



Wrightslaw

The Blame Game! Are School Problems the Kids' Fault? by Pamela Darr Wright, M.A., M.S.W. Licensed Clinical Social Worker

*They think Brian's school problems are **my fault**. When I said he needed more individual help from the LD teacher, they shook their heads. They only "do collaborative" now. They told me I shouldn't use the word "dyslexia" because it sounds hopeless. Then they asked how my husband and I were getting along! (Denise, mother of a boy diagnosed with emotional problems, later found to have severe dyslexia.)*

The school psychologist said Shannon's learning problems were her fault, that she was lazy and unmotivated and we had to pressure her to work harder. We didn't allow her to watch television. We didn't allow her to go out with friends. Homework took hours to complete, even when we helped her. She got terribly depressed. We didn't know what to do. We didn't want to raise a lazy child. (Emory & Elaine Carter before they learned Shannon had dyslexia and ADHD. See Florence County School District Four v. Shannon Carter, 510 U.S. 7, (1993)).

The Blame Game

Parents of special ed kids often say that they are intimidated, patronized and made to feel guilty and inadequate by staff at their children's school. These parents feel helpless, frustrated, and defensive. Not surprisingly, parents behave exactly like other human beings when they are blamed or attacked. Feeling threatened and uncomfortable, most parents try to explain and justify their position, in hopes that they will be understood. A few go on the offense, firing volleys of blame back. Many parents find these experiences exquisitely painful and humiliating. If they withdraw and try to avoid school functions, they find that they've been labeled as "uninvolved parents." Again, they are blamed for their children's learning problems.

Sometimes, emotions get out of control. Feelings of anger, bitterness, and betrayal consume parents and school personnel - who are then unable to work together to make educational decisions. In these cases, everyone loses. The child is usually the biggest loser if the parents and educators cannot work together effectively.

What is the basis for these negative experiences? Are parents too sensitive? Do they misperceive and misunderstand what happens in their contacts with educators? Or are parents just over-protective of their children, as many educators claim?

If you are a "special ed" parent, you know that it's hard to fight - and almost impossible to bail out. If your child receives special education services, you have to attend school meetings and you have to cooperate in developing your child's IEPs. How can you do this?

And here's another question: If the school staff believes that you or your child are responsible for your child's problems, how can you work with them so your child's interests are protected? How can you ensure that your child gets a good quality education?

School Culture

If you have run into a "brick wall" of resistance when you tried to obtain changes in your child's educational program, **you need to understand how schools really**

