

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Red Ladder Optimized Learning Staff

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If your child or teen has special learning needs—for example, a learning disability or learning difficulty such as ADHD—various adults may be involved with him or her. To parent your child successfully, you need to think creatively. Parents are often the most important ally and advocate for their child with LD or ADHD, but it's important to concentrate on fostering a team approach to helping the child. Keep lines of communication open. Keep your child involved and engaged. It's unfortunate that many parents get bogged down with anger, resentment, and hopelessness that amounts to a waste of energy.

In addition to the classroom teacher and music and gym teachers, an educational aid may work in the classroom, and your son or daughter may see school resource staff, a school psychologist, occupational therapist, or speech-language therapist as well. Your family doctor or pediatrician is probably involved, as well as a tutor or counselor outside of school. And don't forget about the grown-ups leading extracurricular activities: a coach or instructor in sports, as well as group leaders or religious leaders may be central to your child's life and growth.

Collaborate with all of the grown-ups in your child's life. Meet each one and know their role with your child. Support each of them as they work to help your child. Share your insights. (Remember, you know your child better than anyone.) Help the adults to understand your child, so they can help your child to thrive.

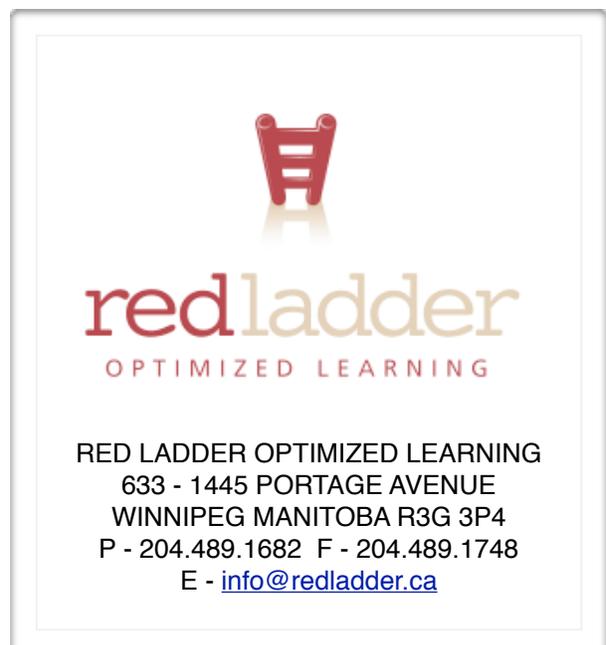
Use a notebook or file folder to store key information about your child. Have information handy you when you need it. Throughout your child's school career, you will likely be the one who does the most to collect and coordinate information about your child. Give people the information you think they need. Ask if there's anything else they want, and do what you can to get it for them.

Chances are that there will have been contact between last year's teacher and your child's new teacher. But it's important that you contribute as well. Make sure the new teacher is informed about your child's personal and learning strengths as well as his or her challenges. Provide your child's new teacher with your views about your child's academic and behavioural needs, as well as information about what has been positive and negative in the past, motivating and demoralizing. If your child has an Individual Education Plan (IEP), be sure everyone is working the plan.

Remember that your child's teacher wants to help: the information you provide may focus the teacher's approach to helping your child. Tell the adults working with your child that you want to know both the positive and negative things that happen when they're involved. Offer yourself as their ally.

Tell adults anything you think he or she needs to know about your child's home life. If the teacher knows about issues currently affecting your your child, or likely to affect her, he'll be better able to understand and help your child, should changes appear. For example, do your child's athletic or artistic activities take a lot of her time and energy at certain times of the year? Are there significant health concerns in the family now, has there been a death in the family or marital discord? Is a change coming in a parent's occupation? It may be good to say something about your family's religion or culture. Is the language spoken in your home something other than English?

Your input at the beginning of the year can be helpful, but stay conscientiously involved throughout the year. Talk with your child every day about how school is going, including academics, extra-curricular activities, and friendships. Monitor schoolwork, and show interest in class and extra-curricular activities. Stay informed and involved so that you have opportunities to compliment your child on steps toward self-improvement, so that you can thank and encourage the adults



working with him or her, and so that you know when things that are going well and recognize early on when things start to go wrong.

Solving problems.

If your child or teen tells you about something troubling, listen carefully to what he or she says. What exactly is the problem? If your child complains about his teacher, don't take sides. Listen, work at problem-solving, but reserve judgement until you have a chance to speak with the teacher. On the other hand, if a teacher or other adult raises the concern, clarify when, where and why the problem seems to present itself. Since you've invited the adults working with your child to consult with you, be sure to follow-through as an ally when they do. Respond promptly and openly to school requests and notes. Remember that listening is the most important first step in problem-solving, and the worst step to miss.

As problems emerge, adopt a problem-solving approach. When you speak with one of the adults working with your child or teen, describe your concerns objectively. Brainstorm. Identify strategies to tackle a problem at home, at school, or wherever it emerges. Make a plan. List specific steps you,

your child, and the teacher or coach or doctor can take to address the problem most effectively. Agree on how and when to follow up, and follow up as planned. Review progress and revise the plan if needed. Keep your child or teen informed about his progress.

Don't talk about teachers or others in inappropriate public and social situations. Definitely don't criticising teachers in front of your child. Young children tend to love their teachers, and negative comments from you will be confused. If an older child or a teen overhears negative remarks about a teacher, he may turn defiant or rebellious in class. Don't go to the principal unless it's really clear that an issue can't be resolved directly with the teacher.

Never forget to demonstrate your appreciation to the adults who help your child. When someone has encouraged or shown a helpful understanding of your child, thank them promptly. It's help like this that boosts your child's confidence and makes him an eager, effective learner and participant.

Be your child's best advocate, but be a helpful advocate. Remember that with the support of family, school, community, and other professionals, kids with LD can and do succeed. □

