TeachME PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CEUs for Teachers and Educators

Supporting Students with Learning Disabilities

Introduction

If you're a teacher in modern America, you are likely already aware of the differing levels of abilities among your extremely varied cohorts of students. To teach these young people effectively, you may have already adapted your teaching style to reach students with differing talents, learning modalities, personalities, and more.

However, when a student who has a learning disability walks into your classroom, you may or may not feel prepared to support that student - along with every other student in your classroom - as he or she needs. Moreover, you may be working with students who have undiagnosed learning abilities. As a teacher, you stand in a unique position to assist children with both diagnosed and undiagnosed learning challenges, if you can recognize them and realize what that child may uniquely need.

In this course, we will detail some ways to recognize common learning disabilities as well as some ways you can work to support the children who need it most. First, we shall look at a few case studies of educational programs that have done this correctly, to great success for all involved.

Case Studies

To begin this course on how best to support students with learning disabilities, we explored Internet resources to seek evidence of teachers, schools, and other academic programs that have done so properly. The following three case studies illustrate the difficulties three students with learning disorders have faced, as well as actions that were taken by the various schools entrusted with their care.

Case Study #1

One school recently welcomed a 7th-grade student with special needs who had previously attended three different schools. He'd, unfortunately, experienced difficulties in each institution, and no one had yet found a way to support him in a way that his disorder required. He was bright and had a great memory, but he was not able to read or write at the level normally attained by his peers. After deeming that the student had not only academic but social and emotional struggles, the school decided to prioritize gaining the student's trust. His teachers patiently taught the student the value of attainable goals in the short-term and designed a curriculum to reach out to him specifically. They gave him accommodations such as oral testing and dramatic role-

playing to help him understand concepts, and helped him reframe his way of thinking to emphasize the progress he was making (instead of his ruminating constantly on his seeming failures.) His teachers also assisted him with intensive reading and writing remediation, but consistently presented this education in a positive light. As a result of all this support, the student is now able to keep himself motivated. He is also sufficiently grounded to recognize and advocate for others who experience similar struggles. He has even had the initiative to take on leadership roles in his school and in his community.

Case Study #2

Another student was referred to the same school by the student's social worker. Previous schools had tried to offer the student accommodations and modifications based upon his disability. However, despite all of this, the student was not able to keep up with his peers. This resulted in many struggles for the student. In his new academic setting, the school first spent a considerable amount of time working with the student to understand what he specifically needed. In past schools, the student had exhibited a hard time understanding social situations. This had resulted in his being an easy mark for bullies. In addition, he often had to go to the nurse because he felt unwell or unsafe. After working with the student, the school found that the student had high reading abilities but lower comprehension than, perhaps, might be expected for one of his age. Emotionally and socially, he tended to rank as developmentally a little behind his peers. The school decided to help support the student with thorough, empathetic instruction and modeling for better organization and executive function, and clearly laid out expectations. The student's teachers helped clarify for the student important information, laid out expectations for classroom behaviors, tasks, and expectations, and ensured that other students did not take advantage of the student as he learned better to engage with those around him. As a result, the student stayed in the same school successfully for three years and enjoyed much stronger relationships with his peers.

Case Study #3

A third student enrolled in the same school after a referral by a previous school's guidance counselor. She had previously not responded well to interventions utilized by public school teachers. The student exhibited a poor understanding and comprehension of phonetics when compared to her peers, which adversely affected her ability to understand verbal instructions as well as normal conversations. Because of this, she distanced herself from her classmates, began to fall behind academically, and was not able to relate very well to her teachers. Her new teachers began to incorporate her into their classrooms with individual instruction as well as engagement with other students.

They decided on a multi-sensory learning approach, targeting ways to pass along information in many different ways. The student was invited to classes that used visual enrichment techniques as well as hands-on, very active student participation in normal academic presentations. In addition, her teachers decided to give this student as much extra time as was needed, particularly in the beginning, to allow this student to fully learn one skill before another was presented. As a result, this student learned how to be fully present and participatory in the classroom activities and discussions she had previously avoided. She became more confident, more capable, and more engaged with her fellow classmates (JCOS, 2020).

Summary: Lessons Learned from Case Studies

As these case studies illustrate, students who suffer from learning disabilities are often very smart and capable individuals; however, they often need creative, constructive, and compassionate coaching in order to progress at similar paces as their peers. While taking the time to experiment empathetically with the affected student takes patience and initiative, the results for the student can be profound (and life-altering). Many times, students who are affected by reading, writing, or phonetic disorders simply need more time, more individualized instruction, and out-of-the-box learning approaches in order to meet them where they are.

In this course, we will delve into a brief synopsis of the different types of common learning disabilities you may see in your classroom. After that, we'll talk about a few substantive, specific practices you can adopt while teaching in order to support your students who may need more specialized attention. Finally, we'll wrap up by talking about ways you can help your student's parents be more engaged and included parts of your student's educational team.

Section 1: Common Types of Learning Disabilities - What You Need to Know

While listing every student's disability entirely would be impossible, we can here introduce the most common disabilities you may need to be able to recognize and support. We've sourced the eight most recurring learning disabilities based on information from the Learning Disabilities Association of America.

Dyscalculia

Dyscalculia is a learning disability that specifically affects the ability of the student to understand what numbers are and what they mean. This necessarily impacts a student's abilities to perform math-related activities and memorize mathematics-related facts.

Occasionally referred to as 'math dyslexia' or 'number dyslexia', dyscalculia does seem to affect approximately 11 percent of children who also exhibit symptoms of ADHD. More than just affecting a child's ability to memorize the timetable, dyscalculia also makes difficult any daily situation which depends upon numbers. Students who have dyscalculia may have a difficult time with counting money, performing mental calculations, and even telling time.

The estimated number of school-age children with dyscalculia is between 3 and 6 percent (Frye, 2020).

How to tell if a student may have dyscalculia

Students may have some level of dyscalculia if they:

- Have difficulty with recalling basic equations and facts about numbers, such as easy sums like 5 + 6 = 11.
- Use their fingers to count instead of feeling comfortable using mental math for basic calculations
- Exhibit misunderstanding of math symbols (such as + or -), or variables when used in algebra
- Struggle to realize how to solve extremely simple math problems (such as 4 + 27 - 27)
- Do not know how to begin to strategize to solve a more complex math problem, even if they have just been shown how
- Do not seem to understand place value (e.g., they switch up tens' and hundreds' places, for example)
- Frequently mix up numerical or quantity-related phrases in the common lexicon (such as 'less than' and 'greater than')
- Are not able to easily keep score when watching a game or sporting event
- Run out of money because they have a hard time calculating the final bill of items

- Avoid playing any kind of game which requires them to keep track of score or numbers during the event
- Struggle to understand any information which you are showing them on a chart
- Have trouble with simple measurements, such as completing a recipe and having to weigh and portion out ingredients

Students who exhibit these signs are not unintelligent, and they can master these higher concepts in time. They will simply need accommodations and help in order to do so without excess frustration (Singh, 2018).

