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A Self-Advocacy Handbook

For Students with Special Needs



Sample Topics:

- Nature of My Disability
- What Do I Need to Know About the Law?
- How Can I be Successful in School?
- Resources for Students and Parents
- An Adult's Guide to Disorders

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A Self-Advocacy Handbook For Students with Special Needs

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Note to the Teacher:

Target Population

This handbook was created specifically for teachers of students with mild to moderate disabilities. In most cases, the majority of students with these disabilities qualify for special education services under the category of "Specific Learning Disability." However, this handbook can also be used for students with disabilities other than those having a learning disability.

Purpose of the Program

The primary goal of this program is to give teachers a guide for teaching self-advocacy to their students. It is hoped that following the completion of this program, students will acquire a solid foundation of self-advocacy by being able to do the following:

- State reason for being in a special education program
- State disability and its implications
- State individual learning profile including strengths and weaknesses and learning style
- Describe needed accommodations and modifications as well as how to ask for them
- State rights and responsibilities as related to special education and federal law

Program Implementation

It is suggested that this program be implemented as a unit over a period of several weeks, for example on several successive Fridays with a review of previously covered material in-between. It is also very important to vary the pace AS NEEDED, depending on the amount of prior knowledge and individual needs of the students. It is likely that the students will need plenty of repetition before truly understanding each component of the program. This should be accomplished through class discussions and additional teacher-made activities, as deemed necessary by the teacher. Pages 1-18 should be photocopied for each student to follow along and to take home following completion of the program.

It is also highly recommended that the teacher find out each student's disability, processing area (if necessary), as well as the major strengths and weaknesses of each student. Part of this program will require each student to find out the above information about himself/herself, so it will be very helpful for you to do so in advance. Self-knowledge is the first and most important step towards your students' ability to effectively self-advocate. The ultimate success of this program will depend on the amount of effort by the teacher as well as the teacher's ability to teach and reinforce each component of the program.

Parent Involvement

As with any instructional program, student participation as well as parent involvement is critical for optimal achievement. It is recommended that the letter on the following page be filled in by you with the necessary information and given to the parent of each child prior to beginning the program.

Dear Parent/Guardian of

:

Soon your child will take part in a program designed to help him/her become a more effective self-advocate. Put simply, self-advocacy means your child's ability to understand his/her disability as well as what your child can do to help himself/herself learn better in school and be successful despite having a disability. The ability to self-advocate will be highly important for your child throughout his/her education and thereafter.

It is important that your child be an effective self-advocate for many reasons: First, your child will have a greater understanding of why he/she is in special education as well as the nature of his/her disability. Second, your child will better understand his/her individual strengths and weaknesses as well as learning style. Third, your child will be able to describe needed accommodations and modifications in the classroom as well as how to ask for them. Finally, your child will be able to state his/her rights and responsibilities as related to special education and federal law. Each component of self-advocacy is critical to your child's ability to look beyond the disability and look towards a path of continued success.

Our hope is that with the ability to effectively self-advocate, your child will reach a higher level of self-knowledge and ultimately be more motivated to strive towards success in and out of the classroom. You can help simply by talking with your child about the self-advocacy skills he/she is learning as a part of this program.

Other ways you can help your child succeed are the following:

- **Set a time and place in your house for your child to do homework each night and help your child with assignments he/she may not understand.**
- **Help your child talk to his/her teachers about problems he/she may be having in school, if necessary.**
- **Encourage your child to participate in IEP and ITP meetings as well as provide support to your child during those meetings.**
- **Help your child to do research to find out more about his/her disability when your child is ready to learn more (see Appendix B for resources).**

Your participation is extremely valued. If you have any questions or would like further information regarding self-advocacy, please contact your child's teacher at the phone number below.

Teacher's name: _____

Teacher's phone number: _____

Best time to call: _____

Teacher's E-mail address: _____

Chapter 1

Introduction

➤ **What is Self-Advocacy?**

Self-advocacy means understanding yourself, including knowledge about your disability, your strengths, and your weaknesses. It also includes knowing what accommodations or modifications you may need in the classroom to help you be more successful. In addition, self-advocacy means knowing your rights and fulfilling your responsibilities.

