



# Nebraska Newsbriefs

Learning Disabilities Association of Nebraska

Summer 2007

## About Reading Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, and Reading Difficulties

By: Kathryn Drummond

Reading difficulties likely occur on a continuum, meaning that there is a wide range of students who experience reading difficulties. There are those students who are diagnosed with a learning disability. There is also an even larger group of students who do not have diagnoses but who need targeted reading assistance.

Many kids struggle with reading. One estimate is that about 10 million children have difficulties learning to read. The good news is that 90 to 95 percent of reading impaired children can overcome their difficulties if they receive appropriate treatment at early ages.

### How can reading difficulties be caught early?

The key is for parents and teachers to be aware of how their student or child is doing and to act immediately if they suspect a problem. Parents and teachers cannot necessarily count on a formal diagnosis as the only sign of a significant reading related difficulty.

Reading difficulties occur on a continuum, meaning that there is a wide range of students who experience reading difficulties. There are those students who are diagnosed with a reading-related disability but there is an even larger group of students (without diagnoses) who still require targeted reading assistance.

When a student has a reading-related difficulty - whether he or she has been formally identified as having a disability or not - the key is to:

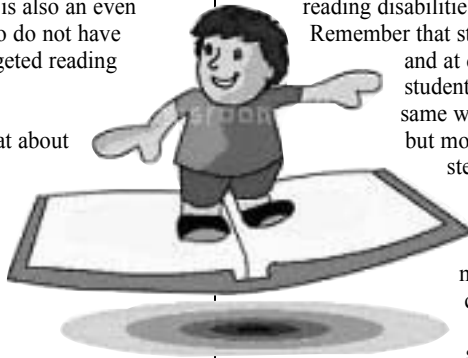
- Correctly determine the nature and source of a student's difficulty
- Provide targeted instruction to remediate difficulties and increase skills level
- Accommodate a student's weaknesses and build upon his or her strengths

### When should a problem be suspected?

Be aware of how each child is doing. A preschool student should be checked, for example, if he or she has a much more difficult time than other students in pronouncing or rhyming words or in learning numbers, the alphabet, the days of the week, colors, or

shapes.

If a student shows consistent problems with several milestones, then you may want to have him or her evaluated for possible learning or reading disabilities.



Remember that students learn differently and at different rates. Not all students will develop in the same way or at the same rate, but most students develop at a steady pace so that by the end of third grade, they are able to read grade appropriate material fluently with comprehension. It is important that a student not get too far behind in learning how to read; reading difficulties are best addressed when they are caught at a young age.

### Are there some students that are more prone to reading difficulties?

Some students are more likely to develop reading difficulties than others. It is important to know about these tendencies so students can be monitored and any difficulties caught early. Students may be more likely to develop a reading difficulty if they have parents with histories of reading difficulties; if they have been diagnosed with a specific language impairment or a hearing impairment; or if they gained less knowledge or skills related to literacy during preschool years (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

### What is the role of teaching and instruction with regard to reading difficulties?

Good reading instruction is necessary for students to learn to read. It is also no simple task. Reading and language experts have likened teaching reading to rocket science (Moats, 1998). With so many different reading components, it can be difficult to diagnose students' difficulties and find precisely the right techniques to remediate them. To be successful, teachers need strong and deep understanding of reading theory and practice.

### When is the difference between a reading "difficulty" and a reading "disability"?

Some students struggle with reading, but do

not have a diagnosed disability. These students may just lag behind their peers a bit, requiring more time to learn certain things, they may require more specialized reading instruction than has been provided, or the students may have previously received poor reading instruction. Whatever the case, these students depend on caring and insightful schools, teachers, and parents to provide them the reading help they need.

Some students are formally diagnosed with a learning disability. These students can receive special education under a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To outline the educational goals and services that the student needs to be successful, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed. For students with a learning disability who struggle with reading, reading-related support and services can be included in the student's IEP goals. According to one expert researcher, reading disabilities likely occur in at least 20 percent of the population (Shaywitz, 2003), however only about four percent of school-age students receive special education services for reading disabilities.

### What is a learning disability, in general?

People with learning disabilities (LD) have difficulty learning particular skills or academic areas. Learning disabilities are not related to intelligence. They are often physiological, in that the brain of someone with LD may be wired differently than other people's brains (though not better or worse).