Dysgraphia

Dysgraphia is a learning disability that may adversely affect your student's ability to write neatly, along with the management and mastery of other fine motor skills. As a neurological disorder, it can affect both children and adults. If one has it, it likely affects all aspects of the typical writing process. This includes spelling, word spacing, word sizing, creative expression, and written legibility.

Experts estimate that somewhere between 5 and 20 percent of all children have a writing deficit—if not dysgraphia, then something like it. Dysgraphia is also common in children who have ADD or ADHD. Typically, if a student has dysgraphia, it will be diagnosed when children first learn how to write (Frye, 2020).

How to tell if a student may have dysgraphia

You may be able to tell that one of your students has dysgraphia if the following is exhibited:

- A consistent difficulty when they attempt to form numbers and letters while writing
- Markedly slower handwriting development when compared to their peers and classmates
- Inconsistent or illegible writing
- Writing that is consistently a mixture of upper and lower-case letters
- A difficulty thinking and writing at the same time - or writing while doing other activities, such as taking notes
- Any ongoing spelling difficulties that persist even after correction

- Very slow speed of writing
- A need to look at what they are writing while they are writing it at all times
- A lack of nuanced spatial skills, which may result in uneven spacing in their writing
- A reluctance to articulate thoughts or skills through writing
- Physiological barriers to long bouts of writing, such as pain or cramps in the fingers
- A very awkward grip on their pen or pencil
- Unusual positioning while writing
- A lot of fatigue, confusion, and frustration after they have finished writing

Just as with dyscalculia, a diagnosis (or suspected diagnosis) of dysgraphia does not mean that such students are ignorant or that it is impossible to help them learn to write well. Alternatively, deciding to support students with dysgraphia using non-written methods of teaching and learning may help them learn to express themselves in differing ways (Cheshire, 2017).

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a learning disability that tends to affect children of a young age with their reading, writing, and all related processing skills which pertain to language retention, use, and performance.

The main method by which dyslexia affects a person's learning ability is by an affectation of the way the brain processes the visual information it sees and the audible information it hears. For example, graphic symbols and the groupings of sounds into words can often be confused by people who suffer from dyslexia. Typically, those with dyslexia may have a difficult time with word recognition, the ability to match sounds and letters, and spelling.

As opposed to dysgraphia and dyscalculia, dyslexia is comparatively common. Experts disagree on the specific prevalence but suspect it is anywhere between 5-17% of people (Brazier, 2020).

How to tell if a student may have dyslexia

Different students may present with dyslexic tendencies very differently, but some signs may include the following:

- A postponed timeline during which the student learns how to speak correctly
- A lengthened rate at which the student learns new words
- A difficulty forming words in expected ways (for example, if the student reverses specific sounds in words, or tends to confuse words that sound similar)
- Difficulties with remembering verbal or numerical facts, such as numbers, letters, or even more abstract concepts like colors
- A difficulty learning lyrics to songs, learning nursery rhymes or acronyms, or playing rhyming games (such as hand-clapping games, either in class or on the playground)
- Struggles with learning or becoming familiar with reading at the competency which is expected for their age
- Significant and recurrent issues processing what the student hears
- An exhibited difficulty finding the words for what the student wishes to express
- Difficulties remembering the specific way in which items are ordered
- Exhibited difficulties with figuring out that different letters and words have differences and similarities
- Difficulties figuring out how new words are pronounced based upon their spelling
- Problems with learning how to spell new words (or spelling words that should be familiar)
- The student takes a very long time to complete any task which may involve writing or reading
- A specific avoidance of any activity that involves reading or writing

Even though dyslexia is considered a neurological disorder, it has nothing to do with how intelligent your student is. A diagnosis can simply help you know how best to support your student precisely where he or she already is (Mayo Clinic, 2017).

Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities

A non-verbal learning disability is any in which the affected student has any difficulties interpreting the nonverbal cues which make up much of human discourse. Such examples of these misinterpreted or unacknowledged nonverbal cues include facial

expressions and body language. As a result of these non-verbal cues missed, the affected student may suffer from poor coordination.

This disability, as opposed to (for example) dyslexia, is relatively unknown. However, experts believe that it impacts more persons than the general populace may imagine. It does cause very real difficulties for the person who has it—who finds it very confusing and troubling.

Often abbreviated as NLD or NVLD, this disability is frequently misunderstood, overlooked, and under-diagnosed. It is regularly characterized by extremely poor organizational, spatial, and visual skills—skills that are extremely prioritized by modern society.

That same modern society tends to pass on the vast majority (approximately 93 percent!) of its information outside of verbal communication, through facial expressions, vocal tones, and body language. Students with NLD may miss this 93% of the critical (but unspoken) information. (Frye and Karanzalis, 2019)

Experts believe that NLD may be as prevalent as dyslexia, and is as common in girls as it is in boys (Frye and Karanzalis, 2019).

How to tell if your student may have a non-verbal learning disability

This disability may be more difficult to notice than dyslexia or dyscalculia. However, you may be able to have a good idea - or enough of an idea to talk to an expert - if your student exhibits any of the following symptoms:

- Talking a lot, but not really saying very much of consequence
- Is able to see details, but not the big picture - or, in other words, the trees but not the larger forest
- When learning new information, the student tends to focus on tiny details while missing the larger idea or concept
- Is unable to read facial expressions, hand gestures, or other cues which are nonverbal
- Tends to miss the more nuanced or subtle aspects of learning new information
- Generally speaking, exhibits social awkwardness
- Perhaps due to this social awkwardness, a lack of friends among peers of the same age

- Exhibits a tendency towards processing new information in a very sequential, linear manner - instead of in a multifaceted or multidimensional way
- Tends to confuse complicated or more abstract concepts, but has a proclivity towards recalling exact sequences
- When faced with the pressure to perform, tends to shut down instead of exhibit vulnerability
- Writes poorly, especially when by hand
- Exhibits poor abilities with visual-spatial tasks
- Exhibits poor abilities with visual discrimination
- Does not have the ability to naturally organize things well
- When asked to infer or follow abstract logical processes, does not show the ability to do so well
- On the other hand, tends to see things in a very one-dimensional, logical, black-and-white framework
- Has issues with reasoning things out mathematically
- Has poorly developed motor skills

Much as is the case with students who have dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia, students who have non-verbal learning disorders can and likely will grow to be productive members of society. However, they will require your help in order to do so. Learning to support students with NLD will help them flourish through their awkward years (Psychology Today, 2017).

