

June 2010

LD *Connections*

learning disabilities
different paths.....same destination

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Welcome

As the school year draws to a close, you as a parent of a special needs child are likely in the process of or have already considered how you are going to support your child through the long summer months. One of the many options open to you may be a camp experience for your child. While this is not necessarily the only possibility, it can provide the opportunity to learn new skills and reinforce emerging ones within a social milieu. In the article "Social Skills and LDs", it suggests that in addition to the academic repercussions of a learning disability, a child's social functioning may also be affected. While the degree of difficulty will vary for each individual child, the acquisition of social skills is best taught within a social context. For parents who are considering a camp option, the Ontario Camping Association (416-781-0525) can provide you with a camping guide of accredited camps that meet or exceed their minimum standards for excellence. In choosing a camp experience it will be important to

match a camp to your child's individual needs. Check out the list of possibilities in our newsletter.

The summer may also be a time to strengthen your child's literacy and numeracy skills. Whether your child has difficulty understanding what they see and hear, communicating with others orally or through written words or understanding and applying mathematical concepts, these skills can be learned through a variety of everyday activities. The goal is to make them fun and meaningful. Doris Johnson provides some practical ideas and suggestions for parents to support their children with these challenges.

So that we may continue to offer quality educational events and services, we are currently accepting new membership applications. We are also seeking individuals who would be interested in serving on our board. This requires attendance at our monthly meetings, AGM and some committee work. Please contact us if you feel this would complement your skills and/or interests. Have a great summer!

Event Postponed

The Dr. Louise Scott workshop on sleep disorders and the effect on learning has been postponed to the Fall of 2010. Those previously registered will be contacted at a later date. The event will be re-advertised once a date has been determined.

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Helping Young Children with Learning Disabilities at Home

This article is a continuation from the previous edition of LD Connections. Doris Johnson, Professor, Department of Speech and Director of Learning Disabilities, Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois.

Help the Child Comprehend and Remember Longer Units of Language

Some children can comprehend single words or short phrases, but they have difficulty understanding the meaning of sentences and stories. When children have difficulty listening to stories, it is often helpful to speak slowly, to repeat phrases or sentences, and when necessary, use pictures to illustrate the meaning.

Verbal discipline may also be problematic. Make certain the vocabulary is clear and that directions are not too lengthy. Show the child what to do if he or she does not understand verbal instructions.

Do Not Call Attention to Expressive Language Weaknesses

Language is first and foremost a form of communication. We recommend that parents and teachers never interrupt a child's flow of thought when he or she is trying to communicate. In certain instances, when children cannot recall a word, it may be helpful to give a multiple-choice question, or the first sound of a word. For example, if the child is trying to recall the word *juice*, the parents might say, *Do you want juice or milk?* If this type of question will allow children to use the word and to provide practice. In general, we think the parents should not correct grammar or pronunciation. Although many parents attempt to correct occasional mistakes, when problems are evident, a specialist should provide the instruction. Meanwhile, the parents should make every effort to communicate in other ways, through gesture and pantomime if necessary. Never bribe a child to say a word or

sentence correctly. Make the verbal interactions as pleasant and meaningful as possible. Listen to children. Make certain they have opportunities to contribute to family discussions.

Engage the Child in Early Literacy Activities

Literacy refers to many oral language, reading, and writing activities, all of which are intertwined. Reading to children strengthens oral language and introduces them to various forms of discourse such as stories, fairy tales, and poetry. Reading signs, labels, or thank you notes helps them understand relationships between oral and written language and emphasizes meaning. Sometimes, children with language disorders do not like being read to because they cannot process all of the information. In these cases, we suggest that parents read the pictures and reduce the language level so that the child comprehends. Wiener (1988) recommends extensive reading of pictures to build vocabulary, descriptive language, and the basis for simple narratives. From a single action picture (e.g., a child eating soup or cereal), one can ask countless questions about the objects, the actions, how things might taste, whether the soup is hot, the kinds of soup the child does or does not like, as well as simple inferential questions. Studies of older students with reading comprehension problems indicate they have difficulty answering inferential questions. Therefore, we introduce such questions in the early childhood years. For example, *Do you think this boy likes the cereal? How do you know? Look at his face.* While reading, we also suggest that parents stop periodically and ask the child questions about the story. Sometimes, it is helpful for the parent and child to take turns asking questions about the content. When looking at a can or carton of food, one might ask, *Which word do you think says milk?* Encourage the child to read signs such as stop, exit and words on doors such as boys, girls, push, etc. The groceries from the market can be used for many purposes including reading labels.