### How are learning disabilities and reading difficulties related?

A large percent of learning disabilities (up to 80 percent) show themselves as problems learning to read. Reading disabilities can be associated with the term dyslexia. Dyslexia refers to persistent difficulties in learning to read. A common misconception is that a person with dyslexia sees or writes letters and numbers in a reversed or backwards way. This is not the case, however.

Dyslexia refers to a broader array of reading difficulties. Dyslexia often results from difficulties with the auditory processing part of language and hinders accurate, fluent word

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# Learning Disabilities Association of Nebraska

E-Mail: [ldaofneb@yahoo.com](mailto:ldaofneb@yahoo.com)

**President:** Stephanie Cain  
Bellevue  
402-291-8435

**Vice-President:** Deb Carlson  
Omaha  
402-731-3039

**Secretary:** Vicky Olson  
Omaha

**Treasurer/  
Membership:** Sharon Bloechle  
Omaha  
402-571-7771

## Board Members:

Fremont Kathy Rayburn  
Sara Bigsby

Omaha Brenda Elson  
Susan Schuele  
Wendy Coenen  
Maureen Penton

## LOCAL CONTACTS

**Columbus:** Nora Tonnies  
402-562-1514

**Gering:** Agnes Larson  
308-436-2789

**Kearney:** Robyn Roth  
308-263-3411

**Lincoln:** Charlene Gondring  
402-489-4621

**Norfolk:** Mark Claussen  
402-371-2036

**Ogallala:** Sue Geischen  
308-284-2106

## *From the President...*

It's hard to believe that another school year has already started! The summer months have been very busy at LDA Nebraska! Plans have been made for the annual LDA State Conference to be held at ESU #3 in Omaha on Saturday, October 27, 2007. The State Conference theme this year is "Where Do We Go From Here!" Keynote speaker is Dr. Ed O'Leary. Dr. O'Leary has spent over 30 years working in schools as a secondary Special Education Teacher, Consultant, Transition Specialist. Dr. O'Leary brings to us experience in working with college students as an instructor; work with Vocational Rehabilitation; an author's knowledge of Transition Requirements, and more. We are very excited to have Dr. Ed O'Leary as our keynote speaker. And we again have many qualified speakers and presenters preparing breakout sessions for the conference. Be sure to read more about the State Conference in this edition of Newbriefs.

LDA Nebraska has been awarded a grant from the LDA Foundation that will allow us to help parents, teachers, adults, tutors learn some strategies and to receive materials that will help them strengthen reading skills in children or themselves. The first training session for the reading strategies help class will be on September 20, 2007 at 7:00 at Bellevue West High School.

Stephanie Cain;  
President, LDA of Nebraska

## Bulletin Board

### **SAVE THE DATE!**

Have you ever asked yourself **Where Do We Go From Here?** The answer is to the 32nd annual LDA of NE State Conference! Join us Saturday, October 27, 2007 at Educational Service Unit #3,6949 South 110th Street, Omaha.

Our keynote speaker is Dr. Ed O'Leary, who has spent over 30 years working in and with schools as a secondary special education teacher, special education consultant, transition specialist, work experience coordinator, program specialist, and program director. Break out sessions will include information on transition, reading, mental health issues and how to obtain the services your student needs.

Contact Nebraska LDA by email, [ldaofneb@yahoo.com](mailto:ldaofneb@yahoo.com), or phone, (402) 348-1567 for further information.

### **Did you know?**

United Way Campaign - LDA of Nebraska is not a United Way Agency. However, as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, it can receive donations through United Way campaigns. United Way pledge cards have a donor Choice Designation where donors can write in LDA of Nebraska, P.O. Box 6464, Omaha, NE 68105

**Omaha LDA**, your learning disabilities support group in Omaha will hold an Open House Tuesday, September 18, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM at The First Christian Church, 6630 Dodge St (across from the UNO Durham Science Center).

Come chat with other parents and professionals, find out about upcoming support meetings. Also learn about the Nebraska LDA reading grant

### **Alert!**

Omaha LDA will be sending out notices of upcoming meetings by email only. If you don't have email, call us at (402) 348-1567. If you aren't sure you are on our list, send a note to: [ldaomaha@yahoo.com](mailto:ldaomaha@yahoo.com).

