

e ssential Guide

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Fathers of Kids with LD

A Parent's Guide by SchwabLearning.org



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A Parent's Guide to Helping Kids with Learning Difficulties

Fathers of Kids with Learning Problems **A Parent's Guide by Schwablearning.org**

Being the dad of a child with learning or attention problems has its special challenges and rewards. Because moms often take the primary role in child rearing, dads can sometimes feel pushed to the sidelines in the day-to-day lives of their children. In this *E-ssential Guide*, we provide practical advice on how dads can more fully connect with, support, and enjoy their children.

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Fathers of Kids with Learning Problems

It Takes Someone Special to Be a Dad

Fatherhood is an increasingly difficult role nowadays. As fathers, we have a cluster of concerns and anxieties that **our** dads could not have imagined...internet pornography...terrorism...school violence. Today's father is confronted daily with pleasures and pressures that are unique to this generation of parents.

Dads face a particular challenge when one of the kids has a learning problem. I have often thought that a family of five is akin to five people lying side-by-side on a waterbed...whenever one person moves, **everyone** feels the ripple. So it is with a family. Whenever **one** family member has a problem, **all** members are directly or indirectly affected. When that problem is a learning disability, the waterbed can really get rocking!

Gender Roles in Parenting

In our society, moms and dads have distinct and unique roles and expectations. Mom often plays the role of nurturer and protector. Dad is expected to "fix things." The leaky faucet. The worn wiper blades. The loose railing. When a child has a learning difficulty, Dad often attempts to "fix it." These efforts are often fruitless and frustrating. Dad may feel powerless, ineffective and even irrelevant.

“Dads of kids with learning disabilities (LD) must be cautious not to express or reflect disappointment in the child.”

Dads also have a tendency to deny the existence of the problem. They are often responsible for the long-term goals and activities of the family. The mortgage. The family finances. Mom tends to deal with the day-to-day issues. As a result, Dad may not have an opportunity to view the cycle of failure and frustration that the child faces every day. Mom is on "the front lines" and tends to recognize the problems and its implications before Dad does. As a father once told me, "I denied Tommy's problem for years and felt that my wife was overreacting. But I was home sick one day and saw him when he got off the school bus. I never saw that pain and sadness in his eyes before. I realized then that I had to help **her** to help **him**."

Once Dad recognizes that a learning problem exists, he may then experience frustration when he realizes that the situation cannot be solved solely by love and attention. **Dad also has a tendency to focus on the needs of the mom and the child while ignoring his own needs and reactions to the situation.** I have often conducted "dads-only" seminars and the participants frequently state that they are so involved in being "supporters" that they have never examined their own responses to the child's difficulties. Communicating with dads who face similar challenges can be very comforting and confirming. It is painful to watch your child struggle and fail. Discussing and exploring that pain can help to eliminate it.

What Kids Need Most

The child needs one thing from Dad...unconditional love. She needs to know that you accept and love her fully and without reservation. She recognizes that her behavior will, at times, be a source of puzzlement and frustration for you, but you must always communicate that your love for her is boundless and inexhaustible. Tell her so. And let your daily interactions with her reflect this. Praise her

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often and show genuine interest in her activities. Be available to her and take pride in her successes and her small victories. Compare her **only** to herself and focus upon the positive aspects of her personality and her life.

I have long held the bias that the most powerful and damaging emotion that one human being can inflict on another is **disappointment**. Consider: Think of a person you know and admire; a person whose opinion and approval are important to you. Would you rather have this person **angry** at you...or **disappointed** in you? Most people would prefer anger.

“ Mom often plays the role of nurturer and protector. Dad is expected to 'fix things.' ”

Anger hurts, but **disappointment** communicates the child's failure to fulfill your hopes and expectations. Dads of kids with learning disabilities (LD) must be cautious not to express or reflect disappointment in the child. Avoid communicating that the child is a burden. The weight of a dad's disappointment may be too much for a child to bear.

