



# Idawc • Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County

*The right to learn, the power to achieve*

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## LDawc News

April was a busy and productive month at LDawc; we submitted our 2018/19 United Way report detailing all of our accomplishments. A huge thank you to United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin! Without your generous funding, we wouldn't be able to provide all the necessary supports and programming to our parent, child, teen and adult clients.

Planning for our upcoming Family Conference is well underway, and this year's conference is on Saturday, October 19. Mark Your Calendars Now! We're excited to have booked an engaging keynote speaker with a fresh perspective. The day will also include and some interesting breakout sessions. We think that our parent and caregiver

audience will be pleased. More details to come!

Our April 17 Motivating Struggling Readers workshop, with UGDSB teacher Fil DaSilva as guest speaker, featured his personal story of how he struggled in school until some critical relationships put him on a different trajectory. Thank you, Fil, for sharing your story with us on the power of resiliency, helping one another, and having a growth mindset.

We are excited to welcome back speaker Susan Slack Miller for our May 15 workshop, UnderstandABILITY – Demystifying Psycho-Educational Assessments. Just as the title suggests, Susan will break down assessments to make them more accessible and usable for parents. Susan has had tons of experience working with students with LDs, and taught at the Trillium Demonstration School for students with profound LDs. You'll find more information about this workshop, including registration details, later on in this newsletter.

Parents, we hope you will join us for our final Peer Support Network meeting of this school year. Join us on Thursday, May 30 from 7 – 8:30 PM at Eramosa Engineering on Woodlawn. We know from feedback



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how valuable it can be for parents to share experiences and learn from each other. Keep reading for more details about this event.

We have wrapped up both Reading Rocks programs now and the assessments were submitted for analysis. Stay tuned for results of the programs and to see how reading scores have climbed! A big thank you to everyone – students, tutors, and parents – for their feedback on the surveys our Reading Rocks Facilitator sent out.

Note: We're still looking for the 50/50 draw winner at the March 1/19 Guelph Storm game: ticket #U-342901.

## Articles – LDs and ADHD

### The Elephant in the Classroom

*Most articles we include in our newsletter are written by educators or parents. This one brings a different perspective, as it's written by a university student who has an LD. See how she viewed her LD growing up.*

by Elisa Blasi, Learning Disabilities Association of York Region Ambassador

Have you ever heard the term “the elephant in the room”? It is often used when there is an obvious issue or problem that everyone can see, yet, in order to avoid an uncomfortable situation, is sidestepped.

For most of my life, I have felt like the elephant in the classroom. I was that kid in school who left class after our national anthem and only saw other students during lunch, art, gym, and recess. The reasons for why I would go to a “special room” were rarely discussed in my mainstream classrooms.

Essentially, there was a gap between the implementation of my individual education plan and an explanation as to why I was doing things differently from the average student. This gap left space for me to create my own view as to why I was frequently taken out of the classroom. Looking back at that time, now as an adult, it is alarming to think that as a child I actually believed I was not as smart as my friends. Further, when my peers were left with this lack of information, it gave them the opportunity to create their own reasons as to why I was taken out of the classroom. As you can imagine, I quickly became the “stupid kid”. Yet, most adults in my life kept using the same go-to phrase whenever they saw I was frustrated with my school environment:

## *You Are No Different Than Anyone Else*

### **Feeling Like the Elephant in the Room**



There I was, sitting in a classroom, trying my hardest to believe I was no different than any other student, doing everything I could to blend in, and yet, extremely frustrated that I was not reading and writing the same way as my peers. My learning disability became the elephant in the room. It was obvious to other students that I had a difficult time with reading, writing, and math. Nevertheless, the actual learning disability was not talked about, but rather, covered up with an explanation that I was no different from my peers. At the very least, this period in my life was confusing. My learning disability was something many people noticed, but very few knew how to approach. Hesitant and passive explanations left me wondering, should I be embarrassed that I could not learn like my peers? By the time I was in grade nine, I had made two conclusions regarding my difficulties in school:

1. My learning disability is something I should be embarrassed about.
2. My learning disability is something that I should hide.

Before going on, let me introduce myself. My name is Elisa Blasi and I am currently attending York University as a Psychology major. My journey in understanding my learning disability has truly been a rollercoaster. What I once saw as a roadblock and as an excuse has slowly turned into something that has shaped me into the person I am today. My learning disability is what pushes me to relentlessly work at something, even in the face of failure. In fact, my learning disability has taught me to look at failure from a completely different viewpoint. It has given me an opportunity to develop a unique perspective on how I view challenges in my life. Meaning, I strive to approach a challenge as a learning experience, rather than an opportunity to play the victim. In turn, I have learned that I can be proud of myself; something I would never have believed possible when I was in grade nine. Currently, I work as an ambassador for the Learning Disability Association of York Region. Our goal is to empower students and

eliminate stigmas attached to the diagnosis. As someone who has personally dealt with the weight a school environment can place on a student with a learning disability, it is important that I share my experiences in order to build an environment that will help support the needs of students to come.

