

A 13 Step Action Plan for Your Child with Learning Difficulties

21 Questions to ask to make sure your child is getting the right in school support.

By Liz Dunoon

Assisting your child or student is much easier when you know the steps to take. Here is a list to help you to get started.

1. Start observing your child and making notes about their strengths and weaknesses. Include everything.



2. Start collecting samples of your child's schoolwork and items that demonstrate their strengths and weaknesses.
3. Get a notebook and keep track of any conversions meetings, comments and phone calls regarding your child. Include dates, who was involved and the outcome.



4. Get a pocket folder to keep copies of notes, letters, documents and school reports.
5. Talk to your child's school about your concerns.

Don't wait until your child is anxious and stressed before you do this, as it can lead to emotional, accusatory, defensive dialogue between parents and teachers. Not a great place to start, when you want to work together as a team with your school. No parent likes to see their child struggling and distressed. Get in early, stay calm and collected and state your concerns to get the best response from your school from day one.

6. Have a professional diagnosis or assessment conducted. Make sure the report you receive at the end of this process is recognised by your, state, county or education authority. It may be possible to organise this through your school, so ask first, before you pay for a private service provider.
7. Based on your child's report, speak to the school and check if your child's strengths are being utilised and their weaknesses are being accommodated for and how.
8. Make sure the school creates a 'Support Plan' (IEP) that includes access to a 'Support Teacher' for the teaching of specific skills and to provide daily accommodations in the classroom and for assessments. This makes the school accountable to your child's educational outcomes and get parents and teachers working on the same goals and outcomes for each term or semester.

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In your meeting with the school you can ask if your child:

1. Is receiving small group support and how often?
2. Is sitting within easy access of the teacher or in class teaching assistants?
3. Sits next to a supportive class member?
4. Can signal to teachers if they require further instructions or explanations of tasks in class?
5. Is using a multisensory, literacy program, preferably phonics based?
6. Has access to learning programs or software that suits their learning strengths and supports their learning weaknesses?
7. Can access reading books that support their reading ability and allows for their level of maturity. This maybe; phonic based, high interest - low reading ability books, graphic novels or comic books.
8. Has a class note taker or has notes provided to save time?
9. If worksheets are being provided on tinted paper if this helps?
10. Is seated where fluorescent lighting and excessive noise is controlled if this helps them?
11. Is allowed to use a computer for writing or has a scribe in class?
12. Has audio text and audio books available?
13. Has access to a timetable answer grid if this helps them?
14. Looks up and works out Math facts and algorithms using grid paper?

15. Has extra time/movement breaks/drink breaks, for tests and exams? Can also ask for a question clarifier in those exams not pertaining to reading and spelling.
16. Has access to larger font and appropriate font styles in class? Altered formats for Math tests can also be hugely beneficial for students with learning difficulties. For example; one problem per page, large font, bolded symbols etc.
17. Is allowed to give oral responses/use PowerPoint/use speech to text software or computing devices for tests and exams, instead of writing if they have dysgraphia and require spell check?
18. In tests and exams or can access audio questions, using a live scribe pen or text to speech software?
19. If homework can be modified to suit your child's strengths?
20. If time limits can be put in place for homework?
21. If your child has particular strength, is able to access a mentor or advanced class in this subject area?



9. Maintain open lines of communication between yourself, your child and your school via email, phone or regular personal contact. Staying in regular contact with your school will keep teachers informed as to your child's needs and work both ways to ensure a team effort is maintained.

10. Find a good dyslexia educational program that you can use at home or hire a tutor.

11. Put a support system in place for your child – educate immediate family, extended family and friends, your child's friends, teachers, local community and sporting groups.

12. Put some strategies in place to maintain and build your child's self esteem and confidence. Allow them to define themselves based on their strengths. Children who struggle at school are often gifted in other areas. Make sure your child has time to pursue their goals and achieve their dreams.

13. Include a photo of your child having fun at the top of any emails or letters you send to the school with requests for additional school support for your child. A parent told me recently she does this and it creates an instant response from educators who can identify with the child in the photo and then take action.

Above all, believe in your child and tell them constantly that you do, because with your love and support they can and will be a success.