The ability to advocate for yourself is very powerful. It shows others around you, especially adults, that you demonstrate a lot of maturity because you understand your disability and are ultimately ready to take responsibility for it.

➤ **What is a Successful Self-Advocate Able to Do?**

You will be a successful self-advocate when you can do these things:

1. Explain why you are in special education.
2. Describe what kind of disability you have and why you need special help in school.
3. Understand what your strengths and weaknesses are as well as how you learn best.
4. Know what kinds of things the teacher can do to help you do well in the classroom and how to ask for those things if needed.
5. Know what rights the law gives to you because you are in special education.
6. Understand and fulfill your responsibilities!

➤ **Why Should I be a Self-Advocate?**

The ability to advocate for yourself is like owning up to your disability and taking responsibility for it by doing what it takes to overcome your weaknesses. Everyone has weaknesses, but people with disabilities are often challenged more than those without disabilities. It has been said that people with disabilities are often stronger than those without because they have had more to overcome than other people. The bottom line is this: People with disabilities who advocate for themselves are more successful than those who don't!!

What does being a self-advocate mean to you?

Chapter 2

Nature of My Disability

➤ Why am I in Special Education?

Many students in special education often feel embarrassed or ashamed. Those feelings come from not understanding what special education is all about. Students think they are in "special ed." because they are dumb or stupid. That just isn't true. Students in special education have a disability that has nothing to do with being stupid or dumb. Many very successful people have a disability of some kind and it is certainly nothing to be ashamed of.

Special education is a set of services designed to help students who are having difficulty succeeding in a general education environment. Some students may only need special help for reading, or math, or maybe all subjects. It depends on what type of disability the student has and what subject(s) it affects. The Special Day Class (SDC) program is designed to help students who have trouble learning and

who need special help to do well in school. It is important for you to understand exactly why you are having trouble learning in school and what you can do to be more successful.

➤ **What is My Disability and What Does it Mean?**

Having a disability means that a part of you does not work as well as other parts. Everyone has things about them that work better than others, so having a disability is really nothing to be ashamed of. Self-advocates are able to understand their disability well enough that they know what to do to overcome, and possibly strengthen, that part that doesn't work as well as other parts.

Most likely, you are receiving special education services because you have a learning disability. Many students in a Special Day Class have been diagnosed with a learning disability. There are really two parts to a learning disability.

First, having a learning disability means your brain has difficulty processing certain kinds of information. Processing means being able to use information given to you. If you have a processing disorder, this means that information can get stuck or lost while traveling through your brain. There are many kinds of processing disorders. For example, you may have a disorder in visual processing, auditory processing, language processing, or a disorder involving attention, memory, or speed. Many students have a disorder in more than one area.

Look below for a description of some of the different ways your brain uses or "processes" information.

Examples of ways your brain processes information:

- a. visual processing- your brain's ability to understand what you see.
 - you can see the words, but you can't understand them
 - sentences may look like this: Wor ds may look l i k k e t h i s.
 - you lose your place while reading
 - when writing, you leave out letters or words

b. auditory processing- your brain's ability to understand what you hear.

-can hear words, but can't understand them

-you say, "huh?" a lot

c. language processing- your brain's ability to receive language (spoken or written) or to express self through language (spoken or written).

-you don't understand stories that the teacher reads out loud

-you have trouble writing

-you don't like to tell anyone what is going on in your mind

d. attention processing- your brain's ability to concentrate.

-you get frustrated easily

-you act before you think (impulsivity)

-you are very active

e. memory processing- your brain's ability to remember; there are about ten different kinds of memory!

-you forget things a lot

-you can't remember people's names

f. processing speed- how fast your brain is able to process information.

-if a teacher calls on you, you always need more time to think

Second, having a learning disability causes a discrepancy between your ability and your achievement. This really means that you are actually a lot smarter than you perform in school. Students who have a learning disability usually have trouble proving how smart they are. This means you are just as smart as other students but you are not achieving at the level where you should be because of some kind of processing disorder.

➤ **What About Other Disabilities?**

There are many other disabilities for which you can be in special education. If you have been diagnosed with a disability other than a learning disability, you will need to find out what the disability is and what it means. Your teacher can help you do this by talking to the psychologist at your school.

No matter what kind of disability you have, you will need to determine what your individual strengths and weaknesses are. This will be discussed more in the next chapter.

