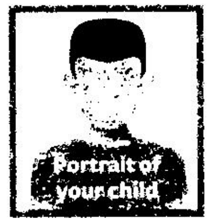
Get to Know My Child

Personalize this letter of introduction and hand it to the teacher during the first month of school.



Dear [Teacher's Name],

We wanted to take this opportunity to help you get to know [Child's Name] better. He is smart, but he often struggles in school because of his ADHD and deficits in executive functions. The more you know about him, the easier your job will be and the more successful he will be in school.

First let me tell you about his strengths:

> Creative
> Kind and respectful
> Eager to please adults

[Child's Name's] special interests and talents

> Athletic; a great swimmer
> Understands and can program and repair computers
> Does electrical repairs around the house
> Loves video games
> Enjoys socializing with friends

Most of [Child's Name's] challenges are due to his diagnosed ADHD and executive function deficits:

> Daydreaming
> Finds it hard to get started on and finish his work
> Forgets homework assignments
> Forgets to turn in homework
> Weak written expression—finds it hard to get his ideas on paper and to organize them
> Difficulty memorizing math facts, learning foreign languages, and completing complex multi-step algebra problems
> Slow writing and reading—as a result, he produces less written work

Previous teachers have found these strategies to be most effective. He has a Section 504 Plan, which has been helpful in recent years.

> Select someone to gently remind him to get started
> Tap him gently on his shoulder to get his attention
> Give him a quiet place to take tests

Our child wants to do well in school, even though it may be hard for him at times. His [dad] and I are willing to work with you any time. Let us know if texting, email, or calling fits your schedule best. Here's our contact information: [111-111-1111; name@email.com].

We look forward to having a great school year.

Warm regards,

[Your Names(s)]

ADDITUDE *Inside the ADHD mind*

TALKING ABOUT ADHD

The Meaning of ADHD: Clear Explanations for Complex Kids

The more your child understands about ADHD — its causes, symptoms, and treatments — the better. Learn how to explain attention deficit disorder in a way she can understand, and teach her it's nothing to be ashamed of.

BY LARRY SILVER, M.D.

Your son or daughter has been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADHD or ADD). You've done your due diligence, learning about the condition and how the symptoms affect him, academically and socially. But have you explained the meaning of ADHD to your child? Does she understand what it is? How it steers her focus and impulsivity? Why he is taking medication and how it works? Saying, "You are so hyper all of the time" makes your child feel he is doing something wrong. Saying, "Sometimes your brakes don't work so well, so you say and do things that might upset your friends" is better.

How Can You Explain What ADHD Means?

Explaining ADHD to your child, and giving him the words to tell you how his symptoms affect him, will allow you to work more effectively with doctors, teachers, and family members. Martha's third-grade teacher tells her mom that she is not paying attention during math period. Martha knows how ADHD affects her and knows the reason for her inattention. "I sit next to a window in math class, and I can't filter out the noises coming from the playground. The noises make it hard for me to listen to the teacher." Martha's mom asks the teacher to move her daughter away from the window. Her grades improve.

Alex, a fourth-grader, gets into trouble running around and bothering the other kids during lunchtime. Like Martha, Alex knows about ADHD and knows how to talk about it. His dad asks him why he is acting up. "Dad, my brakes work fine until around 11:30. Then, they don't work too good, and it is hard for me not to run around." His dad asks, "When do your brakes start to work again?" Alex says, "When I go back to class after lunch." Alex's dad realizes that his morning dose of medication wears off around noon and that his afternoon dose doesn't kick in until he returns to class. That explains his hyperactivity in the cafeteria. He asks Alex's doctor to switch to a longer-acting medication, and the lunch-period problems stop.

[Self-Test: Could Your Child Have an Executive Function Deficit?]

If your child doesn't understand how ADHD affects him, he can't tell you what's bothering him. Worse, he feels bad about his behaviors because he doesn't know what's causing them.

Using the Right Words to Explain the Meaning of ADHD

There are three groups of behaviors that you may need to explain. Some kids will have one of these, some two, and others all three.

