

Gifted and Learning Difficulties Continued

Curricular Needs and Strategies



4. Strategies for parents, teachers, and professionals

Students who are Gifted/LD have learned to react stressfully to school tasks which focus on their problem area. These students learn to expect that school tasks will be a problem. The key to reducing the stress is to somehow change the perception. Then, with luck, the learned response of helplessness, and the resulting failure will also change.



The following suggestions can help reduce school stress and increase chances of success. They are essential, and if you do not agree or understand any one of these strategies, please discuss this with someone who has expertise in this area.

1. **Foster a trust relationship:** in any given day students can over-react to the many sources of frustration for them, so do your best to maintain trust to help them. Ask them what is happening to them.
2. **Use language of encouragement; avoid negative assumptions, judgmental or discouraging language:** for example, use "I hope you can" rather than "You should" or ask the student if they can.
3. **Schools should provide a safe place:** this could be a resource room in any school.
4. **Use all the tools available:** computers, calculators, I-Pods, CD/MP3 players with headphones, adaptations, enough time, photocopied worksheets.
5. **Provide a flexible timetable:** consider a partial timetable if that will keep the student in school.

6. **Have and use your sense of humor:** you can diffuse anxiety and capitalize on the often quirky sense of humour of the students who are Gifted/LD.
7. **Don't sweat the small stuff:** misspelling and finger twitching are "small stuff".
8. **Let the student talk:** make sure the focus is on the student not the adult, and give the student time to problem-solve.
9. **Provide structure with empowerment:** students need to participate in establishing clear expectations. Structure is essential for students who are Gifted/LD.
10. **Provide non-judgmental help with organizing:** everyone involved will likely experience frustration with the student's struggle to be organized.
11. **Understand that the student cannot succeed just by trying harder:** avoid the platitude "just try harder." Look at all the other strategies in this section!
12. **Provide one-to-one help if necessary:** tutors are often preferable to parents as homework support people, especially for high school students. (Parents often have such anxiety themselves over their child's success that their anxiety interferes with their ability to help. The atmosphere is too charged.) If a family does not have the finances to pay for a tutor, seek help from school. There might be peer tutors or a homework club. Ask the student's resource teacher or counsellor.
13. **Provide sympathy and understanding but not pity or condescension:** teacher to another teacher in front of the student: "Oh look, our Johnnie is trying so hard!"
14. **Demystify their learning problems:** in an atmosphere of trust and knowledge, a student can learn to understand their learning strengths and weaknesses.
15. **Help with self-advocacy:** role-playing is one way to learn these skills. An educator who knows the student might still need to be the advocate though, because some people will listen better to professionals rather than students.
16. **Celebrate:** any success or goal reached, however small, should be celebrated.
17. **Be careful of expecting more once the student starts succeeding:** another very easy temptation.
18. **Medication:** often used but not always needed if the strategies above can be used.
19. **Minimize writing demands:** particularly important in math where questions could be photocopied rather than re-written.
20. **Practise forgiveness.**



Since many students who are Gifted/LD often also have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), here are specific strategies to help with this problem:

1. Encourage doodling, drawing, or use of a small squeeze ball to help student focus while listening or waiting.
2. Seat student near teacher's desk or front of room.
3. Surround the student who is Gifted/LD with good role models.
4. Avoid distracting stimuli such as high traffic areas, windows, etc.
5. Listen to student about what helps them focus. Often music can help, and sometimes watching television facilitates written work.
6. Prepare students for transitions — they do not change easily.

Other suggestions — from a parent:

1. Use massage – cranial-sacral for concentration; shoulders and back for symptoms of anxiety.
2. Use relaxation techniques - progressive relaxation, yoga, guided visualization.
3. Exercise in any form.
4. Volunteer as a family in an area of interest.
5. Be mindful of recreational computer use.
6. Look for mentoring possibilities.
7. Look for clubs.
8. Try naturopathic and homeopathic doctors.
9. Try aromatherapy - for relaxation, concentration, mood elevation, sleep etc.
10. Have good sleep hygiene - regular bedtimes, routines, not too much difference on weekends etc.



5. Professional development

Students, parents, and teachers need to keep abreast of new knowledge regarding understanding and education of the Gifted/LD population.

Participation in conferences, training programs, continuing education, and Web discussions is essential.



References:

Corinne Bees, recently retired, was a special education teacher who designed and taught a program called the “GOLD” Program. The program, at Prince of Wales Secondary School in Vancouver, B.C., is for students who are Gifted with Learning Difficulties (Gifted/LD).

Adapted by Get into Neurodiversity for a global audience