Why do you think you are in special education?

Chapter 3

Effect of My Disability in the Classroom

Since you are in special education, your disability probably has an effect on how you learn in the classroom. It is important for you to understand at least a little about the way you learn best.

➤ What is My Learning Profile?

It is now your turn to find out what your disability is, what type of processing disorder(s) you may have as well as what some of your strengths and weaknesses are! In order to answer the following questions about yourself, you will need help from your teacher and maybe your school psychologist.

1. What is My Disability?

What type of disability do you have?

What does it mean that you have that disability?

If you have a learning disability, what processing disability(s) do you have?

2. What are My Strengths?

All students have strengths in certain areas, including students in special education. It is very important to find out what you are good at so you can use these strengths to help you in areas in which you are not so good. Write some of the things you are good at here:

3. What are My Weaknesses?

Just as all students have strengths, all students also have weaknesses in certain areas. It is also very important to find out what your weaknesses are so you know what areas you need to work on and improve! Write down some of the things you need to work on and would like to improve in:

➤ **What Accommodations and Modifications Do I Need?**

Most students in special education can be very successful, even in general education classes if they have accommodations or modifications.

Accommodations are things teachers can do to make teaching you new things easier for you to understand and easier for you to learn. For example, the teacher can slow down, repeat the directions, highlight key words or phrases for you to remember, or show pictures while he/she is explaining something. Accommodations may also include the way the teacher sets up the classroom, assigns a buddy to help you take notes or stay organized, or gives you graph paper to do math problems.

Modifications are usually things teachers can do to make assignments and tests less difficult and frustrating for you so you can be more successful. For example, the teacher can shorten your assignments, read the directions out loud, read quizzes and tests out loud, give you extra time to finish assignments, or give you a book on tape to listen to instead of read.

See if you can think of some accommodations or modifications that your teacher already does or that you think might help you learn better. Write them here:

What's My Learning Style?

Here is another way for you to find out if you learn best by hearing, seeing, or a combination of the two. Answer each of the following questions either "True" or "False." Your first spontaneous response is probably the truest answer you can give.

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 1. | I really like to listen to people talk. | True False |
| 2. | I really like to watch television. | True False |
| 3. | I must be reminded often to do something. | True False |
| 4. | I can sit in one place for a long time. | True False |
| 5. | If I could choose to go to school anytime during the day, I would go in the morning. | True False |
| 6. | I really like people to talk to me. | True False |
| 7. | The things I remember best are those I see. | True False |
| 8. | I don't have to be reminded to do something. | True False |
| 9. | I can't sit in one place for a long time. | True False |
| 10. | If I could choose to go to school anytime during the day, I would go in the early evening. | True False |

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------|
| 11. | I'd rather read than listen to a teacher lecture. | True False |
| 12. | I prefer to learn something new by having it told to me. | True False |
| 13. | I forget to do things I've been told to do. | True False |
| 14. | I find it hard to sit in one place for a long time. | True False |
| 15. | I remember things best when I study them in the early morning. | True False |
| 16. | I find it easy to listen to people talk. | True False |
| 17. | It's easy for me to remember what I see. | True False |
| 18. | I remember to do what I am told. | True False |
| 19. | I have to get up and move around when I study. | True False |
| 20. | I remember things best when I study them in the evening. | True False |
| 20. | I enjoy learning by listening. | True False |
| 21. | I like to learn by reading. | True False |
| 22. | I do what I am expected to do. | True False |
| 23. | It's easy for me to stay put when I study. | True False |
| 24. | I study best in the morning. | True False |

Instructions for Scoring, "What's My Learning Style?":

Do I learn best by hearing?

- a. Put a check next to the following statements if you answered "True" to numbers 1, 6, 12, 16, 21.
- b. If you scored four or five checks, you learn by "hearing." If you answered, "True" to only one or two of these statements, you may be better off "seeing" what you want to learn. In all the categories if you score a "3," this means you are adaptable and that you possibly lean toward the higher score.

Do I learn best by seeing?

- c. Put an "X" if you answered "True" to the following statements: 2, 7, 11, 17, and 22.
- d. If you scored four or five "X's", you learn best by "seeing."

Do I learn best with a multisensory approach?