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The primary goal is to make certain that children understand that reading is a meaningful act. It is not learning the alphabet. Although studies indicate that learning letter names predicts early reading, in some instances, we focus on the sounds of the letters rather than the names since the letter names do not really aid the reading process per se. Furthermore, remembering 26 nonmeaningful figures may be too difficult for some children.

Several studies in recent years have found that phonemic awareness is related to early reading. Therefore, we encourage parents to play listening games in which they identify objects that begin or end with a particular sound (i.e., Find all the things that start with m, using the letter sound not the letter name). Blending is often difficult for poor readers so we ask children to *point to the picture that goes with what I say - M - A - N*. It is usually easier for children to recognize the object than to say or blend the sounds themselves, but both activities are beneficial. Rhyming games are also encouraged.

In order to strengthen visual processes and whole word recognition we suggest that when parents read to children they ask them to find letters or words that look the same. For an independent activity, we suggest the parent cut out a page from an old magazine or a page of print and ask the children to circle words that look the same. Parents might highlight a high frequency word such as *the*, and ask the child to find others that look the same. Early writing is also an important part of literacy. By age 3, most children can draw a circle; by four they can draw a square, and by five they can draw a triangle as well as the rudiments of many letters and numerals. They also draw pictures of people, houses, and simple objects. Many preschoolers enjoy pretend writing, which is an important part of development. If one analyzes their scribbles carefully, it is possible to see wordlike strings of figures and drawings interspersed with letters. All of these activities should be encouraged. Do not try to achieve perfect copying or production of letters and numbers.

Rather, let the child engage in writing as a communicative act. When children can copy letters, however, we use the opportunities that arise from going shopping. Encourage children to help write the grocery list by copying one or two words from empty cartons and boxes. Not only will the children feel helpful, but they will begin to realize that writing is an aid to memory - one of the important functions of writing. Invented spelling is also encouraged as a part of meaningful writing. When a child writes ILVU (I love you) on a note, be aware that this is good developmental spelling. The child is beginning to identify certain sounds and associating them with letters.

Many young children with learning disabilities have significant problems with visual-motor integration. Some do not know how to hold a pencil or draw the simplest figures. In these cases, an occupational therapist or specialist in learning disabilities may be needed. Parents can, however, assist by having children draw figures in sand, make designs with finger paint, etc. Often we suggest that parents purchase or make templates (stencils) from cardboard or styrofoam so the child can trace inside the boundaries. We make basic shapes and simple outlines of figures such as an apple, a kite, or a fish. As children trace around the boundaries of the figures, they learn the motor patterns and, when the stencil is removed, they see a product that is better than one they can produce from copy.

Encourage Early Mathematics and Number Activities

Introduce mathematics as a meaningful, pleasurable activity, not a rote memory skill. While most parents play simple counting games and sing number songs (all of which are helpful), we also recommend activities which strengthen the language of mathematics and one-to-one correspondence. Some children with learning disabilities have difficulty counting systematically; others have difficulty with words such as more, less, few and other relational terms. Encourage children to help estimate, measure, pour water or milk, not only to learn some of the quantitative terms but to help them acquire certain visual-spatial-motor skills.

Simple games with dominoes can be used to match quantities, to strengthen counting skills and one-to-one correspondence. When reading to children, have them note the numbers of the pages and say them. Some youngsters learn to count, but they do not learn how to read numerals.