- Hyperactivity: difficulty sitting still; being fidgety and squirmy.
- Inattention: This might be noticed as distractibility (difficulty blocking out unimportant auditory or visual stimulation, having a short attention span); lack of attention (difficulty blocking out internal thoughts); executive function difficulties (problems with organization of materials and thoughts, resulting in losing, forgetting, or misplacing things; difficulty organizing and using information; difficulty with time management).
- Impulsivity: speaking or acting without thinking.

Once you know which behaviors your child exhibits, use the right words to describe them. Here's what I tell patients:

Explaining Hyperactivity to Children With ADHD

"Our brain is amazing. It has one area that makes our muscles move. I think of the pedal in a car that makes the car move. It's called the accelerator. Next to this pedal is another one called the brake. The brakes slow down the car. Some children have a problem with their brakes, so the motor is always running and it is hard to slow down or stop the car. When your brakes don't work well, it is hard to slow down your body."

[Making ADD Less Scary: "Your Brain Is a Ferrari"]

Explaining Distractibility to Children With ADHD

"Our brain is always reacting to things we see and hear. If we paid attention to everything around us, we couldn't pay attention to the teacher's words or to what Mommy is asking you to do. Our brain has a way

of blocking out what is not important, so that we can pay attention to what is important. I call this part of the brain the filter. One set of filters blocks out unimportant sounds and another blocks out unimportant sights. Your filter for blocking out unimportant sounds is not working well. So anything you hear comes right in and gets your attention, distracting you."

Explaining Inattention to Children With ADHD

"In addition to being able to block out unimportant things we see or hear, we often have to block out unimportant thoughts. When I ask you to hang up your coat, you may be busy thinking about the play date you will have with your friend. Our brain has filters to block out unrelated thoughts, so that we can focus on what we should be paying attention to. If this filter is not working, you seem to be distracted because you are focusing on other thoughts."

Explaining Executive Function Problems to Children With ADHD

"There is a part of the brain that helps children keep track of their things. I call this the organizer. Sometimes your organizer does not work as well as you would like. So you might lose, forget, or misplace things."

Explaining Impulsivity to Children With ADHD

"Our brains have lots of thoughts and ideas running around in them. Some thoughts are helpful; some aren't. It is important to think about all of them and to pick the right ones to act on. To do this, our brain has a part I call the pause button. When you press it, you tell your brain to wait until you have considered all of the ideas floating around in your head. If your pause button is not working well, you act on your first thoughts. Only later do you realize what you have done or said, and wish that you had thought more about it."

Explaining Medication to Children With ADHD

"Your brakes don't always work well, so Mommy and the teacher get upset with you. This medicine will help your brakes work better, so that you are not as hyperactive. People will not be so upset with you, and you will feel more relaxed."

When your child understands her ADHD and how it impacts her, life becomes less unpredictable and confusing. She will understand why certain behaviors happen, and not get down on herself for having them. Find your own words for communicating with your child. You — and she — will benefit.

[A Guide to Explaining ADHD to Your Child]

Updated on June 4, 2019

LD online

Talking to Children About LD

By: Ania Siwek (2009)

In this article:

As a school psychologist who has worked in a specialized academic setting with children diagnosed with language based learning disabilities, I have too often encountered countless numbers of genuinely bright children who sincerely believed they were just plain stupid. Often this erroneous conclusion is drawn when children have no other way to explain their learning differences to themselves.

I've found that for most of these children, there was a general misunderstanding about the learning differences they have. Although they could name their learning disability (LD), they lacked an understanding of what an LD is and how to comprehend the nature of their own challenges within the context of their learning differences. It is very important to explain learning disabilities to children.

Griffin's story

Griffin was brought to my office by his language arts teacher when he was nine years old. He appeared younger than his age with radiant green eyes and curly red hair.

Griffin had a history of crying during language arts class. In the first grade it was endearing and easily remedied with a hug from the teacher. However, now in the fourth grade, classmates ridiculed him over his emotional outbursts. When he perceived he didn't know an answer, which occurred quite frequently, Griffin cried.