- e. If you answered "True" to only one or two statements in both the hearing and seeing areas, you probably prefer multisensory instruction. This means that you learn best by both hearing and seeing.

➤ **Why is it Important for Me to Know How I Learn Best?**

Knowing whether you learn best by hearing, seeing, or a combination of the two is important to know for several reasons. It is important for your teachers to know which way you learn best so they can teach you in a way that will help you be the most successful. Later in life, when you have to learn new information on your own, you will know which way is the best way for you to learn.

How do I learn best?

Why is it important for me to know how I learn?

Chapter 4

What do I need to know about the Law?

As required by several different federal laws, you are given several very important rights. Before we look at these rights, let's look at the definitions to some very important terms.

➤ What are an IEP and ITP?

IEP - The IEP is the document schools use to guarantee your right to appropriate special education services. The IEP stands for "Individual Education Plan" and is written especially for you based on your own needs. The IEP is developed by a team working together to help you. The team includes your teachers, your counselor, your parents, and most importantly you.

Each year, the IEP team will write long-term goals and short-term objectives that focus on the most important areas for you to work on. These goals and objectives are a part of your IEP. When you meet your goals and objectives, new ones will be written for you.

ITP- The ITP stands for "Individual Transition Plan" and is a document written for students who are 14 years old, or younger when appropriate, and addresses areas that are important as you continue on with your high school education and as you begin to think about career opportunities. It is designed to prepare you for the transition from high school to other post-secondary education settings.

➤ **What are My Rights?**

There are three main laws that give you special rights because you have a disability. They are called The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). There are many parts to all of these laws, but let's look at the parts that are most important for you to know right now:

You legally have the right to:

1. Appropriate accommodations that interfere with your learning due to your disability,
2. Attend and participate in your IEP and ITP meetings,
3. Give your opinion at the meetings,
4. Have the objectives you want included in the IEP and ITP, and
5. Discuss interests, concerns, and anything else relevant to your education, especially during the transition planning process, as your input is very important.
6. You also legally have the right to participate in any programs or activities that receive federal funds. This may include elective courses as well as other school-sponsored extracurricular activities such as athletic teams, clubs and other organizations.

➤ **What are My Responsibilities?**

Now that you understand some of your rights, let's take a look at some very important responsibilities you have:

1. Do your very best when you are tested. Results of testing are used to identify your strengths and weaknesses so it is very important that the results truly reflect your ability.
2. Attend your IEP meetings. These meetings concern you and you have the right and responsibility to attend and participate in the meetings. Participation in the meetings includes making suggestions and helping to decide what goals are best for you to work on.
3. Work very hard to achieve the goals set by you and the other IEP team members. It is your responsibility to work to the best of your ability during the year to meet those goals. This is one of the most important parts to self-advocacy.
4. Understand and respect your rights. This means asking for help when necessary but not taking advantage of your rights.

➤ **How Important are These Rights and Responsibilities?**

The rights given to you by law and the responsibilities expected of you are designed to protect you and to also help you be as successful as possible. These rights and responsibilities will continue throughout your education and should be taken very seriously. If you ever have any other questions about these you should talk to your teacher or school psychologist.

Here are some of my rights:

Here are some of my responsibilities:

Chapter 5

How Can I be Successful in School?

➤ Why Should I Participate in the IEP and ITP Process?

You learned in chapter 3 that you have the right to participate in the IEP and ITP process. It is very important for you to remember that these documents and meetings are focused on YOU so your participation is very valuable. The better the IEP team knows you and understands your needs, the better able they are to write information that best fits your needs! It is also important for you to hear what your parents, teachers, and your counselor have to say about your educational progress. Your IEP or ITP meeting is also a good opportunity for you to ask any questions or discuss any problems you may have.

➤ How Can I Ask for Accommodations and Modifications?

Remember, accommodations are things the teachers can do to help make learning easier and modifications are things the teachers can do to make assignments and tests/quizzes less stressful and frustrating for you. After you determine what accommodations or modifications you may need to help you work better, you need to decide how to let teachers know under what conditions you work best and what they can do to help you be more successful.

