

Back-to-School: Let's Make It a Great Year!



Meryl Lipton, MD, Ph.D.
Executive Director

For children with neurobehavioral challenges, success in school is a compelling, but sometimes difficult, goal to achieve.

At Rush Neurobehavioral Center, when school starts, the objective we most often hear from parents and teachers is how can we “optimize the student’s learning and development?” (or) “help my child/student learn and develop even beyond my expectations?”

If that is your goal, we have some suggestions:

First, there are three key elements to achieving that goal:

- 1) It must be shared between not just the parent and teacher, but also the child (student) when age appropriate.
- 2) There must be understanding and planning at the start of school. Spending a small amount of time getting ready can pay off handsomely throughout the entire school year.
- 3) Whatever else you do, there has to be a system of consistent parent-teacher communication. How do you achieve that level of exchange? It is do-able but requires understanding and energy on both sides.

Both parents and teachers need to have a shared vision of the school as:

- A place of success for the child
- An environment that promotes positive self-esteem
- A place where the child feels comfortable as well as challenged
- An environment that promotes academic and social-emotional growth

At the same time, parents need to understand what faces teachers as school begins: Yes, they have increased responsibility for children with special needs, but often, they also have too many children in the classroom. Teachers often don’t have support for their increased responsibilities, and they have more to do than time permits.

Of course, that coin has two sides. Teachers need to realize the position of parents. They look to schools to be effective with their sometimes very challenging and complex children. Naturally, parents see the needs of their child as the most important, which

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Talking to Children about their Neurobehavioral Disorders... Guidelines for Parents

Leslie Baer, Ph.D., Licensed Clinical Psychologist

As a clinical psychologist, I am often asked by parents, “How do I talk to my child about their learning/attentional/emotional difficulties?” This is a wonderful question. All too often, children with neurobehavioral difficulties may work regularly in a resource room, visit a psychologist, or receive help from a tutor without any explanation why. When children don’t have accurate information, they often construct their own interpretation and misconceptions may arise. For instance, the child with a learning disability may think, “I am stupid. I will never learn to read. Something is wrong with my brain.” We do children a disservice when we fail to “fill them in.” Positive, straightforward information provides a child with the tools he/she needs to understand and cope with a disability. While there’s no “right” or “wrong” way to have such conversations, here are some general guidelines that may be helpful.

1. Adapt your explanation to the age of the child

When deciding what to tell your child, be sensitive to his/her level of developmental and emotional maturity. Young children are very concrete in their thinking and handle information best when it is given to them in short, simple facts. Discuss specific, observable problems that the child is experiencing (e.g., trouble raising hand in class; difficulty remembering alphabet letters). Older children and adolescents want and can understand more specific facts and information. Children should be encouraged to ask their own questions in order to clear up fears and misperceptions. The sooner you can provide supportive and accurate explanations about why your child is struggling in some areas, the less likely your child will be to develop negative misconceptions.

2. Talk about individual strengths and weaknesses

Talk to your child about the things he/she is good at, and be specific about the things that are harder. Show him/her examples of schoolwork that illustrate both. Reference other significant people in a child’s life (e.g., “Your brother, Brian, is a really good swimmer, but he takes a long time to read a book. You’re a fast reader, but have trouble writing.”). Explain to your child that his/her difficulties are common and that there are other children in

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can be unreasonable. Parents often have important information about their child, and frequently can be amazingly supportive and helpful to the teacher.

So, what have we seen that will help get ready for the fall? The following are recipes for both parents and teachers:

Recipe for Parents

- Write a brief note to the new teacher with a short list of your child's assets, needs and what has worked well in the past
- If there is no IEP, list the goals you have
- Let the teacher know who in the school has been successful with your child in the past
- List for the teacher any outside professionals your child is involved with and how to get in touch with them
- Give the teacher some contact options: e-mail, phone times you are available, fax, etc.
- Let the teacher know you are happy to hear from him/her at any time, but that you would like an update once the teacher has had a chance to get to know your child (3-5 weeks after school starts)
- Once the teacher knows the student, define a helpful communication structure and try it for a while
 - > For a 2nd grader who is very disorganized, a daily communication book might help
 - > For a kindergartner with social and behavioral problems, a weekly e-mail or phone call might be useful
 - > For a high-school student with executive dysfunction, having the homework assignments on the school website might be a great support

Recipe for Teachers

- Provide as much positive feedback as you can
- Share problems early
- Use the resources parents make available, read reports in the child's file... "It takes a village"
- Plan and provide regular communication; daily check out sheets, weekly e-mails, monthly meetings often create an atmosphere of cooperation

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At Home and at School

his/her class who require extra help (e.g., take medicine, talk to a psychologist, work with a tutor). As a parent, model how you celebrate your own strengths and embrace your weaknesses.

