

~ Talking to Children About Their Learning Disabilities ~

~ Providing Hope ~

Even with all the helpful suggestions on how to help a child with a learning disability as outlined in last month's newsletter, one of the most important pieces you want to make sure not to overlook is to: TALK TO CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR LEARNING DISABILITY!

Explain what a learning disability is

Many parents report that they don't want to talk to their children about learning disabilities for fear that talking about it will make the child feel different; however, avoiding talking about it can create a sense of denial that inhibits their child from seeking the help they need. It should also be noted that children who lack an understanding of their learning challenges may be at risk of developing depression or anxiety disorder; therefore it is crucial that each child understand their learning differences. It also helps them recognize that it's not their fault that they don't "get" certain things.

Many children with learning disabilities may not even understand what a learning disability is, or that they even have one. They may just recognize that they are different, and because they have no other way to explain their learning differences, they feel they are just plain stupid or that no one can help them because their brain "is broken". This can be remedied by discussing with them what a learning disorder is. Begin by stressing that nothing is wrong with them. Explaining that it is a neurological glitch that creates differences in how the brain is wired may be more easily understood by older children; for younger children, using less technical terms will make it easier for them to understand. An example would be using a traffic analogy:

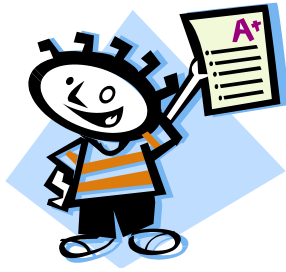


First, explain that all learning takes place in the brain, then explain how your brain is like a highway and cars are what transports information to different areas of the brain. Each area holds different kinds of information – words, numbers, sounds, feelings, and much more – you can call these areas garages. When you learn new things, the information travels in the cars on the highways, heading toward specific garages. Similarly, when you want to get information you already learned, 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.

When you have a learning disability some of the highways in your brain have traffic jams. Sometimes it can be a quick traffic jam and sometimes it can feel like forever! You will probably get to where you need to go but it may just take a long time because the cars move very slowly. Having a traffic jam on your highways to the reading, writing or math garage can cause a lot of problems – mixing things up and causing you to confuse sounds, numbers and letters. This can leave you feeling very frustrated, angry, bored, annoyed, tired, or not caring any longer.

There are tricks that special teachers can teach you to make learning easier – you can call these tricks "side roads." Using side roads help cars get to where

they need to go faster; although they are sometimes unpredictable because of obstacles like traffic lights and stop signs. Even if you use a side road you may still make mistakes, but it's still 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 get much easier and you make fewer mistakes.

Remind the child that all the parts they need to be smart are in their brain. Nothing is missing or broken. It may take a little longer, but eventually the information gets where it needs to go.

Remember, just because a child has symptoms of a learning disability or disorder, does not necessarily mean they have one. There are many other physical or emotional situations in life that affect a child and can cause symptoms that mimic a learning disability such as psychological disorders, medical conditions, a traumatic experience, or a major life event (moving, family divorce, death, bullying, etc.). It is always important, and recommended, that you seek out a professional diagnosis.

Finding Hope

In conclusion, there is hope for those that struggle with a learning disability or learning disorder. While there is no “cure” for learning disabilities, because that is how a person is wired, science has made great strides in understanding the inner workings of the brain. One important discovery is called *neuroplasticity* – the brain’s ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections and brain cells throughout life. This discovery has led to groundbreaking treatments.

New programs have been developed to work based on a child’s strengths to give them new opportunities to learn and grasp information. Strategic brain exercises are designed to identify and strengthen weak cognitive areas. These exercises are easy for a child to perform, giving them the ability to be successful. With further research, these discoveries may lead to additional new treatments that target the actual causes of learning disabilities, rather than simply offering coping strategies.

Remember success is possible!

For more in-depth information, go to any of the following website sources.