Oral/Written Language Disorder and Specific Reading Comprehension Deficit

These types of writing and reading disorders often have an adverse or frustrating effect on a student's understanding of things that they hear, see, read, or attempt to write. Students who have these disorders and deficits may have a hard time expressing themselves orally.

Underneath the umbrella of oral/written language disorder and specific reading comprehension deficit are three more specific difficulties which you may observe in your affected students. These are:

1. **A phonological deficit.** This indicates a fundamental problem with the way that your student processes the types of sounds that are endemic in the way language is spoken aloud.

2. **An orthographic processing deficit.** This can also be known more simply as a 'processing speed' deficit. Sometimes the way in which students can grasp printed or vocalized words comes down to whether they can accurately interpret the sounds and letters as quickly as they come. If they can't, they may have a deficit in this area.

3. **A comprehension deficit.** This type of deficit often happens at the same time as a phonological or orthographic processing deficit. It means that an affected student may simply have difficulties understanding that which he or she hears or reads.

As with other similar disorders, students who exhibit a specific reading comprehension deficit are not unintelligent. They may merely require extra support, tools, guidance, and attention in order to read and operate at the same level as their peers (Lang Linguist Compass, 2017).

How to tell if your student may have an oral/written language disorder or a specific reading comprehension deficit

For better or for worse, this type of learning disorder may be easier to notice and diagnose than others. Students who have a specific reading comprehension deficit or a related disorder will have a more difficult time reading than their peers. They may shy away from tasks that involve reading because of this fact. They may be brushed off or teased by their peers as being weak readers; they may avoid classroom discussions or become anxious when called upon in classroom debates, as they may have a more difficult time with reading materials to prepare for such activities (Driscoll, 2019).

ADHD

ADHD is a learning disorder that has a few different ramifications for a student's attention span. These include a difficulty for students staying focused as well as the student exhibiting a hard time paying attention. Often, students with ADHD channel excess energy into hyperactivity. They can have a hard time controlling their own behavior.

All children may have issues behaving or focusing at times; that's part of being a child. However, a child who has ADHD will do this more often than not - perhaps even all of the time.

There are a few different ways that ADHD can present itself in a young individual, loosely defined by the symptoms which the individual experiences or exhibits most strongly:

- **The Predominantly Inattentive Presentation:** With this type of ADHD, it can be difficult for the affected student to be able to finish a task once it's begun or focus on organizing the different steps or components effectively. These students may also have difficulties paying attention to small details, or following the gist of what's going on in detailed instructions or long conversations. The student who presents with predominantly inattentive ADHD can be distracted easily. These students may also forget how to go about their daily routines.
- **The Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Presentation:** The student who presents with this form of ADHD may fidget or speak much of the time, seemingly unable to stay still. Because of this, it can be very difficult for affected students to sit for the duration of a meal, or long enough to finish their homework. Young children may even climb furniture, run around, or jump in the air constantly, with seemingly never-ending bouts of energy. Internally, students who present with ADHD feel restless. They may have problems with impulse control. Because of this, they may interject and interrupt in conversation, take things away from other persons, or speak up when they shouldn't. They may have a hard time taking or waiting for directions. As a result, those individuals who present with heightened impulsiveness may injure themselves a lot.
- **The Combination Presentation:** As with many other learning disorders, the symptoms likely exist on a spectrum. Therefore, students will often present with aspects of both typical presentations of ADHD.

As it is possible for symptoms to change over time, it's important to note that a child's presentation of ADHD may evolve similarly (CDC, 2020).

How to tell if your student may have ADHD

If your student has ADHD, he or she may:

- Often exhibit difficulties with paying attention in class or during long conversations, or even just listening appropriately

- Require many reminders to complete even simple tasks
- Have a hard time keeping their attention on any specific topic, instead often getting distracted easily
- Come across as absent-minded
- Exhibit poor organizational skills (perhaps often to the point where the student often loses personal belongings)
- Be unable to 'wait one's turn' or otherwise exhibit normal levels of patience for one's age
- Complete homework without care and as fast as possible, just to get it over with quickly
- Interrupt others without any seeming attention to the subject matter or the feelings of a speaker
- Feel fidgety, as if unable to can't keep still; student may also complain of boredom or frustration

As noted above, many of these signs and symptoms are also seen in children who are simply tired, don't have interesting projects or assignments, or may have other complaints. A diagnosis of ADHD generally comes after one has noticed these symptoms or signs in the individual for a long time, and these issues tend to happen most of the time (Lyness, 2017).

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia is a little-known disorder that tends to cause issues with a student's coordination and muscle or body movement. As a downstream effect, a student with dyspraxia may have difficulties with normal or easy language and speech habits and functionalities.

Dyspraxia can be more than just a neurological disorder, as many of the other disabilities on this list may. In particularly severe cases of dyspraxia, the affected student's immune system and nervous system can also have adverse effects.

Those suffering from dyspraxia have only recently begun to come into the limelight. Until very recently, children suffering from dyspraxia were simply labeled as 'clumsy.' Others wondered whether those with dyspraxia actually had minor brain damage.

Needless to say, it's more nuanced than that! While an affected individual's ability to complete fine motor tasks can be affected and sometimes children with dyspraxia might take longer to learn complicated subjects, it does not affect your student's intelligence (Medical News Today, 2017).

How to tell if your student may have dyspraxia

Your affected student may exhibit any of the following signs, symptoms, or tendencies:

- **Poor muscle strength** (especially in the child's core): Students who suffer from dyspraxia may tend to slide out of their chairs, slump or slouch their shoulders, or consistently lean to one side because they just don't have the same innate core strength that other students of similar ages may have. They also do not gain this strength in the same way, over time, that others do. As a result, the mere act of sitting up for hours can truly exhaust them. Some children with dyspraxia even fall over toward the end of the day, because the normal activities of their day have completely tapped their strength.
- **Trouble with fine motor skills:** Students who have dyspraxia also suffer from weakness in other parts of their bodies, not just their core. Children with dyspraxia may not have the strength in their fingers necessary to grip writing implements or small objects. Because of this, activities involving writing or other fine motor skills can be completely draining for affected individuals.
- **Irregular or consistent clumsiness:** Although we have realized in recent years that dyspraxia is about far more than simply being clumsy, watching for a pattern of clumsiness in a child may help with a diagnosis. Many typically abled persons do not realize that so-called simple movements (such as packing a day bag, writing, putting papers away, and other administrative and daily tasks) actually require a whole litany of fine motor movements. For normally abled children, learning how to do these things may take a few tries to be able to do them correctly. However, for students who have dyspraxia, these simple tasks may take as many as one hundred repetitions to become proficient with these basic skills.
- **Behavioral and social difficulties:** Perhaps because of the heightened difficulties students who have dyspraxia often encounter, these students may get very frustrated simply over the course of everyday events. Because of this frustration and requisite exhaustion, these students may act out or (alternatively) naturally be less inclined to take part in normal, social activities. Their disability can also make them very visible, natural targets for those who are looking for victims to bully.

