

Include Your Child in the Evaluation Process

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The decision to have your child evaluated for learning disabilities or ADHD sets in motion a process that, at times, can feel all-encompassing. Finding the right professional, undergoing the actual evaluation, reviewing the results and recommendations, and meeting with school personnel is time-consuming, if not anxiety-producing. And what often gets lost in the hubbub is the most important component: the child.

It is vitally important to involve your child in the process from beginning to end. Sadly, that is rarely the case.



Why Include Your Child

There are two crucial parts to the evaluation process: Ensuring that the psychologist gives sound, detailed recommendations about how to help your child, and making sure everyone involved in your child's education is on the same page—*everyone*, including your child.

By age six or seven, children know if they are struggling in school. When your child gets pulled out of class to sit with a psychologist he knows something is up. To fail to include him in the process instills doubts and uncertainty; including him sends the message that his problems can and will be addressed.

It's in your child's interest to understand his diagnosis and feel comfortable with it. He needs to be knowledgeable about his strengths and weaknesses and buy into the recommendations for addressing his deficits. Having that information makes it palatable for him to sit with a learning specialist to do more of something he "hates" (such as reading or over-learning math facts).

What to Share

There should be two feedback conferences after an evaluation: One with the parents to go over the results, diagnosis, and recommendations, and another with the child. If your child is young, it is best to have a parent attend; however if your child is older or requests it, he should be encouraged to meet with the evaluator independently.

When meeting with the child, it is important that the evaluator and the parents avoid using numbers in their explanation. Children should never be given an IQ score or numerical test results.

They should, however, hear about their particular strengths and weaknesses. The fact is, your child already is aware of his academic challenges, even if he can't articulate them. Explaining weaknesses in terms of his performance on the battery of tests may help him understand. For example, if your child struggles with auditory discrimination, it should be explained as one of the reasons it is hard for him to understand what the teacher is saying at the front of the room and why he becomes frustrated or loses focus in class. He now has a framework for understanding why he is being moved to the front row: It's not a punishment; it's a way to help.

It is also important to explain his strengths. Children who are struggling in school usually suffer from low self-esteem, and hearing from a professional about their strengths can be uplifting.

Providing Context

Your child must understand that a disability is a difference—not a death sentence or a declaration of stupidity; that weaknesses can be overcome and compensated for with time and hard work.

The best way for your child to accept the extra work required of him is to understand why he's being asked to do it and how it will benefit him. He also may be more willing to sit with a tutor or review math facts nightly if the psychologist explains that this is her recommendation and not his parents' idea.

If your child is given accommodations (e.g. extended time), he must understand the reasoning behind it: It will "level the playing field" so that he can perform to his best ability and is necessary because he has slower processing in that particular area.

By bringing your child into the evaluation process, you're telegraphing your belief in his ability to handle the situation and help manage his learning issues. That's a vote of confidence that could pay dividends for years to come.

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