to travel about, participate in recreational and social activities, learn, work, communicate with others, and much more.

Here are several examples of AT that enables people with disabilities to enter into the community and interact with others.

• For greater independence with mobility and travel, people with physical disabilities may utilize mobility aids, such as wheelchairs, scooters, and walkers. Adapted car seats and vehicle wheelchair restraints promote safe travel.
• Hand-held GPS devices help persons with visual impairments navigate busy city streets and utilize public transportation.
• Building modifications at work sites, such as ramps, automatic door openers, grab bars, and wider doorways mean fewer barriers to employment, businesses, and community spaces, such as libraries, churches, and shopping malls.
• Special computer software and hardware, such as voice recognition programs and screen enlargement programs, enable persons with mobility and sensory impairments to carry out educational or work-related tasks.
• Education and work aids such as automatic page turners, book holders, and adapted pencil grips enable children to participate in classroom activities.
• Bowling balls with hand-grips and one-handed fishing reels are a few examples of how technology can be adapted for sporting activities. Light-weight wheelchairs have been designed for organized sports, such as basketball, tennis, and racing.
• Accessibly designed movie theaters provide closed captioning and audio description for moviegoers with hearing and visual difficulties.
• Devices to assist a person with daily living tasks, such as cooking, dressing, and grooming, are available for people with special needs. For example, a medication dispenser with an alarm can be set to remind a person with memory loss to take daily medication. A person with use of only one hand can use a one-handed cutting board and a cabinet mounted can opener to cook meals with improved independence and safety.
Choosing the Right Assistive Technology Device(s) for Your Child

To determine the assistive technology needs of a child, an AT assessment should be conducted. The assessment can be conducted by the school, an independent agency, or an individual consultant. This assessment should take place in a child’s customary environments -- home, school, and community.

It is important that the assessment address the child’s strengths as well as his/her weaknesses. It is key, when discussing how the child participates in his/her world, to hear the perspectives of teachers, parents and siblings, as well as that of the child. The discussion should not be limited merely to what skills the child possesses but should include the ways in which a child communicates, what he likes and dislikes, and what kind of strategies and interventions are helpful in interacting with the child. Consideration must be taken on how a child’s need for AT might change depending on the environment, for example on the playground, the classroom, a friend’s house or in a public place like a mall or library. This type of input will provide clues as to what technology might work and how well your child will respond to it.

The end result of an assessment is a recommendation for specific devices and services. Once it is agreed that assistive technology would benefit a child, issues related to design and selection of the device, as well as maintenance, repair, and replacement of devices should be considered. Training (to use the device) and ongoing technical assistance is necessary not only for the child, but also for family members, teachers, service providers, and other people who are significantly involved in a student’s life. It is also important to integrate and coordinate any assistive technology with therapies, interventions, or services provided by education and rehabilitation plans and programs.

Acquiring assistive technology does not just happen once in a lifetime. The type of devices your child needs may change depending on the child’s age, abilities, physical status, and features of the immediate environment. Change in your child’s life may necessitate a re-assessment of his or her assistive technology needs.

Learning More about Assistive Technology

Parents can help to identify potential AT for their child if they learn about the choices that are available. A good place to start is often with speech-Language therapists, occupational therapists and school professionals. There are many organizations that provide AT information and training to consumers and families such as parent training and Information centers (PTI's), community technology centers, state assistive technology programs and rehabilitation centers. If possible you should visit an AT center with your child to see and try out various devices and equipment. Some AT centers offer lending programs that allow families to borrow devices for a trial period.

The Family Center on Technology and Disability (FCTD) offers a wide range of assistive technology resources for disability organizations, AT providers, educators and families of children with disabilities. Families are always welcome to visit the FCTD web site (www.fctd.info) to find other AT and disability organizations and to learn more about assistive technology.

The following list includes several organizations that offer a various resources on AT.

Abledata - www.abledata.com
Assistivetech.net - www.assistivetech.net
AbilityHub - www.abilityhub.com
PACER Center - Simon Technology Center - http://www.pacer.org/stc/
Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Centers - www.taalliance.org
Association of State Technology Act Programs - www.ataporg.org/stateatprojects.asp
Organization and Time Management Strategies for Kids With LD

Read about strategies to help your child better manage his time, his tasks, and his stuff.

By Nancy Firchow, M.L.S.

There seem to be so many demands on everyone's time and energy these days. You're busy, and so are your kids. Unfortunately, children aren't born knowing how to manage time and organize their stuff. Kids with learning disabilities (LD) often have an even harder time learning how to get and stay organized and meet deadlines. You can help though, by teaching your child strategies that make staying organized easier and by setting a good example.

