

Red Flags that may Indicate Your Child is Struggling at School

Written by Georgina Rayner

Parents often ask how they can recognize the red flags that indicate their child may be struggling in the school system. The following is a list of some behaviours that would warrant further investigation.

- Signs of stress, crying, temper tantrums.
- Reclusive and/or depressed.
- Excessively fearful about being centered out.
- Reluctance to go to school.
- Bed wetting reoccurring after a long period of dry beds (children with ADHD can often be delayed in achieving bladder control).
- Unusually clingy and insecure.
- Frequent visits to the time out bench.
- Suggestions from the school that you need to visit your doctor and have your child medicated because he is hyperactive or doesn't pay attention.
- Unable to go to their room and carry out a prescribed task as they forgot what it was by the time they get there.
- Take forever to brush their teeth as everything else in the bathroom caught their attention.
- Move from toy to toy or play station to play station and not stay focused for any length of time.
- Becomes "absorbed" into some preferred activities and struggles to shift away from them.
- Asks frequent questions but does not appear to listen to the answers.
- Displays unusual or no response to emotional situations (discipline seems to have no impact on behaviour).
- History of frequent ear infections as a small child that may or may not continue.
- Dislikes loud noises, prefers a quiet play area.
- Tells you he feels dumb or stupid.
- Forgetful, loses his belongings and homework.
- Has huge volumes of homework as he couldn't complete any work at school.
- Has trouble getting started.
- Awkward pencil grip – pressure right through the paper.
- Reluctance to try or do puzzles.
- Unusually clumsy – an accident looking for a place to happen.
- Teacher remarks on a report card that indicate this student is too verbal, needs to learn to take their turn, doesn't concentrate on work, unfocused, disorganized, uses time poorly.
- Prefers to be read to, as opposed to trying to read.
- Work has many reversals and is impossible to read.
- School asks you if you are having any problems in your home.
- Transitions from one activity (or classroom) to the other take much longer than other students.

As a parent there is a process to follow to get to the bottom of your child's concerns. First and foremost, assure them of your love and commitment to them. Next, visit the teacher. Observe in the class. Discuss

your child's concerns with the teacher. Try and work out some strategies that both the child and the teacher can employ. While they are experimenting with these strategies, be sure and communicate with the teacher to see if there have been any positive changes. If the teacher, principal and parents are all working together and the child is still experiencing stress and a lack of success it is time to look at the child's individual learning or lack thereof. The following is a process which will help to identify the specific needs of your child:

- Have a complete medical to make sure there are no physiological problems.
- Have a vision test by a doctor and ask for perceptual testing especially if your child is not having success reading.
- Have an audiology test done to check your child's hearing. Make sure it includes an auditory processing test which will tell you if your child understands what they hear. Make sure the child is checked for sound sensitivity.
- Talk to the school team. They may have ideas for the teacher as well.
- Take the results of all vision and hearing tests to physician who specializes in ADHD and have a thorough assessment done for ADHD and any other neurodevelopmental disorders.
- If learning disabilities are being considered, see a Registered Psychologist specializing in ADHD for psychoeducational testing to occur. Screen out auditory processing issues before tests are done if CAPD symptoms are present. Many psychological tests are auditory-based and if the psychologist starts testing before the results of the auditory processing are ready, the tests could show low levels of ability in your child. Request that Executive Functioning testing be included. Research your psychologist before submitting your child to testing to ensure they are experienced with ADHD and writing reports for schools that target the ability to access resources. Make sure the results will be very detailed. Avoid accepting reports where the subset scores are averaged. Many children are overlooked if they have a high intelligence and their average subset scores are in the normal range. If looked at as separate scores, it could show a gifted-learning disabled student. Make sure the diagnosis is in the report and a series of recommendations are attached to assist in developing an individual education plan (IEP) for the student. Be sure the diagnosis is made by an accredited professional registered in accordance with the regulated Health Professions Act.
- Once all the information is gathered, take it to the school identification team.
- The human rights commission has determined that education is a service and therefore the child must receive the appropriate interventions.

Each year will bring new challenges. Be aware of your child's stress and look for help. Early intervention is the most positive way to help your child experience success.

How to be an Effective Advocate for your Child

By Georgina Rayner

The role of an advocate may be vital at some point in our life to obtain and maintain the necessary changes and opportunities for our children and ourselves. By definition, advocacy involves speaking on behalf of a person(s) or yourself to ensure that their rights and needs are recognized. The word “advocacy” comes from Latin and means ‘to add a voice’. The purpose of advocacy is to assist in securing the rights of one’s self or another. We all need to develop advocacy skills in order to ensure that our needs are met and our rights are respected.

Tips to be an Effective Advocate

1. Believe in yourself – one person can do a lot.
2. Be organized!
3. Identify unmet need(s) or right(s). What is the problem? Listen carefully to what the individual or family’s concerns are and help them to focus on the issue(s).
4. Research the law for understanding and how it impacts the case.
5. Be systematic in your approach:
 - Know and build your case.
 - Identify all the key players
 - Narrow down the problem
 - Develop a plan or map of where everyone is on the issue.
 - Do your homework.
 - Document the facts
 - Keep careful notes and logs of contacts and calls
 - Listen carefully.
 - What are the desired outcomes? What is acceptable? What is unacceptable?
 - Identify what conditions need to be developed or altered in order for change to take place.
6. Know your resources and your allies. Assess the nature of the barriers, resistance you might meet and/or the opposition. Knowing what you are up against will sharpen your strategic thinking. What kind of pressure is possible and from where.
7. Be assertive and communicate well. Note: an assertive person clearly states a point of view but takes into account other points of view as well, then works for the right outcome cooperatively.
8. Analyze possible consequences.
 - What is the possible fallout?
 - What historically has happened in other advocacy situations related to this issue?
 - What is the worst case scenario?
 - Can the family/child live with it?
9. Develop a back-up plan.
 - Look at alternate strategies to achieve the same goal.
 - Be careful what you ask for as you might get it.

- Make sure you have plan B in case it is needed. Do not accept that nothing will happen or change.
10. Remember the process is about the needs of the child. Parental egos and/or your personal preferences should not influence the process or outcome.
 11. Provide a process so that the individual/family can undertake their own advocacy the next time.
 12. Provide feedback to the key players. Analyze your own process and look to see what you could have done better.
 13. Be Respectful of your client and their ideals. They may have different cultures, beliefs and ideas than you. If you think that you cannot act independently because of your cultural, ethical, moral, or political belief, respectfully decline the case and send them to someone who can assist them.