*Thanks for all your support!!!*



11204 Davenport Street • Omaha, NE 68154  
Tel: 402-333-8869 • Fax: 402-333-9878  
Email: [frogscopy1@aol.com](mailto:frogscopy1@aol.com) • [www.FrogsCopy.com](http://www.FrogsCopy.com)

*LDA of Nebraska is a non-profit nationally affiliated volunteer organization of parents and professionals dedicated to helping children and adults with learning disabilities. LDA does not endorse or recommend any institution, school, treatment or person. We provide support, information and advocacy for our members.*

*Letters to the Editor may be sent to:*

**Maureen Penton**  
**5702 Mason St. • Omaha, NE 68106**  
**[ldaomaha@yahoo.com](mailto:ldaomaha@yahoo.com)**

# Risks & Rewards of Living with Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities can affect skills in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, mathematics and reasoning - skills that adults must use every day in fulfilling their roles as family members, employees and citizens. They may occur with, and be complicated by, problems in attention and social skills.

The experiences and hardships you may have had as a child with LD don't always go away during the adult years. In fact, they may hold you back from reaching your goals, even though you may not recognize it.

Recognizing the risks and rewards of having a learning disability as an adult is the first step in helping you to manage your LD and lead a successful life.

## The Risks

### Limited Educational Opportunities

Not all educators understand or are responsive to the needs of people with learning disabilities. When teaching methods are not appropriate, people with learning disabilities may become frustrated and experience failure. This may cause them to drop out of educational programs or make them afraid to enter other programs.

### Limited Vocational Options

People with learning disabilities may have trouble finding and keeping a job. Limited literacy skills and poor organizational skills are also factors that might result in low job satisfaction and underemployment. Some employers may not understand the nature of learning disabilities or know if they have a legal responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations.

### Isolation

Adults with learning disabilities may misinterpret others' gestures, facial expressions and tone of voice. They may have trouble responding appropriately in social situations. This may



cause some adults with learning disabilities to be isolated from others, both at work and in their communities. Adults with learning disabilities may feel inadequate and incapable. They may remember being teased, criticized, or even rejected by their peers. As a result, they may have a poor self-image and lack the confidence to try new things.

### Difficulty with independent living

Adults with severe learning disabilities may have difficulty with tasks such as writing checks, filling out forms, taking phone messages and following directions.

### The Rewards

#### Creative Problem-Solving

Adults with learning disabilities must learn to work around their disabilities. This experience allows them to think "outside the box", often leading to more creative solutions and imaginative answers to problems.

#### Outgoing Personality

Many adults with learning disabilities develop outgoing personalities in an attempt to compensate for their learning problems.

#### Strong Compensatory Skills

To make up for their learning disabilities, many people develop strong skills in other areas.

#### Persistence

Often, people with LD do not give up when attempting a difficult task. Despite frustrations, they keep trying until they meet with success.

#### Empathy

Persons with learning disabilities often provide support and understanding for others. Because they themselves have experienced the frustration that can result from having a learning disability, they can be that much more supportive of others.

*Reprinted from The Missing Piece, Newsletter of the Learning Disabilities Association of Washington, Vol. 1 Issue 3*

## Meet A Board Member

The Learning Disabilities Association of Nebraska board includes parents, educators and other professionals. They all have one thing in common: they volunteer their time to inform other parent, educators and the general public about the hidden handicap of learning disabilities.

In this issue we present the second in a series to introduce you to the board.

### Meet Deb Carlson, Vice President of LDA Nebraska.

*Tell our readers a little about yourself*

I was born in Boone, Iowa but have spent most of my life in Nebraska. I attended Elementary School in Central City, Nebraska and moved in Jr. High to Schuyler, Nebraska where I completed High School. I attended Midland Lutheran College in Fremont, Nebraska and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education K-6 and Special Education K-12. I began working for the Bellevue Public Schools in 1985 as an Elementary school teacher. I later switched over to an Elementary Resource teacher and for the past 8 years have been a Secondary Resource teacher at Bellevue West High School. I received my Masters of Science degree in Learning Disabilities from the University of Nebraska at Omaha 3 years ago.

