

Seven Steps to School Success

By Lisa Harp

Ok, so your kid's not doing well in school - maybe bringing home C's, and some D's and F's. Yet, you know he's a bright kid! His vocabulary is astounding and when you talk about the universe - the stars, the galaxy, comets, and the general relationship between man and his world, his understanding is remarkable. All along you thought this kid was gifted. Yet, you can't read his writing. Capitals, periods? Unheard of. The content of his written work is phenomenal if you can muddle through it. Math? A struggle at best. Reading? A nightmare to listen to out loud, yet he seems to understand what he's reading. Of course, he hates to read. I know this child, because I had one. (He's now an honor roll student). I also work with similar children daily in my private practice. I know they are bright. I know they are creative. Yet the schools don't seem to recognize the brilliance within these children. So, what should a parent do?

- Don't allow your child to be labeled. LD, ADD, dyslexia - these all give him an excuse not to live up to his full potential. The labels allow him to feel different, not as good as the other kids, and believe me, he does not feel "special" when he goes to special education. Also, most schools just water down the curriculum, lower the expectations, don't actually treat the problem at hand, just the symptoms, and collect their money for a special education student. The actual processing issues at hand are not addressed.
- Work on the process, not the symptoms. Schools and most learning centers treat and mask the symptoms. They don't actually deal with the processing issues at hand. There are numerous programs, activities, and exercises available to correct learning problems. The most common learning issues I deal with are eye muscle issues where the muscles of the eye turn in and a weakness in visual memory, which is where the student is unable to keep a picture in his mind for very long. This usually explains why reading, spelling, and memorizing math facts are so difficult for this bright child. These are correctable learning issues.
- Understand that some days the school work is truly too difficult and that on other days it is easily accomplished. Just because he understood it yesterday doesn't mean he will remember it today, especially if his visual memory skills are weak. One exercise that helps a lot is to give the student a paper and pencil. Draw a combination of about four figures, letters, shapes, or numbers, such as D#9>. Show it to the student for about 5 to 10 seconds and then take it away. Now have the student write the combination on his piece of paper. Check to see if he copied the shapes correctly and discuss. I give points for correct answers and make a game of this.

- Keep the student involved in what he is good at - baseball, soccer, gymnastics, tennis - whatever motivates him. I often encounter parents who take away these activities because the student's grades are poor. This only adds to an already poor self esteem. A great activity to help a struggling learner is martial arts, not only for the focusing and discipline involved, but also because the student is constantly crossing his vertical midline, and this helps to coordinate the left side of the brain with the right side. I have noticed that most kids who stick with martial arts long term have reasonably good grades.
- Don't do marathon nights with homework. Most districts have guidelines about how many minutes of homework a child should have. If your child is in the 5th grade and is spending three hours a night on homework, then this is too much. Contact the teacher and principal if necessary and have the work load decreased. I am constantly amazed that so many parents don't know this and feel they have to work for hours on end every evening on homework that usually isn't even worthwhile.
- Regularly work on simple eye exercises. 80% of what we take in is through our eyes. I consistently find strain on the visual system of kids who struggle in school. No, they usually do not need glasses. What they need is to strengthen their eye muscles. One way to do this is to purchase an eye patch. Put the patch on the child's eye. Move a pen or pencil in front of the unpatched eye. Move it slowly back and forth, diagonally, and in a circular pattern. Next, patch the other eye and repeat the procedure.
- Turn off the television. Unplug the video games. Limit computer time. Play board games and cards. Get those kids outside and exercising. Children sitting in front of media are not actively learning. This is passive learning, and it will only hinder school learning. Too many parents think that if they plug in an educational game or movie that learning is taking place. Yes, that is true, but kids today are inundated with technology, causing their brains to become lazy in a sense. Without even getting into the current problem with childhood obesity, please understand that the body and the brain are connected, and those kids need exercise and interactive learning in order for their brains to work properly.

There are many more things that you can do to help your child succeed in school. There are numerous learning programs available. Anything done is better than nothing. So, you are on the right track to start getting help for your child.