Despite great efforts to do his best, Griffin's weakness in writing far exceeded his strengths. He had an excruciating time conveying his thoughts and ideas in written format. As Griffin walked hesitantly into my office, I heard him whisper "No one can help me. My brain is broken." His shoulders slumped, his chin met his chest, Griffin appeared defeated.

A crucial understanding

A learning disability is a neurological glitch that creates differences in how the brain is wired. These differences make it difficult to acquire certain basic academic skills appropriate for an individual's age, level of intelligence, and education. It is not yet known what causes LD, however it often has a genetic component, a characteristic that runs in families (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2001; Pennington and Gilger, 1996).

The most common LD is dyslexia, which is a language-based LD (Shaywitz, 1998). Though there is no single indicator, individuals with language-based LD experience difficulties acquiring and using language. For example, common problems include learning the sounds of letters, accurate and fluid word recognition, spelling, comprehending what is read, copying letters and numbers, retrieving words, organizing thoughts into spoken or written form, and associated memory difficulties. (IDA, 2008). Many individuals also struggle with their ability to make and sustain friendships which may be due in part to social immaturity and difficulty interpreting social cues (IDA, 2004).

If unaware of a child's learning differences, parents and teachers can see a child with exceptional qualities who does not try hard enough. This could not be further from the truth. The child with LD exerts great effort to complete difficult tasks. Yet without adequate supports, they often fail.

When these bright and motivated children fail, they often have no idea why. Those children who lack an understanding of their learning challenges may be at risk of developing depression (Bender, 1994; IDA, 2004) or anxiety disorder (Stein and Hoover, 1989). Some symptoms borne of children's frustration and negative feelings are: defying parents and teachers, lashing out at siblings and peers, ignoring rules, crying easily, preferring to be alone, developing sleep and/or eating issues, and suffering somatic complaints such as stomachaches and headaches.

Many parents report that they don't want to talk to their children about LD for fear that talking about LD makes a child feel different. Acknowledging that their child has a learning issue may provoke in parents feelings of guilt or shame. For some it might even trigger personal feelings of helplessness since they too struggled with an LD in their childhood.

But in my experience I've seen that that the parent who avoids talk of LD in the home often fosters a sense of denial that inhibits their child from seeking the help they need. I encourage parents to find a way to explain LD to their child. Whether they do it themselves or seek guidance from school counselors or teachers, it is crucial that each child understands their learning differences.

Sienna's story

Sienna was in the third grade when she was brought to my office for the first time. Her teachers reported concern that after two years at the school, she hadn't made friends and rarely participated during recess.

Sienna was a charming eight year old with twinkling blue eyes and jet black hair. She favored pink converse sneakers to match the array of colorful hair barrettes she wore. One on one, she was quite bubbly and personable and loved to share stories about exciting family vacations and adventures with her laboradoodle. In addition, she was an impressive artist. However, at recess, Sienna presented as a different person. What I observed supported her teachers' concerns. During games of kickball or catch the flag, Sienna could be found sitting quietly on her own, close by but never part of the group.

Sienna was quite nervous when she entered my office. She kept her gaze towards the floor and played with her brightly painted fingernails. I watched as she shifted uncomfortably in her seat. I pulled out colorful paper and markers and invited Sienna to draw with me. Suddenly her mood changed. Sienna's eyes met mine; she sat up in her chair and eagerly worked at finding the perfect color markers. As she relaxed, she began to smile, and then laugh. In time, she began to relay funny stories about her new baby brother.

I asked why she often sat alone during recess instead of playing with the group. She shrugged her shoulders to let me know that she didn't know why. I continued my questioning until finally she reported, "Every time I try to play with the other kids, I mess up. I get confused and run the wrong way or someone gets mad at me for doing the wrong thing. I just stopped trying and it makes me sad."

When I thought back to previous educational evaluations that initially detected Sienna's learning challenges, it occurred to me that Sienna's difficulty in comprehension along with memory problems made it difficult for her to follow the guidelines of games. She needed game rules to be broken down into manageable units of information and required frequent reminders.

