



# **Idawc • Learning Disabilities** **Association of Wellington County**

*The right to learn, the power to achieve*

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## **In our October 2018 Issue:**

LDAWC News – 1-2

*Articles – LDs and ADHD*

Understanding Executive Functioning  
Issues – 3-5

Why Kids with Executive Functioning  
Issues Have Trouble Planning – 6-8

SickKids Reading Disability study – 9

Guelph Storm tickets – 10

LDAO Webinar - 11

*Upcoming LDAWC events*

Family Conference – 12

November The Myth of IQ – 13

December Non-Medication & Medication  
Interventions for ADHD – 14

*Other Agency Events*

WRFN Family Conference - 15

LDAO Membership Application – 16

## **LDAWC News**

September was a busy month at LDAWC, with many things on the go. A lot of time went together preparing for Reading Rocks program. This offering began on October 1<sup>st</sup>, with 20 students aged 6-12 matched with 20 volunteer tutors. These pairs will work together for 16 sessions over 8 weeks on a number of reading skills, including building sight words, phonics and fluency. Tutors also read each week to their student.

On September 19, we held a very successful workshop, Preparing for the School Year – IEP 101, with over 30 people in attendance. Sue Shaw was the workshop speaker, and she gave parents lots to think about and strategies to use to develop good relationships with their son/daughters teachers and how to approach IEPs in a new way.

Our Peer Support Network met on September 26, and 9 people shared their stories, experiences and resources to try to help one another. A common theme among many was that raising a child with a learning disability is a huge job, sometimes a full-time job. I want to thank everyone who came, and their openness and willingness to help the other members.

Our FREE Family Conference, on Saturday, October 20, is shaping up to be a phenomenal day of learning and networking. The opportunity to hear a renowned speaker doesn't come around very often, and Dr. Peg Dawson won't disappoint. With a highly relevant topic to all those with LDs and ADHD, her keynote on *Beyond "Lazy and Unmotivated": Why Parents and Teachers Need to Know about Executive Skills* is something you won't want to miss. But the learning doesn't stop there! There's a choice of four breakout sessions over two time slots that round out the afternoon. Lunch and nutrition break snacks and beverages are also provided.

Finally, join us as we celebrate October as LD Awareness month. As you can see from the poster below, the message is clear: every learner needs to be seen from a strengths-based perspective. From kindergarten to grade 12 and beyond, each person with has a unique set of strengths. Our message is this: people with LD have abilities and strengths - see and recognize these!

# Don't **DIS** my **ABILITIES!**



**October is Learning Disabilities Awareness Month.**  
Help stop the stigma and realize the **ABILITIES!**



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[www.LDAWC.ca](http://www.LDAWC.ca)

## Articles – LDs and ADHD

*To help prepare for our upcoming conference and speaker Dr. Peg Dawson, this issues will feature articles on executive functioning skills.*

### Understanding Executive Functioning Issues



By The Understood Team

#### **Snapshot: What Executive Functioning Issues Are**

Some people describe executive function as “the CEO of the brain.” That’s because these skills allow us to set goals, plan and get things done. When kids struggle with executive skills, it impacts them in school and in everyday life.

Trouble with executive skills isn’t a diagnosis or learning disability on its own. But it’s a common problem for kids with learning and attention issues. All kids with ADHD have issues with executive function. And many kids with specific learning disabilities have weaknesses in some executive skills.

The three main areas of executive function are:

1. Working memory
2. Cognitive flexibility (also called flexible thinking)
3. Inhibitory control (which includes self-control)

Executive function is responsible for a number of skills, including:

- Paying attention
- Organizing, planning and prioritizing
- Starting tasks and staying focused on them to completion
- Understanding different points of view

- Regulating emotions
- Self-monitoring (keeping track of what you're doing)

Executive skills usually develop quickly during early childhood and into adolescence. But they keep developing into the mid-twenties. When they're younger, some kids may lag behind their faster-developing peers for a while. As they get older, though, they may have fewer challenges as teens and young adults. And in the meantime, there are strategies and supports at school that can help.

### **Executive Functioning Issues Signs and Symptoms**

Executive functioning issues impact kids in different ways. Kids may have weakness in only one or two areas, or in all of them. The signs of problems with executive function often look like the signs of ADHD. That's because ADHD *is* a problem with executive function.

Kids with weak executive skills may:

- Have trouble starting and/or completing tasks
- Have difficulty prioritizing tasks
- Forget what they've just heard or read
- Have trouble following directions or a sequence of steps
- Panic when rules or routines change
- Have trouble switching focus from one task to another
- Get overly emotional and fixate on things
- Have trouble organizing their thoughts
- Have trouble keeping track of their belongings
- Not be able to manage their time

Since executive function develops over time, a child may struggle in different ways at different ages. Here are some signs you might see at various grade levels.

