

No.2/November 2011

LEARNING DISABILITIES



3
TIPS

UNDERSTANDING YOUR UNIQUE GIFTS

Allying individuals with the **leading tools, teachers and advocates** to achieve a successful education and life of learning

PHOTO: ALL COVER PHOTOS BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Know the facts
How to address
early signs



Diamond in
the rough
Comprehensive
education



Parents as
advocates
Know your child's
needs

CHALLENGES

One of the **most important messages** we can give kids with learning disabilities is they can be successful both inside and outside the classroom.

Learning strategies lead to success

After being diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD, I came to understand that learning disabilities don't come with an owner's manual. This, more or less, is the short answer to why some 2.5 million students are struggling each year in America's schools. I know you're probably hoping I can tell you how to quickly unleash your child's potential, but if you want to help a child succeed with a learning disability, then you should probably avoid any advice that sounds like a "quick fix." Why? Learning disabilities are lifelong adventures. What can make all the difference is knowing how to self-advocate and find allies when you reach a hurdle.

I grew up among the first generation of students who were given the label "learning disability." In fifth grade, I didn't know how to read—or at least not very well. I'd been diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD and felt the weight of those labels as failures. Did I think I'd one day go to Brown University? No. I was just hoping to make it to sixth grade.

We in the "Republic of People Who Learn Differently" simply represent a paradox. We drop out of high school at twice the normal rate. We are overrepresented in the federal justice system, accounting for up to 42 percent of prisoners. But on the flipside we represent an exceptionally high number of CEOs, entrepreneurs, and A-list actors. We include Steven Spielberg, Whoopi Goldberg, Steve Jobs and Tom Cruise.

So we don't "kind of" fail. We fail miserably. And we don't "kind of" succeed. We really succeed.

Of course, in fifth grade I didn't know how to be Tom Cruise, and since learning disabilities don't come with an owner's manual, I had no idea how to empower myself as a learner. Part of the reason I made it through school is that I finally came around to being proud of the way my mind does work with its gifts and flaws. I stopped trying to overcome dyslexia—dyslexia doesn't go away—and started making the most of learning strategies that allowed me to succeed.

To empower kids and put them on the best possible track toward reaching their full potential, consider

"Learning disabilities are lifelong adventures. What can make all the difference is knowing how to self-advocate and find allies when you reach a hurdle."

David Flink
Executive Director
& Co-Founder of
Project Eye-To-Eye
National



as a start these three things that students with learning disabilities absolutely need:

An early diagnosis

We need to know how our brain works so we can find learning strategies that are effective for us.

Accommodations

From audio books and spell-check to extra time on written tests, we need tools that support our learning style.

Allies & mentors

We need people who can teach us when and how to ask for help.

I hope that you will keep these three things in mind and take advantage of the insights and resources on the pages that follow, because together we can work to empower every student who learns differently.

DAVID FLINK

editorial@mediaplanet.com



WE RECOMMEND



Andrew Friedman
President and CEO
of Learning Ally, a
conversation on
providing accessible
digital audiobooks to
students with learning
disabilities

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MEDIA PLANET

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Publisher: Anna Jeon
anna.jeon@mediaplanet.com
Business Developer: Brandon Hale
brandon.hale@mediaplanet.com
Designer: Ariela Anelli
ariela.anelli@mediaplanet.com
Managing Director: Geraldine Delacuesta
geraldine.delacuesta@mediaplanet.com
Editorial Manager: Missy Kayko
missy.kayko@mediaplanet.com

Contributors: David Flink, Andrew Friedman, Bonnie Z. Goldsmith, Sally Grimes, Cinthia Coletti Haan, Edward Hallowell, Tina G. Ledbetter, Patricia Lillie, Michael McManmon, National Center for Learning Disabilities, Molly Reno

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ADHD & DYSLEXIA

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SCHOOL

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NEWS

What to expect when your child has a learning disability

Often a child's teacher will notice the first symptoms of a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Parents may also notice different symptoms from those the teacher sees. That's why it is so important for teachers and parents to share notes on the development of a child. These conversations may lead to an evaluation for a diagnosis of SLD and eligibility for special education services.

Teachers might see basic word confusion, consistent reading and spelling errors, or difficulty learning basic math.

Parents might see problems doing homework, dreading school days, or trouble learning numbers and the alphabet.

The child may be given help in an

early intervention support process called Response to Intervention (RTI). Each school can implement RTI differently, but parents should always be involved in the process.

According to Federal law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), parents have the right to write a letter to the school principal requesting a special education comprehensive evaluation for their child. A sample letter can be found on the Learning Disabilities Association of America, ldaamerica.org.

Individualized education plan

If a child is eligible for special education services, the parent(s) and the school team develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) based on the child's Present Levels of Performance. The plan contains specific techniques for the special education

teacher to use in teaching the child and instructional methods for the general education classroom.

Specific Learning Disabilities are brain-based, often complex, and not easy to understand or resolve. Some schools prefer to have children with disabilities taught in the general education classroom with the special education teacher co-teaching with the general education teacher. This system is called "inclusion." It is thought by some that children with learning disabilities respond well in this system. However, many more may not learn and progress.

A number of children with SLD and/or ADHD may need special education services using intense, direct, explicit instruction, delivered in a special education classroom, one to one or in small group instruction. Parents have the right to request that

their child is taught in that setting.

Goals and objectives

Teachers should frequently test the child and compare the child's progress to the Present Levels of Performance on the IEP. As the child progresses, new goals and objectives are written into the plan. This process continues until the child reaches grade level. Some children need continued Special Education services to provide ongoing support with reading, math, written language, homework, and organizational problems.

Parents and teachers working together and comprehensive special education services are the secret to success for many children with specific learning disabilities.

PATRICIA LILLIE

editorial@mediaplanet.com



DON'T MISS!

Unique brain wiring

■ We should embrace a strength-based approach to learning differences like ADHD and dyslexia, an approach that recognizes major assets and challenges. For example, when I tell a child they have ADHD, I say, "...you have an enormously powerful brain. It's like a Ferrari engine, [but one problem is it] has bicycle brakes. I, however, am a brake specialist and can help you strengthen your brakes." I now tell people, "I do not treat disabilities, I help people unwrap their gifts." This is what we all should be doing, parents, teachers and doctors alike.

EDWARD (NED) HALLOWELL, M.D.

editorial@mediaplanet.com




RUSH NEUROBEHAVIORAL CENTER

When children have challenges with learning, attention, behavior, and social interactions, families turn to the Rush Neurobehavioral Center. At RNBC, world-class professionals conduct comprehensive evaluations to clarify children's strengths and needs. We develop a plan tailored to each child; work with school staff and other professionals to put the plan in place; and provide a range of therapies. RNBC staff are also researching and developing methods to assess, treat, and educate children with organizational and social challenges. These values permeate RNBC's approach to helping children and families realize their full potential.

Visit us at RNBC.org or call (847) 933-9339.



The College Internship Program (CIP) provides individualized, postsecondary, academic, internship and independent living experiences for young adults with Asperger's ADHD, and other Learning Differences. CIP offers year-round programs in Indiana, California, Massachusetts, Florida and New York and teen summer programs on college and university campuses across the U.S. CIP's mission is to inspire independence and expand the foundation on which young adults can build happy and productive lives.

For further information about CIP Bloomington or other programs nationwide, please visit www.cipworldwide.org or call 877-566-9247



HYDE PARK DAY SCHOOL is the only school in the Chicago area that specializes in meeting the needs of children of average-to-superior intelligence who have learning disabilities. We prepare students for a successful transition to mainstream schools by concentrating on academic and self-advocacy skills in a collaborative and caring environment. At HPDS, our curriculum is driven by a strong focus on developing self-understanding and self-awareness, which has proven to enhance self-esteem, self-confidence, and a positive attitude toward learning. With campuses at the University of Chicago and in north suburban Northfield, Hyde Park Day School offers individualized programming to every child, grades 1-8.

hpds.uchicago.edu • 877-477-5665

NEWS

READING REFORM TO BUILD A LITERATE NATION

Every country's greatest asset is its human capital — human capital that must become literate and educated, both of which are the gift of freedom a country endows its future. Alarmingly, today, America is failing its future by producing functionally illiterate and uneducated young people.

SEEDS is the acronym for all students who are at risk for attaining proficient grade-level reading and literacy abilities—abilities that are the building blocks for academic success. SEEDS comprises a variety of student representatives from all communities in society: Struggling readers of all ethnicities and social groups,

“It is not the child’s fault when they do not graduate high school ready for college and the workforce.”

Economically disadvantaged youth, English language learners, students with Dyslexia and those diagnosed with a Specific Learning Disability.

Proper reading and instruction

Research has shown that the largest barrier to the academic success of SEEDS students is the failure to receive proper reading instruction and

support. It is not the child’s fault when they do not graduate high school ready for college and the workforce. Most likely the student was never taught the necessary skills required for reading development which later translates to lifelong learning literacy, a skill that is mandated by today’s fast-paced society.

In watching the global economy rapidly out educate, out hire, and out perform America, this fact must change NOW for the health of the nation and its entire population. There is no time left for America—the writing is on the wall already.

CINTHIA COLETTI HAAN
editorial@mediaplanet.com

TIP

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HELP INITIATE
CHANGE

EARLY IDENTIFICATION
Since strong reading skills form the basis for learning in all subjects, it is important to identify those who struggle with reading as early as possible.
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How parents can choose the right school to meet their child's needs

Today's parents have considerable say about where their children go to school. Kids do not all attend their neighborhood school, as they did in the past.

Most districts allow students to attend any of their schools and any school outside the district, provided space is available. Public school options may also include charter schools and magnet schools. Families can consider private schools, some devoted to the education of children with learning disabilities, others with well-established special education services. Homeschooling is increasingly popular, and there are many high-quality online schools.

Where do you start? You know you have specific requirements for a school. Your child needs special services, informed and sympathetic teachers and administra-

tors, and a suitable atmosphere for learning. How will you find the school that suits your child best? What rights does your child have for special education services, particularly if you're looking at private schools? You need to know what your state offers because school choice varies from state to state. Most important, though, are the things you and your family find most valuable in a school.

What your child needs from school is probably more important than any other factor. Consider what you know about how your child learns best, what her or his major learning challenges are, any social issues that get in your child's way, your child's interests and passions, and teaching techniques or strategies that help your child succeed.

BONNIE Z. GOLDSMITH
editorial@mediaplanet.com

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TIPS

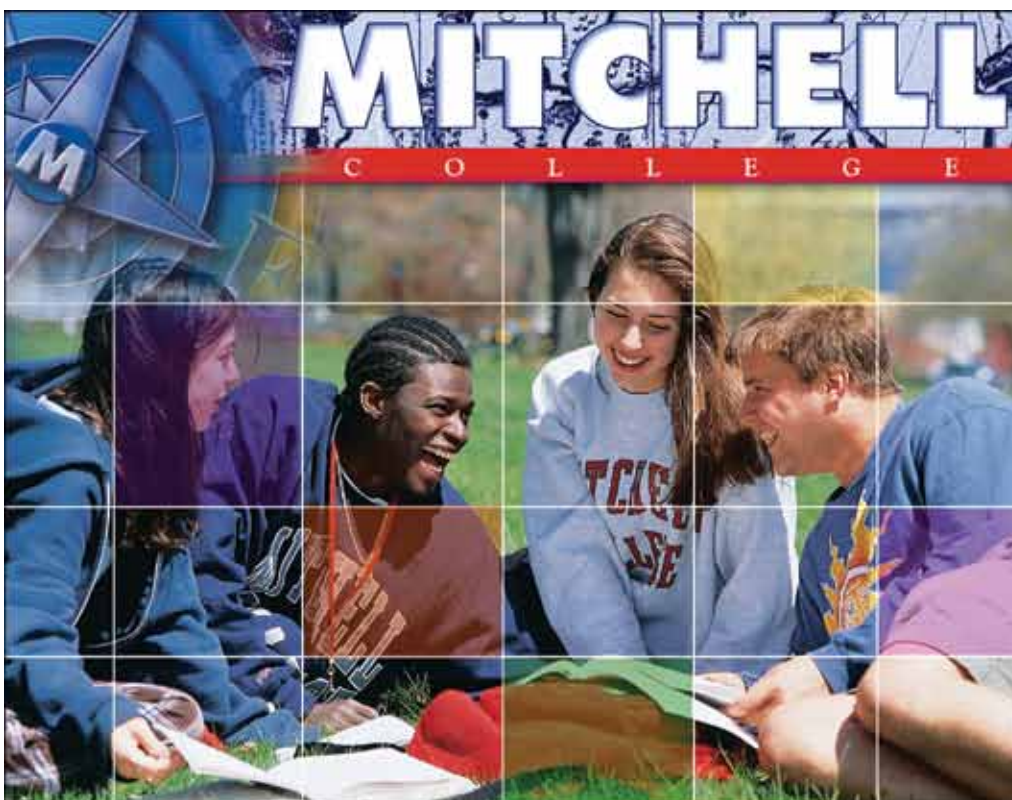
Tips for parents and educators

- Encourage oral language from cradle to grave.
- Provide varying degrees of "scaffolding"—a paper or foam hand nearby to encourage who, what, where, when, why, how responses with writing, speaking, and listening tasks.

- Go back to the "point of breakdown" to avoid the "Swiss Cheese" effect, filling in gaps of skills and concepts.

- Encourage metacognition: Help students know what they know, what is easy for them and not so easy. And ask "why"?

SALLY GRIMES
editorial@mediaplanet.com



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TIP

3

EMBRACE
YOUR GIFTS

INSPIRATION

As an adult with a fifth grade reading level, Molly Reno understands that **dyslexia is not a curse**. Rather, it is a gift that makes life oh-so-much more interesting and entertaining.

I might have ended up like Bart Simpson

Over the years I have been a carhop at A&W Root Beer, a theater dork, snorkeling instructor, tri-athlete, and a fashion stylist. I have had around 20 jobs, failed more things than succeeded, lived in five states and two countries, and gotten lost about a billion times—all while having a fifth grade reading level.

In the fourth grade I was diagnosed with dyslexia; from there I was introduced to Learning Ally (formerly Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic). I used Learning Ally to help me get through elementary and middle



“So many fun things happen when you make honest mistakes, which allow me to embrace all my imperfections and personality quirks.”

Molly Reno
Author of Dummies for Dyslexia blog

school and beyond. It changed my way of learning and ended a constant battle with my parents, who never stopped trying to get me to sit down to read my schoolbooks. I can't even imagine how I would have gotten through education without Learning Ally. I might have ended up like Bart Simpson and be stuck in fourth grade for the past 20 years.

Living life as a dyslexic took many years and many tears to come to terms with. I have met my fair share of people telling me I can't, you'll fail, you're not smart enough, you're wrong, and straight up 'NO.' One day, I realized that trying to be perfect is never going to happen and frankly, no one is perfect; it's just way too hard. So many fun things happen

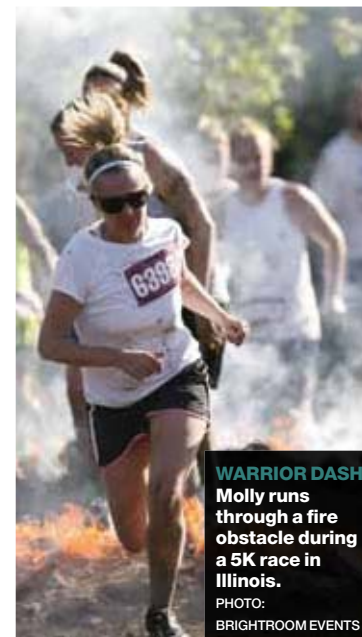
when you make honest mistakes, which allow me to embrace all my imperfections and personality quirks. It makes me very proud to be a dyslexic.

Molly Reno found out she was dyslexic in elementary school. She's written a humorous book about her experiences, and her Dummies for Dyslexia blog is a repository of wit and positive attitude about "being different."

A member of Learning Ally through grade school, high school and college, Molly has gone on to do professional work in the design field, is a ferocious tri-athlete, and jumps at any chance to speak out on behalf of dyslexic students.

For more information and testimonials, please visit LearningAlly.org.

editorial@mediaplanet.com



WARRIOR DASH
Molly runs through a fire obstacle during a 5K race in Illinois.

PHOTO:
BRIGHTROOM EVENTS

NOURISHING YOUR CHILD'S ASSETS

Spark a commitment to learning

- Set daily homework guidelines for children and provide a place for them to study.
- Let children read to you every day as they learn to read. Show them that you are excited and proud about their reading.
- Help children find ways to learn more about subjects that really interest them.
- Plan an "educational" side trip during family vacations to connect the child to history.

Develop social competencies

- Encourage children to use words—rather than just actions—to communicate.
- Encourage children to develop more skills in areas that interest them.
- Find ways for children to spend time with people who look, act, think, and talk in different ways.



PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

Affirm positive identity


- When children are facing problems or difficult times, help them think of all the possible ways they could deal with the situation. Then help them pick what they want to do.
- Encourage children to find inspirational, positive role models.
- Talk with children about what gives your life meaning and a sense of purpose.

Provided by NCLD.org

TINA G. LEDBETTER, PH.D.

editorial@mediaplanet.com

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NEWS

Top 10 areas of support for college students with learning differences

The following are 10 key areas of support that can help this population transition successfully to college and careers.

■ **1. Executive functioning and scheduling.** Each student should work to develop organizational and follow through strategies for his/her academic schedule. By working in small groups and using visual prompts to support these skills, young adults can learn how to succeed into their college classes, the workplace and daily life.

■ **2. Scheduling tutorials and study groups.** Individual and group tutoring sessions that meet throughout the week keep students on track. Routine, personalized support helps students to build a competency in writing and math required in college classes and beyond. Consistently attending tutoring sessions brings stability and the ability to predict and plan for challenges. This also helps students avoid last-minute cramming and “all-nighters.”

■ **3. Social competency.** The social learning difference is the most abstract of all learning differences. Students need to interpret what others are thinking and feeling by assuming another’s perspective. Interpreting facial expressions can be especially a challenge for individuals on the autism spectrum, and appreciating alternative



Dr. Michael McManmon has an inside perspective as he himself was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome.

perspectives can be a challenge for students with ADHD or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. By participating in small group sessions to discuss perspectives and practice real-life social situations, students can gain explicit training in social learning. They can work on essential skills including reciprocal conversation, eye contact and spatial awareness.

■ **4. Sensory integration.** Students with processing delays or attention deficits benefit from having a holistic understanding of their sensory issues and a key sense of the environmental factors that affect their performance. Finding the best seat in their classroom, identifying distraction-free environments, preparing for sensory triggers such as heat, cold, or noise can help students be calm and receptive for the start of class.

■ **5. Internships.** Internship placement serves as a bridge for a student’s transition from college to work and directly supports development of the skills necessary for real world success. Counselors, educational therapists and teachers can help students by assessing their interests and by matching

their skills and goals to fit new opportunities.

■ **6. Community service.** This activity allows students to network with non-profit professionals. Through community service, students gain a sense of accomplishment, exposure to diverse fields and people, and achieve personal growth by contributing their time to help others.

■ **7. Wellness.** A healthy lifestyle can help a person both reduce stress and elevate their level of healthy functioning. Awareness and a practice of exercise and a good diet increases energy and promotes positive social behaviors.

