

## **Are They For Real?**

### **Understanding who to Trust with your Child's Learning Differences**

**By Lisa Harp**

In this modern age of digital products, internet, technology, and more information available than ever before, how do you know who to trust with your child's learning differences? When my child had learning disabilities in the 1990's, there was very little information about this subject, and the internet was an infant compared to what it is today. I remember researching auditory processing problems on the internet and finding two entries! I had to go to the library, take courses, and research the old fashioned way.

I was lucky. I had college degrees and over a decade of teaching experience at the time. I was able to practice what I learned not only on my own children, but on a plethora of students who came my way on a professional level as well.

Unfortunately, there are many people, especially on the internet, who are just wanting to pad their pocket books and are not really interested in actually helping your child. Often, these people have pirated other people's material, changed it a little, and make claims that are untrue or hard to imagine. Usually these people are excellent marketers, but often they know little or nothing about the field of education or how to actually help a student who has learning disabilities.

If you are a parent with a struggling student, it is easy to get pulled into the promises, hope, and false information that may be bombarding you by these people. Following are some helpful hints to let you know how to find a trustworthy source to help your child overcome a learning challenge or learning difference. It can be done, but it must be done by experienced, educated, and knowledgeable people who care about your student's learning success!

1. Be aware of claims that an intensive, short program will correct your child's learning problems. It takes time, work, and effort to make this happen, and a weekend course will not be the miracle you are looking for.

2. Research the people who are making the claim. They should have college degrees, specifically in the field of education, and actual experience working with students who are learning disabled. Check their Facebook ,LinkedIn page, or Twitter accounts. They should mention their college degrees and then you can research if they

are telling the truth by contacting the actual university. Also, call them up and ask specifically how many students they have personally worked with in an educational setting. Drill them on how, where, what they were paid, etc. If they are vague, they are probably lying.

3. Be aware of claims that the person selling a product or program has hired a “team of educators and psychologists” to help them come up with this program. If this is true, they will be happy to provide you with a list of these people’s names and their phone numbers, email addresses, and addresses. However, a team of this magnitude would cost a fortune to hire and most educators and psychologists would not be interested in doing a project like this when they could do their own for their own financial gain as well as getting their name and degrees well known. Anyone who has a college degree is aware of the amount of work and expense it takes to accomplish this and is probably not interested in letting someone else use their degrees as a front for a product.

4. Check for an actual store front. For instance, I have two learning centers operating in Northern California, and I am opening a new center in Colorado. At any rate, a true professional will have a store front. Check out the addresses to make sure the address given is legitimate. For instance, there is a person selling a learning program online. Her address is 139 Main Street, Valley Springs, CA. If you research this address, you will find that it is a karate studio, not a learning center. Being a karate instructor does not qualify you to sell a program for students with learning disabilities! (If you research further, you will find that she also does not have a college degree or experience working with children in an educational setting.) I would not suggest buying a product from this person.

5. Look at the site that is selling the product or program. Is it mostly blogs, or is there information on the site about learning differences and how the person selling the product has worked, researched, and found actual successes to help these disabilities? If the site is primarily a blog, is it fresh with new insights about learning differences, or is a “reblog” of other people’s articles and materials? If it is just a “reblog”, then this person probably does not have the experience, certification, education, or insight necessary to be selling a learning product. This person is probably just trying to increase standings with Google to increase profits and does not care about really helping your child.

6. Call this person. Ask specific questions about your child’s learning difficulties. For instance, ask what you should do with your child who shows symptoms of dysgraphia. The person should be able to tell you specifically what to do, not just give a spiel about needing a comprehensive program and that you should buy their program because it will fix dysgraphia. Ask for case studies. Ask for references of people this person has worked with.

7. Be aware of programs that claim they will fix every learning disability. The program should be specific to the student’s disability.

8. Be aware of improper grammar and poor punctuation. Real educators are careful about writing, grammar and punctuation. Although educators might have a few typos, most of the time their writing is grammatically correct.

9. Be alarmed if the email or correspondence you receive is in "cutesy" marketing language. The people sending the messages are trained to sell and they probably are not interested in the outcome of your child's learning achievements and obstacles.

10. Listen to your "gut". You will know if you are being lied to. Steer away from these people, as there are many honest people who want to help your child.