I explained to Sienna why group games were often difficult for her and how it made sense given the LD she had. She was initially surprised to hear that she had an LD. "My mom tells me that nothing is wrong with me." I made sure to explain that nothing was wrong with her but that her brain was wired differently than children without LD. I helped put into context her learning and social issues considering her learning disability. At the end of our conversation, Sienna looked relieved. "I get it now; it's not my fault that I don't get certain things." In time, Sienna's participation in group activities increased dramatically.

The traffic metaphor

Through years of practice, I have developed a simple approach to explain LD using words that children understand and remember. Following is language that parent can use to talk to their children about LD. It is recommended for children starting in the fourth grade, but can be modified for younger children. The language used is purposely simple. Metaphors are used to describe complicated brain functioning so that children understand what an LD is and how it makes learning difficult.

Step 1: An explanation of how everyone learns

Explain to the child that all learning takes place in the brain. Everything we know now and will learn in the future happens by taking in information around us. Information gets brought into the brain through elaborate systems of specialized mechanisms traveling on pathways throughout the brain.

Instead of using the technical terms for these real systems, I prefer to talk about them as cars and highways. The brain is made up of millions of pretend highways with millions of pretend cars traveling on them super fast all the time. These cars transport information to different areas of the brain. You know what your mother's voice sounds like because that information was sent in a car to a special area in your brain that keeps that information whenever you need it.

There are many different areas in your brain and each holds different kinds of information. I call these areas in the brain garages. There are garages for information on words, numbers, feelings, and so much more. When you learn new things, it's like the information travels inside cars on highways, heading toward specific garages. Similarly, when you want to get information you learned awhile ago, it's like a car goes to that specific garage, picks up the information, and drives it on highways to take it to the place you need it.

These cars travel super fast because there are no obstacles like traffic lights or stop signs to get in their way. It can take a car less than a second to pick up information from a garage and get the information to where it needs to go. Blinking your eye takes longer!

Step 2: An explanation of what it means to have a learning disability

When you have an LD some of the highways in your brain have traffic jams. Not all the highways in your brain have traffic jams, just the ones that are affected by your LD.

When cars sit in traffic jams no one knows how long it will take them to get to their final destination. Sometimes it can be a quick traffic jam and sometimes it can feel like forever!

If you're someone with an LD, having a traffic jam on your highways to the reading, writing or math garage can feel very frustrating. Think about the last time you were stuck in a real traffic jam - maybe you were on your way to school or soccer practice or a friend's home for a play date. Was it fun to sit in traffic? Were you frustrated? angry? bored? annoyed? tired? Or you just didn't care? You probably got to where you needed to go but it just took a long time.

Traffic jams can cause a lot of problems. When you have a reading LD, trying to sound out letters on a page can take a long time. That is because there is a traffic jam going to the reading garage (where the words get stored) and the cars move very slowly. Sometimes you might confuse sounds for some letters like B and D, you might make up sounds or you might give up because you are either embarrassed or too tired to continue. When you try to do math, you might confuse the symbols so you add instead of multiply or you might line up the numbers in a subtraction problem in the wrong order and end up with the wrong answer. Even trying to tell a story can be a problem because of the traffic jams. Sometimes, you say things like "um," "one second," "that thingy," or "you know," because you can't find the right words to explain yourself.

Step 3: Help the child understand that their potential is limitless

There are great challenges about having an LD. The good news is that there are tricks that special teachers or tutors can teach you to make learning easier. I call these tricks "side roads." Using side roads help your cars get to where they need to go faster.

The thing to remember, though, is that these side roads are unpredictable; sometimes they get to where they need to go super fast and sometimes they take a long time because of obstacles like traffic lights, stop signs, and children riding their bicycles. You just never know what will happen on a side road. That means that even if you use a side road when you're spelling a word, you may still make mistakes. But taking a side road is always faster than getting stuck in a traffic jam.

And using a side road over and over again means that the tasks that were once hard, like spelling, get much easier and you make less mistakes. Using side roads encourages you to be creative. Maybe that's why so many successful artists, singers, athletes and business people have learning disabilities.

All the parts you need to be smart are in your brain. Nothing is missing or broken. The difference between your brain and one that doesn't have an LD is that your brain gets traffic jams on certain highways. That means that it takes your cars longer to travel to information garages. Eventually, they do get there.