3. Have more than one conversation

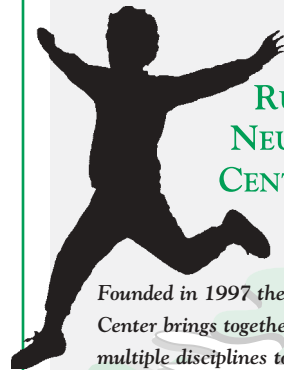
Talking about a child's neurobehavioral disorder should be an ongoing series of discussions, not just a single information-giving session. Children need time to hear what is said and they process information differently as they grow older. Only give as much information as you believe your child can handle at a time. Be prepared to repeat information and explanations several times. Some information may be hard for children to accept or understand. Asking the same question over and over may also be a child's way of seeking reassurance.

4. Enlist help

Parents need not be solely on their own in talking with a child about his or her difficulties. Seek advice from the professional who conducted the assessment and knows your child. Encourage your child to talk to his or her teacher or mental health professional about any questions or concerns. Sometimes it is easier for children to express their feelings to someone outside the family. Inform teachers of what your child has been told. It can be very confusing to a child if the school has an interpretation that contradicts what the child and the parents believe. Obtain pamphlets, books and videotapes that you can share with your child. Reading books and watching videos together can help open up discussions of these important issues.

5. Plan for Treatment

Focus on the fact that your child can be helped. Let your child know all the different ways that you are going to help him/her to learn and/or feel better. Depending on your child's age and maturity level, his/her understanding may be enhanced through the use of concrete examples. (e.g., "Daddy needs glasses to help his eyes see better. You will go to a special teacher who will help you read better.") Ask your child if he/she can think of ways to make their difficulties easier (e.g., "Can you think of anything that your teacher can do to help you if you're feeling really frustrated in class?") The more the child feels included, the more likely he/she is to cooperate. Adolescents should be taught how to advocate for their own specific learning needs.



RUSH NEUROBEHAVIORAL CENTER

Founded in 1997 the Rush Neurobehavioral Center brings together (professionals from) multiple disciplines to address the diagnosis and treatment of children with neurobehavioral issues. RNBC's unique contribution is the understanding of each child's strengths and weaknesses within the context of the family and school. From this knowledge individualized interventions are developed, implemented, and monitored.

MISSION

The mission of the Rush Neurobehavioral Center is to serve the medical, psychological, and educational needs of children with neurobehavioral problems with a special emphasis on social-emotional learning disorders.

In support of the center's mission, RNBC develops innovative approaches for diagnosis and treatment, trains parents and professionals, conducts research, and shares the knowledge acquired through the center's diverse activities to create a sophisticated community where our children are understood and celebrated.

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RNBC Parent Connections

Are you interested in meeting with other parents to share ideas, gain support and discuss concerns about your child? RNBC is exploring the creation of Parent Connections, an informal, parent led group that will meet periodically to discuss issues that are of most concern to its participants. It would be an opportunity to network with parents in similar circumstances, share what has (or hasn't) worked for you and benefit from the experiences and suggestions of other parents. This proposed program may also feature a mentor option where you can either act as a mentor to a newer parent or be assigned a mentor. **If interested, please fill out the form below. There will be no fee for this program.**

Name _____

Child's Name _____

Address _____

Age/Sex _____ Age Diagnosed _____

Best Time to Meet: DAY EVENING

Phone _____

I'm interested in BEING a mentor HAVING a mentor

City/State/ZIP _____

Please mail to Cate Gonley at
RNBC
9711 Skokie Blvd., Suite D
Skokie, IL 60077

or FAX to (847) 933-0874.

The Social Journey to the 3 R's

Josh Price, Ed.D., School Psychologist and Peter Rastrelli, Ed.D., School Psychologist

In the not too distant past, the school setting was seen strictly as an academic environment within which the sole purpose was to teach the three R's: Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic. Since that time, however, advancements in research, shifts in societal demands, and changes in familial structures have forced parallel adjustments in the education of our children, particularly the navigation of their Social journey; a journey that begins from the cradle.

Just as our children need support for their academic challenges, they too need support with those bumps and potholes along their social journey. No longer is the attitude "what happens on the playground stays on the playground" a driving model. Research has demonstrated a powerful connection between how well a child fares socially and how successful he/she is in other areas of life.

Thankfully, there's assistance and intervention available before those bumps and potholes turn into sinkholes.

Children and adolescents with a variety of brain-based learning and behavioral disorders, including learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autistic spectrum disorders frequently present with difficulties in interpersonal skills. These deficits range from mild to severe and may impact on self-esteem, affect school performance and a variety of other psychosocial venues. Given that interpersonal skills are required for many endeavors, it is critical to intervene in this area when working with students who have special needs. Clinical intervention helps children acquire these skills. Accordingly, effective social skills

training must extend beyond the group treatment. Teachers and parents can also benefit from training and consultation to maximize their effectiveness in helping children learn to disengage from negative behavior patterns and promote pro-social competency.