Dyspraxia may be more difficult to diagnose than other similar disabilities, but a diagnosis can give you the chance to support a child when he or she needs it most. Keeping an eye out for these signs and symptoms is one of the ways you can help support these children (Thomas, 2019).

Executive Functioning

Students who have an executive functioning disorder may have difficulty planning and using their time well. Executive function commands a student's attention to detail and ability to strategize; therefore, students who have a difficult time with executive functioning may have issues with managing their space and time.

Executive functioning is an attribute that often suffers along with the disorders mentioned above, but it can also be a standalone diagnosis. The hallmark of an executive functioning disorder is a marked difficulty with organizing and planning. The best of us often have issues in these areas, but a student who has an executive functioning disorder will often exhibit related difficulties to a debilitating degree.

There are seven general executive functions. They are as follows:

1. Self-awareness
2. Inhibition
3. Non-verbal working memory
4. Verbal working memory
5. Emotional self-regulation
6. Self-motivation
7. Planning and problem solving

A student who is suffering from an executive functioning disorder (or a combination of an executive functioning disorder and a related disability, such as ADHD) will have chronic issues in at least one of these areas. Fortunately, there are ways that you can help your child learn how to flex these muscles and grow in these areas. While the child is growing, there are specific support systems you can foster and encourage to help the child thrive (Barkley and Saline, 2019).

Section 1: Summary

These eight learning disorders are not an exhaustive list of the disorders you may see in your classroom; however, they are the most common. While many of these disorders may present necessary obstacles to learning, none completely precludes a student's access to an enjoyable, efficient, and effective education. Your support will have to be specially designed for each student. In the following section, we'll discuss specific ways in which you as a teacher can support students who have these (as well as other) learning disabilities.

Section 1: Key Takeaways

- Learning disorders can take many different forms. Most do not affect a student's intelligence; they just require special accommodations to help the child learn.
- Many learning disorders affect executive function and reading comprehension.
- As a teacher, you have an opportunity to both assist with a diagnosis and make a plan going forward to alleviate any symptoms of common learning disabilities.

Section 2: Teacher Approaches to Supporting and Helping Students with Learning Disabilities

As a teacher, you have several resources you can utilize to ensure that all students in your classroom, no matter their natural abilities, feel fully supported. In this section, we'll delve into specific ways to help students with learning disabilities grow.

Inside the Mind of a Student with Learning Disabilities

The best way to understand what students with learning disabilities are going through is simply to ask them, or their parents, so that those closest to the situation can best describe your students' specific challenges.

However, recent forays in childhood psychology can give us a few clues as to what students with learning disabilities may be experiencing.

1. **Students with disabilities often fear losing the respect of others.** There are many psychologists who believe that students with learning disabilities battle primarily with the prospect of learning the respect of their peers, their families, and their teachers. They believe that this respect will be lost if it becomes widespread knowledge that

they struggle with the same activities which come so naturally to everyone around them. Due to this fear, they naturally try to keep their hard work and struggles secret - which greatly exacerbates the problem itself (LD @School, 2016).

2. **Students with learning disabilities also tend to downplay their personal strengths because they tend to focus so exclusively on how difficult they find their weaknesses.** Perhaps logically, they also tend to downplay the positive aspects of school. Students with learning disabilities tend to put themselves at fault for situations that are usually far beyond their control. Often, to help these children feel like they can have any say or control in what goes on with their time, these children try to avoid situations that cause them pain or difficulty. This 'avoiding' technique can cause the student frustration, resentment, and shame, or even anxiety. The anxiety may then become the central problem — or at least the most visible problem. In order to help those children who are suffering from anxiety secondary to a disability, the triggers for both their anxiety and their disability need to be documented. Once the student and his or her family, peers, and teachers are aware of these triggers, the student can work on reducing anxiety and working to ameliorate the main difficulty at hand (LD @School, 2016).

Wondering what signs might manifest themselves in a student who is manifesting anxiety secondary to a larger learning disorder? The following signs may help indicate a student who may be in need of your support:

- Difficulty performing tasks, especially ones which come more easily to others of a similar age;
- Difficulty sitting or staying still (or fidgeting, etc)
- Difficulty remembering details, concentrating on what's in front of them, or focusing on anything for more than a few minutes
- Difficulty approaching any new or unfamiliar task without trepidation or dragging feet
- Dependence upon a specific routine or schedule, to the point where any sudden or unnecessary change in that routine can confuse or stress the student to a debilitating level
- Perhaps because of the above, an innate reluctance to deviate from any normal schedule or routine

- Any physical signs of distress or discomfort when asked to complete a novel task, including palpitations, perspiration, and trembling
- Speaking without listening to him or herself
- Overly detailed adherence to perfectionism, to the point where the student moves much more slowly than is proper for the student to move
- Asking similar questions repetitively without seeming to understand that they are related and the base question has already been answered

Researchers have noted that the anxiety that students with learning disorders often display tends to be of an internal nature. This can readily manifest on the outside as awkwardness or stress — not always in obvious ways. These students might not tell their parents or classmates about this internal stress, either, because they may not realize that it is different or important (LD @School, 2016).

It's, therefore, our job as teachers to help these students heal — often, whether they realize that they are in need of healing or not. By paying attention to the signs of anxiety and learning disabilities in young students, by prioritizing allocations of needed resources for these students, and being proactive about meeting these students where they are, it is entirely possible for teachers to play a large role in changing these students' lives for the better.

How to Boost Executive Function

Following these tips can help boost the seven hallmarks of executive functioning in students who are struggling with this set of skills:

1. **Help your students be accountable for their own actions.** Many people wonder just how much students with ADHD should be held accountable for what they do. According to some experts, we absolutely should focus on accountability - for the good of the student's own growth. We have to be careful to do this with kindness and mercy, but this type of follow-through can be very fundamentally important for a student with ADHD. Many times, students who have ADHD don't fail to understand that consequences exist. The issue is that the timing of these consequences don't often fall in a window that is conducive to helping the student with ADHD understand what's going on. Boosting accountability in your students can help make your student's path forward clear, especially to him or her. It will also increase self-confidence (if done realistically, and with tact and support) by showing the students

you have faith in their abilities. This can help alleviate the anxiety which many students with learning disabilities experience (Wexellblatt, 2019).

2. **Help your student out with written reminders.** If your student suffers from a working memory deficit, make the things they need to remember very difficult to forget! You can use sticky notes, taped-up note cards, a gifted journal, or just a series of to-do lists to help your student be more accountable and productive. If your students are able to see this information easily laid out, they won't forget it - and this act of remembering will actually help them build their working memory (Zeigler Dendy, 2020).