Griffin's new way of thinking

Not long after I met Griffin his teacher emailed me a classroom anecdote. She overheard Griffin and a friend practicing their speeches for the student council. As Griffin struggled to read his speech, his friend sensed that Griffin was becoming alarmingly frustrated and offered to take a break. Instead, Griffin smiled and said, "that's okay, there's just a traffic jam going on in my head right now. I get annoyed but I'll be okay."

About the author

Dr. Ania Siwek, Psy.D., is a School-Clinical Child Psychologist currently in private practice in Manhattan and Westchester, N.Y., working with children, adolescents, and young adults. Her specialties include anxiety, depression, ADD/ADHD and Learning Disabilities. Previously she served for seven years as a school-based psychologist for students with language-based learning disabilities.

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psychology

Disclosure of Diagnosis - Across Development
presented by Rose Freigang
LDAO Family Conference
October 22, 2019

What do we mean by disclosure?

For parents it means letting your child or adolescent know that they have "an identifiable, common, measurable, and treatable condition." Frustration, self-blame, and low motivation may be avoided or reduced when a student has a basic understanding of their learning challenges. If there is less confusion or worry about learning problems in the classroom, there is more energy for learning.

Disclosure at school, college, university or the workplace means an approach to inform an instructor, counsellor, employer (potential employer) of a disability that needs to be addressed and accommodated. A "hidden disability" like an LD, ADHD or mental health problem does not need to be disclosed; however, without declaration of a disability the organization or institution will not be aware of the need to accommodate. In Ontario, these all qualify as disabilities (according to the Ontario Human Rights Commission) for which reasonable accommodations (i.e., those that do not cause "undue hardships" to the facilty in terms of expense or operations) need to be provided. The timing and the content beyond what the disability is at the discretion of the individual. The expectation of confidentiality remains a right of the individual.

Elementary School

Starting point for disclosure is at the **beginning** of the assessment process before your child has even met the practitioner who will be doing the assessment. Typically, the first session is with parent(s)/or caregiver(s) to obtain a history and to pin down the questions you would like to have answered by the assessment. If you are uncertain about how to describe the process, ask your psychologist or psychological associate for some guidance.

You can set the stage for "buy in" with the process by offering a straightforward explanation that is geared to your child's age and way you understand he/she takes in information. Using a metaphor (e.g., sports team with different members playing a role; science/detective team collecting information to figure out a mystery; family working together to put together a puzzle, build something, make a meal etc.) that your child might relate to can be helpful. It will be important to put forward the idea that you, your child, the school and the person doing the assessment **will be working together**.

Briefly describe what you know will happen (e.g., doing different activities) and when – letting your child know through your body language, facial expression, and words that you have confidence that this will be a positive experience and that you trust and like the person they will be seeing. If you have worries about how your child will do with testing, discuss this in advance.

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with your psychology professional. You can let them know things that will set them at ease, help them manage fidgetiness and focus, improve co-operation etc.

Some children will like to know lots of information, and others will not. Both responses are OK and may reflect personality differences in how they adapt to new situations or cope with stress. Answer his or her questions clearly – keeping in mind the general parenting advice about other "tricky" topics like sex – just answer the question being asked. If you don't know the answer to a question, let your child know you will find out or that you can ask at the first session.

Even if you have done your best to set the stage, some children will not remember what you told them. Don't worry or be embarrassed when you meet the practitioner – this happens a lot – and he or she will go over the basics and fill in any gaps.

After the assessment is completed, the feedback will be shared with you in an interview and in written form with a report. This can be a long meeting with lots of words! Sometimes when children reach 10-12 years of age, they may be given the option of attending all or part of this. Many clinicians will offer a mini-feedback with your child as well – tailored to their attention span, tolerance for the "spotlight", and vocabulary and comprehension. Visual tools may be used to support the presentation, and they may be given a summary sheet to take home. This can be an important process, not just for **what is said** but also demonstrate **respect and appreciation** for the child's involvement. Again, we are setting the stage for them to be involved in their education and ultimately their ability to advocate for themselves.