### **I Learn Differently**

I believe the source of our problem is rooted in the phrase “you are no different than anyone else”. When directed to a person who has a learning disability, this phrase can deeply damage their self-concept in both a school and a social setting. What you are saying is that their overall learning style and pace are the same as an average student. When hearing this from an adult, many students, including myself, will initially believe that statement. However, even at a young age, it does not take long for a student with a learning disability to see that they have different learning needs from their peers. This push and pull between being told you are the same as your peers, and yet seeing that you are not, is what causes “the elephant in the room”. Ultimately, this situation informs the student that homogeneity in learning styles should be both desired and strived for. Yet, when students who have a learning disability attempt to learn the same way as their peers, they often experience failure. This type of failure confirms to students that our education system was not designed for a different type of learner.

### **Advice to Educators**

I believe this cycle will stop the day we start openly talking about learning disabilities within mainstream classrooms. Every student, learning disability (LD) or not, should understand that an LD does not mean a student is unable to learn, but rather, that they learn in a different way. In other words, the classroom environment should be designed to not only celebrate different types of learners but also complement each student’s learning style. In order to create a classroom setting like this, changes must be made:

1. The special education classroom should no longer be seen as a mystical room where some students disappear to. Rather, teachers should explain what the special education room is and why it is important to students who have different learning needs.
2. Each student, learning disability or not, should have a clear understanding of what an LD means.
3. Students who have a learning disability should be made aware of their diagnosis and take part in their IEP process or any other parent/board personnel meetings. Further, students with a learning disability and their prospective teachers should be actively reviewing and exploring successful ways of accessing and processing the curriculum.
4. The mainstream classroom should be set up in a way that allows students to have access to their accommodations seamlessly, and in the same manner other students have access to a pen and paper, thus, creating a welcoming school environment for the needs of a different type of learner.

This type of classroom setting rejects any misconceptions about learning disabilities to mainstream students, students who have a learning disability, and teachers who do not fully understand the

meaning of an LD. By setting up your classroom in these aforementioned ways, you are saying to students that it is acceptable to learn in a different way. This type of atmosphere will allow each student to mature in his or her understanding of their own learning disability. Thus, when that student is faced with a situation that does not welcome their learning style, they will have the confidence to advocate for themselves because of the nurturing school environment they grew up in.

### **Elementary teachers**

If you are an elementary-school teacher and reading this, I encourage you to start openly talking about learning disabilities in your classroom. These “talks” should be both informative and allow students to ask questions in order to debunk any stereotypes. I do not believe that there is an age when a student is too young to understand, rather, it is dependent on the teacher to create a lesson on learning disabilities that is appropriate for that age group.

### **Secondary Teachers**

If you are a high school teacher and reading this, then you have your work cut out for you. The problem is that by the time students get to you, they have been the elephant in the room for far too long. Many will be resistant and most will not even understand what a learning disability is. I suggest that high school teachers work together with their students with an LD to create a plan toward self-advocacy and understanding of their learning disability. Some will take longer to come around to the idea, but what is important is that you make yourself available for when they do.

Empowering students who have a learning disability today will have a considerable effect in the years to come. In fact, informing all students about learning disabilities will eventually cause a ripple effect in our society. What we have to remember is that the students in our classrooms today will one day be active participants in society and possibly parents themselves. If we start opening our children’s minds to the concept that there are different types of learners and thinkers in this world and also empower students of all learning backgrounds, then the future for people who are different will be brighter.

Source: <https://www.ldatschool.ca/the-elephant-in-the-room/>

## But What Are the Side Effects of NOT Trying Medication?

*“I know that ADHD drugs are safe and effective, but I worried that perhaps, for some unknown reason, they might harm my children’s health.” How Dr. Ned Hallowell made the decision to use ADHD meds with his own kids.*

By Edward Hallowell, M.D.

After a child is diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), one of the most difficult decisions for a parent to make is whether to start him or her on medication. I’ve been there myself. Two of my three children have ADHD, and, although my wife and I eventually decided to try medication — which, by the way, has helped both of them immensely without any side effects — arriving at that decision took careful reflection.

When it was suggested that my kids try medication, I had my concerns. I know that ADHD meds are safe and effective for kids, but I worried that perhaps, for some unknown reason, they might harm my children’s health. Although stimulant medications have been with us for more than 60 years, I wondered if some new side effect might emerge.