3. **Emphasize time-telling skills for your student.** 'Time blindness' is a real thing that students with learning disorders often struggle with. Students with ADHD (for example) often don't have an innate sense of how much time has passed or how much time they have left to complete a task. Go overboard with the number of timers, clocks, or counters you let your student have access to, and remind him or her to check the clock frequently. By doing this, you can help your student build a sense of the natural passage of time (Reynolds, 2017).

4. **Incentivize progress with frequent rewards.** Students with learning disabilities often struggle with interior motivation - as do many of those of us who are more regularly abled. If a specific executive function is very difficult for your student, the student will naturally try to avoid it. Create an external framework for their motivation like a reward or report-card system so they can see continued progress. If you're able to reinforce less tangible long-term goals with shorter-term rewards, you'll be able to help increase your student's own interior motivational skills (Additude, 2019).

5. **Emphasize more hands-on methods of learning.** Students with learning disabilities often struggle with conceptualizing abstract concepts or paying attention to lessons that mostly consist of reading, watching, or listening. If you can find ways to put objects into their hands that represent what they are learning (for example, numbered blocks to help with basic math problems, or magnetic letters or words to assist with spelling or sentence structure), they'll have to rely less on conceptualization to understand the lesson you're teaching (Zeigler Dendy, 2020).

6. **Allow yourself and your student to take frequent breaks.** The types of executive function that many students struggle with (motivation, self-control, etc) often naturally come in short supply. When your student has to concentrate very hard to stay focused or work hard on a problem set, his or her internal stores of willpower will

get depleted extremely quickly. However, if you're able to take a quick break to allow your student to refuel, you may find that you both experience much more success after your break. Structure your day with your students with learning disabilities so they're able to take short (5 minutes or so) breaks throughout the day, and see if that helps their symptoms and their progress (Meyer and Lasky, 2017).

7. **Help your student out with encouraging or motivational speeches.** Before big games, coaches tend to give athletes motivational pep talks. For a student with learning disabilities, every day is a big game. Your student may therefore need a motivational speech or pep talk every day - or even more often than that! More than simply hearing motivational speeches from you, however, students with learning disabilities need to learn how to motivate themselves. If you're able to teach your students how to pump themselves up, you'll be giving them a tool they can surely benefit from their whole life long! Simply helping your students learn how to say "I can do this, I've got this!" may be transformative for them. If you can assist your students with learning how to visualize their own success and their own way forward, you'll get them one step closer to learning how to complete their own goals (LaVoie, 2019).

8. **Teach your student the benefits of daily exercise.** There are many documented benefits to getting your blood pumping every day. For students with learning disabilities, the benefits may be even greater! It's been shown that routine physical activity can boost students' executive functioning. It can also help them sleep better, and teach them motivational practices that they can extrapolate outside of the gym. It doesn't have to be formal or organized physical activity, however. Simply help your child find a sports team to play with or help the child pick up an active hobby, and the rewards of consistent physical activity should be realized in no time at all (Brain Balance, 2017).

9. **Be compassionate toward your student with learning disabilities.** This may sound like an obvious point to remember, but learning to be there for someone who struggles with everyday tasks can be frustrating for all involved. You need to remember that children who suffer from ADHD or similar learning disorders are as smart as their fellow students; they just need support, sometimes, to realize it. Students who suffer from learning disorders often experience higher than normal changes in their educational strategies, and their environments may also change more than they might for a differently-abled student. Helping your students learn to navigate these changes will set them up for success in the long term, but you need to remember that this can be very difficult. Therefore, if a student with learning

disabilities makes a mistake or expresses frustration with a project, try to empathize and help the individual understand what is wrong instead of showing frustration yourself. Taking frequent breaks, as noted above, may help with the experience for all concerned (Barkley and Saline, 2019).

Specific Ways to Support Students With Learning Disabilities

To alleviate the two specific fears that students with learning disabilities often exhibit, strategies to assist these students often focus on managing expectations, assisting with compensation, and lowering anxiety.

Wondering what action to take when your student with learning disabilities is obviously having a hard time? The following tips may help. We'll discuss specific symptoms or types of behavior you may notice as well as a few expert tips for alleviating the behavior or mitigating the responsible situations.

If Your Student Exhibits Anxiety or Related Behaviors:

- It may be a good idea to realize that you'll need the help of a larger team to help your student face his or her anxiety. Enlist the help of parents and other teachers your student may interact with.
- Find ways to reward your students whenever they show brave or calm behavior, to help them realize that there's a benefit to taking a quick breather.
- More literally speaking, taking deep breaths does still the body's fight-or-flight anxiety response. Teach your student to take a few minutes to steady his or her breathing when he or she feels anxious.
- Nature can have a calming effect on people. When your student feels anxious, invite him or her to take a quick walk outside.
- Treating anxiety as if it's the elephant in the room will do no one any favors. Instead, be very frank and forthright about the fact that your student may experience difficulties in this arena.
- Similar to going outside and deep breathing, physical exercise can help your student relax. Talk to your student and his or her parents about investing in a consistent exercise regimen to help calm your student's nerves.
- Whenever students experience a particularly severe bout of anxiety while in the classroom, invite them to take a walk with you to talk it out. Doing so will very literally

remove the students from a stressful environment. It will also give them the much needed time to explain everything they're feeling and experiencing about the situation, which may give you the clues you need to best help them through it.

- If your students exhibit consistent anxiety, it may be a good idea to give them a gratitude journal and ask them to use it consistently. This way, for at least a few minutes every day, they'll be concentrating on how things are going well—during which activity it's very difficult to be fully anxious.

- If appropriate, perhaps when you're on a walk with your student, tell the student about a time that you felt anxious, and what you did to overcome the negative associated feelings. One of the horrible things about anxiety is that when you're in the midst of these particularly severe feelings, you do tend to feel like you're all alone. By helping to eliminate this sense of isolation, you'll give your student one less thing to worry about (Nelson, 2019).

If Your Student Exhibits Perfectionism:

- Normalize mistakes. Tell your student that perfectionism is not a realistic goal, because all humans - even very successful humans - make mistakes. You can do this partially by telling your student about times when you've made mistakes or other students have tripped up; you can also take care to present every time your perfectionist student makes a mistake as an opportunity for your student to learn a little more.

- Prioritize rough drafts and brainstorming hours. To help your students understand that having a perfectly shiny facade on all of their work is not the goal of learning, ask your students specifically to turn in projects at the 75% completed stage, or work with your students as a project is progressing. This may be scary or uncomfortable for your students, but it will help them understand that the end goal is not the most important part of learning.

