

TALKING WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR IEP

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WHEN IS A GOOD TIME? THAT DEPENDS ON...

The type of disability your child has--emotional, physical, intellectual, and/or sensory--will influence when you tell your child.

When you see them suffering, then it's time to demystify by explaining the disability to the child, thereby making sense of the child's daily struggles. Children often feel greatly relieved once he realizes that his difficulties actually have a name and that others have similar problems and challenges.

How will this discussion impact a child's wellbeing?

Will this information help them thrive?

BEFORE THE TALK...INFLUENCING FACTORS

Your response to your child's disability will influence the way your child views herself, so it's important to send a message that acknowledges the challenges your child faces, while also telling her she's a capable person who has much to offer the world.

What are your views? Experiences? Philosophy? Beliefs?

How do you feel about asking for and/or receiving help?

VALUABLE TEACHABLE MOMENT

- The benefits of recognizing when we need help
- Knowing how to access the help that we need
- Feeling good about the process
- Learning how to help others

START THE CONVERSATION...

Reassure her that she's perfectly healthy and her learning difficulty does not define her. We all have strengths and challenges, and having learning difficulties may mean taking a different path than some, but it does not mean she cannot achieve her goals and dreams.

Communicate clearly. Make sure your child understands everything you're saying. Don't hide behind jargon and clinical terms. Translate those into language she will understand. Help her apply the information in proactive, upbeat ways.

Compliment her often and sincerely. Self-esteem and resiliency are often fragile in a child with LD. Praise her lavishly, but make sure you mean it. Never give empty or gratuitous praise.

TIPS...

Be informed: The more you know about your child's specific learning disability, the better.

Frame It as an Ongoing Conversation: Think of this as a gradual, informal, and sequential discussion that will take place throughout your child's life.

Be Open and Honest with Your Child: Self-knowledge is critical for your child's self-esteem and motivation. Knowing that he or she has a diagnosed and treatable condition is comforting — especially as opposed to the alternative of not knowing what is wrong or why school is difficult.

Try Not to Overwhelm: Keep your child's vocabulary in mind when explaining his or her learning disability. Use words that are familiar to him or her.

SOME MORE TIPS...

Give Them Someone To Relate To: It's easy for a child with learning disabilities to feel isolated and alone. Talk about people the child knows who have dealt with similar diagnoses — whether a parent, neighbor, or teacher.

Stay Positive: Amidst all of this conversation about what your child can't do, be sure to remind them of all the things they can do.

Identify Your Child's Support System: It's important for children with learning disabilities to know that they are not alone. Make a list of all of the people who are there to support your child — whether parents, siblings, teachers, tutors, or otherwise.

REFERENCES

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