*How did you get involved in LDA?*

I became involved through LDA by a co-worker who is currently the President of the Nebraska chapter, Stephanie Cain. She had me go to some conferences with her and later she and Sharon Bloechle convinced me to join and become a member of the board. I have been involved with LDA for several years now and have attended several

State Conferences and have been a presenter at the past 2 State Conferences.

*What changes have you seen in special education since you first entered the field?*

Special Education has changed a great deal from when I first started in the field. They have changed the requirements for qualification and early identification. Children are getting services sooner than in the past. Programs are now in place for services to begin at birth with some services being in place before birth. They have added more categories to identify students eligible for services. The new trend is now trying to focus on response to intervention (RTI) before referring a student for special education testing. This could delay the referral process even longer than the time it already takes for the testing to be completed. Many teachers are already using RTI because it is just good teaching practice.

*What concerns you most about the current trends in special education?*

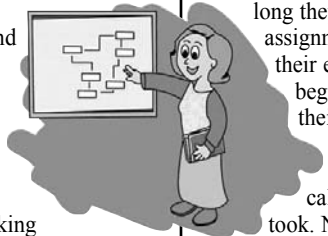
RTI (Response to Intervention, see Nebraska Newsbriefs Fall 2006) worries me because I feel that more students will not be referred because teachers will feel that it takes even more time to determine if a student could receive services. There is a big movement toward Differentiated Instruction (DI) to help those students who are having difficulty but some students will still need further supports than what DI provides. I want teachers and parents to feel that they are continuing to have a voice in the education of students and that the current laws are not hindering them in finding the appropriate services needed for their students.

# 15 Strategies for Enhancing Processing and Ordering Skills

By: Alice Thomas, MEd. and Glenda Thorne, Ph.D.

The following strategies are offered for enhancing graphomotor skills. This listing is by no means exhaustive, but rather is meant as a place to begin.

1. **Take the Mystery Away.** Teach students about simultaneous/spatial and successive/sequential processing and ordering and about organization strategies. Help students understand their processing and ordering strengths and challenges. This process is sometimes called demystification - taking the mystery away.
2. **Everything has its place.** Teach students to choose specific places where certain materials are kept. The places may be color coded and labeled. Prompt students to return materials to the same place once they have finished using them until this behavior becomes habitual. Help students with developing and implementing these strategies.
3. **Assign time for getting organized, and model the behavior.** Teachers should assign class time each week for "getting organized" or "staying organized". Make it the same time every week. For example, devote 15 minutes every Monday or every Friday to reorganizing notebooks, backpacks, lockers and/or desks. Parents should also designate a set time each week for all family members, including parents, to reorganize their things. Teachers and parents should model these behaviors.
4. **Use Post-Its to transport math steps.** Many students who are challenged by sequencing skills have trouble remembering the steps to solve math problems. They may benefit from writing the steps on a Post-It and moving the Post-It from problem to problem down the page as they are solving problems.
5. **Chunk it!** Students who have difficulty with time management will benefit from guidance in planning long-term assignments and projects. They may need



- to divide the work into "chunks" and adhere to a schedule that requires them to submit their work "chunks" in stages to help them keep on track.
6. **How much time does it take?** It can be helpful to ask students to estimate how long they think a class work or homework assignment might take. Have them record their estimate and the time that they begin the assignment at the top of their assignment. Then ask them to record what time it is when they finish the assignment, and calculate the total amount of time it took. Next, have them compare their estimate with the actual time spent. If their estimates are way off, encourage them to keep a log of their estimates and their actuals to see if their time estimating skills are improving.
  7. **Use a variety of formats.** Information on any topic should be presented to all students in a variety of formats including spatial and sequential. For example, teachers could present an outline in the traditional sequential format as well as in a spatial mind map format.
  8. **Talk it out.** Students who have spatial challenges may need sequential verbal explanations given to them. They may benefit from written explanations and/or descriptions of the information contained in charts, graphs and/or diagrams.
  9. **Use charts, graphs and mind maps.** Many students who are challenged by sequencing skills may have difficulty developing traditional outlines. They may find it more productive to use ordering strategies such as charts, graphs or mind maps that provide a spatial arrangement of information on a page. Also, if they are artistic, students may want to draw pictures to represent a complex concept.
  10. **Line it up.** Elementary school students who have challenges lining up math problems may want to use graph paper a way to keep their math columns in order. Students may also turn regular notebook paper sideways and put their numbers in