The concept of LD can be difficult for a child to understand because it can be complex and subtle. Children often draw a **direct line** between struggling at school with something like reading or math and being "stupid" or "not as smart as others." Unfortunately, they have also had this idea reinforced by others' comments. By the time a child reaches the age of seven or so, he or she has become much more "tuned in to how they compare with others – they pay attention and notice. All of this can make the idea of being intelligent and even sometimes having special talents, but not being able to read or spell as well as most kids, very difficult to grasp. It may take a while, and lots of experiences (especially if a child's sense of competence has been challenged or discouragement has started to set in).

A simple explanation is usually the best, and information does not need to be provided all at once. Rick Lavoie, in an article on the Attitude website, highlights a few important details to include in your ongoing discussion:

- Remind your child that they are capable of learning (you can give clear examples of this in a variety of situations from school or outside of like athletics, music, art etc).
- Explain that they learn in a way that is unique to them, and may require them to participate in activities and programmes that are different than those of their peers or siblings.
- Their unique learning style will pose challenges for them with some activities, and so it take them longer to master some skills. They may need to keep trying, and stick with things before feeling like they are successful. Reassure them that they will "finish the race" but they may need to take a different route to get there.
- Their learning disability or difference is not their fault, and they have the support of home and school.

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Putting your child's "profile" in the context of all people of all ages having *preferences* in they way they learn can be helpful. The LDAO Soar booklet also describes this can be referred to as a *learning style* and refers to different modalities – reading, listening, doing, watching, and talking. There are also *learning abilities* – strengths and weaknesses. The psychoeducational assessment should have provided information about both of these areas. When describing this you might want to share your own experiences and self-reflection on your style/abilities. You might ask your youngster to give their opinion of what they've noticed about you (if you're brave!) re: learning.

You can also talk about struggles you experienced growing up (or even as an adult) learning how to do something. Those of us who have not grown up as digital natives are not nearly as technologically savvy, or skilled at videogames as our children – so this can be a good example. You can use this to talk about how you cope!

Including conversations with your child about their strengths can be helpful as well, but it will be important to "keep it real." Children are pretty good detectives when it comes to false compliments, or exaggerated reactions to accomplishments. A list of strengths in different areas has been provided to help you have this conversation, and maybe even broaden your perspective on characteristics and skills that should be noticed.

One of the most important aspects of this discussion is what will happen now to make things go more smoothly in the future. Emphasize working **smarter not harder** – sometimes children think they are going to have to spend even more time with school work. Here, you can talk about leveling the playing field by removing obstacles to learning (e.g., too much printing on a page), changing the way a subject is taught/explained, offering some strategies/tips/tricks to learning subject matter (i.e., toolbox), providing access to technology. Engaging your child, if they are ready and able to do this kind of problem solving, in the discussion of what they think might help is ideal.

You can mention or discuss how research is showing us that the brain continues to develop throughout or lifetime, and that it can change by using it and "exercising" it by trying new ways of learning and practicing. New connections can be made – there is hope that things will get better.

Talking with your son or daughter about privacy, and that they have control over who to share information with will be important. This can be especially important for a youngster who may lack "filters" or who acts impulsively. Also, respecting their need for confidentiality within the family and among other adults is your obligation.

> The role of effort (vs. making attributions related to traits) should be an underlying theme moving forward. Similarly, LD needs to be framed as an **explanation** for what is happening with regard to learning, but not as an **excuse**.
>
> Knowledge is power.

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High School and Beyond

Students with a diagnosed LD, even those who may have been relieved to understand why they were having academic problems as a younger child, may struggle to acknowledge their continued difficulties as they transition into secondary school or college/university.

The desire to "fit in" and belong with their peer group trumps the potential benefits using assistive technology or seeking academic support. Concerns about being or looking different from the mainstream can be very strong. Fears that they *are or may be perceived* as "stupid" may resurface with a vengeance.

Another developmental task for teens and young adults is to establish their independence from parents and other adults. Sometimes this translates into wanting to try to succeed without anyone's advice, support, or practical help. Attempts to provide the aforementioned assistance may be met with anger and rejection.