➤ **How Can I Ask for Additional Help from the Teacher?**

Part of being a successful self-advocate is being able to ask for help from the teacher and other adults when you need it. Remember that a self-advocate is able to state his or her needs when appropriate. Sometimes, you may just need the teacher to repeat the directions or show you how to do a specific type of math problem. The teacher may not always know when you need help. If there is something an adult can do to help you succeed, it is your responsibility to ask for it! Remember, though, that a teacher or other adult will be more likely to listen to your needs if you ask in a way that is appropriate. This generally means asking at an appropriate time and asking in a way that is polite.

How can I be successful in school?

Chapter 6

How Can My Parents Help?

Your parents are very important to your success in school! Although it is really up to you to do be an effective self-advocate and do well in school, your parents can also help. Below are some of the ways your parents can help you:

➤ **Help with Homework**

Your parents can help you set a time and place in your house to do homework each night. They can also help you with assignments that you do not understand. If you do not ask them for help, they will likely assume you don't need help!

➤ **Help with Problems at School**

Your parents can help you talk to your teachers about problems you may be having in your classes. They may be able to figure out appropriate ways for you to deal with things that are bothering you.

➤ **Support During Meetings**

Your parents can support you during IEP and ITP meetings. Your parents know you better than anyone else and are there to support your needs and interests.

➤ **Learning More About Your Disability**

Your parents can help you do research to find out more about your disability. There are several books available for you to read as well as your parents when you are ready to learn more about your disability.

My parents can also help me in the following ways:

Most likely, your parents have a pretty busy schedule. You may have to go out of your way to talk to parents about the ways they can help you. Your parents want to help you and will be more than happy to help you if you ask appropriately.

The best times to ask my parents for help are:

Chapter 7

Role-Playing: Practice Makes Perfect!

So far you have learned several ways you can become an effective self-advocate. Let's take some time now to practice what you have learned! Below are several situations you may come across in the future or you may have already come across.

With a partner, read each situation and decide what you should do. Write your answers next to each situation.

#1- You are taking an art class as your elective. You are supposed to take a test on some famous painters. When you get the test, you realize that you can't read the test on your own because the words are too hard for you. Although you remember learning a lot about the painters, you know you will not pass this test on your own. What could you do in this situation?

#2- You are eating lunch one day with your best friend who happens to be a general education student (not in special ed.). Your friend asks you why you are in special education classes. What do you say?

#3- You are in your IEP meeting with your parents, teacher, and counselor. Your teacher, counselor, and parents decide to write a goal for you that you do not agree with. What would you say in this situation?

#4- You are in a general education math class (with no special ed. help). You have been having a very hard time learning the new skills and concepts and haven't been able to keep up with your assignments. You have been getting help at home from your parents but you still feel very frustrated and overwhelmed. What should you do in this situation?

#5- You are in your social studies class where the teacher does a lot of lecturing (talking in front of the class). You are having a really hard time concentrating and understanding what she is saying and she is talking too fast to take notes. What could you do to help yourself in this situation?

Chapter 8

Conclusion

➤ What Have I Learned About Self-Advocacy?

Hopefully by participating in this program, you have learned several ways in which you can begin to advocate for yourself. Remember, self-advocacy means understanding yourself, including knowledge about your disability, your strengths, weaknesses, and learning style. It also includes knowing what accommodations or modifications you may need in the classroom to help you be more successful. In addition, self-advocacy means knowing your rights and fulfilling your responsibilities. It takes a lot of maturity to be a self-advocate!

Below, write three specific things you learned during this program.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

➤ **What Will I Do Different Now?**

Hopefully, you have a much better understanding of what special education is, why you are in special education, and what you can do to help yourself be more successful now and as you continue through school.

Below, write three skills you learned about self-advocacy that you could use this school year.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

CONGRATULATIONS!!

You have just completed a very important program in Self-Advocacy. On the next two pages, you will find "Ten Steps to Becoming an Effective Self-Advocate." These are skills you will continue to work on and improve as you continue through school. At the end of this program, you will also find some additional resources for you and your parents to use when you are ready to learn more about your disability.

Appendix A: Ten Steps to Becoming an Effective Self-Advocate

Step 1: Accept your disability

This step is usually most difficult. It is important to remember that you have a disability and that you are not "dumb" or "stupid." You have to accept that you have a specific problem with learning, but that you are willing to move beyond that and do what you can do help yourself.