Taking the Whole Family Into Account

Dads must also be aware of the reactions of the siblings to the child with LD. **Brothers and sisters are often confused about the situation and may resent the extra time and attention that the child with LD receives.** Assure the sibling that you love him and that you are proud of his unique accomplishments. Acknowledge that his sister **does** require extra resources and energy from Mom and Dad. But remind him that this situation is being handled fairly. Although your time is not divided **equally** between the kids, it **is** being divided **fairly**. Equality and fairness are not synonymous. The special challenges faced by the child with LD require the parent to invest extra time and attention in her. That's fair.

But, perhaps Dad's most crucial role is to support Mom through this journey. She may have the need to discuss the child's problems with you frequently. Listen. She is not necessarily asking you to **solve** the problem. Merely talking about the situation may make her feel better. Reinforce her. Commend her efforts. Comfort her. Be there.

I'm a dad and I have worked with countless dads through the years. This experience has taught me the two most important lessons of fatherhood:

- Always remember...she is **their** mommy, not **yours**!
- The most important thing that a father can do for his children is to love their mother.

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About the Author

Richard D. Lavoie, M.A., M.Ed. is a recognized authority on learning disabilities. He has spent more than thirty years working with kids who struggle to learn, as well as with their parents and teachers.



Fathers of Kids with Learning Problems

Building the Bond between Fathers and Kids with Learning Difficulties

Ever since our son, Alex, was little and I was taking him from tutoring to speech therapy to therapeutic swimming, the overwhelming prevalence of women in those settings was impossible to ignore. In waiting rooms, on the sidelines of swim and horseback riding lessons, and in parent support groups, moms were everywhere. Articles, brochures, and even books offered advice on everything from potty training to classroom accommodations. But, always, the target audience was the mother.

It is no wonder, then, that fathers often feel excluded. And in families where kids have learning disabilities (LD) or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), the related emotional and academic problems can leave fathers feeling even more excluded from the family dynamics.

"All the literature is very mother-focused. There is a real shortage of information and support for fathers," observes James May, program director for the Washington State Fathers Network. "I'm amazed at the number of calls I get from men saying, 'I can't find any resources designed for me.' So often there is a feeling of, 'I guess I'm not important.' It doesn't help that you walk into agencies and there are no pictures of men and their kids on the walls. It's easy to see why fathers feel isolated."

Traditionally, it has been the mother who has carted children from school to lessons to play dates. And while more dads are involved in their children's lives today than ever before, the gap is still great, particularly for those fathers whose children struggle in school.

Why Dads Aren't More Involved

"I tried early on to be really involved in my son's life at school and at home," says one San Francisco Bay Area father of a 12-year-old son who has attention and motor problems. "It just seemed to backfire. Every time I made a suggestion or tried to get involved, my wife would give me 'the look.' It was like I couldn't do anything right, and since she was home with our son the most, I finally just backed off."

This is a common scenario, say family therapists. And the longer it goes on, the harder it is to change the way fathers interact with their children with learning difficulties.

One factor that complicates the picture, says Stanford Children's Health Council Executive Director, Christopher Harris, is the fact that the father is often the parent whose genetic history causes dyslexia (one type of learning disability), which may be passed on to his child. "From the dad's perspective," Harris explains, "if he had a miserable time in school, living through it again through his child is a painful déjà vu."

What often happens, Harris says, is that the father withdraws from the pain of looking back, or feels unsure how to intercede, because in many cases, the mom has already taken charge. Add to that the historic stereotype of the strong, invulnerable man, and things only become more difficult.

“ Whether you are the best-read expert on your child's problems is much less important than that you are consistently present and involved with him. ”

Building the Bond between Fathers and Kids with Learning Difficulties

In the case of the stay-at-home mother and the father who works outside the home, it is even easier for the mother to become the "do-er," and the parent who is most knowledgeable about the child's struggles.

"My wife was the expert," says Robert, who has three children, one of them severely dyslexic. "Whenever there was a school problem, or a problem with making friends, she would have read the latest articles or talked with our counselor, so she would just handle it. The more she did it, the less I was involved." Another complicating factor can be when men try to suppress or deny their feelings about their child's struggles, Harris says. "They'll say to their child with learning difficulties, 'I overcame this thing, why can't you?' and that can put even more distance between them."

Why Kids Need Their Dads

The U.S. Department of Education is working to get fathers more involved because it is known that children enjoy school more, and do better, when their fathers participate. **Research also shows that children whose fathers are not very involved in their daily lives are more likely to drop out of school and to have problems developing relationships of their own.** Especially in the life of a child who has learning and emotional issues, the alliance with dad is crucial, say child development experts.

