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Understanding Why Your Child Has Been Recommended for Testing

By Sandy Gauvin

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You have just received a call from your child's teacher explaining that she has noticed your child having difficulty in school. Your child is not understanding math or reading the way the other children do. So she would like your permission to proceed with testing to find out if he has a learning disability.

When this happens, it is always a good idea to meet with the teacher in person. Being proactive is extremely important to your child's educational future. Arrange to sit down and talk with the teacher to discover specifically why she has recommended this. You may want to include the special education teacher as well, as she may be able to further clarify just what they are seeing that is causing them to question your child's abilities.

One thing you have to understand is that just because a learning disability is questioned, that does not mean that your child isn't smart. It just means that, for some reason, he's either not able to access those smarts and is not "getting" what is being taught. Or, he may be having difficulty expressing what he has actually learned.

One indication that there is a problem might be that the child gets very good grades in math, but his reading is below average. He is not reading at the same level that most of the other students of his age are reading at. There is a big difference between his learning in math and his learning in reading. If he is old enough, there may be standardized test scores that also show that huge difference, and the teacher should be able to show you that information.

You may have noticed other indications at home but thought they were just "kid things". If you ask your child to do 2 or 3 things in a row, does he forget most of them? When you ask him a question, does he have difficulty expressing the answer? Is his room always disorganized? Does he have trouble socially?

These are some of the questions you might want to think about as you talk with the teacher and ask if she notices them in the classroom.

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It is important you realize that by doing this, you are not putting your child down or complaining about him or labeling him as a "bad kid". You are discussing the facts of what is actually going on, or not going on, with his learning. You are acting in his best interest.

Do not hesitate to ask questions about anything you don't understand. The teachers will not think that you are stupid or inadequate. The area of Learning Disabilities can be very confusing and overwhelming to anyone. It is best that you understand what is going on right from the beginning.

When the teachers have explained the symptoms to your satisfaction, then it is time to find out what will happen from here. Ask specific questions about the testing, how best to address your child's concerns and how to minimize any "stigma" your child might experience as a result of being tested.

Remember, you are the parent. And everyone is here to help your child.

For more up-to-date plain talk about learning disabilities, please visit us at www.ldperspectives.com.

Sandy Gauvin is a retired educator who has seen learning disabilities from many perspectives - as the parent of a daughter with learning disabilities, as the teacher of children with learning disabilities, and as an advocate for others who have diagnosed and unrecognized learning disabilities. Sandy shares her wisdom and her resources at www.LDPerspectives.com

So, My Child Has Been Recommended for Testing – What Do I Do Now?

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So, My Child Has Been Recommended for Testing – What Do I Do Now? by Sandy Gauvin

You've just received a call from your child's teacher. As your blood pounds in your ears, you hear her explain how she has noticed your child having difficulty with some academic subject in school. Your child is not understanding math or reading the way the other children do. So she would like your permission to proceed with testing to find out what exactly is causing the problem.

So what do you do next?

The first thing is, Don't panic. This referral for testing simply means that she's asking for your permission to find out whether a learning disability is evident, or, if not, how she can help your child. She wants to know 1) how your child learns best, 2) where the child's learning strengths are, and 3) where his learning weakness lie. This does NOT mean she thinks your child is stupid or that you are a bad parent. She sees that your child does very well in many areas of learning, but there are one or two areas that are really just not "clicking".

When your child is referred, it's always a good idea to meet with the teacher in person. Arrange to sit down and talk with the teacher to discover specifically why she has recommended an evaluation. What is she seeing that causes concern? Can she show you some samples of your child's work that illustrate

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the problem? It's a good idea to include the special education teacher in the meeting as well. She will be able to further clarify why these indicators are cause for concern. She can also explain the referral and evaluation process to you.

One indication that there is a problem might be that the child gets very good grades in math, but his reading achievement is below average for his age or grade. He is not reading at the same level that most of the other students of his age are reading at. There is a big difference between his learning in math and his learning in reading. If he is old enough, there may be standardized test scores that also show a huge difference. Ask the teacher to show you that information.

You may have noticed other indications at home, but thought they were just "kid things". If you ask your child to do 2 or 3 things in a row, does he forget much of your instruction? When you ask him a question, does he have difficulty expressing the answer? Are his room, his book bag, or his locker always disorganized, making it difficult for him to find things? Does he lose his assignment book or his homework frequently? Does he have trouble socially? Does he have trouble paying attention? What does the teacher see at school? Ask her.

Realize that when you talk about these things with the teacher, it does not mean that you are complaining about your child, or that you think he is "bad". What you're really doing is discussing the facts of what is actually going on, or not going on, with his learning. You're trying to help him. You're acting in his best interest.

Don't hesitate to ask questions about anything you don't understand. The teachers will not think you are stupid or inadequate. The area of Learning Disabilities can be very confusing and overwhelming to

anyone, and it is best that you understand what is going on right from the beginning. That way you can make an intelligent decision regarding your child's future.

It is important to find out what will happen once you give permission to have your child tested. The special education teacher will be able to explain the referral and testing process to you. Use her as a resource to answer any questions you might have and explain anything you don't understand. That way you can be informed and help your child through the process as well.

Know your child's rights from the beginning. When the process begins, you will be sent a copy of your child's rights. If you don't understand them, or if you suspect that a right is being compromised, don't hesitate to speak to the special education teacher, the principal, or the special education director.

These are things you can do to help your child and yourself through the referral process. They are all part of being informed so you can advocate for your child, and so you can make sure he receives the best services possible in order for him to have a successful, happy, productive future. Remember, it's in your hands!

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