Step 2: Admit your disability to others

Your disability is not something to be ashamed of. Many of your peers may not understand why you are in special education unless you are able to explain it to them. Admitting your disability to others shows strength and confidence in yourself.

Step 3: Understand your learning style

Your style of learning is likely to be different from the person sitting next to you. It is your responsibility to find out how you learn best. Use this knowledge to help you be more successful in your classes by using the learning style that is best for you.

Step 4: Realize how other issues might interfere with your self-advocacy

Students who have a disability are likely to have difficulty with self-confidence, motivation, or maybe behavior in the classroom. Many times these are related to having a disability. You need to think about how your disability may be impacting you in other ways that are keeping you from being successful in school.

Step 5: Be willing to compromise

Some teachers will likely be less willing than others to make certain accommodations. You may have to make "deals" with teachers to prove yourself. Build trust with your teachers by trying your best and fulfilling your obligations.

Step 6: Know what you need

As you begin to learn more about your disability, your specific strengths and weaknesses, and your learning style, you will learn more about what you need to be successful in school. For example, if you find out that you do well on tests that are read to you, then you will know to talk to your teachers about this in the future.

Step 7: Anticipate your needs in each class

It is important not to wait until it is too late to talk to your teachers about accommodations or modifications you might need. For example, if you are having trouble in one of your classes because there are too many distractions in the room (including talkative students around you!) then talk to that teacher as soon as possible.

Step 8: Know your rights and responsibilities

You should at least be familiar with your legal rights, such as the right to attend and participate in IEP and ITP meetings and the right for appropriate accommodations by your teachers. Fulfill your responsibilities by participating in your meetings, trying your best to meet your goals and objectives, and not taking advantage of your rights.

Step 9: Know where to go for support

You should always know who you can talk to for support when you have a problem or need advice about something. Your school counselor is often a good person to talk to. It is important that you talk to someone who understands your disability and who can support you.

Step 10: Plan for the future

You should begin to think about what interests you have that may help you decide what kind of work you would like to do after your education. It is never too early to begin thinking about your future.

Appendix B: Resources for Students and Parents

Books

- Armstrong, Thomas. *In Their Own Way: Discovering and Encouraging Your Child's Personal Learning Style.*
- Cicci, Regina. *What's Wrong with Me? Learning Disabilities at Home and School.*
- Crouse, Scott L. *Uncovering the Mysteries of your Learning Disability.*
- Cummings, Rhoda and Fisher, Gary. *The School Survival Guide for Teenagers with Learning Differences.*
- Fisher, Gary and Cummings, Rhoda. *When Your Child Has Learning Differences.*
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Organizations

American Hyperlexia Association
www.hyperlexia.org

The Council for Exceptional Children
888/CEC-SPED www.cec.sped.org

The Council for Learning Disabilities
www.cldinternational.org

Division of Learning Disabilities
The Council for Exceptional Children
888/CEC-SPED www.dldcec.org

Dyslexia Awareness and Resource Center
www.dyslexia-center.com

International Dyslexia Foundation
www.interdys.org

Learning Disabilities Association of America
412/341-1515 www.ldanatl.org or www.ldaca.org

Learning Disabilities Online
www.ldonline.org

Learning Disabilities Resources
www.ldresources.com

National Attention Deficit Disorder Association
www.add.org

National Center for Learning Disabilities
www.ncld.org

Orton Dyslexic Society
410/296-0232 www.ods.org
Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic
www.rfbd.org

Appendix C: A Parent's Creed

I BELIEVE that being the parent of a child with a hidden handicap is the most important and challenging job I will ever have. In the few years I have to help him mature, I will always attempt to instill in him a deep knowledge of his innate worth as an individual and never measure his behavior or scholastic achievement by any other child.

I WILL strive to always remember that this child is operating under great pressure and much frustration; therefore, I will not reject his outbursts as being abnormal or unrestrained behavior. I will recall the many times he has been loving and kind and try to overlook the incidences when there is overt hostility. And then I will try to help structure his world so that frustrations might be lessened and he will feel more secure.

I WILL have endless patience when directions are not followed at the first command, and when some rule or concept is forgotten or misunderstood. I will not expect perfection. I will be aware of and grateful for every small improvement he makes.

