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# TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS

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## Chapter 1 | Understanding Learning Difficulties

Developed by LeGO

### Introduction

Learning difficulties are specific challenges in certain areas of learning, such as reading, writing, spelling, or math. They are neurobiological traits, not illnesses, and do not reflect a child's intelligence or willingness to learn.

Even though today we have much more knowledge than in the past about learning difficulties, many myths and misconceptions still persist. For this reason, it is essential to increase awareness among all the people involved, especially families and schools.

Early detection, understanding, and the use of effective strategies and tools can help children overcome challenges, maintain self-confidence, and succeed both academically and socially.



## Learning outcomes

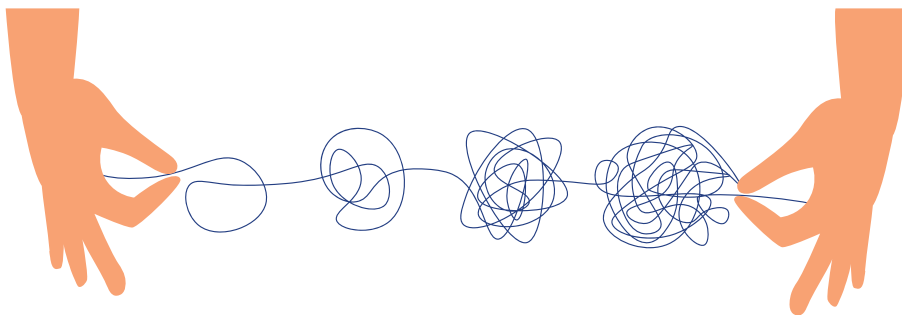
By the end of this chapter, parents will be able to:

- Identify common types of learning difficulties (reading, writing, math) and understand that they are neurobiological traits
- Recognize the impact of learning difficulties on academic progress, emotional well-being, and long-term life outcomes.
- Distinguish between myths and facts, understanding that intelligence is not affected and that targeted strategies are essential.



## Duration

1 hour



## Content-training material

### 1. Types of LD

Learning difficulties are specific challenges in certain areas of learning, not a general lack of ability. These can include difficulties with reading, writing, spelling, and math. Some examples are dyslexia (reading), dyscalculia (math), dysgraphia (handwriting), and dysorthography (spelling). These difficulties may appear individually or together.

It is important to know that learning difficulties are neurobiological traits, not illnesses. They are present from birth but only become apparent when children begin to learn specific skills. In the past, children with learning difficulties were sometimes labeled as “lazy” or “unmotivated.” Today, we understand that with early detection and the right supports, children can learn effectively while maintaining self-esteem and motivation. To diagnose a learning difficulty, other conditions must be ruled out, such as intellectual disability, sensory impairments, neurological issues, or lack of schooling. Diagnoses are conducted by a multidisciplinary team including specialists in child development, psychology, and language therapy.

### Preschool Indicators of Possible Learning Difficulties (please see Chapter 2 for more information):

#### Language, Listening and Comprehension

- Delayed language development
- Confusion of sounds
- Trouble forming sentences
- Misuse of words in sentences
- Limited vocabulary
- Difficulty understanding instructions

### Memory & Learning

- Trouble recognizing rhyming words
- Difficulty memorizing rhymes and songs
- Trouble remembering days, seasons, colors, or numbers

### Fine Motor & Visual-Spatial Skills

- Difficulty writing their name
- Challenges with drawing, coloring within lines, or using page space

Parents are often the first to notice changes in their child's development, and careful observation at home can provide valuable insight. If any of these indicators are a concern, it is worth discussing them with a healthcare or educational professional.

Also **collaboration with teachers** is crucial: teachers can identify patterns that may not be visible at home, while parents offer a deeper understanding of their child's broader behaviour and history. To learn more on this topic please see Chapter 6.



### **What Families Can Do:**

1. Observe the child while doing homework
2. Share observations with teachers and consider their feedback
3. Seek specialized assessments for a diagnosis
4. Approve and follow a personalized learning plan (with support from specialists if needed)
5. Help the child use compensatory and adaptive tools to work independently
6. Maintain regular communication with teachers
7. Support the child in using tools consistently

## **2. Impact on academic & emotional life**

Children and adolescents with learning difficulties, if not adequately supported in educational settings—both during and outside school—often face academic challenges, repeated failures, and an increased risk of dropping out of school early. In more complex cases, insufficient support can contribute to the development of psychological difficulties, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and stress-related problems.

Without proper support, learning difficulties can affect a person's life beyond school. They may struggle with higher education, vocational training, or employment if foundational skills like reading, writing, math, and organization are not effectively addressed. Social and emotional development can also be affected, including self-confidence, independence, and the ability to manage challenges.

The fact that individuals with learning difficulties learn differently from the “typical” pattern does not mean they are unable to learn. Instead, it emphasizes the need to adapt teaching methods, learning materials, and strategies to match their unique ways of processing information. With targeted supports—such as compensatory and adaptive tools, visual aids, structured routines, and personalized guidance—these students can successfully acquire knowledge, build confidence, and thrive academically and socially.

