



Rifka Schonfeld **STRATEGIES**

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

The Connection Between Social Skills & Learning Disabilities

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter will discuss the connection between social skills and learning disabilities.

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QUESTION:

I know that my son has trouble in school because of his learning disability. But, he is also struggling socially. He doesn't seem to be able to hold on to a friend for more than a few months and he often tells me that other children don't like him. Could there be a connection between his learning disability and his social skills? Are learning disabilities associated with different levels of self-esteem?

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ANSWER:

Of course, learning disabilities are traditionally linked to academics. Children with learning disabilities can have a harder time focusing, deciphering letters, or sitting still. These problems often lead to struggling learners, but what people don't often realize is that having a learning disability is also intrinsically connected to social issues and self-esteem.

Many times, children with learning disabilities struggle and receive little positive feedback from their teachers and parents. Sometimes they are misunderstood and labeled as "lazy," "slow," or "unmotivated." Rather than feeling good about what they are able to accomplish, children with learning disabilities often end up feeling shame and frustration.

Research at the University of Iowa and the UCLA indicates that as much as 70% of children with learning disabilities (LD) suffer from poor self-esteem. Dr. Marshall Raskind, an expert in the field of learning disabilities, says, "Over time, children with LD may just stop trying, entering a state of 'learned helplessness' where they see little connection between their efforts and ultimate outcomes. 'Why bother?' they may ask, 'No matter how hard I try, I always end up failing.'"

Before I address how to combat these negative feelings, it is important to understand just what self-esteem is. People with self-esteem have a strong sense of their own worth, which leads them to stand up for themselves when others attempt to put them down. Those with strong self-esteem also tend to express their feelings freely, enabling them to establish long lasting friendships.

Therefore, when you ask if there is a connection between your son's learning disability and his social skills, the answer is probably "yes." Other people's reactions to your son's learning disability might have caused him to feel badly about his self-worth. This in turn could make him hesitant to stand up for himself (a target for bullies) and also cautious when it comes to opening up to other people (an inability to maintain long-term friendships).

What can you do to help your son gain self-esteem and also make friends? The first thing you can do is to make him understand that his learning disability does not make him stupid or slow. Tell him about Albert Einstein's struggles in grade school and Beethoven's difficulties with hearing loss. They turned their weaknesses into strengths.

Then, you can look for his strengths. Is he really creative? Athletic? Generous? Whatever his strength is, make the most of it. Sign him up for an afterschool activity that he will excel in. This will not only help him gain confidence, it will also introduce him to children his own age who share his passion. This way, you'll be killing two birds with one stone – he will gain self-esteem and friends.



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