Start Small

No matter how frazzled you and your child feel, avoid the temptation to revamp everything at once; it's just too overwhelming. Instead, talk to your child about what he thinks he should tackle first.

- Ask him what he feels is his biggest problem area. Getting ready for school on time? Bringing home everything he needs for homework? Keeping his room clean? Completing his homework and turning it in?
- Examine your own opportunities for improvement. Your child can probably point out a few, such as frequently misplaced keys or last-minute grocery store runs.
- Brainstorm possible solutions for both of you. Keep solutions simple for the greatest likelihood of success.
- Agree on strategies, and make a list of any supplies you need to make them work.

Once you've got a plan, try it out for a week or two. Enlist your child to give you reminders for your new system, and he'll be more receptive to your reminders to him. After the trial period, review how things are working and make adjustments as necessary.

Here are some strategies to help with common problems of kids with LD. Which ones work for you and your child?

General Time Management

- Sit down with your child to examine how he spends his time. Include school, sleep, meals, sports practice, homework time, social activities, religious study, etc. Color in a pie chart or use an hour-by-hour day planner for a visual representation of a typical day.
Use the chart to identify bottlenecks or over scheduling. To resolve issues, look for chances to reschedule activities at another time or cut them out altogether.

Raise time awareness by pointing out conflicts as they occur. "There’s time to either go to the birthday party or to visit with Grandpa." Let him make the choice when it doesn’t involve a "must do."

Post a family calendar in an accessible place for everyone. Use it to track family commitments and your child’s classroom assignments and other activities.

**Weekly Planning**

- Set aside time each Sunday evening to plan the upcoming week with your child.
- Make a "to do" list noting when school tasks and household chores must be finished. Crossing off completed items gives your child a sense of accomplishment.
- Make sure the family calendar is up-to-date.

**The Morning Routine**

- Prepare the night before. Choose clothing, gather books and assignments, and put everything in a specific place.
- Set the alarm clock early enough to provide necessary time to get ready. If it’s an electric clock, be sure the back-up battery is still good.
- Make a list or picture chart of the tasks in your child's morning routine, such as brushing teeth, eating breakfast, and getting dressed. Have him mark each task as it's completed.
- Post a list or pictures of everything your child should have as he walks out the door: backpack, jacket, lunch, etc.
- Use specific verbal reminders. Instead of asking, "Do you have everything?" ask "Do you have your science book?"

**Organization for School**

- Get a sturdy three-ring binder with colored pocket dividers for each subject. Coach your child to slip all assignments into the proper section, and check regularly to see that it's being done.
- Include a pocket labeled "Home" for anything that needs your attention.
- Provide a calendar or assignment page for noting homework, tests, projects, etc. Transfer this information to the family calendar.
- Enlist his teacher’s help, if needed, to ensure assignments are entered in the binder consistently and correctly.
- Help your child maintain his binder by going through the papers with him, putting things in order, and discarding unneeded items.

**Structure for His Room**

- Survey your child’s room from his perspective. Talk to him about the space and storage needs
for his various supplies, activities, and treasures.

- Organize for each activity: e.g., getting dressed requires a hamper for dirty clothes, closet rods he can reach, and dresser drawers with enough space to stow things neatly.
- Use creative storage solutions. Try a door-hung shoe holder for action figures, games, or trading cards. Clay pots or tin cans can be decorated and neatly hold markers, crayons, or paint brushes.
- When the room is neat and organized, take photographs of how it looks. Place them in a spot where your child can check frequently to see if his room still matches the pictures.
- Sort through his stuff on a regular basis. Work together to choose outgrown clothes and toys to be discarded or donated.

**Practice Makes Perfect**

New habits take time to learn, especially if bad habits need to be unlearned. Don't give up. Your child with LD will need frequent reminders, lots of help, and consistency. Don't hesitate to pitch in; he can benefit from watching you put things in good order. Remember to reward his successes and give him a little extra help him when he's feeling discouraged. The strategies you teach him now will pay off his whole life.
Effective Reading Interventions for Kids with Learning Disabilities

By: Kristin Stanberry, Lee Swanson

Research-based information and advice for sizing up reading programs and finding the right one for your child with a learning disability.

A worried mother says, "There's so much publicity about the best programs for teaching kids to read. But my daughter has a learning disability and really struggles with reading. Will those programs help her? I can't bear to watch her to fall further behind."

Fortunately, in recent years, several excellent, well-publicized research studies (including the Report of the National Reading Panel (http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/smallbook.cfm)) have helped parents and educators understand the most effective guidelines for teaching all children to read. But, to date, the general public has heard little about research on effective reading interventions for children who have learning disabilities (LD). Until now, that is!