I countered those concerns by worrying about the potential “side effects” of not taking the medication: namely, my children struggling to stay focused and getting frustrated when they couldn’t. After envisioning that scenario, the decision became far less difficult.

### Take Your Time

Each parent — and child — comes to the question of medication with different assumptions. My strong advice is to take your time, honour your feelings, and find a doctor who will remain patient, a professional who will provide information — not hurried commands — as you wrestle with your decision.

From a medical standpoint, the decision is obvious. Medication is by far the most proven, safe, and effective treatment for ADHD. Careful, controlled studies have established that a trial of medication makes sense once the diagnosis is made. Remember that a trial of medication is just that — a trial. Unlike surgery, it can be undone. If the medication doesn’t work or if it produces side effects, the physician can reduce the dosage or discontinue it. No harm done. But unless your child tries the medication, you will never know if it can benefit him or her as it has other children and adults.

### Do Some Fact-Finding

From a personal, parental standpoint, though, the decision is anything but easy. It takes time and requires talking with your doctor and other experts. You might want to research the medication online and find out what the latest studies conclude about it. Get all the facts, and make a scientific, rather than a superstitious, decision. But I urge you never to start your child on medication until you’re



comfortable doing so. Don't feel that you're trying your doctor's patience or that your questions are foolish. Nothing done out of love for your child is foolish.

However, I also urge you not to reject medication out of hand. Many parents have heard so many bad things about ADHD drugs that they're willing to travel to Tibet to find an alternative treatment before giving medication a try. It's very important to do your homework and separate the facts from the myths before dismissing the treatment.

### **Honour Your Feelings**

When I give lectures, people often ask me if I "believe in" medication for children and adults with ADHD. My reply is that medication isn't a religious principle; it's a medical treatment. My feelings about ADHD medications are similar to those about medications in general: They're great when they're used properly, and they're dangerous when they're not.

Sometimes it takes months or even years before parents decide to put their child on medication. Every parent has his or her own timetable. Stick with yours.

Source: <https://www.additudemag.com/do-not-rush-your-decision-on-adhd-meds-for-kids-dr-ned-hallowell/>

## **3 Mindfulness Techniques to Help Reduce Parenting Stress**

By Jeremy Lehrer



### **At a Glance**

- Mindfulness means calming your mind to be more present in the moment.
- Practicing mindfulness is a good way to reduce parenting stress.
- Certain breathing techniques can help relieve stress.

Parenting can be a stressful job. Learning and attention issues might add to that stress—whether you worry about your child fitting in, your next IEP meeting or other issues.

That’s why it’s important to have strategies to help you relax. Taking a walk and exercising are great options. Another option is called “mindfulness”: calming your mind to be more present in the moment. This can take a little time and patience, but it can be worth the effort. Here are three simple strategies you might try using in your daily life.

### **Technique #1: Focus on your breath.**

One form of mindfulness involves focusing your attention on your breath. You can do this either with your eyes open or closed.

- Take a few moments to start concentrating on your breath.
- With your mouth closed and breathing through your nose (if that’s not comfortable, you can breathe with your mouth open), focus your awareness on the sensation of the breath moving in and out of your body.
- Allow your mind simply to follow the movement of air as you inhale and exhale.
- After a minute or so, try to notice more subtle details about the breath. Is there a certain area where you can feel your breath with greater attention? If so, focus on the sensation of the breath there.
- When your mind starts to wander, gently bring your mind back to the breath.
- After a few more minutes, take a deep breath and go back to your day.

### **Technique #2: Tune in to your body.**

Another kind of mindfulness involves noticing all of the physical sensations you experience in the moment. You might want to lie down or sit on a comfortable chair for this technique.

- First, take a few moments to focus on your breathing, taking deep, slow breaths.
- Then, start to slowly scan through your body and feel the areas where you have physical sensations. Maybe you feel a sensation in your shoulders, or feel your belly moving as you exhale and inhale.
- Notice these sensations, but don’t judge them. You might think, “I feel some pressure in my shoulder,” instead of “My shoulder is tense because I’m worrying too much.”
- Then, listen to the sounds around you (perhaps with your eyes closed). Try not to identify the sounds you hear, but rather listen to them as attentively as you can. Notice how subtle the changes in sound can be.



This method of being aware of your senses can be used at any time. You might focus your attention on the smells you notice while you walk in the park. The goal is to be as deeply aware of an experience as you can.

### **Technique #3: Try “conscious relaxation.”**

When you feel stressed out or wound up, you might try a technique called “conscious relaxation.” Get started by finding a quiet area in your home and ask not to be disturbed for a few minutes. Leave your phone or other tech devices behind.