(Sources: www.helpguide.org; www.wired2learn.org; www.ldonline.org)

Summer Learning

The months of rushing to get homework done, and kids to bed on time and up in the morning to get to school on time, is quickly coming to an end as another school year is completed! Now, it is on to the lazy days of summer and the famous three words every parent loves to hear, "I am bored!" Help fight the summer boredom and keep your children engaged in learning all summer long with these tips!

Drive Home Math and Spelling Skills – A fifteen minute car trip is a great time to review math problems and spelling words. Play a game with your children and spell as many summer-related words as you can. Or challenge them by asking how many addition or subtraction problems they can solve in the time it takes to drive to the grocery store. Create a routine and keep track of how much you spend with this activity – you'll be amazed at how much practice time you'll rack up.



The Research – The largest summer learning losses for all children occur in mathematical computation; an average of 2.6 months.



Read Every Day – No list of summer learning activities would be complete without reading. Reading with a child is one of the most educational and enjoyable pastimes around. Your local library is a valuable resource and often will host special events throughout the summer. Make sure that you and your child have a library card and explore the shelves together. Take turns reading to each other and, if it is not already part of your bedtime routine, set aside 30 minutes each night to *get into a good book* with your child. Barnes and Noble has a summer reading program where your child can earn a FREE

book by reading. All they have to do is read 8 books, log them in a reading journal (available free in stores and online), take the completed journal to the store and choose a FREE book from the selection!

The Research – At the middle school level, reading four to five books over the summer has a positive impact on fall reading achievement comparable to attending summer school.

Write Every Week – Ask your child to write a weekly letter to his or her grandparents, relatives, or friends. Encourage him to keep a summer journal. Have her write the family's grocery list. Organize a secret pal writing project for adults and kids at your church or in your community.



The Research – More freshmen entering degree-granting postsecondary institutions take remedial writing courses than take remedial reading courses.



Do a Good Deed – Encourage your child to help out neighbors or friends. He or she can volunteer with a local group or complete a service learning project. As a family, chose one (or more) fundraisers to get involved with each month such as fun runs or family festivals.

The Research – Students learn better and "act out" less when they engage in activities to aid in their social-emotional development, such as community service.

Go Outside and PLAY – Find ways to ensure your child is active for 60 minutes each day. Have him or her walk the neighbor's dog, go swimming, play badminton or soccer, take walks, or go for family bike rides. Take a family field trip to a local park or historic site. Kids love animals and nature, and can learn lots about science while having a ball.



The Research – Intense physical activity programs have positive effects on academic achievement, including increased concentration; improved mathematics, reading, and writing test scores; and reduced disruptive behavior

FUN ACTIVITIES!



Play Ball! – Let America's favorite pastime give your kids a mental workout this summer. The Science of Baseball is a free web site that offers fun and interactive games (test your reaction time, the science behind a home run) as well as some great historical information (the girls of summer). An entertaining alternative when the game is rained out!

Teach kids to cook – Cooking can help keep kids' minds sharp, as recipes entail math and reading comprehension. Get kids started in the kitchen by giving them some simple tasks around dinnertime, like preparing the salads or helping peel the potatoes. If kids enjoy their time in the kitchen, involve them more when prepping the main course, making sure they read the recipe and help measure the ingredients.



Family Game Night – Set aside one night a week for family game night. Chess supports youngsters' analytical and problem-solving skills, and scrabble helps boost spelling and vocabulary skills. You can play the board game, or even play free online versions, if your 'plugged in' students prefer.

Encourage creativity – Summer is a carefree time for kids, and marks the perfect opportunity for them to flex their creative muscles. Encourage kids to build kites, or work with them building a bird house. Kids often love the process of creating something, and it can be a great bonding experience for parents and kids alike. Nearly every child has some artistic inclination, be it painting, singing, dancing, writing, etc. Encourage your artist to paint or draw a summer landscape, which will get them off the couch and outdoors while cultivating a talent. For the household thespian or singer, visit the local playhouse and see if there are any roles for kids in the summer play. Whatever a child's artistic inclination, the freedom of summer vacation is the perfect opportunity for kids to embrace theirs.



(Sources: www.summerlearning.org; www.readingrockets.org; www.connectionsacademy.com)