Seriation (ordering objects according to size) is an important aspect of mathematics which parents can encourage. When children are given pots and pans of various sizes to stack in order, they are learning the rudiments of seriation. When they stack various size rings on a peg they also learn about the smallest and largest figures.

Simple problem solving can begin with activities such as setting the table. *How many more forks do we need? Do we have enough spoons?* These same types of activities can be used when playing games - *Do we have enough players, cards?* etc. Many simple board games with dice are excellent ways of teaching counting, one-to-one correspondence, and turn taking.

Help the Child Learn to Play

Some learning disabilities interfere with a child's ability to play and acquire social skills. One does not usually think about having to teach children how to play, yet consider the visual-spatial, language, and symbolic skills that are needed to play with blocks, a doll house, trucks and cars in garages, making sand castles, etc. While we do not want to make work out of play, in order for children to play unsupervised or to participate in groups, adults may need to show them how to stack blocks so they do not fall, to pretend, to dig in the sand, and to play simple games. We can prepare them for group activities by teaching the subskills in advance.

Throughout all of these activities, take time to enjoy the children and have fun. Laugh at

incongruous situations, and allow for the learner's leeway. Everyone makes mistakes and we can learn from them.

Encourage Children to Listen to Music and to Develop a Sense of Rhythm

Musical skills may come easily for some children with learning disabilities, in which case they can be used as a way to teach certain early reading skills such as rhyming. We often use songs the child knows (e.g., Happy Birthday) as a way in to reading.

Other children need help in listening to rhythm, beat, and tempo so they can participate in group activities. In these cases, we encourage parents to clap or march with the children in time to the music.

Teach Simple Time Concepts

Many students with learning disabilities have problems understanding the language of time, the calendar, saying days of the week, months of the year, telling time, and estimating time. Therefore, we recommend work in this area at many age levels. During the early childhood years, words such as early, late, today, tomorrow, etc. can be emphasized. Mark school days on a calendar with a special color, and perhaps keep simple weather journals illustrating sunny or rainy days with simple drawings of a sun or raindrops.

Provide Structure for Children with Attention problems

Some, but not all, children with learning disabilities have problems focusing and maintaining attention. In these cases, we recommend structure, reduction of stimulation in the environment, and quiet, but firm discipline. The goal is not to punish, but to create an environment in which the children can succeed. They may need help with organization by breaking down complex tasks and by giving

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them an orderly sequence of activities. Develop each subskill to achieve automaticity. Create situations where parents and teachers can say *good work*

Summary

Children with special needs often have special gifts - gifts such as sensitivity, perseverance, tenacity, and resilience. These gifts are far more important than perfect recitation of the alphabet or copying letters. All children can make progress, but the rate and amount of improvement varies. Try to build on the child's strengths to build his or her sense of self-respect. Help the child realize the value of people in all walks of life as you go about daily routines. There is a place for everyone.

When things do not seem to go as well as expected, it is often helpful to contact teachers, physicians, and other specialists for suggestions. Parents need time out and opportunities to talk with parents of children with similar problems. Many communities have support groups that may be beneficial. Parents learn from each other and can share strategies that were most helpful for them.

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Firefly Therapy Services Sponsored by KidsAbility

Come on out for this fun-filled camp for children with learning disabilities! Children ages 8-12 will enjoy play based learning activities in a group setting. With the support of a teacher and camp counsellor, campers will work on the following goals: challenge-specific learning strategies in group settings, reading and writing, math, social and communication skills. All strategies will be incorporated into a variety of settings, such as: sports activities, team-building exercises, scavenger hunts, group problem-solving activities, and some independent work.

Camps are available in Guelph, Cambridge and Waterloo.