#### **Preschool–Grade 2**

- Gets frustrated easily, and gives up instead of asking for help
- Has trouble following directions
- Has frequent tantrums over minor things
- Insists on doing things a certain way
- Answers questions in vague ways

#### **Grades 3–7**

- Starts a task, gets distracted, and never finishes it
- Often mixes up school assignments and brings home the wrong books
- Has a messy desk and backpack
- Wants to have friends come over, but never sets it up

- Seems to focus on the least important point in a discussion

### Teens

- Loses track of time
- Engages in risky behaviour
- Has trouble working in groups
- Forgets to fill out job or college applications
- Is overly optimistic or unrealistic

Processing speed can also play a role in executive function. Kids need to notice challenges, weigh the options, and put things in context to solve problems. Some of the signs of executive functioning issues may be partly due to slow processing speed.

### Other Issues That Can Co-Occur With Executive Functioning Issues

Weak executive function can occur with many learning issues. And it always occurs with ADHD. Here are some ways that issues with executive function can overlap with other conditions that impact learning and behaviour.

**ADHD** (also known as ADD) is essentially a problem of executive function. Its main symptoms are all the result of weak executive skills. These include impulsivity, difficulty paying attention, poor working memory, trouble managing emotions and difficulty shifting focus from one task to another.

**Specific learning disabilities** don't always involve a problem with executive function. But it's not uncommon for kids with dyslexia, dysgraphia or dyscalculia to also have weak executive skills. Those weaknesses make the learning issue even more complicated.

**Slow processing speed** isn't a problem with executive function. But it can create problems with executive function. Not being able to quickly size up situations and consider the options means that kids can't solve problems as fast as they need to.

**Anxiety and depression** are common in kids with executive functioning issues, learning disabilities and ADHD, which is a problem with executive function. It can sometimes be hard to figure out which issue is behind certain behaviours without professional help.

Source: <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/understanding-executive-functioning-issues>

# Why Kids with Executive Functioning Issues Have Trouble with Planning

By Kate Kelly



## At a Glance

- Kids with executive functioning issues often have trouble with planning.
- Planning is a complex skill involving the three main executive functioning skills.
- Trouble with planning impacts all aspects of life, including learning.

Planning might seem like a natural process when you have to get something done. For kids with executive functioning issues, however, it can be a big challenge. The result is that things often *don't* get done or even started, no matter how large or small the task.

Learn more about why many kids with poor executive functioning skills struggle with planning.

## What Trouble with Planning Looks Like

Imagine this scenario. It's 11pm and your child has a paper due in the morning. But there are only a few sentences on the screen, and panic has set in. After staring at the computer for an hour, your child quickly throws together a few paragraphs and then heads to bed.

It might be natural to chalk this behaviour up to procrastination or lack of motivation. But what you might really be seeing is your child's inability to plan.

Planning is the ability to set a goal, think of the steps needed to achieve it, and decide on the order of the steps. It's a complex process that requires all three areas of executive function.

People who don't struggle with these skills may easily be able to figure out the steps needed to get something done, and just do it. That's often not the case for people with executive functioning issues. They may not know where to begin, or what has to happen next in order to reach their goal. So, they don't get through tasks, even if they're able to do each step individually.

Difficulties with planning impact all areas of life. But you may notice the impact most at school, especially as your child gets to the higher grades.

In the early grades, teachers often break projects down into steps. In middle school, kids may do writing assignments in stages. Over a period of a week or more, they may separately turn in an outline, an introduction, a set number of paragraphs that make up the body of the paper, the conclusion, and the footnotes.

By high school, however, there's more emphasis on independent learning. Teachers expect kids to figure out on their own how to get assignments done on time. For kids with executive functioning issues, this requires a level of planning that can be a real challenge.

### **The Role of Executive Functioning Skills**

Each of the key areas of executive function plays a role in the ability to plan. A breakdown in any one of them can result in poor planning.

**Flexible thinking:** Kids who struggle with flexible thinking, or cognitive flexibility, may have trouble coming up with the appropriate steps needed to achieve a goal. They might get stuck on one step and be unable to think of additional ones or alternatives.

Imagine a middle-schooler has a test at the end of the week. She makes plans to study early in the week with a friend, but then the friend gets sick. As a result, she doesn't study at all until the night before the test. It's not that she didn't want to study and do well on the test. She just couldn't come up with a plan B.

That's not the only way trouble with flexible thinking can get in the way of planning. Kids with this challenge often have a hard time coming up with new strategies or switching from one strategy to another.

If a strategy works for one type of activity, kids may want to use it for everything. Say your child likes studying with flashcards. That might be ideal for a vocabulary test. But it may not be the best way to prepare for an exam about a book's major themes.