Early identification, consistent support, and the development of personalized strategies can help individuals leverage their strengths, improve problem-solving and organizational skills, and succeed in both academic and professional settings. Adults who received effective support often demonstrate resilience, creativity, and strong self-advocacy skills—qualities that contribute to lifelong learning and career success.

Compensatory tools are devices, digital or paper-based, that each person can use to achieve their goals by compensating for their specific difficulties. Adaptive tools are supports or devices, digital or paper-based, designed to help a person complete tasks more easily by adjusting for their specific learning difficulties or challenges.

These tools depend on the child's needs and age. Examples include:

- **Memory support:** number tables, multiplication charts
- **Organizational support:** planners, calendars, visual schedules, distraction-free spaces
- **Handwriting support:** typing on a computer, using print letters, lined or colored paper, special grips
- **Spelling support:** spell checkers or typing software
- **Reading support:** text read aloud by a person, audiobooks, digital books, text-to-speech, or reading guides
- **Conceptual support:** visual maps, step-by-step charts
- **Software tools:** both paid and free programs exist

Summary Table on Learning Difficulties

| Type of Learning Difficulty      | Main Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Basic Strategies                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dyslexia (Reading)</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty decoding words and reading fluently</li> <li>• Poor phonological awareness and spelling</li> </ul>                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audiobooks and text-to-speech tools</li> <li>• Reading guides and colored overlays</li> <li>• Breaking words into syllables.</li> </ul>              |
| <b>Dyscalculia (Math)</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty understanding numbers and math concepts</li> <li>• Struggles with counting, sequences, and time</li> <li>• Confusion with symbols and spatial reasoning</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number tables, multiplication charts</li> <li>• Calculators</li> <li>• Multisensorial and concrete approaches</li> </ul>                             |
| <b>Dysgraphia (Handwriting)</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor handwriting and difficulty forming letters</li> <li>• Slow or inconsistent written output</li> <li>• Struggles with organizing thoughts on paper</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typing on a computer instead of handwriting</li> <li>• Lined or colored paper</li> <li>• Special pen grips</li> <li>• Voice-to-text tools</li> </ul> |
| <b>Dysorthography (Spelling)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistent spelling errors despite effort</li> <li>• Difficulty applying spelling rules consistently</li> <li>• Often co-occurs with dyslexia</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multisensory spelling practice</li> <li>• Personalised word lists</li> <li>• Visual aids</li> </ul>                                                  |

### 3. Myths vs reality

Even though today we have much more knowledge than in the past about learning difficulties, many myths and misconceptions still persist. For this reason, it is essential to increase awareness among all the people involved, especially families and schools.

Parents can sometimes be misled by myths about LDs. It is important to know these myths and why they are wrong.

#### **Myth 1: Low Intelligence**

Myth: Kids with learning difficulties are just not smart.

Reality: Most have average or above-average intelligence. Challenges arise from how the brain processes information, not lack of ability.

#### **Myth 2: Just Work Harder**

Myth: More effort alone fixes it.

Reality: Neurological differences require targeted strategies, like breaking tasks into smaller steps, using visuals, or using timers. Effort builds on these tools.

#### **Myth 3: Bad Parenting Causes It**

Myth: Screens, diet, or discipline are to blame.

Reality: Learning difficulties are neurobiological and genetic, not caused by parenting.

#### **Myth 4: They'll Outgrow It**

Myth: The problem will disappear with age.

Reality: These traits persist lifelong, but with proper strategies, children can thrive academically and socially.

#### **Myth 5: Special Help Hurts "Smart" Kids**

Myth: Accommodations label or limit high-ability children.

Reality: Supports like extra time or adaptive tools enhance learning without stigma.



### 4. Useful References

American Psychiatric Association. (2022). What is ADHD? <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/adhd/what-is-adhd>

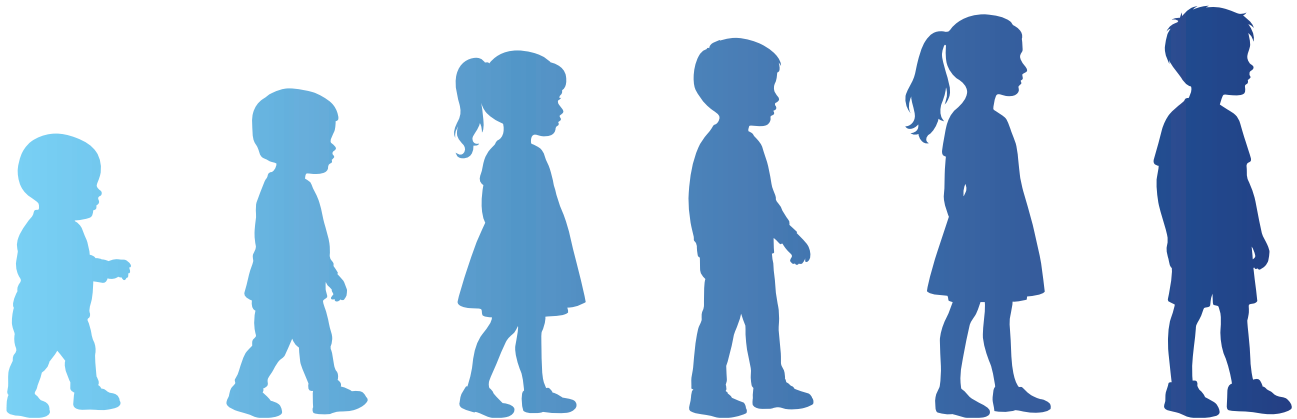
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## Chapter 2 | Early Warning Signs at Home