THROUGH the trials which I may face each day, I will always remember that this child did not choose to be different and that he would, if possible, gladly be "normal". However, since he is different, he deserves special understanding, patience, acceptance, and love. He's my child, and it is my right and my duty to guide him in finding fulfillment in life.

Written by the Mother of a child with a learning disability

Appendix D: How Can I Help?
An Adult's Guide to Visual Processing Disorders,
Auditory Processing Disorders, Sensory Motor Processing
Disorders,
And Attention Deficit Disorders

Visual Processing Disorders

Spatial Relationships: This is the ability to distinguish letters, words, sentences, numbers, and equations as separate units. The spacing of the letters or numbers is misinterpreted.

- Columns of numbers are difficult to align and organize.
- Similarly shaped letters are confused and frequently reversed (b/d/p/q)
- “Bubble-in” tests are difficult to complete
- Students have trouble transferring information from one paper to another (board to paper, test to answer sheet)
- Loses materials or unorganized work/homework
- May be late or have difficulty judging time or sequencing events

Visual Discrimination: This is the ability to differentiate objects based on the characteristics of that object. This is a skill crucial to a student's ability to assign attributes such as color, shape, size, pattern, or position. Children can also have difficulty recognizing an object as being distinct from its surrounding environment (“find the hidden object” pictures are torture!).

- Reading or math symbols are confused.
- Charts, graphs, or pictures are difficult or impossible to interpret.

- Students have trouble categorizing by visual traits (color, shape, size, etc.).
- Words cannot be recognized by their configuration (shape).
- Difficulty telling a story from a picture (has trouble distinguishing important from non-important details).

Visual Closure: The ability to recognize a symbol or object when the complete form is not there or simply is not completely visible. Children could not mentally complete or comprehend a sentence with a _____ word. In more severe forms, an incomplete picture or form could render the student unable to identify even common objects.

- Difficulty with “fill in the blank” tests.
- Confusion with math problems with “blanks” before the answer ($3 + _ = 7$).
- Difficulty completing drawings or labeling drawings (maps).

Object Recognition: This is also called visual agnosia or visual memory. Students with visual agnosia are unable to consistently recognize objects or familiar symbols. They may learn something one day and not have an ability to retrieve or recognize it the next.

- Difficulty remembering what was seen.
- Poor reading comprehension.
- Difficulty with math equations.
- Poor recall of information.

Part to Whole Relationships: This is similar to not being able to see the forest for the trees, or not being able to see the trees for the forest. The child may be able to perceive the individual parts of a task, but not be able to integrate the parts (part perceivers). The child may be able to easily identify every letter of a word, or every digit of a number, but then be unable to identify the intact word or number. Others, who are whole perceivers may be able to recognize very difficult words, but are unable to tell you the letters contained within it.

How Can I Help A Child With a Visual Processing Disorder?

- 1. Read directions aloud.**
- 2. Color code (or highlight) important new information.**
- 3. Provide oral instruction.**
- 4. Provide help with organization.**
- 5. Use an index card or window to reduce visual stimulus on a page.**
- 6. Use enlarged print to reduce the number of words on a page.**
- 7. Give extra time for homework.**
- 8. Create study guides with reference page numbers to help locate requested information.**
- 9. Reduce readability for reading tasks or tests.**
Original: Name those structures that are commonly found in both plant cells and animal cells.
Revised: What parts do animal cells and plant cells both have?

Auditory Processing Disorders

Phonological Awareness: These disorders prevent the child from identifying individual sounds within words. This creates several problems. These children are unable to “sound out” in order to read or spell. When students cannot “sound out” words, it creates a need for the brain to memorize the spelling of each word in order to read it or recreate it.

- Great difficulties with spelling.
- Reduced sight vocabulary.
- Difficulty determining the number of syllables in spoken words.
- Cannot utilize phonetic clues to decode or spell unknown words.
- Difficulty hearing similarities in words that rhyme.
- Confuses sounds of similarly shaped letters (b/d/p/q).
- Difficulty with reading comprehension (decoding interference).

Auditory Discrimination: This refers to the ability to distinguish the differences in sounds. This impacts a child’s ability to identify words and sounds that are similar and those that are different. A child may substitute sounds within words when they speak or write. This child may also have trouble hearing and focusing on important sounds over the environmental sounds (traffic or mechanical hums) or extraneous noises (radios or TV).