Bringing Dad into the Picture

If your family is one in which mom is still the authority and the main participant when it comes to your child with learning difficulties, there are steps both parents can take to change that, say experts. Here are some suggestions:

- **First and foremost, dads need to start speaking up.** If either parent sees a website on issues impacting children and it speaks only to mothers, it is an opportunity to write to the host and suggest a change in approach to include fathers. If mom or dad visits an agency or school office where the presence of fathers is either unrepresented or not welcome, fathers can let the administrators know. Don't be afraid to make suggestions.
- **Be sure dad has the same information about the child's LD or AD/HD that mom has.** If mom is the one who surfs the Web for news and support, share print-outs and take time to discuss them.
- **When mothers and fathers can share how they felt about school when they were growing up,** it can clear the air if either parent is having trouble reliving his or her own academic or social struggles. Consider seeing a family therapist if this area is too hard to discuss without a facilitator.
- **Set aside father-kid time that doesn't involve the usual stressors of competition or homework.** Find something you both enjoy and do it purely for fun.
- **Don't compete for who's right.** Remember that fathers and mothers can each have their own approach to problem solving and neither one has to be "right" or "better." Often mothers discourage fathers from handling an issue because they know men won't do it the way they would. But therapists say it's actually good for kids to learn different approaches from mothers and fathers, since it reflects the fact that there is more than one way to approach life.
- **Look into ways to get support for both parents.** There is no need for moms or dads to go it alone. Whether it's through a fathers group dad starts himself, or books and videos geared toward the father's perspective, there is support out there for fathers, too. (See the attached list of websites for some of these resources.)

Building the Bond between Fathers and Kids with Learning Difficulties

Be the Dad Who Shows Up

In the end, whether you are the best-read expert on your child's problems is much less important than that you are consistently present and involved with him, experts have found.

At my house, we have, over time, found ways to divide the tasks and activities related to our son. My husband is the golfer and the basketball player, so he shares those activities with Alex by coaching or just going out to play. I'm usually the one who reads aloud and helps with book reports. But when it comes to meeting with teachers or counselors, we both make time.

Eric Speitzel, whose two grown sons both have dyslexia, says he has always made time to be around. What has bothered him is the continuous lack of understanding of other people about what it is like to be a father of children with LD. "Over and over I'd hear, 'Your kids are lazy,' or, 'They could do that if they just tried.'" He says "I'm not dyslexic, but I did everything with my sons. **You have to find ways to get involved and be a part of what's going on. You have to try to find out what it's like.** Everybody should do a simulation (a program with exercises designed to simulate what it's like to be dyslexic, put on by organizations like Parents Helping Parents). It's about hanging in there with your kids. You just can't give up."

From our Parent-to-Parent Message Board:

"My 8-year-old daughter and husband have LD. My husband wasn't told when he was younger and he just felt stupid. He has dyslexia. The effects of not feeling like everyone else are still with him. Now my daughter is going through the same thing. He didn't want to help her at first. I explained that although I do my best I can't understand what she is going through. He does. So, he started helping her. She is doing so much better and feels better about herself because her daddy has LD too. He isn't stupid so she knows she isn't either. Since he started helping her, her grades have gone up dramatically. I am so happy that my husband got involved, it really made a difference for our daughter." — Jennaren

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About the Author

Melinda Sacks is a journalist who specializes in writing on children, education, learning disabilities, and family issues. She has written for the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Stanford Magazine*, and many other Bay Area publications.



Fathers of Kids with Learning Problems

Dynamic Duo: A Father and Daughter Who Share LD

Schwab Learning recently spoke with David Sharpe about his teenage daughter, Hayley, and the role he plays in her life. Both David and Hayley have learning disabilities (LD). David first contacted Schwab Learning to make us aware of the support group Hayley set up at her high school to help incoming freshman with LD learn effective self-advocacy skills. We soon realized that David is actively involved in Hayley's life and wanted to know more about his parenting philosophy and experiences. Like many parents, David is quick to discuss his daughter's achievements but is modest about his contribution to her success. We convinced him that his insights would benefit other parents — particularly fathers — who are also raising kids with LD. This is his story.

