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Learning Disabilities & Child Behavior

(this article's content is also included in the article "Disability Issues & the Wild Child")

PROCESSING DIFFICULTIES & DIFFERENCES

Children with Learning Disabilities (Learning Disorders), or who are considered Learning Different process, integrate, and retrieve information differently, and/or have weaknesses in their processing, integration, and retrieval mechanisms. **Learning Disabilities are not grown out of, nor do they go away.** The technical definition is a substantial difference between a child's academic achievement and what is expected for someone his/her age. LD's include deficits in visual perception, linguistic processes, auditory processes, attention, and memory.

Examples of LD's include:

A child who clearly hears instructions but is inefficient in processing the information into short term memory. He/she then "forgets," and gets in trouble. In reality, this is the result of an auditory processing problem;

A child who is not as efficient as other children in retrieving information from his/her cognitive storage, and takes more time to find the answer to a question. Unaware that the teacher has gotten a correct answer from the other children and has asked a new question because he/she had been concentrating on finding the answer, the LD child gives out that answer for the previous question. His/her correct answer (to the previous question) but incorrect answer (to the current question!) is seen as him/her being funny by his/her classmates, but as being disruptive by the teacher.

A child is attentive and understands the materials presented, and participates appropriately verbally in class, then turns in an unclear jumbled written assignment with disconnected thoughts. Criticized for poor effort, the child actually has an LD processing problem that makes it difficult and confusing as he/she tries to put ideas and opinions in written form.

A child is a very slow reader and is making very minimal progress becoming a better reader. He/she is thought to not care and/or mentally deficient. The child may have an undiagnosed visual perception learning disability creating difficulty in distinguishing the differences in letters that are "mirrors" of each other: "b" & "d", "p" & "q", "M" & "W", "Z" & "N".

MISDIAGNOSED & MISUNDERSTOOD

LD children are often misdiagnosed. They are seen as mentally deficient, or resistant to learning. They are often criticized for not paying attention and being lazy. They are constantly being told to try harder. Their motivation is questioned- adults often think they don't care. The lack of learning or progress is sometimes seen as the child being defiant.

Having encountering failure after failure despite tremendous effort, being constantly criticized and harangued, feeling tremendous frustration, and having had his/her self-esteem



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devastated, the LD child may start acting out and fulfill the negative criticisms of being a lazy, unmotivated, stupid, and defiant child.

TRYING AS HARD AS THEY CAN- "JUST STUPID"

LD children are constantly being encouraged and admonished to try harder, and constantly being doubted that they are trying hard. LD children, like other children try very hard to please their parents and children, and to be accepted by their other children. So, they try very hard.. and then try even harder...and harder. They try as hard as they can, but their learning disability may prevent them from being successful; and prevent them from satisfying or pleasing the important adults and from not being labeled negatively by them and the other children.

As they try and fail, try harder and fail, try as hard as they can and still fail, LD children are stigmatized by adults and other children as being stupid- worse, they believe themselves to be stupid. After all, all that trying just proved it. LD children are often demoralized and their self-esteem destroyed. Loss of self-esteem in LD children, as in all children makes them vulnerable to a tremendous number of other negative behaviors (emotional problems, relationship problems, violence, defiance, substance abuse, and so forth).

COMPENSATION- TRY DIFFERENTLY, NOT TRY HARDER!

The key to successfully helping LD children progress comes from first, recognizing that the child's lack of success or progress is not due to other issues (especially negatively judgemental issues); second, successfully identifying the specific learning disability or learning difference that the child has; and third, training the child to use compensating techniques and/or skills.

This type of instruction is specialized and drawing assistance from and using specially educated and trained professional resources is usually required and recommended. Not all schools have staff that are equipped to do this.

There is philosophy in some educational programs to put LD children in a less demanding academic environment, give them easier work, and allow them to "succeed" in that way. As a result, some LD children complete public school, get a diploma, and are sent into advanced academic programs and/or the work world without any acquired compensatory skills or techniques to function successfully with their learning disability in the real world. And, then they fail.

Parents need to forcefully advocate for their children to be taught **LD Survival Skills!** and not just be passed through schools.

Biography

Ronald Mah, therapist and educator, combines concepts, principles, and philosophy with practical techniques and guidelines for effective and productive results. He uses humor and stories from his many experiences to illustrate important points in a stimulating and highly motivating and engaging style.



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A Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, his experiences include: Asian-American community mental health, Severely Emotionally Disturbed mental health & school partnership programs, vocational programs for at risk youth, welfare to work programs, clinical consulting & cross and multi-cultural training for Head Start, other early childhood education programs, social services organizations, & mental health agencies, supervising a high school mental health clinic, training and supervising therapists, private practice in Castro Valley, author of the Asian Pacific Islander Parent Education Support curriculum.

Professional Education experiences include: 16 years in ECE, including owning and running a child development center for 11 years, Kindergarten, elementary, & secondary teaching credentials and experience, ethnic studies curriculum writer, community college instructor, Masters of Psychology instructor, and former member Board of Directors of the California Kindergarten Association and of the California Association of Marriage & Family Therapists.