Practical roadblocks may interfere with seeking assistance. For example, students with a nonverbal LD who have visual-spatial deficits may have difficulty navigating the larger high school or university environment. They may get frustrated trying to find the student success centre and give up. Similarly, the need to move quickly from one class to another may challenge the student with slower processing speed to formulate his/her thoughts quickly enough to ask a teacher or instructor for help at the end of class.

Expectations for self-advocacy and independence in secondary school can be dramatically different than in elementary school. Implementation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) can look very different, and requires more effort from the student (and parents). There tends to be less oversight and monitoring by individual teachers, or the school's resource staff. Special education resources are offered, teachers (especially in math/science) regularly offer extra help during lunch hours/after school, librarians can be a great resource for accessing resources for projects – but the student needs to take the initiative in using them

For college/university, documentation is required to verify the LD and *the student must him or herself initiate contact with the student success centre* to access accommodations and other supports. No one will seek them out!

Anxiety, a not uncommon cousin to an LD, about approaching a teacher or instructor may prevent students from disclosing the need for accommodation or extra help. This may result in delay/avoidance, procrastination with assignments, and becoming overwhelmed by mid-semester.

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How you can help now and in the future....

Start early and revisit the LD issue often throughout a student's educational career. Create a shared vocabulary for discussing learning differences and style. Respect you son or daughter's privacy within and outside the family. At the same time, it is important to keep the LD diagnosis in its place – it is a part of, but does not define who your child is!

Share your own experiences with formal education/learning as well as your own self-awareness of strengths/weaknesses. Invite them to help you solve problems that allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and competence (e.g., digital technology, mechanics, drawing etc.). Link their help to their *strengths* (e.g., skill with tools) and *effort*.

Model asking for help/clarification, running into a roadblock and working through it, coping with disappointment/frustration, self-advocacy.

Involve students in outside activities that focus on their strengths and interests.

Your role needs to shift from *director* to *facilitator* as your child moves into adolescence and young adulthood. Provide the tools for success. Be there for encouragement, problem-solving/trouble shooting, and the provision of an environment at home that is conducive to learning (whatever that means for your student's preferred learning style).

"Outsource" homework/assignment completion, if it becomes too fraught with emotion and conflict.

Involve the student in school meetings about their IEP or other relevant issues (timing will depend on your student's maturity/readiness). Prepare them for meetings by reviewing what the agenda will be, discuss their role (e.g., observer/listener, self-advocate), chat about what issues they would like to raise or have you mention in a meeting.

Demonstrate to your student that you value education through your own actions. At the secondary school level, participating in school council can help to keep you informed about resources available, deadlines (e.g., application for special programmes like CELP or admission to postsecondary), and programmes that may be of value to your student. Often such information resides in the bottom of knapsacks. It can help you develop supportive relationships with other parents as well.

Help your student translate their learning differences, skills and interests into everyday behaviours and experiences.

We live in a culture that can set people up for unnecessary disappointment and feelings of failure by suggesting that you can be anyone or anything you want. Very few talented and competent teenage hockey players make it to the NHL. Always have a plan B or plan C.

Disclosure of Diagnosis Across Development
LDAO Family Conference – October 19, 2919
Presented by Rose Freigang – Insight Psychology on Norfolk

Support your student to set *realistic* goals for postsecondary education and career. Although it is important to dream big and think about many possibilities for the future as a young person; supporting a dream that is outside the realm of possibility does not do your child any favours. If your student has really struggled to obtain credits in science – even with appropriate supports and accommodations; then becoming a vet is not likely an achievable goal. Becoming a vet tech, however, may be.

Participation in summer jobs, volunteer opportunities, and co-operative learning experiences are a great way to help your student make decisions about what they would like to do in the future without having to make a longterm commitment. They can learn some of the "soft skills" – time management, following direction, customer service etc. – here as well.

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Building On Strengths

Types of Strengths in Kids

By Amanda Morin

Children have many different kinds of strengths. Sometimes these strengths are obvious, like when a kid is really good at drawing or playing sports. But some strengths can be harder to notice—like being a good listener or working well in groups.

