

## Learning Disabilities: An Introduction for Parents

### **Children with Learning Disabilities CAN Learn**

Learning is a life long process. Children with learning disabilities can learn if we have the skills to help them. At one time they were called slow, lazy, careless or undisciplined. Today, they are recognized as having a Learning Disability and with appropriate help they can develop the necessary coping skills to reach their potential.

**\*Remember:** *If a child cannot learn the way he or she is taught, then he or she should be taught the way he or she can learn.*

With your help and support, your child with learning disabilities can:

- **Develop** self-confidence and a positive self image
- **Use** their areas of strengths to make up for their difficulties
- **Learn** to cope at school and at home
- **Grow** into a successful capable adult

*“A Different Way of Learning Can Lead to Success”*

### **Definition**

Learning Disabilities are defined as a neurological dysfunction which interferes with the brain’s capacity to process information in the conventional manner.

People with specific learning disabilities exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. The primary cause of this dysfunction is not due to visual, hearing or motor handicap, to developmental disabilities, emotional disturbances or to environmental disadvantages.

Learning Disabilities affect 10% of the population - that’s one in every ten children.

### **Some Common Characteristics**

- **Pre - school Years:**
  - Trouble nursing, sucking, digesting
  - Delays in sitting, standing, walking
  - Delayed language
  - Overly active, early walking, running
  - Lack of or excessive response to sound or other stimulus
- **School Years**
  - Difficulty with reading, writing, spelling or mathematics
  - Difficulty expressing ideas
  - Reads but does not comprehend
  - Poor social skills, few friends
  - Cannot foresee consequences
  - Left-right confusion
  - Impulsive
  - Difficulty with abstract thinking,

- Poor gross or fine motor coordination
- Reversals in number and letters
- Difficulty following directions

All children exhibit some of these behaviours. The presence of one or more may not be significant, but a cluster of these behaviour may indicate that your child has a Learning Disability

### **Helping Your Child At Home**

It is important to remember that you are your child's parent and not his/her teacher. Therefore, your support should focus on encouragement and ability, rather than difficulties and problems. Children with Learning Disabilities benefit from having the right environment at home as well as at school. Your child may need:

- A quiet area and a quiet time to focus on school work
- Consistent discipline
- Regular patterns
- The opportunity to practice new skills in a non - academic way, e.g. sorting laundry, baking cookies.
- Positive encouragement from you and other members of the family
- A safe environment in which to practice social skills
- An opportunity for role playing to prepare for new activities.

### **The First Step: Identification**

It is usually parents who first realize that their child learn differently. Trust your instincts. Consult your paediatrician or family doctor to rule out other more obvious problems such as difficulties with hearing or vision. Then seek an assessment for Learning Disabilities.

Assessment can be done through your child's school, or by a psychologist in private practice. Learning disabilities are diagnosed fully and accurately by a qualified psychologist. A good assessment is the first step towards getting help. After the assessment is done meet with the psychologist to ensure that you understand your child's strengths/abilities and areas of need and what impact these have at both home and school.

### **What Works for Your Child with Learning Disabilities**

Research, as well as adults who have learning disabilities, tell us that the most important components of future success for children with learning disabilities include:

- Identification of the learning disability
- Appropriate special education support
- Helping the child to understand his/her learning disability and its impact now and in the future
- Someone who believes and supports the child no matter what goes on
- Good coping and compensatory skills so that the impact of the Learning Disability can be circumvented or reduced, e.g. social skills training, taped books, etc.
- Accommodation of the Learning Disability through assistive devices such as a computer, tape recorder or calculator

### **How to Get Special Education Help for Your Child**

The Education Act of Ontario guarantees your child's right to an appropriate education, regardless of any difficulties or special needs. As a parent you have an important role as an advocate in ensuring that your child receives an appropriate education.

#### ***The Process:***

If you believe that your child would benefit from special education, write to your child's school principal requesting that your child be referred to an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (I.P.R.C.). You may be requested to sign a form giving permission for a psychological assessment if one has not already been done.

When the case conference/school resource team is called, be sure that you attend. This is the pre-I.P.R.C. discussion. Important decisions are often made prior to the I.P.R.C meeting. Make sure that you have a copy of your school boards' "Parent Guide to Special Education Booklet".

- Prepare for the I.P.R.C. by writing down what you want. Be prepared to be an active participant. If you feel the need, take someone with you.
- At the I.P.R.C., it will be decided whether your child is "exceptional", i.e. has a special need, what those needs are and what placement will best meet his or her needs. There may also be some discussion about what special education program and/or services may be required to ensure that the placement can meet the needs of your child.
- When the I.P.R.C. has reached a decision you will receive a written copy of that decision. Your written consent indicating your agreement with the decision will be required. If you have any concerns, it is advisable **not** to sign the form at the I.P.R.C. Take it home with you and think about it.
- If you still have questions regarding either the identification or the placement you may request a second meeting with the I.P.R.C. by writing to the principal.
- Once your child has been placed in a special education placement, you can request a review any time after three months. A review every twelve months is mandated by law.
- Each exceptional child must have a written Individual Education Plan (IEP). The plan should contain long and short term goals, measurable objectives, present levels of functioning, regular evaluations to see if the child has achieved the objective, and a list of any special education services (personal, equipment, technology that may be required to assure success).
- If you do not agree with the I.P.R.C. decision, you have the right to appeal. Your notice of appeal must be sent to the Director of Education within 30 days of the I.P.R.C. decision. You may appeal the identification and/or the placement.