

## Collaborating With Other Adults to Address Your Child's Learning Difficulties

How do you work with all of the adults who interact with your child? What should you share with them? What can you expect from them?

### Forming Partnerships

To support your child in his efforts to learn, you'll need to work with school staff and other professionals (<http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=88&d=3>), such as his pediatrician, tutor, or counselor. Since you know your child best, you have valuable insights and information to share. While you may not be familiar or comfortable with the school environment or a clinician's office, your participation is important. Together you can get a better understanding of your child's strengths, learning problems, the school process, the professional's contribution, and what you can do.

Collaborate with the adults who direct your child's activities outside of school, too. Explain his special needs to the coach, scout leader, or religious advisor to help them understand him better. If he's going to thrive on the sports field or in social groups, the leader may need to approach him differently to make sure he can succeed and build self-esteem.

**You'll be the primary gatherer of information from all of the adults who interact with him.** Remember to keep a notebook, file folder, or other method of storing data about your child so that it'll be at your fingertips when you need it.

### Communicating

Share what you know by staying in touch with these adults through notes back and forth, quick check-off forms, email, voice mail, or informal conversations.

- Inform them of your child's talents, interests, and strengths to build self-esteem.
- Successful strategies at home may also work at school or in community activities — and vice versa.
- Help them understand your child's special needs and the accommodations (<http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=77&d=5>) that make him successful.
- Let them know what your child finds rewarding to keep him motivated.
- Communicate regularly with everyone involved. Don't wait until things haven't been going well for awhile.

Be sure to **inform them of issues at home** that could affect your child's learning, attention, or emotional well-being, such as:

- Changes in his health or behavior.
- Parental disagreement over his needs and education program.
- Family structure, including shared-custody, single-parent, or non-traditional households, if you feel it is having an impact on your child.
- Sibling rivalry — arguments and fights may occur between brothers and sisters because they think he gets more of your attention and/or has different rules.
- Your family's cultural traditions and customs if you feel it is having an impact on child-rearing, education, and learning disabilities (LD).

- Environmental pressures, including homelessness, marital problems, family illness or death, domestic violence, substance abuse, emotional abuse, and financial difficulties.

In the spirit of collaboration, **don't be afraid to ask the professionals to do these things:**

- Use plain words, not jargon, so that you can understand what's being discussed.
- Schedule appointments so that you can have someone else attend with you — a spouse, family member, or friend.
- Ask for copies of written reports.
- Ask for suggestions on how to manage problems.
- Ask what you can do to help your child at home.
- Request recommendations and referrals for information and support.

### **Some Reasons to Keep Trying when Communication Breaks Down**

Getting help for your child can be a complicated and emotional process. Because of this, there will inevitably be misunderstandings or even impasses in communication between you and the other adults working with your child. As frustrated as you may become, remember there are many good reasons to set aside emotions and try again.

If you are upset with a teacher's behavior, for example, and you don't communicate with her for awhile, you may be creating some unintended consequences, such as:

- Putting your child "in the middle." By not talking with the teacher, you may force your child to be the one to explain to his teacher why she hasn't heard from you;
- Losing the chance to regularly express your feelings and concerns about the issues your child is struggling with;
- Losing the opportunity to work in a timely way with the teacher on addressing problems that have an impact on your child's school performance;
- Increasing the chances that your child's valuable, skill-building homework may "fall through the cracks" because you and the teacher no longer form a "seamless" system for monitoring homework.
- Having the teacher think that the lack of communication is a sign that you've given up trying to help your child, which may negatively affect her expectations of him.

For all these reasons, it can be very worthwhile — even if you feel the breakdown in communications was not principally your fault — to try to repair the connection with the other adult who plays a role in helping your child.

### **Finding Community-Based Support**

Kids with learning difficulties are more likely to succeed in school when their parents have help from community-based organizations that serve families with special needs, such as human services and advocacy agencies. Some places where you might find this help include:

- Counseling and family discussion groups at religious or medical centers.
- Classes, workshops, and public events at museums.
- Music, visual arts, and performing arts instruction at theater groups and cultural organizations.
- Activities, sports, and arts and crafts at parks, recreation centers, YMCAs, and YWCAs.
- Literacy programs and resources at libraries.

- Opportunities to make friends in new environments through Big Brothers/Big Sisters and scouting organizations.
- Opportunities to learn new skills through youth mentoring and volunteer programs.
- Help with schoolwork from learning centers, homework clubs, and tutors, available through schools or privately.

### Putting It All Together

To parent a child with LD successfully, you'll need to think creatively. Try not to let yourself get bogged down in anger (<http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=291>), resentment, helplessness, or other negative feelings or waste your energy debating the unfairness of the situation. Concentrate on developing a team (<http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=88>) to ensure your child's success. Keep lines of communication open, and make sure your child stays informed and involved. With help from the family, school, community, and other professionals, kids with LD can and do succeed.

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#### About the Contributors

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