- the columns that the paper then makes.
11. **Get inspired.** Students who are strong in simultaneous/spatial processing and ordering but who are challenged in successive/sequential processing and ordering may benefit from using Inspiration, a software program that organizes concepts and information into visual maps.
  12. **Give choices.** For writing assignments, allow students to choose whether to follow an outline or graphic organizer in the planning stage. Key words, such as who, what, where, when and why, may be used as guides.
  13. **Use landmarks.** Students who get lost easily should try to identify specific landmarks to guide them. For example, they may remember that math class is just down the hall from the picture of Albert Einstein. This same strategy can prove to be helpful other settings such as shopping malls.
  14. **Use mnemonics.** If a student has trouble remembering the steps in a math process, such as long division, it may be helpful to use the first letter of each word to make up a saying that she can remember, such as Dirty Myrna Smells Bad for the steps in long division (divide, multiply, subtract and bring down), creating a mnemonic for remembering the steps.
  15. **Write it down.** All students will benefit from using a plan book or a personal digital assistant (PDA) to remember important dates, events and assignments. They may keep a copy of their daily schedules and their locker combinations taped inside the front cover of the plan book so they are easy to find when needed. Teachers can reward daily use of plan books or PDAs by using a Positive Points for Planning (Triple P) system that applies to student grades.

*Reprinted from the CDL website  
Center for Development and Learning  
A nonprofit organization dedicated to  
increasing school success for all children*

## EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA!

*Are you a parent who wants to teach their child to read?  
Are you a retired teacher who misses the one on one with students?*

### **You're in luck!**

The Learning Disabilities Association of Nebraska has received a grant from the LD Foundation of America that will enable us to develop a training class for tutors to learn how to teach reading skills to individuals with learning disabilities.

LDA of Nebraska will be offering training for volunteer tutors.

Emails are preferred, [ldaofneb@yahoo.com](mailto:ldaofneb@yahoo.com), but you can also call our office, (402) 348-1567.

# Why Is High School So ADD - Unfriendly, and What Can You Do About It?

by Kathleen G. Nadeau, Ph.D. (1998)

## High school years can be some of the most ADD-unfriendly years of your life.

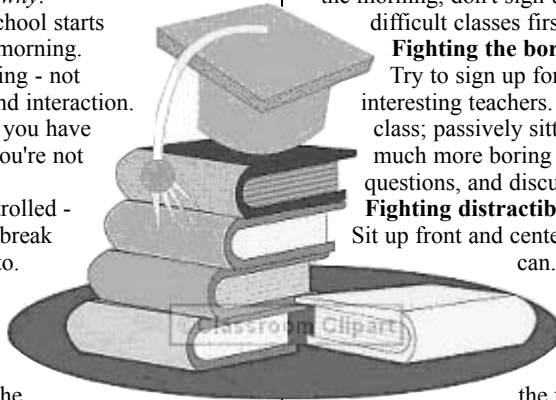
Let's take a look at why:

- Fatigue - high school starts too early in the morning.
- Too much listening - not enough action and interaction.
- Boring classes - you have to take classes you're not interested in.
- Your day is controlled - you can't take a break when you need to.
- Negative teachers - sometimes the subject is interesting, but the teacher is boring or has a negative attitude.
- Distracting - it's hard to concentrate in noise and confusion.
- Day is too long - it's impossible to concentrate for seven periods.
- Too many rules - very little independence or freedom.
- Too much homework - you can't work all day and at night too.
- Not enough high-interest activities - if you don't keep your grades up, you can't do the extracurricular things you like.
- Have to sit still - even when you feel restless.
- Too many things to keep track of - notes, assignments, and projects for six or seven classes.