The primary goal of our program is to provide a safe and predictable environment in which the child can work cooperatively with others to improve their social skills while assisting the others in doing the same. As facilitators, we find value in providing an approach that allows for rapid familiarity and decreased uncertainty. We also respect the power behind effective modeling of appropriate behavior. Finally, we believe that a program needs to offer uniqueness while maintaining generalizability so that skills can transfer beyond the four walls of the learning environment.

In the fall of 2003 we will begin our social skills group. This group will focus on the fundamental aspects of social skill development. Skill examples include social entry, conversational skills, conflict resolution, introductions, asking questions, listening, dealing with trust and teasing issues, and understanding multiple perspectives or shades of grey. At the conclusion of the social skills group, a face-to-face feedback session is conducted with the parents and the future needs of the child are discussed.

Just as those three R's remain vital to the academic development of children today, so to is the S next to the Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic that perhaps represent the ongoing Social journey.



Parents' Perspectives On the Home Front

To quickly familiarize new teachers and staff, I put together an “IEP At-A-Glance”; a short, easy-to-read overview of my son Sam’s key issues and strategies for working with him. There are four sections, the first of which describes Sam as a person, his interests, and hobbies. Also included is a brief explanation of his disability and how it affects his school work. The next section is a list of his strengths.

These are included to help his teachers’ understand how some of his difficulties can be circumvented by capitalizing on the things he does well. The third section describes what Sam specifically needs to be successful in an academic and social setting. General hints and suggestions for working with him are listed in the fourth section.

The following is this year’s Individualized Education Program.

“IEP At-a-Glance”: Eighth Grade

Sam is a friendly, easy going kid who enjoys learning and being part of a group. He is an avid karate student, which has been an important source of pride and motivation for him for the last seven years. He enjoys electronic games; not only playing, but reading magazines and players guides to uncover winning codes and strategies. He spent this past summer at camp in Pennsylvania working on social skills and independence along with hiking and canoeing.

Sam has a Nonverbal Learning Disability, which means he has difficulty processing nonverbal information. Specifically, it effects his perceptual-motor and visual-spatial functioning. He has difficulty organizing himself and his work, especially written information. Problem-solving, generalizing information, abstract reasoning and adapting to new or complex situations are especially challenging. Academically, Sam has poor handwriting and drawing skills, and is weak in math and written composition. Despite these difficulties, and with the appropriate support, Sam has been able to learn and make progress in school.

More challenging and harder to remediate, are Sam’s deficits in social perception and interaction. Because of his disability, he often misinterprets non-verbal social cues and rarely picks-up on the unspoken nuances inherent in conversations. Sam’s social judgment is poor and he often misreads situations between other kids frequently perceiving conflict where none exists. However, Sam wants and needs friends and is very receptive to learning how to improve his social skills.

Sam has also been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), which affects his ability to focus his attention, modulate his actions, and ignore distractions. He takes daily medication in an effort to manage these symptoms.

Sam’s Strengths

- Very strong auditory memory
- Learns rote material quickly and easily
- Good reader
- Enthusiastic learner, positive attitude
- Tries hard, eager to please
- Receptive to correction/ constructive criticism

- Comfortable talking in front of the class, likes role playing
- Active class participant
- Outgoing, friendly

Sam’s Needs

- A systematic, step-by-step approach to learning and problem solving. Tasks/information need to be broken down into individual steps and written down for him to follow.
- Self-talk and verbal mediation to reinforce the task at hand and help him stay focused and organized.
- Additional time to process information before responding to a question.
- Structure in unstructured situations or assignments (academic and social).
- Preparation for changes in routine, transitions, and/or novel situations.
- Guidance in navigating social situations and instruction in what to do next time.
- Curriculum modifications and adaptations to compensate for deficits

Suggestions for Working with Sam

- Positive reinforcement and attention works very well with Sam. A thumbs-up, small reward, or enthusiastic “nice job” goes along way in keeping Sam motivated and feeling good about himself.
- Allow Sam to leave the room or take a break from class if he appears upset or frustrated. Sometimes a few minutes alone are all he needs to collect himself.
- Although Sam may appear disengaged from what is going on in the classroom because he is fidgeting or looking away he often is picking up on everything that is being said. Eye contact is extremely difficult for him and is not always a realistic expectation.
- Sam cannot “look and learn.” He needs to be verbally taught the things most kids pick up intuitively or learn through observation. Directly pointing things out and making connections for him (*i.e.*, making the implicit explicit) can help him understand more abstract and complex situations.

The “IEP At-a-Glance” has been a wonderful way to connect with all of Sam’s teachers and other individuals working with him, (*e.g.*, coaches, religious instructors, camp counselors, etc.). It has allowed us to share easily what we feel are the most important things to know and understand about our son.