Words of Wisdom

We asked David what advice he'd like to share with other men whose kids have LD. Here is what he frequently tells other fathers:

"We men tend to want to 'fix' problems, but we can't fix or cure LD. What we can do is learn about LD and get our kids the help they need to succeed."

"If you watch your child stumble and fall at the playground, you'd naturally run over to help. If you watch your child struggling in school, you should intervene in the same caring manner. Don't ignore it and hope it will just go away."

Demystifying Learning Disabilities

Hayley has been identified with dyslexia, dyscalculia, and short-term memory issues. David has always believed strongly in demystifying LD for her. "We never hid Hayley's disabilities from her. From the time her LD was first identified in first grade, we told her she simply learned in a different way. We encouraged her to be aware of her LD but not ashamed of it."

David is a pro at delving into books and the Internet in search of research-based information that sheds light on his and his daughter's learning disabilities. He and Hayley are both intrigued by brain research that helps explain the physiology and dynamics of LD. He's grateful that scientific evidence is making learning disabilities, often called "invisible disabilities," more tangible in the eyes of the general public.

A Positive Perspective

David speaks passionately about his philosophy on living with learning disabilities. "Learning differences are something to be embraced and celebrated," he says. He and his wife have always emphasized this perspective with Hayley and her teachers and school administrators. As parents, they've always taught Hayley that the world needs and values people who learn and think differently, and they point to many successful people in history who probably had LD. While in elementary school,





Dynamic Duo: A Father and Daughter Who Share LD

when Hayley was assigned to play the role of an historical figure she could relate to, she chose Thomas Edison, who is believed to have had LD.

Supporting Self-Advocacy

Understanding one's learning disability doesn't always insulate a child from the stigma and misconceptions held by others. Even when her LD had been explained to her, Hayley was self-conscious about it, especially when other kids teased her or asked why she had to go to a special classroom. How did David and his wife address her insecurities? David says, "Since the time Hayley was in first grade, we've taught her how to advocate for herself. She learned how to explain her disability, her needs, and her strengths to teachers and peers."

“The last thing most disabled people want is sympathy; what they want is information and support.”

Self-advocacy doesn't mean making excuses; it means asking for what one needs to work around a disability and function well. As David points out, "The last thing most disabled people want is sympathy; what they want is information and support. An amputee is only disabled if he doesn't have the proper prosthetics."

Hayley's teachers and school administrators have been supportive of her special needs. Many other adults, however, subscribe to some harmful misconceptions about LD. "I get really angry about people's ignorance when it comes to learning disabilities," David admits, "especially those who think LD stands for 'lazy and dumb.'" As Hayley becomes a young adult, she'll be equipped to deal with such views because she has a clear understanding of what her disabilities are and can articulate that to others.

Harmony at Home

David admits that his wife, who doesn't have LD, is a tougher disciplinarian than he is — and that he sometimes has to act as a buffer between mother and daughter. While David holds Hayley accountable for her homework and coaches her on day-to-day responsibilities, he empathizes with her challenges, having struggled with learning all his life.

When asked if having different parenting styles causes marital conflict, Dave is quick to explain that he and his wife see their roles as complementary, providing Hayley with a balance of structure and support. While David and his wife don't always see eye to eye, they stand united on the most important values and decisions.

David also encourages other fathers to spend time now to nurture their marriages. "After all," he points out, "when your kids are grown and gone, you don't want to be a stranger to your spouse."

Involvement and Influence

From the time Hayley was in preschool, David has been actively involved in her education and extra-curricular activities. Whether it's an IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting or a disabled students rally, David is usually on the scene. Many fathers complain they don't have time to be involved. David's reply to them is clear: "Put your child first. Get involved. Just do it!"

David's work schedule is somewhat flexible; he has every other Friday off, and he usually devotes that time to his family and the school. He's a familiar face at Hayley's school because he's an active volunteer. He helps repair the facilities and does set construction for high school drama productions. It's his way of giving back to the school community that has supported his daughter.