- Help your student realize that understanding is the goal, not completion of an arbitrary milestone. Instead of memorizing endless flashcards or striving towards a perfect grade, ask your student to tell you stories about what is being learned.

- Help your student develop a growth mindset. In short, a growth mindset prioritizes change and progress toward a goal, instead of mastery of a goal in and of itself. By prioritizing true learning, with all of its challenges and pitfalls, instead of scores or

grades, your student will have a better educational experience - and learn to appreciate that one poor grade is an opportunity, not a catastrophe (Busch, 2016).

If Your Student Exhibits Test Anxiety:

- Start by sitting down with your student and having a conversation about the different accommodations you may be able to assist with. Depending on the specific nature of your subject and the way your student's anxiety manifests itself, you might be able to give your student an adaptation or modification of the parameters of the test (for example, more time to take a test).
- State the expectations of the test clearly. Tell your student (or students) precisely what material they will need to know before the test and any other information you can give without being unfair for the purposes of the assessment. Simply knowing whether to expect multiple choice questions or essay questions, for example, can allay the anxiety of many students. Print the instructions for the test at the top of the test, and make it clear to your students that if they need help with anything on the test itself, they can come to you with questions (as long as they are ones you can answer without being unfair for purposes of assessment).
- Have your students free-write before the test about their anxiety regarding the test itself. By writing down their worries, and perhaps comparing their worries prior to the test to other times in their life that they have experienced nervousness, the students may experience a cathartic effect of simply writing down their stressors. They may often gain a little perspective by noticing the pattern stress takes on in their lives, and this may be very beneficial going forward.
- Remind your students that many of the physiological effects of nervousness - for example, a higher heart rate, heavier breathing - may actually help them perform well on the test. These types of heightened body responses are geared towards helping your students focus more and think more quickly, which will aid with performance in an assessment scenario.
- Take ten minutes before every test to give your students a chance to get up, get their blood moving, air any anxieties they may be having, and ask you any last-minute questions. If you're able to give them any reassurances about your merely seeking to get an idea of where they are instead of giving them life-altering grades, then do so - it may give them the tiny bit of relief they may need immediately before heading into a test (Terada, 2019).

If Your Student Exhibits Anxiety about Details:

- If your students have a hard time seeing the forest for the trees, aim to help them learn about perspective in their everyday life. While they're at school, encourage a focus on one task at a time. When your students attempt to multitask, they're allowing their brain to run from one subject to the next and they are getting their mind filled with an overstimulating number of details. If you're able to promote unitasking, with breaks in between tasks to allow your student's mind to transition calmly, that may help your student have a healthier project processing mindset.
- Similarly, many students who suffer from learning disabilities, anxiety, or disorders relating to executive function may naturally try to run through their work as quickly as is humanly possible. Instead of encouraging your students to complete their work quickly, try to set a premium on doing the opposite. Perhaps you could incentivize ways for them to sit down, slow down, and appreciate a written passage - or give them quests, games, or puzzles to solve that require concentration and comprehension, and can not be completed by flying through the task on a superficial level (Chandler, 2016).

If Your Student Exhibits an Intolerance of Uncertainty:

Remember that even a little uncertainty can trigger symptoms of anxiety, especially in children who have learning disabilities. Help your students with these scenarios by providing the following measures of support:

- Make sure that your child has a daily schedule or to-do list. Simply enabling students to have an idea of what to expect will help erase much of their experience of uncertainty. If students begin to appear anxious, reroute them to their schedule. Making it hard to lose and easy to read (for example, a laminated copy, with bright colors) could help with this process and help them feel more confident.
- Whenever you are aware that your student will have to deviate from their comfortable routine, take your student to the side and explain exactly what is going to happen. If you can come up with a silly or goofy way to signal that your student is going to have to be flexible and brave, this can help break your student out of paranoia or anxiety spiraling.
- Make sure that your students know that you are there for them at all times. When you are figuring out ways to teach them, whenever your students get great or poor grades, or on days when nothing at all seems to be happening - a quick reminder (in

person or via email) that you are ready to help your students with anything they need will enforce in their mind that they have a safety net. This can be very helpful to alleviate fear of uncertainty.

- When you do have to shift your schedule, make sure that you can sit down with your students and tell them exactly why it is happening. Understanding the rationale behind apparently confounding actions will help your student.

- Both academically and otherwise, feel free to repeat things occasionally for your student. A sense of repetition and ritual will help your student feel grounded. That way, when something else inevitably changes in your classroom experience, your student will have something to cling to. When you talk to your student, rely on this shared past often in regular conversation. The simple act of saying things like 'remember when we learned this?' helps enforce continuity, as well as a dependable cause and effect, for your student.

- Similarly, using language that presumes a successful and happy future helps create something for your student to look forward to. Students with anxiety, and particularly those with learning disorders, can often have a difficult time conceptualizing a happy outcome - instead preferring instinctively to mull over more paranoid projections. Just saying things like 'next time, we'll have a chance to do this,' or 'later, I'm so excited that we get to do that,' will help put events in perspective.

- If you have more than one student exhibiting signs of anxiety, put them into contact with each other after you've helped coach them with more positive examples of ways to think. The fear of isolation or suffering alone often contributes a lot to uncertainty or anxiety. Make sure that your students aren't going to feed off each other's fears, of course; but, properly done, these students may be able to help each other naturally.

- Be open and honest with your students about their anxiety and fears around uncertainty. If they can put a name to it, it'll be far easier for them to face it. Just as your students should be aware of their specific learning disabilities, they should be aware that their difficulties with excessive worry may be a logical downstream effect. This way, when they know that they're having anxious thoughts, they may be better equipped to compartmentalize them in a helpful way.

- Finally, just make a point to ask your students how you can best help them. There may be some occasions where your students do not know what, precisely, they need. There may be other cases in which your students are very truly the experts in what would make them feel the most comfortable. Either way, it's often useful information,

even if it's just something that you may need to pass along to your students' care teams. Asking your students will also help them feel more confident, capable, and involved in their own care. This sense of control can go a long way toward helping students face and combat uncertainty (Nelson, 2019).

If Your Student Exhibits Social Anxiety:

- When you're working with your entire class, try to prioritize the creation of an entire accepting atmosphere in your classroom - a community of people who all work to make everyone feel included. This will be great for all of your students, including your student who may exhibit social anxiety.

- It may be easy or even feel kind to allow your student to avoid participating in community events, such as plays or after-school activities, or even daily social interactions with his or her peers. This might be intuitive, because your student with social anxiety may show particular discomfort if asked to participate in a conversation (or another similarly low-key activity. Try to avoid doing this. Although forcing a student who has social anxiety into social situations may seem cruel, it's the only way that the child will be able to learn how to accommodate these types of circumstances. Keep a close eye on the student so you can aid if necessary, but otherwise, allow the student to experience normal school events.