Julie Becker

The Search for the “Perfect” Tutor

Another school year is underway, and it’s possible that the school work and homework already feel overwhelming for you and your child. You’ve decided that you both could benefit from the assistance of a tutor. Like many parents reaching this conclusion (or receiving this recommendation from your child’s teacher), you may now be wondering how in the world to find an appropriate tutor and, once you’ve done so, how to create a positive working relationship between your child and the tutor.

As is true in all aspects of educating our children with neurobehavioral issues, you need a plan. The following are a list of five key questions to consider when developing one:

1. *What do you expect of a tutor?*

- Review your child's area of academic difficulty and determine what you specifically want the tutor to concentrate on. Are you looking for:
assistance with homework assignments?
instruction in a specific subject area?
assistance with special class projects?
review of class material, particularly to study for a test?
preview of upcoming material, in advance of your child's class?
- Keep in mind a single tutor may not be appropriate for all subjects.

2. *How frequently do you wish your child to meet with the tutor?*

- Homework assistance will obviously require more frequent meetings than reviewing material and studying for tests.
- The consistency of regularly scheduled appointments will be important for the child who requires routine.

3. *Who is an appropriate tutor candidate and where can you find one?*

- Professional tutoring consultants are an obvious first choice and are often listed in the phone book. Your child's school or district special education administrator may also provide a referral.
- Consider teachers and aides from your child's school, particularly those who have worked well with your child. Contact the principal or a teacher with whom you have a positive working relationship and who appreciates and understands your child's strengths and deficits.
- College students are also a possible option. Contact the education department of a local college and inquire whether any of those students, particularly those interested in working with children with learning differences, might be available. If the college does not have an education department, contact the placement office, as the college may offer a job board. College students often have flexible hours and their own transportation.
- Depending on your child's needs, a high school student may be a good choice. Contact the guidance office at your local high school or the chairperson of the department(s) that includes the subject matter(s) with which your child needs assistance. A student potentially interested in a teaching career or a student who is particularly enthused about a subject may be possible candidates.
- Retired teachers living in your community and the children's librarian at your local public library may also be resources.
- Never underestimate the power of word-of-mouth. Network with your friends, neighbors, parents of children with learning differences, members of the congregation at your place of worship, and co-workers.

4. *Where should the tutor and your child meet and work?*

- Choose a location that is best suited for your child. This might be the tutor's office or home, your home or another location like the library. Regardless, you need a setting that will be quiet and minimize distractions, as well as a setting that your child takes seriously.
- A setting away from home may be taken more seriously by your child, but the novelty of such a setting may create distractions. A college or high school student may not have an office or

home to offer, but may be able to work with your child in a library or a room in your local community center.

- Keep in mind that a tutor may charge a higher hourly rate if the tutor travels to your child, rather than your child traveling to the tutor.

5. *What tools can you provide to the tutor?*

- Educate the tutor about your child's learning differences and his/her strengths and deficits.
- Arrange for the tutor to regularly communicate with your child's classroom teacher(s).
- Advise the tutor of subjects that are of particular interest to your child, as well as those in which your child has no interest.
- If your child will be tutored in math, seek out games that will be fun to play and offer learning opportunities (e.g. Yahtzee).
- Provide the tutor with copies of Peggy Kaye's books: Games for Math; Games for Reading; and Games for Learning.
- Consider sitting in on the first couple of tutoring sessions to ensure that your child is comfortable with the tutor and that the tutor's teaching style is suitable for your child.

Tutoring can be fun and a positive learning experience. Tutoring does not have to feel like a punishment to your child. Rather, with the right tutor and the right setting, your child will not only learn, but feel as though a special opportunity has been provided to him/her. Good luck with your search.

Suzanne Bessette-Smith

**Grand Rounds
Rush Neurobehavioral Center
9711 Skokie Blvd., Suite D, Skokie
RSVP at 847-933-9339, x222**

Tues., Sept. 30, 2003

Shartrina Robinson-Amato,
Dir., Educational Programs,
Executive Function Disorder:
Exploring the Difficulties
Associated with having an
Executive Function Disorder

Tues., Jan 27, 2004

Gloria Levin MA,
Registered/Licensed
Occupational Therapist
Sensory Integration –
Theory and Practice: An
Overview

Grand Rounds are held on Tuesdays at the Rush North Shore Medical Center, 9600 Gross Point Road, Skokie, Illinois, in the Sharfstein Auditorium. The presentations begin promptly at 12:30 pm and last approximately one hour.

Participation is free and open to the public. Registration is required since space and materials are limited.

Our Take

For someone with various learning disabilities such as myself, school can be a challenge. Not the just usual difficulties that any ordinary thinker would face, but the added mental road-blocks of having to learn everything a different way than what is taught in class.

A common misconception among teachers when it comes to school is that their student is just lazy and has no motivation to learn. I've been labeled as this more than once and from many people. They often fail to realize that not everyone processes information in the same way. Some people learn orally and others visually. Since teachers can't cater to both ways of learning at the same time, they teach to the majority, thus leaving us S.P.E.D.'s (special education) to fend for ourselves, seeking outside help.

Teachers are often not very sympathetic to our issues. They do not deliberately penalize me for things that cannot be helped; they just don't completely grasp the concept that people learn differently and the way they may be teaching does not fulfill my learning needs. When I try to educate them about my needs, it seems like they are not at all interested in learning how they can help me to learn better.

When teachers and parents see us "slacking off" or being "lazy" in class or at home, it is not because I don't care about school or have lack of motivation, it is often because I am trying to understand the concept currently being taught. Some more common attributes to learning disabilities that are often misinterpreted to be laziness are forgetfulness and time-management problems. These attributes primarily affect those with ADHD. I, myself falling victim to this, have chronic issues with work completion. I either thought I had more time than I really did, or I completely forgot to actually do the assignment.

One thing teachers can do to help is get more involved with their students and check up on them once in a while to confirm their homework completion. Students can also play a role in trying to solve this. They can learn ways of keeping track of assignments via notebooks or PDAs. The parent also plays a key role in this by simply checking assignments for completion. This is a sure way to help keep on top of work.

Sophomore from New Trier

A lot of people think that it's not a big deal having a learning difference. Well, it is actually a bigger deal than it seems like. For me, I have an auditory processing L.D. and mild ADHD (attention deficit disorder). That means that it is extremely hard for me to do things like take notes, look at the teacher, and understand and listen to what they are saying all at the same time. I also get distracted very easily. It can sometimes take three and a half hours to finish my homework or more, on a regular homework night, mainly because the littlest thing can catch my attention. Something like the phone ringing or a door slamming can set me off track for 10 minutes.

Sometimes it can really get to you, knowing that it's a lot harder to understand things than everyone else. I graduated from 8th grade in a class of 34 students, so there was always a lot of comparing going on, and everyone would always share their test scores, or talk about how short it took them to finish last night's homework. This was always the worst part of my day, because I knew that it had taken me the longest to complete the assignment or I had gotten one of the worst grades on the test. Luckily, no one would ever make fun of me for having LD or tease me for not understanding something, but the occasional jokes of "Are you stupid?" or "I can't believe you don't get it! It's so easy!?" would really hurt my feelings.

But although it may seem like having an LD is a horrible, horrible thing, I'd say there's a tiny part of me that's actually thankful for having one. For instance, it has made my creative part of my brain extremely strong and I've really succeeded in all of my arts classes and projects involving free writing, drawing

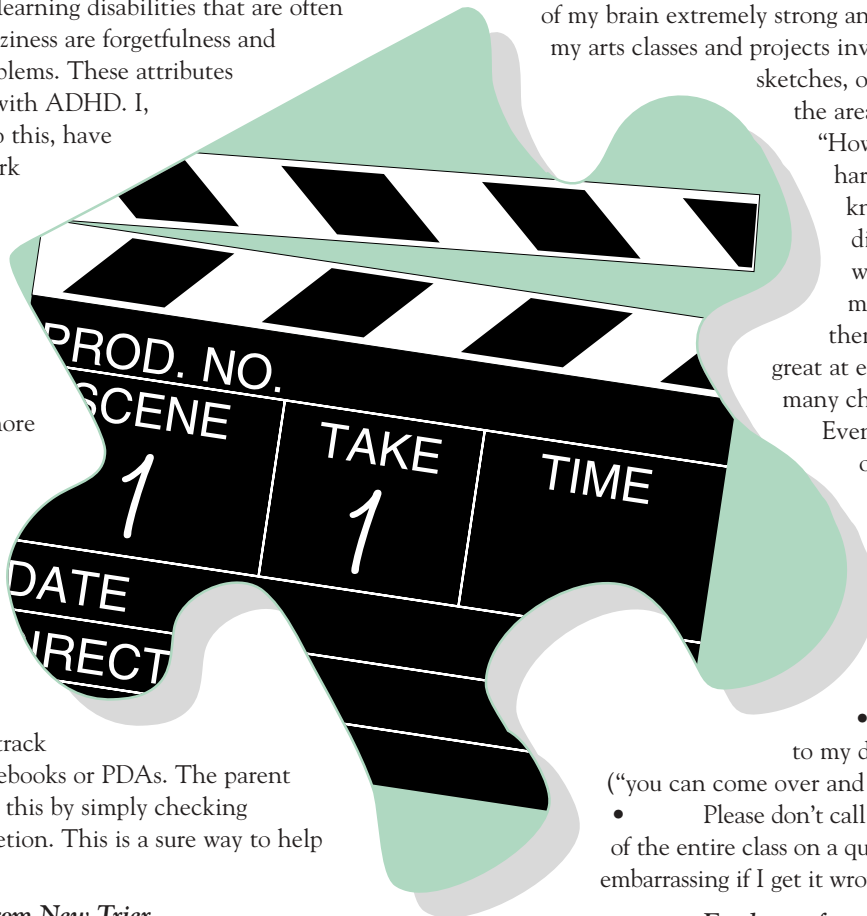
sketches, or making things. And these are the areas where I have been asked, "How can you do that? This is so hard for me!" And I just smile and know that everyone is very different in how their brains work, what they really shine in and how much respect they have for themselves. I know that I am not great at everything, and that there are many challenges to come my way in life.

Even still though, I look forward to overcome them and strive to do my best every day, for myself and for others.

Ways my teachers can help:

- Please don't get frustrated when I ask a lot of questions
- Please don't bring attention to my disability in front of the class ("you can come over and get the word bank now").
- Please don't call on me and single me out in front of the entire class on a question because it's very embarrassing if I get it wrong.

Freshman from New Trier



Selections from children and young adults sharing their gifts

MASTER PIECE

Sea Glass

By Maddy

The sky is gray mist that hangs low to the ground and cleanse my lungs when I inhale
The lake is a sea-foam green that has massive turquoise waves
Yellow, thick sand sweeps away my feet like jungle quicksand
The call of sea gulls echoes in the distance
This is where I begin my walk

As my feet sink deeper with each powerful step
I start looking for the most unique thing to catch my eye at the beach: sea glass
Every piece differently shaped, sized, colored, and textured
The surprise of finding sea glass is rare, yet exciting
Even still, it is my favorite thing to look for

I keep walking, my jeans rolled up on top of my knees
I spot my first piece: a lime-green, kidney shape that is lying right in front of me
I study it for a while-it reminds me of my mind, the way I make decisions and choices
The sea glass makes me think of the way I handle people and things: with chosen respect
The color is shining and bright; it makes me happy when I look into its depth

I walk farther, only more into the cooling water this time
Ever time the laps upon my ankles, it takes a piece of stress and washes it away
When I put the lime-green piece away in my pocket, I spot my next piece
It is beautiful sky-blue oval-it reminds me of my heart: uplifting and delicate
How I help others, and what I set my mind to is packed into this tiny piece of glass

Washed up, leafy green seaweed feathers around up on the shore
The speckled purple and blue colors of fish shimmer close to the water's surface
This time I dig a little to find my piece in the sand-I find a smoke-gray piece, just a chip
When I look into it, I think of my relationships with my family and friends
How sometimes I have precious memories that make me laugh and smile,
And other times that gray makes me think of sad feelings I go through

I feel a tap on my shoulder-then another on my ear-light drops of rain start to fall
As I look at all the pieces I've collected, I look past them and see my last piece
A rusty-red piece, the shape of a curved square
This last piece is my life: everything I am that makes me grin, hope for, dream of,
Laugh at, cry for, and think of-everything is in this piece
Which makes me happy for who I am



"Celebration of Differences" VHS

To order, please call 847-933-9339 or fax 847-933-4194. Make check or money order payable to **Rush Neurobehavioral Center**. Orders will be processed upon receipt of payment. All sales are final. Tapes may also be purchased at the center.

| | | |
|---|-----------|----------|
| "A Celebration of Differences" (22 min.) | price | \$ 39.95 |
| | shipping | \$ 7.00 |
| | sales tax | \$ 3.40 |
| | total | \$ 50.35 |

Managing Executive Functioning Deficits... at Home and at School

Shartrina Robinson-Amato, Director of Educational Programs

Organization and time-management are essential skills in today's academic environment. The ever-increasing demands placed upon today's children continue to highlight those children with Executive Functioning Deficits, EFD. Executive functions are the processes that underlie planning, organization, decision-making, attentional and behavioral regulation. Keeping up with the demands of academic productivity can seem a daunting task for children with EFD. Most children, as many adults, have the innate desire to achieve. However, if achievement is measured through production, the final product may never reach the teacher's desk. If it does, the teacher usually has no idea how much effort went into the smallest task, let alone major assignments completed by children with EFD. The child often is left feeling mentally and physically tired, and completing other assignments is equivalent to the effort of climbing Mount Everest on a bad day. Difficulties continue to mount as the child's natural talents and strengths do not match the demands of the academic arena and the expectations of the adults in his/her life. The question then remains, *how do we begin to help children with EFD?*

- **First, ongoing goal assessment:**

- ☞ Have your children write down three goals in each of the following areas: social, academic, spiritual, physical, family, mental, and material. Discuss their goals with them. This may be the single most important task you do with you child.
- ☞ Help your children achieve their goals; help them find success in their areas of interest. Find the most logical connections between their goals and how organization and time-management will help them achieve their goals. You must start where your child is at on the developmental continuum of Executive Functioning. Knowing your children's strengths, and knowing what their struggles are will help you know where to begin. Helping them achieve their goals is the spark that will rekindle their motivation. Remember motivation is a secondary problem. There are reasons for the lack of motivation; discover them.

- **Second, children must use a Notebook Organizational System.**

- ☞ I recommend an all-inclusive system. I realize that teachers and parents have only the best of intentions, but requiring individual folders and notebooks for each class is an invitation to failure for children with EFD.
- ☞ Essential items for an Organizational System.
 - ✔ Zippered three-ring binder
 - ✔ Assignment notebook – 8.5" x 11", 3-hole punched (insert in three-ring binder) or PDA
 - ✔ 5 or 8 plastic double pockets from Avery, one for each subject
 - ✔ 3-hole punched college-ruled notepad, perforated at the top
 - ✔ Zipped see-through plastic holder for pencils (elementary students)
 - ✔ See notes for long-term assignment planning

There hasn't yet been a situation where a system like this cannot be adapted to satisfy the needs of all parties involved. If your

children are resistant to working with you, find a tutor who can help them with organizational maintenance.

- **Third — Assignment Notebook or a PDA is a must.**

- ☞ All assignments must be written down. NO EXCUSES! This habit needs to be established for all children. Our brains have a unique way of "thinking" it will remember everything. Our retrieval falls short of 100%, and with EFD, retrieval of information is even significantly less.
- ☞ Teachers K-12 must write all assignments in the same location everyday, preferably at the beginning of the day, or at the beginning of the period, hand out a syllabus at the same time weekly, post it on the web, or leave daily voice messages on a homework hotline, and lastly, give verbal reminders.
- ☞ Teachers, just when you think you've done everything, it still may not be enough. Assign homework buddies in every grade level to insure a back-up system. Homework buddies should have each other's phone numbers written down in their assignment notebooks or PDA.

Children with EFD have minimal chance of implementing a "to do list," a fundamental skill of organization, unless the assignments are assigned in a predictable manner. Routines are the route to success; establishing habits that can become lifelong skills.

- ☞ Parents must assist, as well, checking the assignment notebooks nightly, and working with the teachers on an appropriate back-up system for checking the daily assignments.

Children will not be able to establish the necessary organizational habits unless teacher, parents, children, and other professionals are working together as a team.

Other routines that are essential:

- ☞ A predictable evening schedule: Children should have at least one hour each school night that they work on homework at the same time. Again, routines establish life patterns, and routines help diminish procrastination.
- ☞ Prioritize assignments and "to do lists" each evening. As a general rule, start with the hardest task first. We put off what we dread the most...so children should start with what they perceive as most difficult.
- ☞ Children should predict how long each assignment takes to complete. Set a clock, like the one from www.timetimer.com, where children can visually watch time pass. This activity will help teach children time awareness. Two leading causes of procrastination are the overestimation and underestimation of time. Teaching children time awareness does not happen overnight, but should be an ongoing process at school and home over a few years.
- ☞ Schedule a weekly organization time: Children need to establish the habit of organizing their materials. Set up a weekly or bi-weekly time that they agree to organize their 3-ring binder, backpack, school desk, and lockers.

☞ Teach backwards planning: Children with EFD have a difficult time breaking down assignments into individual steps of completion. Long-term assignments, which seem relatively straight forward, can be overwhelming for the child with EFD.

✔ Record individual steps of completion and due dates in the assignment notebook. (Preferably on a See-note) The See notes can be moved to the next day if the task isn't completed on the stated day. This is a visual reminder of procrastination and the task visually looks like it is piling up.

☞ Children need to check off each task on the "to do list" when completed. Checking off tasks is a visual and physical confirmation of accomplishment, and gives them the motivation to continue with their other assignments. I believe it's a great source of endorphins, as well...try it.

Children with Executive Functioning Disorder are complex children, and may also have other co-existing neurobehavioral disorders that need to be addressed. The previous recommendations are a starting point from which to begin helping all children and children with EFD. Organizational and time-management strategies are the beginning steps for success. Misconceptions of laziness and lack of motivation only continue the "myth." Changing our behaviors and beliefs about children with EFD will have a productive impact on their ability to accomplish academic tasks. If you would like more information about Executive Functioning Disorder, please feel free to contact Rush Neurobehavioral Center.

The Do's and Don'ts of a Successful Playdate

Nadine Wengroff M.S., C.S., Clinical Nurse Specialist

Assist your child in deciding who to invite over for a play date. Including your child in this decision will allow him/her some control.

Speak directly to the child's parent to arrange the time. Set up the play date time so you can be there the entire time. Set a reasonable length of time. If it is the first play date, plan for a shorter time. You can gradually increase the length of time after several successful play dates.