Dynamic Duo: A Father and Daughter Who Share LD

We asked Dave to name a high point — a seminal event — in his support of Hayley. With a broad smile, he told us how he took Hayley and several other teens with LD to the governor's office in Sacramento where the group staged a peaceful protest against state legislation that penalizes kids with LD taking state-mandated tests. Hayley took a stand and led the protest, but it was David behind the wheel who quietly maneuvered the group to the steps of the governor's office.

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About the Authors

David Sharpe and his teenage daughter both have LD. David is artistic and learns best in a creative, hands-on environment. He has a college degree in art and enjoys pottery and glass blowing. He works as a municipal building inspector in the San Francisco Bay Area.

In her role as Writer/Editor for Schwab Learning, **Kristin Stanberry** provides information, insight, strategies, and support for parents whose children have LD and AD/HD. She combines a professional background developing consumer health and wellness publications with her personal experience of coaching family members with learning and behavior problems.





Fathers of Kids with Learning Problems

Marriage under Pressure

Raising a child who has a learning disability (LD) requires a lot of time and energy from parents. At times, the whole family may be caught up in the whirlwind of adjusting to life with LD. In this situation, it's easy to neglect your marriage. Remember it's essential to nurture your relationship during such challenging times. Partners who understand and support each other can better help their children and each other. Having a strong, healthy marriage also gives your children a sense of security.

Follow Your Tracks

When focusing on your marriage, you may find it useful to imagine two different tracks running parallel to each other. **Track One** includes a couple's outward behavior and actions — things that are easy to observe. **Track Two** runs parallel to Track One but involves deeper feelings under the surface. For every behavior on Track One, there are corresponding emotions at work on Track Two.

Track One: Watch for Warning Signs

When a child has LD, his relationship with one or both parents can intensify. This is normal and expected. However, pouring extra energy into your child's well being can make it easy to ignore signs of stress in your marriage. Try to stay aware of how you and your spouse are behaving.

There are some common warning signs to be aware of. For example, do you or your spouse:

- Devote most of your time, energy, and attention to your child and have "nothing" left for yourself or your partner?
- Avoid being at home and find excuses to stay away?
- Seem to be addicted to drugs, alcohol, food, work, or exercise?
- Have trouble communicating with your partner without blame, anger, defensiveness, or frustration?

It's best not to ignore signs like these, hoping they'll disappear. Try to face problems together and resolve them as soon as possible. It takes courage to ask your partner about his behavior. It can be even harder to admit to your own shortcomings.

There are many ways to improve how you behave with each other and your family. Often, a licensed marriage counselor or clergy member can help you change the patterns you've fallen into. Let's explore some steps you can take right now.

- **Work as a Team**

It's critical that you and your partner both understand your child's LD — and how you can help him. Whenever possible, participate in these activities together:

- o Back-to-school night and Open House
- o Parent-teacher conferences

“ Partners who understand and support each other can better help their children and each other. Having a strong, healthy marriage also gives your children a sense of security. ”

Marriage under Pressure

- o IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings
- o Your child's medical appointments
- o Seminars about learning difficulties

Doing this allows each of you to hear information directly and ask questions. You'll also get a clear sense of what's involved. That way, you can make better decisions as a team. If you handle the day-to-day management of your child's LD, your spouse will better understand the work you're doing.

As the father of a second grade student explains, "By attending the parent-teacher conferences with my wife, I found there were some tasks I was comfortable volunteering for. I offered to complete most of the paperwork, which I'm good at. That left my wife more time to help our daughter with her homework."

- **Give Each Other Some Space**

It takes energy to help your child and maintain your marriage. To stay healthy, you and your partner may need time away from each other and your responsibilities. Try to give each other a break from parenting duties on a regular basis. Then, use your free time to enjoy activities, hobbies, or social plans that help you relax and recharge.

When you and your partner are together, be sensitive to each other's need for space and privacy. One stay-at-home mom cringes when she describes how she used to greet her husband when he returned home from work. "He was barely in the door when I'd unload all the problems I'd had with the kids that day," she admits. "He'd give me the silent treatment all evening." After several arguments about this, she realized he needed to settle in before helping her. She found that if she let him unwind for a while, then he was happy to play with the kids while she fixed dinner. They learned to wait and discuss problems at less hectic times of the day.

