



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Countercultural Parenting, Part 4 SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS

Quick fix, instant gratification and intolerance for long-suffering are too prevalent among our youth. Heroes of counter-culture teach children how to plan their work and work their plan, to hang-in overtime with a project, to foster a sense of industry that implies a work ethic of consistency, continuity, and finishing whatever one starts. This formation begins at home and then extends to school and extracurricular interests.

The effort required to establish helpful schooling attitudes is hard under the best of conditions. But it exacts from parents and teachers heroic patience, creativity, and organizational skills when children have special learning needs and/or an attention deficit disorder. It also calls for sensitivity to counteract poor self-esteem from developing. It may be helpful to read books and to discuss with children people who have become successful despite having special learning needs. For instance, Leonardo DaVinci had several learning disabilities, dyslexia, ADD and epilepsy. Einstein, considered the greatest physicist of all time, and George Washington, our first president, were both dyslexic. In addition to dyslexia, Edison, Disney, "Magic" Johnson, Tom Cruise, Whoppi Goldberg, Woodrow Wilson and Winston Churchill also suffered with attention deficit disorder. And ADHD did not interfere with Robin Williams' ability to entertain the world. Consistent effort, organization, coping skills and goal setting are the hallmarks of success for all learners, particularly those with special learning needs.

LEARNING DISABILITIES

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (www.nclld.org) defined learning disabilities as permanent neurological disorders of the central nervous system that interfere with a person's ability to store, process, or produce information, therefore creating a 'gap' between ability and performance. Generally, individuals with learning disabilities are of average or above average intelligence. With intervention, children can learn to compensate for learning disabilities and even overcome areas of weakness.

The most common instances of learning disabilities include **dyslexia** (language processing), **dysgraphia** (writing, spelling, organizing written composition), **dyscalculia** (math skills, memory of math facts, concepts of time and money), **dyspraxia/apaxia** (motor coordination of body movements), **auditory discrimination** (difficulty recognizing speech sounds and sequencing sounds into meaningful words despite normal hearing and vision), and **visual perception** (difficulty in noticing important details).

ADD & ADHD

Attention Deficit Disorder with or without Hyperactivity is a complex condition. The symptoms include (1) **inattentiveness** (careless mistakes, forgetfulness, not listening, being easily distracted), (2) **impulsivity** (acting without thinking), and (3) **hyperactivity**. These same symptoms may be signs of other conditions like allergies, diabetes, anemia, neurological problems, stress, depression, or a learning disability. Consult a doctor if the symptoms appear for more than six months and are negatively affecting relationships, schoolwork, or self-esteem.

All children, particularly those with ADHD tendencies, benefit from an environment where adults:

- increase security, i.e., structure, routine, system, procedure, adult predictability
- reliably enforce clear boundaries and expectations
- define rules clearly and simply
- use respectful, related consequences
- acknowledge both effort and achievement
- break a task into several steps
- post chores, duties, schedule
- eliminate distraction and noisy stimulation
- establish goal setting that is practical, manageable, and arranges for small successes

ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

It has been said, “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” Though a bit extreme, it has a kernel of truth. Parents teach organization through very structured steps. For example:

- Establish bedtime and wake up time that allows for morning routine, transportation to school, and lunch arrangements. Be firm about bedtime.
- Designate a personal box or space where a child stores all school materials. i.e., book bag, projects, gym clothes, permission slips, etc.
- Preview the day’s schedule. Add reminder notes.
- Insist that your child maintain a homework log to track requirements. Establish clear guidelines regarding maintenance. If child shows a pattern of neglect, require a teacher signature.
- Label and color-code, if possible, books, folders, portfolios for each subject.
- Establish a place for homework that is free from the distraction of TV, telephone, e-mail, electronic games, refrigerator, etc.
- Schedule a time for homework. If no homework is assigned the child devotes the allotted time to review, read ahead, or work on a long-range project.
- Pre-plan long-range assignments on a calendar. Use “to do lists” and post-it notes for emphasis and prioritizing.
- Limit “free choice time” on school days for TV, video games, and social use of the Internet.
- Provide parent supervision daily, then weekly, until the process becomes second nature.

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