- Confuses sounds or words that sound similar (seventeen for seventy).
- Substitutes sounds in a word for sounds in another word.
- Cannot filter important sounds from background noise.

- Spelling errors do not make phonetic sense.
- Seems not to listen.

Auditory Memory: This is the ability to recall and retrieve information that was given verbally. Even when paying close attention to directions, this child may have forgotten the first thing that was said by the time the third thing is said!

- Difficulty following directions just given.
- Difficulty remembering key information from a lecture or story read `aloud.
- Incomplete work.
- Spells poorly.

Auditory Sequencing: Taking oral information and reconstructing it in a specific order is auditory sequencing. Problems here may affect a child's ability to follow more than a single direction.

- Difficulty completing more than one oral direction at a time.
- Confuses or leaves out steps in projects
- May confuse the order of sounds in a word or syllables (saying "ephelant" instead of elephant, or ninety-four instead of forty-nine).

Auditory Blending: This child's difficulties come when he needs to link the individual sounds of a word into a complete word. These children may be able to individually identify sounds within a word such as /c/, /a/, /t/, but may not be able to identify it as the word /cat/.

How Can I Help A Child With an Auditory Processing Disorder?

- 1. Use visuals.**
- 2. Use gestures that clarify information.**
- 3. Vary volume when giving directions/information.**
- 4. Give one direction at a time.**
- 5. Directions should be simple, brief, and time-ordered.**
- 6. Provide checklists for daily activities.**
- 7. Have child repeat directions or key information.**
- 8. Minimize extraneous noises.**
- 9. Help check understanding by having them repeat instructions.**

Sensory Motor Processing Disorders

Visual Motor Integration

- Mechanical problems in test taking.**
- Difficulty copying from board or book.**
- Spaces poorly.**
- Poorly written work, poor handwriting.**
- Disorganized.**
- May be awkward or clumsy.**
- May have difficulty riding a bike, skipping, jumping rope, etc.**
- Difficulty manipulating small objects or cutting with scissors.**
- Difficulty with spatial tasks.**

How Can I Help A Child With Sensory Motor Processing Disorder?

- 1. Allow the use of a computer for work.**
- 2. Tape record lectures.**
- 3. Provide individual outlines with fewer steps.**
- 4. Use graph paper.**
- 5. Lower your expectations for acceptable writing.**

Auditory Motor Integration

- May have difficulty with games with responses to oral commands (Simon Says, square dancing, baseball, etc.).**
- Difficulty beginning tasks.**
- Difficulty gathering necessary materials to complete tasks.**
- Incomplete work.**
- Difficulty taking notes.**
- Difficulty retaining and recalling information.**
- Difficulty taking accurate phone messages.**

How Can I Help A Child With An Auditory Motor Integration Disorder?

- 1. Provide checklists.**
- 2. Supervise the beginning of tasks.**
- 3. Help gather materials.**
- 4. Provide additional time for homework.**
- 5. Create routines.**

Attention Deficit Disorders

Currently, to be diagnosed with ADHD, an individual must demonstrate eight of the following symptoms, and they must have occurred before the age of seven:

- 1. Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat.**
- 2. Has difficulty remaining seated when required to do so.**
- 3. Is easily distracted by extraneous stimuli.**
- 4. Has difficulty waiting for a turn in games or group situations.**
- 5. Often blurts out answers to questions before they have been completed.**

- 6. Has difficulty following through on instructions from others.**
- 7. Has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities.**
- 8. Often shifts from one uncompleted activity to another.**
- 9. Has difficulty playing quietly.**
- 10. Often talks excessively.**
- 11. Often interrupts or intrudes on others.**
- 12. Often does not seem to listen to what is being said about him or her.**
- 13. Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities at school or at home.**
- 14. Often engages in physically dangerous activities without considering possible consequences.**

How Can I Help A Child With An Attention Deficit Disorder?

- 1. Help make assignments interesting.**
- 2. Make sure child sits close to the teacher.**
- 3. Use games to over-learn rote materials.**
- 4. Channel excess energy into productive projects.**
- 5. Allow standing when doing work (homework).**
- 6. Provide activity rewards.**
- 7. Give child questions to ask during a lesson.**
- 8. Help child underline, highlight, or rewrite directions.**