- **Rediscover Each Other**

When your child's needs demand your time and energy, romance may be the last thing on your mind! But rekindling your relationship is critical if you and your partner are to stay strong and happy.

Make it a point to schedule regular dates with each other. Your time together can be as simple as taking a walk after dinner or as special as the two of you getting away for the weekend. Use this time together to rediscover each other. Avoid talking about your child's problems. To accomplish this, hire a sitter or enlist help from other family members.

Track Two: When Actions and Feelings Don't Match

Often, a person's behavior reflects what he feels inside. But if you and your partner are stressed and have lost touch with each other, one or both of you may behave in a way that hides your true feelings. From there, communication often breaks down and your marriage suffers. There are steps you can take to understand each other better.

- **Understanding Your Partner**

If your partner's behavior frustrates or confuses you, there may be a "disconnect" between outward behavior (Track One) and inner feelings (Track Two). One woman recalls how her husband's silence bothered her as she struggled to help their son who has AD/HD. She thought back to another time when her husband seemed aloof and unconcerned. It was before she had surgery. "He didn't seem to care about my operation. Months later he admitted how afraid he had been that something would happen to me during surgery. He couldn't tell me at the time."

That memory prompted her to ask him how he really felt about the current situation with their son. Professional counseling helped him sort through and express his emotions. "It turned out my husband felt guilty because he couldn't solve all of our son's problems," she explains.

Marriage under Pressure

This story is not uncommon. Like many men in our culture, her husband needed encouragement to verbalize his feelings. And when he did speak up, he expressed a sense of inadequacy for not being able to protect his wife during surgery, or end their son's struggle. Men often prefer to look for immediate solutions rather than learn to understand and manage a problem over time.

Finally, consider the different emotions you've felt about your child's LD. Your spouse may be processing his feelings in a different way. And his past experiences may influence his reaction to your child's LD.

- **Helping Your Partner Understand You**

Sharing information honestly and in ways that are comfortable will help you and your spouse understand each other better.

Try expressing your feelings to your spouse in an honest, non-threatening way. Remember your partner is not a mind reader! Make it clear to your partner what you do — and don't — expect from him. For instance, you might tell him you want to talk about your feelings, but you don't expect him to give you answers. In general, women tend to verbalize their feelings more than men do. Women are comfortable "thinking out loud" and appreciate being heard. Often, all a woman wants is an outlet, not the solution to a problem.

If your partner seems to have a hard time hearing you talk about feelings, try writing him a note to express yourself. This will help you focus on what's important and give him time to consider your concerns without having to respond right away.

Looking to the Future

Working to repair and strengthen your marriage can be hard work. The path to a better marriage is seldom smooth; you'll encounter bumps and detours along the way. But if you and your partner agree on your overall goal, the journey will be a bit easier. "Some of the couples I counsel make a clear commitment to stay married," a therapist relates. "Once they set that as their goal, then the other pieces fall into place."

Your marriage is a union of two people with individual needs. Your child and family situation are also unique to you. Working together, you and your partner will find the best path to take. The reward comes when your understanding and love for each other deepens. There's a good chance your marriage and family will not only survive — but also thrive — from the challenging experience you are going through.

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About the Author

In her role as Writer/Editor for Schwab Learning, **Kristin Stanberry** provides information, insight, strategies, and support for parents whose children have LD and AD/HD. She combines a professional background developing consumer health and wellness publications with her personal experience of coaching family members with learning and behavior problems.



Fathers of Kids with Learning Problems

Top Tips For Dads Getting Involved

Policy makers and educators agree that a child is more likely to succeed in school if her family is involved in her education. Parent participation usually means mothers' involvement in school-related issues because many fathers have been reluctant to get involved.

In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education focused on the interaction of fathers and school. Results showed that kids were more likely to do well academically, to participate in extracurricular activities, and to enjoy school if fathers were involved in their education. If dads had a high involvement in schools, kids were less likely to repeat a grade or be suspended or expelled. Overall, the results show that fathers can be a positive influence in their kids' education.

“Kids were more likely to do well academically, to participate in extracurricular activities, and to enjoy school if fathers were involved in their education.”