**Working memory:** Making a plan requires keep multiple things in mind at once. Kids with weak working memory skills may have trouble remembering the end goal while also thinking about the individual steps it will take to get there.

Putting steps in the right sequence can also be a challenge. You need to remember what came before and what still needs to happen as you put the steps in the right order.

**Self-control:** It takes self-control (part of an executive function called *inhibitory control*) to complete all the steps of the plan or do them in the right order. A child with poor self-control may impulsively decide to skip the outline and dive into writing the paper. The result is a paper that doesn't read well because it's missing required sections.

Making a plan and executing it are two different things. For instance, your child may have a great plan in place for doing a book report. But she may not act on it if she can't resist the temptation to play video games. It takes self-control to step away from the screen and execute the plan.

### Ways to Help Your Child with Planning

Trouble with executive function can make the act of planning a long-term challenge that affects performance and self-esteem. But there are a number of ways you can help your child get better at it.

**Ask open-ended questions.** Encouraging kids to reflect can help them become better at flexible thinking. When your child is starting a new project, ask questions like:

- “Did that strategy work the last time you tried it? What might work better?”
- “How much lead time do you need to get it done? Do you think you’ve left enough time?”
- “You said you’d have the flashcards done by Wednesday but that’s the same night as soccer. What can you adjust?”

**Help break down tasks.** Have your child use a calendar or planner to map out school assignments and activities. Together, write down the steps with timelines. Create a checklist to mark off tasks as they are completed to help your child stay on track.

**Look into accommodations.** Your child might be able to get accommodations at school through an IEP. The teacher might break the task into chunks and give them each a deadline, for instance. The teacher might also set up check-in points to make sure the work is staying on track.

Read up on more ways to help kids with executive functioning issues at home. Find tips to help your child improve flexible thinking and boost working memory. You can also explore ways to help your child gain self-control, including apps to help younger kids and teens and tweens.

### Key Takeaways

- Flexible thinking, working memory and self-control are key skills required for planning.
- Planning skills become increasingly important as kids get older.
- To strengthen planning skills, ask open-ended questions and help your child break down tasks.

Source: <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/why-kids-with-executive-functioning-issues-have-trouble-with-planning>



## **Families needed for SickKids research study on the genetics of reading disabilities**

### **Who can apply?**

Children aged 6 to 16 who struggle with reading, and their parents

### **What's involved?**

1. Eligibility screening
2. Eligible families come to SickKids hospital in Toronto for one full day of study participation, involving the following:
  - Psycho-educational assessment for the child
  - Parent interviews and questionnaires
  - Blood sample from child and parents
3. Following participation, families will receive a detailed report describing the results of their child's psycho-educational assessment, which may be helpful with educational planning

### **How do I apply?**

Contact Kirsten Blokland, PhD:  
[kirsten.blokland@sickkids.ca](mailto:kirsten.blokland@sickkids.ca) (please note spelling)  
 416-813-8207

*This study is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research*  
**Study recruiting participants until January 2019, and possibly beyond**

## *Guelph Storm - Help Us Fundraise!*



***Tickets are \$17.50 each  
(regular adult price \$26)***

Help support LDAWC and The United Way! By purchasing tickets to these Storm games we're able to run our 50/50 draw. This is a significant fundraiser for us every year - please help us to be able to participate!

***\$1 from each ticket will be donated to the United Way.***

Game dates are:

**Sunday, October 28, 2:00 PM** – Guelph vs. Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds

**Friday, December 28, 7:30 PM** – Guelph vs. Hamilton Bulldogs

**Friday, January 4, 7:30 PM** – Guelph vs. Windsor Spitfires

**Sunday, January 20, 2:00 PM** – Guelph vs. Niagara IceDogs

**Sunday, February 10, 2:00 PM** – Guelph vs. Kingston Frontenacs

***For tickets, contact Jen Paterson, Resource Coordinator  
at [info@ldawc.ca](mailto:info@ldawc.ca) or (519) 837-2050.***

# LDAO Webinar – Partnering with Schools for Student Success



LDAO offers some amazing webinars for parents to build their knowledge base and help them become more effective advocates for their children.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, in partnership with the **Integra Program** of the Child Development Institute, is presenting an online workshop for parents and those who are helping parents navigate the school system. The course is called ***Partnering with Schools for Student Success***, and promotes a collaborative approach to advocacy, based on knowledge and understanding on both sides.

It's a seven unit course, and begins Monday, October 15, 2018.