- Students who suffer from social anxiety often suffer a lack of self-esteem. You can work to increase this by offering small amounts of praise for any small accomplishments the student may be able to exhibit. Don't be overly or obviously excited, as that might look overblown, but just showing gratitude and happiness whenever the student willingly participates may be enough approval to help the child build up a little bit of self-esteem.

- Don't exacerbate an existing issue. When you speak to the student, speak calmly and softly. Doing otherwise might needlessly startle your student, which won't help feelings of anxiety.

- If you know an activity is coming up that your students will have a hard time confronting, go out of your way to stand next to the anxious children and gently encourage them through it. Don't give them an opportunity to just ignore or run away from the situation - but don't make them feel like they're confronting it alone.

- When you're getting ready to teach an activity that requires the students in your class to be paired up, consider pairing the students in advance for the activity—instead of

expecting everyone to choose and pair up themselves. It's a little bit of extra work for you, but it prevents a common social-anxiety nightmare. Students with social anxiety tend to fear that they will be left out or the last one picked. Prevent that from happening if you possibly can.

- If you have a younger student that has social anxiety, consider making him or her a helper or assistant in your classroom. Give this student papers to pass out, for example. This will give the individual a clearly-defined role in your classroom, which might help alleviate some of the fears and worries.
- If your student with social anxiety needs help finding calm in a crowded or chaotic situation, brainstorm with the child to find a 'safe place' that he or she can go to when feeling overwhelmed. Make sure the student knows that you need to be told before going to this safe place. For example, you could create a secret signal that your student will employ if he or she needs to go to this place to calm down.
- Finally, consider setting up a defined weekly meeting with this student - either with yourself or with a special needs or student counselor. During that meeting, make it clear that the student can and should speak openly about the struggles being facing and the anxieties that are being experienced. Use the time to brainstorm solutions, but mostly allow the student to speak. The power of getting these types of things off one's chest is sorely underestimated (Cuncic, 2020).
- By following these simple guidelines, it is entirely possible to assist children with difficulties responding to new or charged situations to learn new coping mechanisms, embrace the support and opportunities they are given, and figure out how to live a productive life. These are precisely the tools these children will need to grow as happy members of society with their learning disabilities. By helping children learn and utilize these tools, you are helping them become the people they need to be.

Section 2: Summary

Fortunately for everyone involved, there are many ways that you can help students with learning disabilities comprehend more information, enjoy their learning experience, and keep up with their peers. These strategies may take a little more effort on your part, but they can change the life of your student with a learning disability for the better.

Section 2: Key Takeaways

- Students with learning disabilities often suffer from anxiety. Incorporating solutions to alleviate anxiety in your classroom may go a long way toward helping your student.
- Similarly, many learning disabilities affect comprehension and executive function. You may find that strategizing to help your student understand better and work in a more organized fashion will help everyone in your classroom!

Section 3: Helping Parents Become Advocates of Children with Learning Disabilities

As your students' teacher, you have a unique opportunity to help your students grow in an educational setting. You may be in a position to give your child the support he or she needs, and you may even be best suited, in some cases, to recognize first that your student needs additional help.

Whether your student has a known disability when first he or she steps into your classroom or you play a part in discovering this fact, you need to realize that you alone cannot constitute full support of any student with learning disabilities. Their parents need to be advocates for their learning and support as well.

In this section, we'll discuss the importance of parents as advocates for their children who experience learning disabilities. We'll talk about the ways that you as a teacher can help parents grow in this aspect, and we'll present the ways that you, your student's other teachers, and your student's parents can all work together in the best interest of your student with special needs.

The Important Role Parents Play in Their Child's Special Education

Parents may underestimate their own importance, playing up instead of the integral role their children's teachers play instead. However, your student's parents are the ones who have the most time with these children. They make the most direct decisions, and they know their children the best. Even if you have to convince your students' parents of their importance, it's vital that you do so. Here are just a few reasons why parents have a crucial role to play in the support of their child with learning disabilities:

- Your student's parents are a vital part of your student's IEP team. As a part of the Individualized Education Program team, the parents will have to make educational

decisions that will impact your student's path. It can be easy for parents to get overwhelmed by the paperwork-laden process. It can also be easy for parents to feel intimidated when working with special needs professionals and educational experts (such as yourself). They need to remember that their sole job is to advocate for the student—and that really is the most important job of all.

- Parents are a source of critical inside input for their child's well-being. Even if parents don't feel like they have much insight into their child (for example, if they work long hours and don't get to spend much time with the child), they do. They've known their child and their child's specific learning disabilities for the longest amount of time. Even if they don't feel their contributions are important, they are.

- Beyond past or background information that your student's parents may be able to provide, parents need to recognize that they are the ones with the best (and most) opportunity to work with their children long-term. Even if they don't have official training in special needs, they remain the most important caregivers for their child's long-term success. Think of it this way: Even though you as a teacher are certainly very invested in each individual student's success, at the end of the day, you have many students to care for, and a limited number of hours in each day to do so. Your student's parents, on the other hand, even if they work full-time or have odd shifts, should have at least some opportunity to give their child their undivided attention. Parents can therefore more directly assist with homework and other assigned learning activities.

More than just being able to help with the success of any at-home assignments, parents can also more closely monitor their child's health and performance at home. If health or special needs professionals give parents signs and symptoms to look out for, for example, the parents of your student are almost certainly the ones in the best position to do so.

Because of their intimacy with the student, it's vital that parents realize their importance as part of their child's caregiving team. If you, as the teacher, can help them be more confident in their assessments and help them realize that their attendance at IEP team meetings is far more than just token, parents may be more willing to step up and make a huge difference in their child's life.

Parents can also act as a check for school teachers and administration. While parents can be less-versed in their child's disability than professionals, they can also be incredibly aware of their child's disability and the rules and regulations of your state. Be prepared

for either end of the spectrum, and make sure that (regardless of the parent's preparation) you impress upon them the importance of working together for the sake of their child.

You can let parents that you're working with know that there are four steps they can take, as parents of a child with a learning disability, to support them best. These four steps will help them fulfill the vital role they play as part of their child's caregiving team:

- The parents should learn as much as they can about their child's disability. The resources we have linked here are good jumping-off points, as are any special needs professionals in your community or special needs educators who work at your school.
- The parents should observe the learning styles their child exhibits. Remind the child's parents that learning styles often have nothing to do with academia. The parents should watch as their child learns how to tie their shoes, as their child meets new people, as their child watches TV or reads or cleans up their room. Any behavioral idiosyncrasies or patterns which the parents can report will add to the overall picture of their prognosis—which will help health and special needs professionals to provide more accurate support and guidance.
- The parents should keep very careful records of all medication, education, activities, and health evaluations that their child takes, experiences, or accrues. Various institutions will likely also have detailed records of these events and data, but these records will all exist in differing locations. Parents are the only ones who will have copies or records of all of their student's information and data. Having all of this information in one place is often a great way to put puzzle pieces together (per se) regarding their child's care.
- The parents need to contribute to any ongoing communication chains about their child's education or well-being. When educators or healthcare professionals request information about their child's status, the parents need to be able to respond, even if they don't believe their response is necessary or value-driven.