To Register, Contact: Kim Andrews, Program Manager, Firefly Therapy Services
(519) 886-8886 ext 562
1-888-372-2259 ext 562

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Highlights from our Public Education Event

Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County hosted an event on April 27, 2010 where Christina Deroche, a PhD student from McMaster University, presented about “Learning Disabilities and Emerging Research, New Trends and Social Importance”. The audience was full of parents as well as a few teachers who were interested in what research their child(ren) might benefit from. Christina’s presentation began by identifying the types of learning disabilities and what is affected: organization and focus; social life; physical interaction with the world; and academic life. As a group we identified words that we connect with the four types of learning disabilities. Christina’s presentation also touched on different types of reading and written language accommodations and strategies. These included such things as extended time, speech-to-text software and a note taker to just mention a few. Christina provided an extensive chart that outlined many options depending on the type of learning disability. There were also various emerging issues discussed which included items such as a focus on the teacher’s roles in identification as well as studies in comorbidity of learning disabilities and other disorders. Comorbidity could include such things as ADHD and learning disabilities; dyslexia and learning disabilities; depressive disorders and anxiety along with a learning disability. One of the newest comorbidity issues relates to developmental coordination disorder (DCD) which can cause problems with holding a pencil or copying things off the board. Research is indicating the importance of diagnosing this in order to assist with addressing the learning disability. The presentation was concluded with a discussion on the social importance of parents advocating for their children. There was lots of

discussion among the group after the presentation as people shared their personal experiences as well as asked Christina questions about their specific situations. Another successful event hosted by the Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County!

Summer Camps

Camp Belwood (YMCA) 519-699-5150
 Belwood Lodge and Camp 519-843-1211
 Camp Brebeuf 519-856-4671
 Centre Wellington Sportsplex 519-843-2800
 Christian Horizons 519-353-5756
 City of Guelph 519-822-1260 ext.2702
 CMA Music Academy 519-826-9788
 Conestoga Bible Camp 519-638-2440
 Crane Lake Discovery Camp
info@cranelakediscoverycamp.org
 Discovery day camp 519-836-9360
 Easter Seals Ontario 1-800-668-6252 ext.325
 Elora Centre of Arts 519-846-9698
 Flying Dance Company 519-767-2721
 Guelph Lake Nature Centre 519-836-7860
 Guelph School of Arts 519-767-1317
 Guelph Youth Theatre 519-831-1012
 Hanover Recreation Department 519-364-2310 ext.123
 Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp 519-625-8602
 Camp Hermosa www.camphermosa.org
 Camp Joshua www.campjoshua.com
 J. Steckle Heritage Homestead 519-748-4690 Kerry’s
 Place Autism Services 519-763-5812
 Kidsability 519-780-0186 ext.235
 Kinark Outdoor Centre 1-800-805-8252
 Royal City Soccer 1-800-427-0536
 Saults Gymnastics club 519-837-3335
 Sealy Karate school 519-821-5425
 Camp Shalom 519-623-4860
 Sunrise Therapeutic Riding Camp 519-837-0558
 YMCA-YWCA of Guelph 519-824-5150

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Resources

Websites to check out

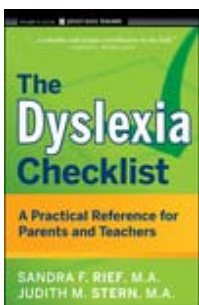
www.transitionsportal.ca - This is a resource and communication portal for participants of the longitudinal research study Transitions. The Portal features discussion forums, file downloads, and a resource library.

<http://www.uniquelygifted.org> Resources for Gifted Children with Special Needs (ADD/ADHD), Learning Disabilities (LD), Asperger Syndrome, etc.).

<http://www.totallyadd.com>

Upcoming Course

The Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County is pleased to offer a 6 week Stress Management course for parents of children with LD. Course to take place in the Fall 2010. Christine Rickards, M.A., Behaviour Consultant will lead the event. Topics to be covered include the sources of stress, symptoms of stress, types of thinking, goal setting. Course fee includes a Participant Workbook and CD. Additional details to follow later this summer.