Professional version with assignments & Certificate of Completion: \$350 (\$300 LDAO member rate)

Parent option without assignments or certificate: \$250 (\$200 LDAO member rate)

For more information, cost and to register, go to: <http://www.ldao.ca/ldao-services/workshops-courses/partnering-with-schools-for-student-success-effective-parent-advocacy/>



# The Myth of IQ — November 28, 2018



## About our Workshop:

Myths surrounding learning disabilities, IQ and how students can reach their full potential will frame this workshop. The path for a student with a LD from primary to post-secondary can be tricky, so we're pleased to have Sean Cameron return as he leads this discussion and offers tips.

Having a long term goal is key, as is knowing the steps to get there. In addition to giving important tips to make a student's path successful, Sean will discuss the myths of IQ and the IQ/Achievement discrepancy. This event will be of interest to parents, teachers and professionals.

## About our Speaker:

Dr. Cameron is a Developmental Psychologist who has worked in the field of education for the past 12 years. He has taught courses on learning disabilities at the University of Guelph for 8 years, and currently works as an administrator in elementary education.

**When:** Wednesday, November 28, 7-9 PM

**Where:** RLB LLP Guelph, 197 Hanlon Creek Blvd #103, Guelph

**Cost:** \$15, or \$10 for LDAWC members

*We never want cost to be a deterrent! Please contact us about subsidies.*

**Register:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ldawc-the-myth-of-ig-tickets-48444277137> or on our website at [www.ldawc.ca/events/](http://www.ldawc.ca/events/)

## ***Non-medication and Medication Interventions for ADHD – December 6, 2018***



### **About our Workshop:**

ADHD is a complex disorder that affects every person differently. The decision to ‘medicate’ or ‘not medicate’ is a big one, and there are usually strong opinions and arguments on both sides. But non-medical interventions are also available – strategies to cope with inattention and focus difficulties. Come to an engaging workshop to learn more and about both options – from a medical expert who understands attention difficulties on a personal level.

### **About our Speaker:**

Dr. Alexandre Tavares is a child psychiatrist practicing in Waterloo who also speaks on a wide range of topics. He grew up knowing that he did not have the best attention span, was not a good speller, and was not a fast reader, but had a thirst for knowledge. He was supported by his parents and grandparents since his childhood. They believed in him and never questioned the validity of learning with less formal educational methods used at that time: TV programs, magazines and supported listening. Dr. Tavares uses his personal experiences to better empathize with the experiences of children and teenagers with ADHD and/or learning disorders. To learn more about Dr. Tavares’ work, visit: [www.drtavares.ca](http://www.drtavares.ca)

**When:** Thursday, December 6, 7-9 PM

**Where:** Community Living Guelph – Boardroom (2<sup>nd</sup> floor); 8 Royal Road, Guelph

**Cost:** \$15, or \$10 for LDAWC members

*We never want cost to be a deterrent! Please contact us about subsidies.*

**Register:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ldawc-non-medication-and-medication-interventions-for-adhd-tickets-48444676331> or on our website at [www.ldawc.ca/events/](http://www.ldawc.ca/events/)

## Other Agency Events

### Waterloo Region Family Network (WRFN) Family Conference

Please join us for the WRFN Family Conference. This is a free event for parents to connect and learn together.

When: Saturday, November 3, 9:30 – 3:30

Where: 425 Bingemans Centre Dr, Kitchener

Childcare provided (4+).

#### **Keynote address: Connecting with Nature - Rob Klea**

In the morning presentation you will learn about the benefits to health and wellbeing, particularly for those with disabilities, associated with being connected to nature, how to become connected to nature and what to do if it is challenging to get outside.

About Rob - Rob Klea is the founder and Executive Director of New Trail Edventures Inc. / New Trail Forest Therapy.

For more information or to register please contact Krista McCann  
[Krista.McCann@wrfn.info](mailto:Krista.McCann@wrfn.info) or 519-886-9150 ext. 2. Registration Deadline: October 27, 2018



## Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario Membership Application

### Membership Benefits:

- Member fee rates to LDAO programs and services, including some online workshops/courses
- Member fee rates to all chapter programs and services, where available
- Two issues of the LDAO digital magazine LD@Ontario, sent biannually through email
- Chapter newsletters (frequency varies from chapter to chapter)

We're going **paperless**! Please provide us with your email address to receive your copy of LD@Ontario!

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### Required Information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Type:

Family/Individual ☐ \$50.00

Professional ☐ \$75.00

Institutional ☐ \$125.00

Student ☐ \$20.00

ID # Required \_\_\_\_\_

### Type of Payment:

☐ Cash (only if paying in person) ☐ Cheque ☐ Visa ☐ Master Card

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Cardholder: \_\_\_\_\_

CVV #: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make all cheques payable to **LDAO** and forward to **365 Evans Avenue**  
**Suite 202 Toronto ON M8Z 1K2**