■ **8. Reframing.** Reframing is a practice that helps students connect the dots between behavior and emotion. Reframing is a themed pro-social activity that aid students’ self understanding and provides daily structure to their lives.

■ **9. Relationship development.** Students with learning differences may have had limited exposure to intimacy and healthy relationship development. Many students with learning differences need basic instruction in common strategies such as initiating friendships and conversations, and learning how and when to be intimate.

■ **10. Individual therapy.** Therapy is a critical component for students with learning dif-



TIME MANAGEMENT. A CIP instructor holds a Bookends Executive Functioning Skills Group class where students learn to organize and manage their time.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CIP

ferences who need support with social, anxiety, and sensory issues. Each student arrives at college with a unique set of challenges. Many come to college without a sense of how to ask a teacher for help, work in a group, or develop typical college friendships. Individual counseling utilizing cognitive behavior therapy strategies can be very effective in assisting students to deal with their emotions and to independently solve problems.

As the number of students being diagnosed with learning differences increases, post-secondary institutions need to develop curricula and supports that provide them with a variety of comprehensive and individualized services so they can transition successfully to adulthood.

MICHAEL P. MCMANMON, ED.D.
editorial@mediaplanet.com



MUST READ

Why are assistive technologies and services so important?

We know there are millions of individuals with learning differences, and for so many of them, the inability to read in a print-based world is a barrier to their success in education and progression in the workplace. But we also know (and science now confirms) that having a reading disability is by no means a reflector of intelligence or potential to succeed.

Kids with learning differences like dyslexia, for instance, can be incredibly bright, hard-working and capable of original, out-of-the-box thinking. They simply need a different way to access their educational content—and once you give that to them, they flourish.

Today’s assistive technologies make it possible to deliver educational materials in accessible, digital formats that people can enjoy in the midst of daily life.

Countless voices in the community have challenged us to make educational content accessible on mainstream devices like iPad, iPhone, MP3 players, Macs and PCs. The technology frees parents from always having to be readers for their children, teachers are delighted to use it in the classroom, and best of all, kids themselves embrace learning and get on an equal playing field with their peers, which does wonders for their confidence and self-esteem.

ANDREW FRIEDMAN
President and CEO of Learning Ally
editorial@mediaplanet.com



What are learning disabilities?

SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT

■ Learning disabilities (LD) are a group of varying disorders that have a negative impact on learning. They may affect one's ability to speak, think, read, write, spell or compute. The most prevalent LD is in the area of reading, known as dyslexia. ■ Currently 2.4 million students are diagnosed with LD and receive special education services in our schools, representing 41 percent of students with disabilities.

■ They are life long and cannot be cured; however, the effects of an LD may be mitigated to support learning, living and earning, particularly when identified early and dealt with effectively.

■ Intellectual disabilities (once referred to as mental retardation), autism, deafness, blindness, behavioral disorders, and ADD/ADHD are not learning disabilities; however, these conditions are frequently confused with LD.

■ While students with LD con-

tinue to represent the largest group served by Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the special education law (42 percent), the number of school-age students identified with LD has seen a decline during the past 10 years.

Outcomes

■ While some educational outcomes for students with LD have shown improvements in recent years, overall they remain unacceptably low.

■ Close to half of secondary students with LD perform more than three grade levels below their enrolled grade in essential academic skills (45 percent in reading, 44 percent in math).

■ 64 percent of students with LD graduate from high school with a regular diploma vs. 74 percent of students in the general population.

■ 22 percent of students with LD drop out of high school vs. 8 percent of students in the general population.

■ 10 percent of students with

LD are enrolled in a four-year college within two years of leaving school, compared with 28 percent of the general population.

■ Among working-age adults with LD versus those without LD: 55 percent vs. 76 percent are employed; 6 percent vs. 3 percent of adults are unemployed; and 39 percent vs. 21 percent are not in the labor force partly because of lack of education.