The Dyslexia Checklist is a valuable guide for parents and teachers that can help them better understand children and teenagers with dyslexia and other reading and language based disabilities. The book also provides information on the educational rights of students with dyslexia.

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Social Skills and LDs

Source: www.ldao.ca

About Social Skills

Learning disabilities can affect any area of a person's life, including how well we learn the social skills that allow us to live with other people, how to make friends, how to interact with peers, how to deal with authority figures, how to fit in. Since our social lives are so central to human lives, deficits in social skills can be as or more debilitating than academic difficulties.

What Sort of LD is That?

Social skills can be impacted by a number of different types of LDs.

- People with nonverbal LDs struggle with the unspoken elements of communication and interaction, and so, for example, may not learn social norms and expectations, like how close to stand to others when talking, or how to join in a game, or how to begin dating. As we learn a language, we also learn the non-verbal conventions of that language, the meaning of a shrug, a pout, or a smile. Speech often includes not only a face-to-face meeting, but also a meeting of the minds. "Conversation," Steven Pinker notes, "requires cooperation. (<http://www.criticalreading.com/nonverbal.htm>)
- People with language related LDs may miss out on the verbal interactions of social life: conversations, jokes, small talk, etc. For example, people with auditory processing deficits may not be able to follow the fast paced dialogue in a movie.
- People with ADHD may have negative social interactions, accidentally, through interruptions, impulsivity, habitual lateness, disorganization, etc. They may be very difficult in a group because they keep interrupting or don't wait for their turn. In addition to the LD related aspects of social skills, people who experience ongoing academic or work-related failures can suffer damage to their self-esteem, as well as become socially isolated, further reducing their opportunity to learn and practice social interactions.

What Helps?

There are ways to help – and they may vary significantly depending on the reason for the deficit.

For a person who struggles with the nonverbal elements of social life, it could help greatly for a parent, teacher or other ally to orally describe the non-verbal aspects and elements of the social situation (e.g. to translate). "He looks angry – his eyebrows are tight and he is frowning – and I think this is because the other boy took his sandwich." Putting the often abstract aspects of our communication into words helps with understanding, and if this is done while the situation is still happening, it can also help demonstrate the connection between verbal and nonverbal communication.

For a person who is missing out for reasons to do with language the strategy will be different. If conversation is too fast to process, a friend or advocate may explain privately what has transpired; or the person with the LD may request the explanation, or decide to spend time in

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smaller groups where the conversation is easier to follow. Learning to ask for rephrasing of complicated language can be a useful self-advocacy skill for those with language LDs.

As complex and diverse as LDs are, there are some key strategies that work well for all. People who feel anxious or isolated need to be included – through simple kindness and courtesy. Acceptance of difference, patience, respectful assistance, and encouragement can make a world of difference for anyone trying to practice new skills. Risk taking requires safety and support.

Social Skills Classes?

It is a long-standing question in the field of LDs: can social skills be deliberately taught in a classroom or group setting, in the same way that mathematics can? Research has supported different points of view at different times, but it is widely accepted that social skills teaching is best done in context, as immediately as possible: if a teacher or parent can help a student analyse situations as they arise, and make suggestions or refinements to social behaviour that can be used right away, the potential for learning is best.

Whether this learning happens in the course of a social-skills group or class – or somewhere else, it is clear that respectful teaching of social skills can be useful, although how formalized that teaching needs to be is less clear.

Donation/Membership Form

Name: _____ Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____

Postal Code: _____ Tell: (H) _____ (W) _____

Email: _____

Annual Dues: Family/individual \$50; Student \$20; Professional \$75

I am interested in making a donation: _____ and/or volunteering: _____

Membership Advantages:

Awareness and advocacy efforts on behalf of those with learning disabilities or ADHD at the local, provincial and national level, subscription to local and provincial newsletters, information on learning disabilities and ADHD, use of local resources and support services.

Please mail this form and cheque to: Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
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