High school may never be your ideal environment, but there are things you can do to make it better! Although you can't change many factors that make high school so difficult for students with ADD, here are some strategies that can help:

### Fighting the fatigue factor

Try to get to bed earlier at night. Pay attention to your "best" times of the day, and



take your hardest classes at these times. If you feel half asleep when you get to school in the morning, don't sign up for your most difficult classes first or second period.

### Fighting the boredom factor

Try to sign up for the most interesting teachers. Get involved in class; passively sitting for hours is much more boring than talking, asking questions, and discussing ideas.

### Fighting distractibility

Sit up front and center in class if you can. You'll be less distracted by other students and more involved in class. Take notes while the teacher is talking;

this will help you maintain concentration.

### Dealing with restlessness

Keep something with you to manipulate with your hands - a nerf ball or small rubber ball that makes no noise. But don't let yourself be tempted to toss it to a friend, or your "help" will become a "hindrance." Get regular, daily exercise. Try to arrange your schedule so that you have periods of activity interspersed throughout the day-lunch, PE, art or shop, chorus, band, etc.

### Coping with homework

Do homework in small bits - on the bus, before class, when you first get home, just after dinner. Dividing homework into small bits is easier than sitting down to a two-hour stretch in the evening. Get a tutor to teach you how to write and study more efficiently. Many people with ADD spend too much time on homework because they haven't learned effective study techniques. Get help to get organized: an assignment book, a folder in your backpack for daily assignments; a large calendar above your desk at home so that you can visually mark out longer term projects.

### Your resource teacher or guidance

## counselor can also help make school more "ADD-friendly"

Work closely with your academic advisor to choose your courses each semester.

### Customize your registration.

Ask for customized registration rather than computerized registration. This will let you carefully choose the best periods to take your most difficult subjects. Take them at the times of day when your energy is highest.

### Work hard to develop a good relationship with your teachers

Teachers usually work hard to help students who seem involved and motivated. Try to get them to help you solve your problems. Don't wait until there is a problem before you talk to your teacher about your add. Let your teacher know you are trying.

### Attend summer school

Consider taking a really tough course in summer school, when you can concentrate on it without all of the competing courses and activities of the school year.

### Consider community college

Explore the possibility of taking courses at the community college for high school credit. Sometimes these courses can be more interesting and challenging and can also be taken in summer school.

### Work with an ADD tutor or coach

A tutor or coach who specializes in students with ADD can teach you tips and strategies to overcome procrastination, to become more organized, and to study more efficiently.

Good luck in making your high school years more ADD friendly. Don't try to do it all alone. With the help of parents, tutors, coaches, and counselors working with you and with your school, you can greatly improve your chances for success in high school.

Kathleen Nadeau 1998 Excerpted from Help4ADD@HIGH SCHOOL

## Quotations

"I do the very best I know how--the very best I can; and mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference." *Abraham Lincoln*

"The older I get, the more wisdom I find in the ancient rule of taking first things first-- a process in which often reduces the most complex human problems to manageable proportions." *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

"Courage is very important. Like a muscle, it is strengthened by use" *Ruth Gordon*

"Some people look at the world and say "why?" Some people look at the world and say "why not?"" *George Bernard Shaw*

"Do what you know best; if you're a runner, run, if you're a bell, ring" *Ignas Bernstein*

"It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something." *Franklin D. Roosevelt*

"A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral." *Antoine De Saint-Exupery*

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has." *Margaret Mead*

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations of life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself." *John P. Webster*

"I am only one, but still I am one; I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." *Edward E. Hale*

# Parents' Top Tips for Partnering with Your Child's Teacher

By: Robbie Fanning, M.A.

At the beginning of the school year, every parent wonders about the new-to-you teacher. Will she understand your child's individual learning or attention needs? Will she recognize your child's special talents? Will this year be a successful collaboration between you and the teacher-or a struggle?

Unfortunately, there is no operating manual for your child that you can consult for easy answers to your questions. But you can learn from other parents who are experiencing the same situations. To collect helpful advice, we consulted members of our MVP (Most Valuable Parent) Research Club. These are parents who have signed up to participate in projects that help us better understand the needs of the people who visit our website.

We asked, "What tried-and-true steps or strategies have you used to foster a positive, supportive relationship with your child's teachers?" Here are their top ten tips:

## 1. Help the teacher get to know your child.

Mark Condon says, "During the first week of school, tell the teacher about your child as a person-her likes and dislikes, strengths and weakness, general personality traits, and your vision for your child in the future. The more the teacher knows your child as a person, the better she can address your child's specific situation."

Debbie Penny meets with all her child's teachers about two weeks after school starts. "I always have one or two goals for my son that I stress, like how to take notes or what to study for exams. It makes the teachers realize I am supporting my son and that together, we are partners in his learning."

Likewise, Michelle Hall gives the teacher a list of study habits and routines she and her child follow at home, "so she knows where my daughter is coming from."

Rhonda Jacobson also shares strategies with the teacher. "Keep the teacher informed about your child, including recent assessments, medical information, family situations-in other words, anything that will have an impact on your child's performance."

"Above all else," says DeEtte Wiberg, "I let them know how appreciative I am of them looking after my daughter's feelings."

## 2. Be collaborative.

Patti Maddox tells us, "I have always stated at every school meeting that we are not the enemy. We look at this as a partnership,

with the goal being to have our son succeed at education. We ask the teachers to tell us what we can do to assist them."

Margaret Franco concurs. "Treat your child's teacher as part of your team. Ask him for help and strategies you can use at home with your child-then do it! Teachers appreciate it when parents do their part."

Deborah Brownson says, "If the teacher wants to try a new strategy, I make a date in

two to three weeks to see how the approach is working out. After trying their way, teachers may be more open to trying another approach."

When the teacher alerts you to an academic or behavioral problem, Mark Condon advises, "Let the teacher know what actions you have taken with your child at home to correct these problems. It also sends a message to your child that all of you are a team that supports each other."

Martha Randolph Carr says, "I'm very careful to pick my battles and be firm when necessary but without ever making it personal. No one wants to do a bad job, and very few teachers are truly mean-hearted. If a teacher appears overworked, I ask how we can do it together."

But don't concentrate solely on problems. Annette McMillian suggests, "When I see something positive happening to better my child's learning, I let the teacher know that she is doing a good job."

## 3. Communicate, communicate, communicate!

Whether it's by email, phone, notes, or in person, our parent advisors make an ongoing effort to stay in touch with their children's teachers.

Sandy Barr says, "We communicate by email to ensure that important information, homework assignments, and project assignments are known."

Kathy Foy also emails her son's teacher at least once a week. "With email we keep in constant contact at times that are good for both of us, with time to ask and answer questions."

Michelle Hall says, "I make sure the teacher knows that I am open to any discussions and to contact me before a little issue becomes a big one."

Mary Drabik adds, "Not only do I email questions and give information, I also occasionally send appropriate articles and

even funny jokes."

Carol Hudson believes that "having an open communication by way of notes and conferences with the teacher is a positive way of finding out how your child is doing in class. For example, find out what they are studying in science or history. Then talk over the homework with your child each night."

Emilie Serratelli and her husband email, phone, and stop by for chats with the teacher periodically throughout the year. She says, "In all the communications, we reassure the teacher that she is a key player in the child's care team because she spends the most time with our child."

## 4. Be even-tempered.

Mary Peitsso advises, "Don't try to lay blame on anyone. Attempt to deal with the issues at hand in a non-adversarial manner."

Amy Moore says, "Use 'I' sentences, not 'You' sentences-for example, 'I am concerned that my child is stressing about too much homework,' instead of 'You give too much homework!'"

Nancy Ficaró always tries to be "as positive as I possibly can when working with my daughter's teachers. I also let them know that I fully understand that working with a child who requires extra attention is not always easy, especially when they are trying to juggle the needs of the rest of their students."

Pam Swayne reminds us that being "even-tempered" applies to your child, too. "When my child wants me to intervene at school, I don't react emotionally. Instead, I have him write out a list of what he wants to talk to a teacher about. Then we both go in. He does the talking, and I support."

## 5. Put it in writing.

Susan Morgan and her husband have found that the best way to partner with their daughter's teachers is "to put everything in writing and to document requests, questions, and notes. We are always well-prepared for the trimester conferences based on documentation to and from each teacher."

Kim Klupenger also puts it in writing. "Every month, I write a brief summary of how my child is doing at home-what areas I am seeing improvement in, what we have been doing to further our mutual goals, and what struggles we have been experiencing at home."

## 6. Join forces to help your child get organized.

Together, you and your child's teachers can help your child get organized. As Robin Joslin relates, "At the beginning of the year my son's teacher established a folder method: every child has a folder in his or her

(Continued on Page 7)



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## Parents' Top Tips

*(Continued from Page 6)*

backpack, so if anything needs to come home, she puts it in there and the kids don't lose things. She also checks each folder every morning for anything that has been returned. With the folder system, I know she gets my notes."

Jana Boswell has a similar approach. "The teacher and my child keep a daily assignment book. At the end of each class my child stops by the teacher's desk, has the teacher check what assignment she has written down, and has the teacher initial that day. It takes 15 seconds out of the teacher's day, and it gives us something to follow at home."  
*7. Participate in the classroom.*

S. Barend advises, "Taking interest beyond your child helps foster a good relationship with the teacher. Nothing is a substitute for being in the classroom."

Karen Peterson volunteers not only in her daughter's classroom, but also for her daughter's resource teacher. "My goal is to relieve the teacher of some routine tasks, so that she has more time and energy to invest in creating ways to help my child succeed in school. I benefit greatly by being more connected to what is happening at school—especially since my daughter is so non-communicative about her day."

Lana Baeten volunteers not only in her daughter's room, but for any teacher who needs help. "This helps me establish a relationship with the other teachers, which helps when my daughter advances to the next grade."

One computer-savvy mother, Debbie Johnson, volunteers by using clipart to create calendars and signs they need in the classroom.

Jackie Brennan assists the teacher by making computer-generated forms, such as assignment sheets. "These efforts," Jackie points out, "benefit all of the students."  
*8. Sweeten the relationship.*

Susan Weans suggests, "Show teachers that you are grateful. Buy them presents and cards. Ask them—sincerely—how they are. Give them things to pamper themselves."

"Don't be afraid to be creative," says Danelle Ivey, "On two occasions I recruited a few friends, and we cooked lunch for the faculty. Even if you work outside the home, you can still feel involved at school by donating serviceable outgrown school clothes or uniforms to the school for emergencies."  
*9. Stretch the teacher's awareness of learning and attention problems.*

Teachers have a lot on their plates each day, especially general education teachers, who have to cover a curriculum with all kinds of learners. You can help them stretch their awareness about learning

difficulties by providing them with well-researched information.

For example, Jill Lewis provides her son's teachers with "fact sheets about dyslexia and about how dyslexia impacts him specifically."

Similarly, Danelle Ivey prepares supplemental material. "Most of the time a teacher is handed a stack of IEP papers with no background or knowledge of the child. Instead of assuming someone from the school would discuss and explain my child's IEP to the teachers, I did it myself. I explained the rationale behind certain modifications or what was meant by some of the more unusual items on the IEP."

Adrienne Lopez says, "When you disagree with a teacher over your child's education, it best to support your argument with facts. Many times I have emailed or printed out copies of articles from websites like SchwabLearning.org, with expert advice on helping children with learning disabilities or special needs. Many of the strategies I have suggested have helped other children in the classroom as well."  
*10. Know your rights and responsibilities.*

"The very best thing any parent of a child with special needs can do," says Patti Maddox, "is learn the rules and laws that govern the schools. Find out what are the school's responsibilities—and then make sure you understand your own responsibilities."

*Robbie Fanning has a Master's in Instructional Technology, with an emphasis on online and distance learning. Her goal is to help parents (and grandparents) help their kids write better.*

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## About Reading Disabilities

*(Continued from Page 1)*

reading. This, in turn, can result in problems with understanding what is read.

### How can I help?

When a student has difficulty with reading, it can be overwhelming to teachers and emotional for both parents and students. The more that is learned about reading and the specific problem, however, the less overwhelming things will seem.

Parents and teachers can act on behalf of a student who struggles with reading by trying to pinpoint the nature and source of a student's difficulty, by increasing skills levels, and by building upon his or her strengths.

*Reprinted from Reading Rockets.org*

*Kathryn Drummond, Ph.D. is a research analyst at The Access Center, a part of the American Institutes for Research, funded by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs.*



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