Recognizing and talking about these strengths can help your child thrive. This is especially true for kids who are struggling in school. Use this list to help identify your child's strengths.

Character Strengths

- Honest and trustworthy

- Caring and kind
- Helpful
- Empathetic
- Loyal
- Hardworking
- Resilient
- Independent
- Cooperative
- Eager
- Curious

Social Strengths

- Shares, takes turns, and can compromise
- Tries to be a good conversation partner and not interrupt too much
- Puts effort into making friends and keeping them
- Is a good listener
- Likes to help and is sensitive to the needs of others
- Accepts differences in others
- Asks for help when needed
- Has ways of coping when frustrated (like not hitting)
- Knows when it's OK to follow the crowd and when to resist peer pressure
- Accepts personal responsibility for actions (good and bad)
- Can be redirected away from a negative situation to a positive one
- Doesn't argue when told by adults what to do
- Tells the truth and can apologize when needed
- Has a good sense of humor

Language Strengths

- Uses words to express needs, wants, and ideas
- Likes talking to people
- Participates in discussions at home, at school, and with friends
- Can change tone of voice when telling a story or asking a question.
- Tells stories that have a clear beginning, middle, and end
- Uses age-appropriate grammar
- Uses lots of words and likes learning new words
- Likes learning the words in songs
- Likes listening to stories
- Can answer "who," "what," "when," "where," "why," and "how" questions in conversation (or about a story)
- Understands jokes, puns, and sarcasm

Literacy Strengths

- Can rhyme and do other tasks that involve understanding the sound structure of words
- Enjoys reading or being read to
- Seeks out fun things to read like magazines and comic books
- Can sound out unfamiliar words
- Can easily recognize sight words
- Understands and uses written information (like following written directions)
- Can remember details and retell stories after reading them
- Can make predictions based on what's happened so far in a story
- Can pause when reading and return to that sentence after being interrupted
- Reads with expression, like the way an actor talks on TV shows
- Can figure out what new words mean by looking at the context or asking questions
- Makes connections between reading material and personal experiences

Math and Logic Strengths

- Has strong number sense, like being able to quickly compare groups of items and know which is larger and which is smaller
- Sees and understands patterns in nature and in numbers
- Remembers math facts (like 5 + 4 = 9)
- Can do mental math ("in your head")
- Uses math concepts in the real world (like cutting a recipe in half)
- Understands math terms used in word problems
- Solves puzzles or word problems
- Likes playing games that involve strategy, like chess
- Likes taking things apart and figuring out how they work

Study Skills Strengths

- Understands and sets goals
- Can plan ahead
- Is a self-starter
- Can ignore distractions and stay focused on tasks
- Can think about something in more than one way (flexible thinking)
- Keeps information in mind long enough to use it in some way (working memory)
- Organizes thoughts and physical items like a backpack
- Follows rules and routines well
- Can keep track of time and obligations
- Can recognize and try to control "big feelings"

- Can pause to think through decisions or choices
- Can learn from mistakes and solve problems
- Self-advocates/asks for help
- Can work or play independently
- Works well/gets along well one-on-one
- Works well/gets along well in groups
- Has a growth mindset and believes skills can improve with effort

Other Strengths and Talents

- Is creative
- Likes drawing and doodling
- Can dance, act, sing, or play a musical instrument
- Can swim or play sports
- Practices yoga, mindfulness, or meditation
- Is gentle with animals and/or younger children
- Enjoys entertaining people by telling jokes or stories
- Likes doing community service projects
- Likes problem-solving in video games

Get tips on how to talk to your child about strengths and challenges. You may also want to try a hands-on activity to identify your child's strengths—one you and your child can work on together. If your child has an IEP, you might want to do this before your next IEP meeting.

While your child's strengths are top of mind, learn about the best ways to praise your child's efforts and achievements. You can also download activities to help your child develop a growth mindset.

Key Takeaways

- Identifying kids' strengths is just as important as focusing on their challenges.
- Some strengths may be easier to notice than others.
- Developing a growth mindset can help kids improve executive function and other kinds of strengths.