Here Are 10 Top Tips for Dad's Involvement:

1. **Maintain a healthy and loving relationship with your wife or partner.** It's the most important thing you can do to support your child with LD or AD/HD. Adult and family relationships become stressed when a child is identified with a learning disability. Your child will do better if the adults present a united approach.
2. **Create an environment in your home that promotes open communication** about your child's LD or AD/HD. Your child is the main player in understanding the learning issues and must be an active participant in the development of a management plan.
3. **Get information about your child's LD or AD/HD.** Learn the appropriate words to describe how your child processes information. Never use demeaning remarks to describe her learning difficulties.
4. **Attend your child's school conferences and/or special education IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings.** Fathers' participation at meetings can change the dynamics of the discussion significantly and influence the outcome for the positive.
5. **Be positive and supportive when solving problems.** Acknowledge your child's difficulty, but model resilient behavior. It's possible to learn to manage issues as difficult as reading, writing, or math.
6. **Emphasize the things she can do, rather than what she can't.** Every child needs to feel like an expert in something. Help your child identify her talents and support her interests.
7. **Emphasize quality of interactions with your child,** rather than the amount of time spent together. Work schedules can be quite hectic, and there can be a lot of pressure to "just spend time together." You don't necessarily need to spend long periods of time together to create wonderful memories that last a long time.



Top Tips For Dads Getting Involved

8. **Follow through on promises made to your child with LD or AD/HD.** Having LD can feel like riding a roller coaster. The fewer the unexpected upsets or disappointments, the better.
9. **Model patience and understanding** by showing your child that you can remain focused even during times of distress. Ignore negative behaviors and reinforce positive strides. Parenting a child with LD or AD/HD may be very taxing on one's patience.
10. **Don't be afraid to seek support** from other parents or professionals. There are no hero awards for the dad who "goes it alone" and refuses to seek advice from others. Your child will recognize your distress and may feel like she's let you down.

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About the Author

Brian Inglesby, M.A., L.E.P., is a school psychologist who enjoys the challenges of working with students who possess a broad spectrum of learning issues. Of special interest to Brian is the opportunity to provide teachers, parents, and students with the ability to better understand and manage a student's unique learning profile.





Fathers of Kids with Learning Problems

Resources

Books

Fathering: Strengthening Connection With Your Children

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1573240028/schwabfoundation/

By Will Glennon

Voices From Fatherhood

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0876308582/schwabfoundation/

By Patricia Quinn

Websites

Children, Youth & Family Consortium Website

<http://www.Cyfc.umn.edu>

The Fatherhood Project/ Families and Work Institute Website

<http://www.familiesandwork.org/fatherhood/index.html>

National Center on Fathers and Families Website

<http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu>

Parents Helping Parents Website

<http://www.php.com/>

U. S. Department of Education

New Study Finds Fathers' Involvement Is Key (OERI Bulletin — Fall 1998)

<http://www.ed.gov/bulletin/fall1998/newstudy.html>

Related SchwabLearning.org Articles

SchwabLearning.org

Talking with Your Elementary School Child about Learning Difficulties

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=283>

SchwabLearning.org

Talking with Your Teenager about Learning Difficulties

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=755>



Visit Schwab Learning's Online Resources



SchwabLearning.org is a parent's guide to helping kids with learning difficulties.

We'll help you understand how to:

- **Identify** your child's problem by working with teachers, doctors, and other professionals.
- **Manage** your child's challenges at school and home by collaborating with teachers to obtain educational and behavioral support, and by using effective parenting strategies.
- **Connect** with other parents who know what you are going through. You'll find support and inspiration in their personal stories and on our Parent-to-Parent message boards.
- Locate **resources** including Schwab Learning publications, plus additional books and websites.

SchwabLearning.org—free and reliable information at your fingertips, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Sparktop.orgTM is a one-of-a-kind website created expressly for kids ages 8-12 with learning difficulties including learning disabilities (LD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). Through games, activities, and creativity tools, kids at SparkTop.org can:

- Find information about how their brain works, and get tips on how to succeed in school and life.
- Showcase their creativity and be recognized for their strengths.
- Safely connect with other kids who know what they are going through.

SparkTop.org is free, carries no advertising, and is fully compliant with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).

Schwab Learning is a nonprofit program of the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation.