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Parent Coaching for Children with AD/HD and Learning Disabilities

Parents of children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) and/or learning disabilities (LD) daily contend with some very challenging parenting tasks. Whether you're facilitating home-school communication, providing support with schoolwork, or responding to your child's social and emotional issues, parent advocacy is critical to your child's happiness and success. Yet, you may spend so much energy trying to help make the outside world more manageable for your child that you find yourself on "low fuel light" when behavior problems arise at home. I've developed a parent coaching system that involves proactive intervention, with parents acting as guides for their children's behavior both at home and in the "real world."

The Self-Control and Social Skills Challenge

If your child has AD/HD and/or LD, you're probably well aware of any problems she has with self-control and social skills. Typical problems include:

- low tolerance for frustration and disappointment
- difficulty making sound decisions
- a limited repertoire of social skills

These problems may cause frequent conflict between you and your child at home. In an effort to curtail problems, many parents turn to the traditional behavior management technique of reward and punishment. While that approach has certain benefits, it doesn't promote self-control and good decision making in children. The reward-and-punishment approach may also place the parent in an adversarial role with the child.

As a child psychologist who specializes in the treatment of AD/HD and LD, I devote much of my time to training parents and children to use a coaching program that promotes self-control and social skills. The parent coaching approach stresses the importance of viewing a child's behavior as a "window" through which to assess her skills. Coaching teams up parent and child to practice strategies for coping with the hurdles of AD/HD and LD.

A Child's "Thinking Side" vs. "Reacting Side"

Coaching is ideally suited to the needs of children with AD/HD and LD. Problems with impulsivity, persistence, and judgment are addressed by the parent coaching principles of preparation, practice, and review. You approach your coaching role with a practical framework for helping your child understand what goes wrong. Underlying this framework are the concepts of your child's "thinking side" and her "reacting side."

- The **thinking side** is the part of your child's mind that makes good decisions and watches over her behavior.
- The **reacting side** is the part of your child's mind that reacts emotionally, and without thinking, to certain events in her life.

