



WHEN YOUR CHILD IS HAVING PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL. . .

Children who have developed normally prior to school age, may still begin to exhibit learning problems as early as kindergarten and first grade. Parent and school staff can work together to determine what is impacting the child's progress, and how best to address it.

The first thing to remember is that all children want to succeed and do their best. If they are not, it is because something is hindering their ability to do so. There are various factors parents need to consider when a child is not doing well in school. What specific school tasks are difficult - learning letters, how to put letters together into words, or beginning computations? A sustained difficulty in a particular academic area may indicate the need for evaluation of a "learning disability". Parents should not panic at the word "disability", as this can also be viewed as an alternative learning style. Once the teaching approach matches the learning style, these children will learn and even excel. Address concerns to the teaching team, in written form, and ask for evaluation.

Did the learning difficulty surface following an illness or family crisis? Caregivers may want to consult with the teacher and school guidance counselor to determine if the child is distracted or preoccupied by emotional issues. If there is tension in the home because of a job loss or even a seemingly positive event such as the birth of a sibling, they may show their worries in poor academic performance. Allowing the child an opportunity to talk about concerns, being reassured that they are not at fault, and that caring adults are there to support them can alleviate upset. They may then need remedial help, in the form of tutoring, if they have fallen behind.

What if the problem is more annoying, taking the form of seemingly willful misbehavior, such as shouting out answers, throwing tantrums, or getting into fights with peers? The idea that these children want to succeed and do their best still holds true, and should guide parent and teacher investigation of the problem. Does the child need additional training and guidance from parents and guidance staff in how to handle frustration, or conflict with peers? Could caregivers benefit from family counseling to help them better model and teach these skills? Does the child have opportunities to interact more appropriately and enjoyably with peers after school - play dates, trips to the playground or organized recreational activities? Children want to have friends, and be like by their peer group in general. What does the child gain from throwing the tantrums - attention, dismissal from a subject they do not enjoy? Attempts to consequence a behavior can sometimes reinforce it. Behaviors such as these may also be

another indicator of a learning disability or alternative learning style. When the child feels unsuccessful in their attempts to learn, they may act out their frustration.

The Greenbelt community has many resources for evaluating and addressing such school issues, counselors at Greenbelt CARES, a wide variety of recreational programs, and concerned principals, guidance staff and teachers at the local schools. The key is to bring the issues to the attention of the appropriate resources in a timely way, so the child can experience the success and recognition they naturally seek. For more information, there are numerous web sites for information on children's learning styles, including SchwabLearning.org, and www.wrightslaw.com.

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