- Lie down on the floor on a soft, comfortable surface with your palms facing up a few inches away from the side of your body.
- Focus your awareness on the different parts of your body. Start with your feet, and then intentionally allow them to relax. Allow the muscles to release and feel them becoming softer. Go up the body all the way to the head.
- Try to direct the breath to any areas of tension you feel. This helps your muscles release and relax. (“Direct your breath” doesn’t literally mean to make your breath move to your neck or shoulders. Instead, you’re directing a feeling of relaxation associated with your breath into the tense areas of your body.)
- When you decide to move again, do so very gently and slowly—allowing yourself transition time from relaxation to movement.

These techniques won’t eliminate stress entirely, but they can help reduce stress levels and give you more energy.

For ways to deal with your child when you’re feeling frustrated, try these steps to keep you from losing your cool.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Mindfulness techniques can involve paying attention to your breath and your body.
- Mindfulness can also help you pay attention to what you’re feeling without judging it.
- Mindfulness techniques won’t eliminate stress altogether but can help you reduce it.

Source: <https://www.understood.org/en/family/taking-care-of-yourself/dealing-with-emotions/3-mindfulness-techniques-to-help-reduce-parenting-stress>

## **Resources**

*Keeping accurate records about communication between you and your child’s school is very important, especially for follow-up items or due dates. On the next page is a resource from Understood.org that you can use for your parent-school communications.*

Parent-School Communication Log	
Date:	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> In Person
Who initiated:	Who participated, received or attended:
What prompted the communication:	
What was discussed:	
What was decided:	
Date:	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> In Person
Who initiated:	Who participated, received or attended:
What prompted the communication:	
What was discussed:	
What was decided:	
Date:	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> In Person
Who initiated:	Who participated, received or attended:
What prompted the communication:	
What was discussed:	
What was decided:	

**Understood**

For more tips and resources, go to  
[understood.org](https://understood.org)

## Upcoming LDAWC Events

### ***UnderstandABILITY – Demystifying Psychoeducational Assessments***

#### **About our Workshop:**



A psycho-educational assessment identifies areas of strengths and challenges within a student's learning profile, and provides a deeper understanding of his/her educational needs. It is also a necessity in identifying a student with a learning disability.

Psycho-eds are challenging to understand, especially if you aren't a psychologist or a teacher.

Please join speaker Susan Slack Miller as she explains psycho-educational assessments from a parent's perspective with the intention of making it an accessible and usable document to support your child's academic success.

Come prepared for an evening filled with lively discussion and interactive activities!

#### **About our Speaker:**

Susan Slack Miller is an educator with over 25 years of experience supporting students who learn differently. In addition to a Master of Science degree in Special Education, and Specialist qualifications in Special Education, Susan taught at Trillium Demonstration School in Milton, ON (Trillium is a public school for students within Ontario with severe to profound learning disabilities.) Beyond her teaching role at Trillium, Susan also provided professional development for Ontario educators and administrators. Her work at Trillium resulted in an *Amethyst Award*, a provincial award that recognizes outstanding achievement.

Beyond her ongoing leadership roles supporting students with exceptionalities, Susan also served as a Board Director for The Learning Disabilities Association of Halton. She is also the owner of *Halton Educational Services*, which provides workshops for parents; professional development for educators/administrators; consultations for families; and direct instruction for students with exceptionalities.

**When:** Wednesday, May 15, 7-9 PM

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

**Cost:** \$10 for LDAWC members; \$15 for non-members

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

**Register:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/understandability-demystifying-psychoeducational-assessments-tickets-58097173209> or find a registration link at [www.ldawc.ca/events](http://www.ldawc.ca/events)

## ***LDAWC Peer Support Network – May 30, 2019***



### **About our Peer Support Network:**

Come join our Peer Support Network and meet other parents on a similar journey to yours. LDAWC Peer Support Network's goal is to provide an informal setting to share experiences, challenges, successes and resources. Living, learning and/or working with a LD, or supporting a family member with LD, has its ups and downs. Come learn from others.

Benefits are:

- Learning about relevant resources, supports and strategies
- Insights into what has and hasn't worked for parents and families
- Learning you and your student aren't alone through shared ideas and experiences
- Reduced stigma and stress

**When:** Thursday, May 30, 7-8:30 PM

**Where:** Eramosa Engineering, 650 Woodlawn Road West, Block C, Unit 4, Guelph

**Cost:** FREE

**Register:** At our website [www.ldawc.ca/events](http://www.ldawc.ca/events) or at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ldawc-may-2019-peer-support-network-tickets-60419835354>



## Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario Membership Application

### Membership:

- 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!

\_\_\_\_\_

### 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**