This article will describe the findings of a research study that will help you become a wise consumer of reading programs for kids with reading disabilities.

Research reveals the best approach to teaching kids with LD to read

You'll be glad to know that, over the past 30 years, a great deal of research has been done to identify the most effective reading interventions for students with learning disabilities who struggle with word recognition and/or reading comprehension skills. Between 1996 and 1998, a group of researchers led by H. Lee Swanson, Ph.D., Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of California at Riverside, set out to synthesize (via meta-analysis) the results of 92 such research studies (all of them
scientifically-based). Through that analysis, Dr. Swanson identified the specific teaching methods and instruction components that proved most effective for increasing word recognition and reading comprehension skills in children and teens with LD.

Some of the findings that emerged from the meta-analysis were surprising. For example, Dr. Swanson points out, "Traditionally, one-on-one reading instruction has been considered optimal for students with LD. Yet we found that students with LD who received reading instruction in small groups (e.g., in a resource room) experienced a greater increase in skills than did students who had individual instruction."

In this article, we'll summarize and explain Dr. Swanson's research findings. Then, for those of you whose kids have LD related to reading, we'll offer practical tips for using the research findings to "size up" a particular reading program. Let's start by looking at what the research uncovered.

A strong instructional core

Dr. Swanson points out that, according to previous research reviews, sound instructional practices include: daily reviews, statements of an instructional objective, teacher presentations of new material, guided practice, independent practice, and formative evaluations (i.e., testing to ensure the child has mastered the material). These practices are at the heart of any good reading intervention program and are reflected in several of the instructional components mentioned in this article.

Improving Word Recognition Skills: What Works?

"The most important outcome of teaching word recognition," Dr. Swanson emphasizes, "is that students learn to recognize real words, not simply sound out 'nonsense' words using phonics skills."

What other terms might teachers or other professionals use to describe a child's problem with "word recognition"

- decoding
- phonics
- phonemic awareness
- word attack skills

Direct instruction appears the most effective approach for improving word recognition skills in students with learning disabilities. Direct instruction refers to teaching skills in an explicit, direct fashion. It involves drill/repetition/practice and can be delivered to one child or to a small group of students at the same time.

The three instruction components that proved most effective in increasing word recognition skills in students with learning disabilities are described below. Ideally, a
reading program for word recognition will include all three components.

Increasing Word Recognition Skills in Students With LD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction component</th>
<th>Program Activities and Techniques*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sequencing</strong></td>
<td>The teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Breaks down the task (e.g., starts by having the child break an unknown word into separate sounds or parts they can sound out).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gradually reduces prompts or cues.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Matches the difficulty level to the task and to the student.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sequences short activities (e.g., first spends 10 minutes reviewing new words from a previous lesson, then 5 minutes underlining new words in the passage, and finally 5 minutes practicing blends).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Uses step-by-step prompts.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Segmentation</strong></td>
<td>The teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Breaks down the targeted skill (e.g., identifying a speech or letter sound) into smaller units or component parts (e.g., sounding out each speech or letter sound in that word).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Segments or synthesizes component parts (e.g., sounds out each phoneme in a word, then blends the sounds together).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advanced organizers</strong></td>
<td>The teacher:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Directs children to look over material prior to instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Directs children to focus on particular information.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provides students with prior information about tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tells students the objectives of instruction upfront.</td>
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* May be called "treatment description" in research studies.

Improving reading comprehension skills: What works?

The most effective approach to improving reading comprehension in students with learning disabilities appears to be a combination of direct instruction and strategy instruction. Strategy instruction means teaching students a plan (or strategy) to search for patterns in words and to identify key passages (paragraph or page) and the main
idea in each. Once a student learns certain strategies, he can generalize them to other reading comprehension tasks. The instruction components found most effective for improving reading comprehension skills in students with LD are shown in the table below. Ideally, a program to improve reading comprehension should include all the components shown.

### Improving Reading Comprehension in Students With LD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction component</th>
<th>Program Activities and Techniques*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Directed response/questioning | The teacher:  
  - Asks questions.  
  - Encourages students to ask questions.  

The teacher and student(s):  
- Engage in dialogue. |
| Control difficulty of processing demands of task | The teacher:  
  - Provides assistance (as needed).  
  - Gives a simplified demonstration.  
  - Sequences tasks from easy to difficult.  
  - Presents easy steps or concepts first and moves on to progressively more difficult steps or concepts (a technique called task analysis).  
  - Allows student to control level of difficulty.  

The activities:  
- Are short. |
| Elaboration | The activities:  
  - Provide student with additional information or explanation about concepts, steps, or procedures.  
  - Use redundant text or repetition within text. |
| Modeling of steps by the teacher | Teacher demonstrates the processes and/or steps the students are to follow. |
| Group instruction | Instruction and/or verbal interaction takes place in a small group composed of students and teacher |
Strategy cues | The teacher:
--- | ---
| | • Reminds the student to use strategies or multiple steps.
| | • Explains steps or procedures for solving problems.

The activities:

• Use "think aloud" models.
• List the benefits of strategy use or procedures.

* May be called "treatment description" in research studies.

Evaluating your child's reading program

Now you are well-equipped with research-based guidelines on the best teaching methods for kids with reading disabilities. These guidelines will serve you well even as new reading programs become available. To evaluate the reading program used in your child’s classroom, follow these steps:

1. Ask for detailed literature on your child's reading program. Some schools voluntarily provide information about the reading programs they use. If they don't do this — or if you need more detail than what they provide — don't hesitate to request it from your child's teacher, special education teacher, resource specialist, or a school district administrator. In any school — whether public or private — it is your right to have access to such information.

2. Once you have literature on a specific reading program, locate the section(s) that describe its instruction components. Take note of where your child's reading program "matches" and where it "misses" the instruction components recommended in this article. To document what you find, you may find our worksheets helpful.
   - [Reading Program Evaluation: Word Recognition](http://www.greatschools.net/pdfs/WordRecog.pdf?date=9-29-03&status=new)
   - [Reading Program Evaluation: Reading Comprehension](http://www.greatschools.net/pdfs/ReadingComp.pdf?date=9-29-03&status=new)

3. Find out if the instruction model your child's teacher uses is Direct Instruction, Strategy Instruction, or a combination approach. Some program literature states which approach a teacher should use; in other cases, it's up to the teacher to decide. Compare the approach used to what this article describes as being most effective for addressing your child's area of need.

4. Once you've evaluated your child's reading program, you may feel satisfied that her needs are being met. If not, schedule a conference with her teacher (or her IEP team, if she has one) to present your concerns and discuss alternative solutions.
Hope and hard work — not miracles

Finally, Dr. Swanson cautions, "There is no 'miracle cure' for reading disabilities. Even a reading program that has all the right elements requires both student and teacher to be persistent and work steadily toward reading proficiency."

But knowledge is power, and the findings of Dr. Swanson's study offer parents and teachers a tremendous opportunity to evaluate and select reading interventions most likely to move kids with LD toward reading success.

References


*Kristin Stanberry, Lee Swanson (2009)*

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Section 3: How to Work with Professionals

Articles about the service providers associated with the specific disability
Parent Tips

Work with your child at home

Parents are a child's first and best teachers. Show your child that reading can be fun. Read to your child every day. Visit the library frequently. Point out words on billboards and traffic signs as you drive, on food labels at the grocery store, on packages, mail, and letters. Play word games. Set an example by giving your child a chance to see you reading and writing at home.

See the tips below on how to help your child with schoolwork.

Join with others who care

You are not alone. By joining with other parents and professionals you can increase awareness of the issue, dispel popular misconceptions, help establish educational systems that provide for the needs of children with learning disabilities, and get support for yourself. Look into the organizations in LD Resources for ways to become involved and learn more about learning disabilities.

Work with professionals

There are many trained professionals who can help your child. Ask your child's teacher or a resource consultant for names of individuals who can help. Contact one of the organizations in LD Resources for additional suggestions and information.

Professionals who can help

- Audiologist – measures hearing ability and provides services for auditory training; offers advice on hearing aids.
- Educational Consultant – gives educational evaluations; familiar with school curriculum but may have a background in special education issues.
- Educational Therapist – develops and runs programs for learning and behavior problems.
- Learning Disabilities Specialist – a teacher with specific training and credentials to provide educational services to students with learning disabilities and their teachers.
- Neurologist – looks for possible damage to brain functions (medical doctor).
- Occupational Therapist – helps improve motor and sensory functions to increase the ability to perform daily tasks.
- Pediatrician – provides medical services to infants, children, and adolescents; trained in overall growth and development including motor, sensory, and behavioral development (medical doctor).
Psychiatrist – diagnoses and treats severe behavioral and emotional problems and may prescribe medications (medical doctor).

Psychologist (Clinical) – provides psychological and intellectual assessment and treatment for mental and emotional health.

School/Educational Psychologist – gives and interprets psychological and educational tests; assists with behavior management; provides counseling; consults with parents, staff, and community agencies about educational issues.

Speech and Language Therapist – helps children with language and speech difficulties.

**Tips for helping with schoolwork**

- Show an interest in your child’s homework. Inquire about the subjects and the work to be done. Ask questions that require answers longer than one or two words.
- Help your child organize homework materials before beginning.
- Establish a regular time with your child to do homework-developing a schedule helps avoid procrastination.
- Find a specific place for your child to do homework that has lots of light, quiet, and plenty of work space.
- Encourage your child to ask questions and search for answers, taking the time to figure out correct answers.
- Make sure your child backs up answers with facts and evidence.
- Practice school-taught skills at home.
- Relate homework to your child’s everyday life. For instance, teach fractions and measurements as you prepare a favorite food together.
- Be a role model-take the opportunity to read a book or newspaper or write a letter while your child studies.
- Praise your child for both the small steps and big leaps in the right direction.

**Help your child become a better reader (for early readers)**

- Work on the relationship between letters and words. Teach younger children how to spell a few special words, such as their own names, the names of pets or favorite cartoon characters, or words they see frequently like stop or exit.
- Help your child understand that language is made up of sounds, syllables, and words. Sing songs and read rhyming books. Play word games; for instance, think of words that rhyme with dog or begin with p.
- Teach letter sounds. Sound out letters and words. Make up your own silly words with your child.
- Sound out new words and encourage your child to spell by speaking each sound aloud.
- Notice spelling patterns. Point out similarities between words, such as fall, ball, and hall or cat, fat,
and hat.

Next >

See also

- Parenting
- Homework Help
- Self Esteem & Stress Management
- Family Relationships
- Behavior & Social Skills

This information was developed by the Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities, with funding from the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation.

http://www.ldonline.org/ldbasics/parenttips?theme=print

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Building Parent-Teacher Relationships

By: American Federation of Teachers

*Effective communication is essential for building school-family partnerships. It constitutes the foundation for all other forms of family involvement in education.*

Parent Benefits

Positive parent-school communications benefit parents. The manner in which schools communicate and interact with parents affects the extent and quality of parents' home involvement with their children's learning. For example, schools that communicate bad news about student performance more often than recognizing students' excellence will discourage parent involvement by making parents feel they cannot effectively help their children.

Parents also benefit from being involved in their children's education by getting ideas from school on how to help and support their children, and by learning more about the school's academic program and how it works. Perhaps most important, parents benefit by becoming more confident about the value of their school involvement. Parents develop a greater appreciation for the important role they play in their children's education.

When communicating with parents, consider your remarks in relation to the three categories that influence how parents participate. For example, are you communicating about:

- Classroom learning activities?
- The child's accomplishments?
- How the parents can help at home with their child's learning?
Student Benefits

Substantial evidence exists showing that parent involvement benefits students, including raising their academic achievement. There are other advantages for children when parents become involved — namely, increased motivation for learning, improved behavior, more regular attendance, and a more positive attitude about homework and school in general.

Teacher Benefits

Research shows that parental involvement can free teachers to focus more on the task of teaching children. Also, by having more contact with parents, teachers learn more about students' needs and home environment, which is information they can apply toward better meeting those needs. Parents who are involved tend to have a more positive view of teachers, which results in improved teacher morale.

Good Two-Way Communication

Good two-way communication between families and schools is necessary for your students' success. Not surprisingly, research shows that the more parents and teachers share relevant information with each other about a student, the better equipped both will be to help that student achieve academically.

Opportunities for two-way communication include:

- Parent conferences
- Parent-teacher organizations or school community councils
- Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for parent review and comment
- Phone calls
- E-mail or school website

Communication Strategies

Personal contact, including conferences, home visits, telephone calls, and curriculum nights or open houses, seems to be the most effective form of communication and may be among the most familiar. However, the establishment of effective school-home communication has grown more complex as society has changed. The great diversity among families means that it is not possible to rely on a single method of communication that will reach all homes with a given message. It is essential that a variety of strategies, adapted to the needs of particular families and their schedules, be incorporated into an overall plan. Some strategies to consider include:

- Parent newsletters
• Annual open houses
• Curriculum nights
• Home visits (where applicable)
• Phone calls
• Annual school calendars
• Inserts in local newspapers
• Annual grandparents or "special persons" days
• Board of Education spokesperson or communications officer at PTA meetings
• Homework hotlines
• Annual field days
• Notices and handouts in local markets, clinics, churches, mosques, temples, or other gathering sites
• Website for the school
• Workshops for parents
• Communications that are focused on fathers as well as mothers

Effective communication strategies involve:

• Initiation: Teachers should initiate contact as soon as they know which students will be in their classroom for the school year. Contact can occur by means of an introductory phone call or a letter to the home introducing yourself to the parents and establishing expectations.
• Timeliness: Adults should make contact soon after a problem has been identified, so a timely solution can be found. Waiting too long can create new problems, possibly through the frustration of those involved.
• Consistency and frequency: Parents want frequent, ongoing feedback about how their children are performing with homework.
• Follow-through: Parents and teachers each want to see that the other will actually do what they say they will do.
• Clarity and usefulness of communication: Parents and teachers should have the information they need to help students, in a form and language that makes sense to them.

Surprise a Parent

Parents are not accustomed to hearing unsolicited positive comments from teachers about their children, especially in a phone call from the school. Imagine how you would feel, as a parent, if you were contacted by a teacher or the school principal and told that your son or daughter was doing well in school, or that your child had overcome a learning or behavior problem. When you make calls to share positive information with parents, be prepared for them to sound surprised-pleasantly surprised.

Research shows that school-home communication is greatly increased through personalized positive telephone contact between teachers and parents. Remember,
when a phone call from school conveys good news, the atmosphere between home and school improves. When you have good news to share, why wait? Make the call and start a positive relationship with a parent.

Phone Guidelines

Sometimes, as a new teacher, it's difficult to make the first call to a parent or guardian. Preparing for the call will make it easier. Before making a call, write down the reasons for the call. One reason can be simply to introduce yourself to the parent or guardian. Here are several guidelines you can use as you prepare:

- Introduce yourself
- Tell the parents what their child is studying
- Invite the parents to an open house and/or other school functions
- Comment on their child's progress
- Inform them of their child's achievements (e.g., "Student of the Week")
- Inform them of their child's strengths or share an anecdote

To hear a sample teacher-parent phone call, visit [www.t-source.org](http://www.t-source.org).


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Section 4: Resources

Where to go for further information
### Learning Differences Materials

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<td>Reading, writing, math: how parents can help children succeed in school (Special edition: character education and parent involvement) [new and expanded]</td>
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<td>Readings for educators: selected reprints on dyslexia.</td>
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<td>The reality of dyslexia U.S. ed.</td>
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<td>Reversals: a personal account of victory over dyslexia Rev. ed.</td>
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<td>School-based assessments and interventions for ADD students.</td>
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<td>**A scientific Watergate, dyslexia: how and why countless millions are deprived of breakthrough medical treatment</td>
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<td>Short Bus (The): A Journey Beyond Normal</td>
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<td>Smart in everything - except school</td>
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<td>Smart kids: how academic talents are developed and nurtured in America</td>
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<td>Smart moves: why learning is not all in your head</td>
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<td>So your child has a learning problem: now what? 2nd ed.</td>
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<td>Socialization of learning disabled adults: why and how to organize a group</td>
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<td>Succeeding against the odds: strategies and insights from the learning disabled 1st ed.</td>
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ResourceMate® 3.0 1663 Mission St, 7th Flr, San Francisco CA 94103 - supportforfamilies.org - 415-920-5040
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<td>**What do we say? What do we do? : vital solutions for children's educational success 1st ed.</td>
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<td>Why our children can't read, and what we can do about it : a scientific revolution in reading 1st Touchstone ed.</td>
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## Library Resources

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<td>How to Help Children Overcome Learning Difficulty [soundrecording] (Parenting Series 19) vol. I+II</td>
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<td>Misunderstood minds [videorecording] : searching for success in schools</td>
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<td>2009 the State of Learning Disabilities [internet resource]</td>
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<td>LD Advocates Guide [internet resource]</td>
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<td>Learning Disabilities Checklist [internet resource]</td>
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<td>Learning to Achieve [internet resource] : A Professional's Guide to Educate Adults with Learning Disabilities</td>
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<td>Making it Stick: Memorable Strategies to Enhance Learning [internet resource]</td>
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<td>One Word At A Time : A Road Map For Navigating Through Dyslexia And Other Disabilities</td>
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Websites, Organizations, and Other Resources – Learning Disabilities

**LD-Specific**

**ADDitude Magazine**
www.additudemag.com/channel/adhd-learning-disabilities/index.html
Offers strategies and support for ADHD and LD, as well as information and advice from experts and practitioners in mental health and learning.

**Center on Instruction**
www.centeroninstructions.org
While these resources are useful for improving the achievement of all students, they particularly target students with difficulties learning mathematics, students needing intensive instruction, or special needs/diverse learners, including English language learners.

**Center on Response to Intervention**
www.rti4success.org
Provides support for states, districts, and schools implementing RTI.

**Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD), the Council for Exceptional Children (CLC)**
www.teachingld.org
DLD works on behalf of students with learning disabilities and the professionals who serve them to meet the needs of millions of school-aged children and youth with learning disabilities.

**GreatSchools**
*Learning Disabilities & ADHD Section*
www.greatschools.org/articles/?topics=226&language=EN
GreatSchools is an independent nonprofit and a national source of school information for families. A section of their website contains a repository of articles about ADHD and Learning Disabilities. They also have adapted legacy resources from Schwab Learning.

**Helpguide**
www.helpguide.org/home-pages/learning-disabilities.htm
Started by two parents, Helpguide offers various articles regarding mental and physical wellness. This specific section describes both conventional and alternative management strategies for LD.

**International Dyslexia Association**
www.eida.org
The IDA actively promotes effective teaching approaches and related clinical educational intervention strategies for dyslexics.

**JAN (Job Accommodation Network)**
www.askjan.org/media/lear.htm
JAN’s Accommodation and Compliance Series is designed to help employers determine effective accommodations and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Also helpful self-advocacy tool for employees with LD.
LD Online
www.ldonline.org
LD Online seeks to help children and adults reach their full potential by providing accurate and up-to-date information and advice about learning disabilities and ADHD.

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)
www.ldaamerica.org
Since 1963, LDA has provided support to people with learning disabilities, their parents, teachers and other professionals with cutting edge information on learning disabilities, practical solutions, and a comprehensive network of resources.

National Center for Learning Disabilities
www.ncld.org
The mission of NCLD is to improve the lives of the one in five children and adults nationwide with learning and attention issues—by empowering parents and young adults, transforming schools and advocating for equal rights and opportunities.

RTI Action Network, a program of NCLD
www.rtinetwork.org
The RTI Action Network is dedicated to the effective implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) in school districts nationwide.

Understood.org, a program of NCLD
www.understood.org
With technology, personalized resources, free daily access to experts, a secure online community, practical tips and more, Understood aims to be support for parents of kids with learning disabilities.

National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials / National Center on Accessible Educational Materials
www.aim.cast.org / www.aem.cast.org
For students with sensory, physical, cognitive, or learning differences and their teachers, accessible instructional materials (AIM) may open doors to teaching and learning that ordinary print-based materials have closed. Accessible educational materials, or AEM, are materials that are designed or converted in a way that makes them usable across the widest range of student variability regardless of format (print, digital, graphical, audio, video).

TeensHealth
www.kidshealth.org/teen/homework/problems/learning_disabilities.html
General informational article, but written directly to the child or teen with LD.

What Works Clearinghouse
www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc
The goal of the WWC is to be a resource for informed education decision making. To reach this goal, the WWC identifies studies that provide credible and reliable evidence of the effectiveness of a given practice, program, or policy (referred to as “interventions”), and disseminates summary information and reports on the WWC website.
Special Education

Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004
idea.ed.gov
This site provides information on major topics covered by IDEA 2004. It has excellent video clips on Early Intervening Services/RTI, Individualized Education Program, Discipline, Highly Qualified Teachers, Procedural Safeguards, and other important topics.

Community Alliance for Special Education (CASE) and Disability Rights California “Special Education Rights and Responsibilities Handbook”
www.disabilityrightsca.org/pubs/PublicationsSERREnglish.htm
This handbook thoroughly and extensively covers topics on basic rights, evaluations and assessments, eligibility, pre-school education services, and more in a Q&A format. These materials are based on special education laws and court decisions in effect at the time of publication.

The Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Digests
www.eric.ed.gov
ERIC Digests are secondary research articles that synthesize research in specific topics of education. These are not the primary research articles, but they give an overview of the types of research being currently conducted in academic settings.

Office for Civil Rights (OCR), U.S. Department of Education
“Frequently Asked Questions about Section 504 and the Education of Children with Disabilities”
www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html
Explains what a 504 plan is, procedural safeguards, terminology, and evaluation information. OCR serves student populations facing discrimination as well as the advocates and institutions promoting systemic solutions to civil rights problems.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs
1-877-433-7827, edpubs.ed.gov
Website has U.S. Department of Education publications and other products. May also order paper copies. All publications are provided at no cost.

Wrightslaw Special Education Law and Education
www.wrightslaw.com
Parents, educators, advocates, and attorneys come to Wrightslaw for accurate, reliable information about special education law, education law, and advocacy for children with disabilities. Fantastic resource.

Parent to Parent

Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)
www.parentcenterhub.org
Serves as a central resource of information and products to the community of Parent Training Information (PTI) Centers and the Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs). Find the parent center(s) in your state here.
San Francisco/California Region
Family Resource Center Network of California (FRCNCA)
www.frcnca.org
FRCNCA is a coalition of California’s 47 Family Resource Centers. Early Start Family Resource Centers (ESFRC) provide parent to parent support, outreach, information and referral services to families of children with disabilities and the professionals who serve them.

Parents Education Network
6050 Geary Blvd. #101, San Francisco, CA 94121
Tel: 415-751-2237
pen@parentseducationnetworks.org
www.parentseducationnetwork.org
PEN is a coalition of parents collaborating with educators, students and the community to empower and bring academic and life success to students with learning and attention differences.

Support for Families (SFCD)
1663 Mission St, 7th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103
Tel: 415-920-5040
info@supportforfamilies.org
www.supportforfamilies.org
www.supportforfamilies.org/resource2/ (Bay Area Agency Directory, by Category)
www.supportforfamilies.org/internetguide/index.html (Even more online resources)
The family resource center and parent training information center for San Francisco County. Provides information, education, and support for families and professionals of children with disabilities, concerns, or special health care needs.

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD)
Early Childhood Special Education Services
1520 Oakdale Ave, San Francisco, CA 94124; Tel: 415-401-2525; Fax: 415-920-5075
Special Education Central Office
3045 Santiago St, San Francisco, CA 94116; Tel: 415-759-2222; Fax: 415-242-2528

SFUSD Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC)
www.cacspedsf.org
The purpose of the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) for Special Education is to champion effective special education programs and services and advise the Board of Education on priorities in the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELP). The State Education Code mandates that each SELPA have a CAC and that a majority of CAC members are parents. If you are not in San Francisco, ask your local school for information about your local Community Advisory Committee for Special Education.
Since 1982, Support for Families has offered information, education, and parent-to-parent support free of charge to families and professionals of children with any kind of disability, concern, or special health care need in San Francisco.

All services are free of charge:

- Phoneline & Drop-In Center
- Resource Library with Computer and Internet Access
- Support Groups
- Educational Workshops
- Family Special Events
- Parent Mentor Program
- Short-term Counseling
- Community Outreach & Satellites
- Information & Resources

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

1663 Mission St, 7th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-282-7494 (Office)
415-920-5040 (Phoneline)
info@supportforfamilies.org
www.supportforfamilies.org

HOURS
MWF 9:30am – 4:30pm
TTH 12:30pm – 8:30pm

PUBLIC TRANSIT
BART: 16th St Mission (3 blocks to 13th)
MUNI: 14 Mission, 49 Van Ness, Van Ness Metro Station
INFORMATION PACKET
EVALUATION

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CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES
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San Francisco, CA 94103

INFORMATION PACKET
EVALUATION
**LEARNING DISABILITIES INFORMATION PACKET EVALUATION**

1. Are you a: **PARENT/CAREGIVER** **PROFESSIONAL** **OTHER** (CIRCLE ONE)

2. This packet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped increase my knowledge about my child’s needs or disability, and/or the needs of children with disabilities and their families</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped increase my feelings of support</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped increase my knowledge of resources or services</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped provide strategies to advocate for my child and/or children I serve as well as participate in the decision-making process</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(The following questions are for Parents/Caregivers Only)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped increase my ability to communicate with professionals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped increase my knowledge of parent participation activities at the school as well as school reform</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(The following questions are for Professionals Only)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helped increase my ability to communicate with families and service providers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped increase my knowledge of family-centered care</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best, how would you rate the value of this packet?

   - Great Value ▶ 5
   - ▶ 4
   - ▶ 3
   - ▶ 2
   - ▶ 1
   - Little Value

   Comments:

4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best, how would you rate the quality of this packet?

   - Great Quality ▶ 5
   - ▶ 4
   - ▶ 3
   - ▶ 2
   - ▶ 1
   - Little Quality

   Comments:

5. Would you recommend this packet to others? ▶ Yes ▶ No

6. What did you find **most** useful?

7. What did you find **least** useful?

8. Any other articles or information you would like to see?

9. Has this information made it more likely that special education issues can be resolved without having to go to Fair Hearing? ▶ Yes ▶ No ▶ Not Applicable

   If not, why not?

*(Optional Information)* Name: Phone Number:

Evaluations help us improve our services and report back to our funders, which allows us to continue to provide our services - including these packets - free of charge. **Please complete and return this evaluation in one of four ways:**

1. Mail this evaluation to our office by folding this sheet of paper into thirds (see other side of page).
2. Scan or take a photo of this evaluation and email it to newsletter@supportforfamilies.org
3. Fax this evaluation to 415-282-1226
4. Or fill out the evaluation online: [www.surveymonkey.com/s/sfcd-info-packet](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/sfcd-info-packet)

THANK YOU!