Have siblings occupied elsewhere, if possible. If you have two children close in age, try to avoid play dates where both children play with the same child, so as to allow each of them to develop his/her own friendships.

Help your child prepare for his/her guest prior to the play date: clean up, help prepare snacks. Also, suggest that your child put away any "special" toys that he/she would rather not share, thereby avoiding any conflict while his/her guest is there.

Supervise the play date by remaining in earshot. Be available to assist in resolving any disagreements. Facilitate negotiations in deciding what the children will play. Be ready to provide a snack as a break. For younger children, or for children who tend to get disorganized or have difficulty with regulation, provide assistance with structuring the play date. If necessary, break down the time into 15 to 30 minute increments, changing activities as needed.

Ask your child how he/she felt the play date went. Remember to point out and praise anything he/she did well during the play date. Assist your child in evaluating the play date, and in deciding if he/she would like another play date with this child.

Outreach Partnerships

The goal of Rush Neurobehavioral Center's (RNBC) outreach programs is that with information and promotion of better understanding, children with neurobehavioral disorders will benefit from earlier diagnosis and improved outcomes.

Edgebrook Branch • Chicago Public Library
5331 W. Devon Avenue, Chicago
312-744-8313

All programs are on Tuesdays, beginning at 7 p.m.

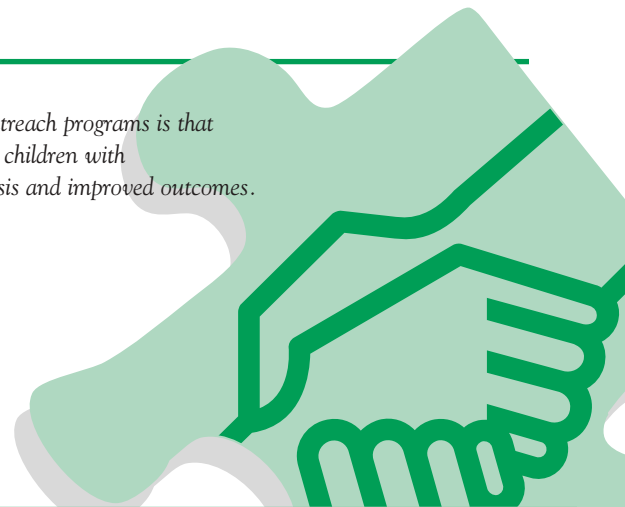
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| Oct. 21, 2003 | Safe at School: Helping Children Deal with Bullying and Teasing Ed Dunkelblau, PhD |
| Nov. 18, 2003 | Beyond Articulation: Exploring the Other Aspects of Language Gail Connelly, MS, CCC-SLP |
| Jan. 20, 2004 | How to Manage Your Child with ADHD: Advice for Parents and Teacher Marc S. Atkins, PhD |

"Learning Disabilities and More" is a monthly series of programs presented in cooperation with the staff of the Rush Neurobehavioral Center (RNBC) and the Adult Services Office of the Chicago Public Library.

Austin-Irving Branch • Chicago Public Library
6100 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago
312-744-6222

All programs are on Tuesdays, beginning at 7 p.m.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Oct. 14, 2003 | Strategies for Teaching Organization and Time Management Skills Shartrina Robinson-Amato |
| Nov. 11, 2003 | Helping Children Be Successful: An Emotionally Intelligent Approach Ed Dunkelblau, PhD |
| Jan. 13, 2004 | Strategies to Enhance Your Child's Social Skills Jennifer Grim, MS |



RNBC Seventh Annual Benefit Dinner

SAVE THE DATE of Wednesday, November 5, 2003, for RNBC's 7th annual benefit dinner. This year's award recipients will be Diane Swonk, Chief Economist at BankOne (**Living Proof Award**) and Samuel P. Gotoff, MD, former professor and Chairman of Pediatrics, Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center, (**Pearl H. Rieger Award**).



Diane Swonk

For
information,
call 847-
933-9339.



Samuel P. Gotoff, MD

Save the Date!

New Social Development Interventions at RNBC

Since its inception, RNBC has offered a variety of social development groups for children of all ages. Now we are going to try a new approach to them; one that we think will have increased impact for the participants.

Here's the background: as we do these groups, we look for ways to make them more effective. What are new approaches to further enhance children's social competence?

We've found a number of constraints that limit the effectiveness of the social development groups. For instance, when a child only takes part in a group for one hour a week for eight weeks, the group experience is a relatively small part of the child's life. Yet, the point of the group is to create a place to learn social skills and then have the child generalize that learning so s/he is more socially able in the classroom, at recess, in the neighborhood, etc. We want to work with children, their parents and teachers to extend the social learning curriculum to see if it leads to better outcomes.

Our hope is that this more intensive approach to social development intervention will provide a stronger outcome. We will evaluate the outcome of this new group format and the results will be used to inform future social development group efforts.