Parents are a crucial part of their student's caregiving team. However, parents often undervalue the contributions they can give—which can result in a lapse of responsibility or ownership of their child's academic and other life experiences. You can assist by reminding the parents of their intrinsic and irreplaceable value to their child's welfare, and by helping them find specific ways they can bring value to an IEP team or to their child (Morin, 2020).

Seven Ways Parents Can Advocate for Their Children

Parents usually want to do everything they can for their children. Often, they will be the true experts in their child's disorder and will be able to help you more understand how to be a part of their child's care team. Other times, you may be the one helping with the discovery of their child's learning disability. Regardless of how everyone is informed of the student's struggles, parents are an integral part of ensuring that a student with learning disabilities has a uniform and truly effective education.

Here, we'll list seven specific ways that parents can advocate for their children.

1. Realize that being a true advocate for their child with learning disabilities will take a long time. Sometimes, parents hope that a teacher can pretty much take over for their child's education and related support. This won't work with a student who is more traditionally abled, and it certainly won't be a viable solution if their student requires a large amount of individualized support. Advocacy for a child with a learning disability requires research, communication, and meetings between all involved, including the student's parents and teachers. One of the first things that parents and teachers need to realize is that if the true goal is to support the child as the child needs it, the required advocacy will take a large time commitment.

2. Parents need to become informed about their child's learning disability. So do all of the teachers who interact with the student in question. The more that a student's care team knows about his or her disability, the more comfortable you will be able to be in both supporting the child and helping others to be more comfortable around the student. This information may be difficult to come by. It will require a great deal of research, something that parents who haven't been in school for a while may not be familiar with. However, there's no way around it. Parents and teachers who are working to support a student with special needs need to read a lot of material on the student's specific learning disability, and you may need to assist parents with this research. There are conferences that parents can attend, which are great avenues for more information and there are also ways to network with other parents who are facing similar courses of action. Finally, the parents of your students with special needs are going to have a lot of questions. Even if they are already intimately familiar with their child's condition, they're going to want to know your plans as to how to make the education experience an enjoyable and efficient process. You'll need to make it clear early on that you are committed to working with their child in an empathetic, engaging manner - and then communicate frequently with the parents while working with their child.

3. You and your student's parents will need to familiarize yourselves with the various regulations and rules of your student's special education classes and programs. Each state will have different expectations for the student, and you'll need to be an expert on the specific subtleties of your student's situation. A good first resource is your state's Department of Education. If your student has a specific special education teacher (or if your district or school has such an expert), this would be a good resource as well. Contacting someone in the community who is familiar with both your student's specific disability and the state's programs and accommodations under these circumstances is definitely a good thing for both you and the student's parents to do.

4. If your student has an assigned team of care professionals, work closely with each of them. Over-communication between every individual - parents, teachers, and special needs professionals - who works with the student will be key. Everyone will bring nuanced and essential information to the table. Positive and comprehensive communication will make it easy to take advantage of the differing perspectives when working to support the child. At the very least, make sure that everyone has each care professional's contact information. If you are able to take the initiative in getting in touch with these individuals on a regular basis to benefit the student, do so. This could be as simple as setting up an ongoing email chain, to which you send occasional updates regarding the child's performance in school. If you feel the need to have an in-person meeting, or if something happens that either you or the parents need to run past a professional, you'll already have the network in place to make that easily accessible.

5. Ensure that you have a centralized location for all paperwork regarding the student's education. Special education often requires (and produces) large amounts of official forms and other types of documentation. Parents and teachers alike can consider this a nuisance. It may fall to you to make sure that everything is organized, and that there are backup copies of essential forms. All paperwork regarding the student's IEP (Individualized Education Program) needs to be in one place, as does information relevant to a student's 504 Plan. If you need assistance with the way this information should best be organized, talk to a special education director at your school. For better or for worse, your student's parents will likely assume that you are more on top of this information than they are, and may request related information from you at any time.

6. When it's time for you to meet with your student's parents, don't forget that they have a lot on the line. They are extremely invested in their 's child's future, and they have a more emotional attachment to the case than you do. They may be very protective; they may be scared. If you are meeting with your student's parents and other professionals at the same time, you might have to function as a bridge, or as a support system for the parents while you are all learning how best to support the student. Remember that you can offer insight to the parents and the professionals, and you also need information from the parents. Ensuring that everyone is treated as an integral part of your student's care team will result in more powerful support for the student.

7. Make sure that the child, if appropriate, is kept apprised of the relationship and communications between his or her parents, teachers, and other professionals. As one of the goals of education, special or otherwise, is to produce students who are capable of taking care of themselves and becoming valuable and productive members of society, your student with a learning disability needs to know how best to take care of him or herself. This does not include keeping your student uninformed or keeping him or her out of the loop. As best as you can, or as is appropriate, let your student know what is happening in meetings that concern his or her care or future. In return, ask your student if he or she has questions that need answers from the care team, or if he or she has any frustrations, hopes, successes, or disappointments that he or she would like the team to know. Some students may feel comfortable sharing this with their parents on their own. They may not. One of your roles is to function as a facilitator of these types of conversations. Embrace it.

When you're partnering with a children's parents to form a team to support their success, you may find that you need to stand up for the child in ways you might not need to apply for other children. In these cases, it's important to be confident in your role, compassionate to the needs of others, and to stand up for the child's rights and needs as much as you possibly can (Protected Tomorrows, 2016).

Section 3: Key Takeaways

- Parents often underestimate their importance to their child's educational team. Their importance is, however, paramount. As a teacher, you can help parents understand and appreciate this.

- Parents need to be informed about their child's learning disability.

- Parents can assist with helping their child learn at home, observing a child's symptoms, helping finetune treatment, and more.
- As a teacher, one of your goals is to support both the parent and child so that they can support each other.

Conclusion

Ultimately, when you are working to support a student in your classroom who needs special accommodations, you need to remember that that student is scared, but smart. When you're designing your curriculum, when you are managing your classroom, and when you are working with that student one-on-one, there are things you can do to ensure that the student is learning and having a good experience. Helping mitigate your student's anxiety, prioritizing parental support, and simply being observant so you can identify when a student may be struggling: These are all ways that you can assist your students with learning disabilities so that they experience a stellar education while under your care.

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