Developed by Ethos Hub

### Introduction

This chapter supports parents in recognizing early signs of emerging learning difficulties at home, understanding what is developmentally expected by age, distinguishing between a temporary developmental delay and learning difficulty (LD) markers and knowing when to support at home and when to consult teachers or professionals.

**Important:** These signs are not a diagnosis. They are signals for observation, reflection, and communication. Persistent academic difficulties that interfere with daily functioning and remain despite targeted support may indicate a possible learning disorder and should prompt further discussion with educators or specialists (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Snowling & Hulme, 2012).



## Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, parents will have a better understanding of the learning skills children typically develop between the ages of 6 and 10 and will be more able to notice signs that their child may be finding learning unusually difficult. They will learn to tell the difference between a temporary delay and difficulties that continue over time, reflect on both their child's strengths and areas where support may be needed, and feel more confident in deciding when to keep supporting their child at home and when it may be helpful to talk with the teacher or a specialist.



## Duration

1 hour



## Content-training material

### 1. What Parents Should Observe by Age

Between the ages of **6 and 10**, children are expected to consolidate basic reading, writing, and math skills, attention and working memory and emotional regulation related to learning. Persistent difficulties during this period may signal the need for early support (Snowling & Hulme, 2012; OECD, 2019).

According to the diagnostic descriptions of Specific Learning Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), learning difficulties become more concerning when they are persistent, affect daily learning, and do not improve despite structured support.

Children develop at different paces, and progress is not always linear. What matters most is noticing patterns, not isolated moments.

## 2. Checklists for 6–7, 7–8, 8–9, 9–10

### Checklist for Ages 6–7

Observe whether your child confuses letters or sounds (e.g. b/d, p/q), struggles to learn the alphabet or basic phonics, avoids reading or becomes tired very quickly, has difficulty following two-step instructions, or shows frustration or emotional distress during writing tasks.

Early phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge are strong predictors of later reading success, and persistent difficulties in these areas warrant monitoring (National Reading Panel, 2000; Foorman et al., 2016).

Uneven progress is common at this age, but difficulties lasting longer than six months despite practice should be observed more carefully (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The role of parents is not to “fix” the difficulty, but to observe how the child learns and what helps them feel confident.

### Checklist for Ages 7–8

Observe whether your child reads word-by-word with little improvement over time, makes frequent errors in familiar words, avoids written homework, forgets material learned the previous day, or uses negative self-talk (“I can’t do this”); the combination of academic and emotional signs is especially important (OECD, 2019).

When a child says ‘I can’t,’ they often mean ‘this feels hard.’ Your calm support can make a bigger difference than extra practice.

Slow reading development, weak retention of practiced material, and emerging emotional responses to learning tasks are early indicators associated with later reading and academic difficulties (Geary, 2011; Nelson & Harwood, 2011).

The combination of academic and emotional signs is particularly important, as children with learning difficulties show elevated risks of anxiety and reduced academic self-concept (Nelson & Harwood, 2011; OECD, 2019).

### Checklist for Ages 8–9

Observe whether your child struggles with reading comprehension, has difficulty remembering basic math facts, needs excessive time to complete homework, is easily distracted even in quiet settings, or shows anxiety or physical complaints before studying.

At this age, comprehension, working memory, and math fact retrieval become central to classroom success; persistent weaknesses in these areas predict later academic underachievement (Geary, 2011; Swanson & Alloway, 2012). School-related anxiety and physical complaints may reflect academic stress and should be considered alongside academic indicators (Nelson & Harwood, 2011).

If homework takes much longer than expected, it’s not a sign of laziness – it’s information about how much effort your child is investing.

### Checklist for Ages 9–10

Observe whether your child avoids schoolwork or school itself, shows emotional outbursts or shutdowns during homework, struggles with organization and time management, has low self-esteem despite effort, or constantly compares themselves negatively to peers.

By this age, academic gaps rarely resolve without targeted support, and persistent difficulties often require structured intervention rather than a “wait-and-see” approach (Snowling & Hulme, 2012; OECD, 2019).

Avoidance is often a sign of discouragement, not unwillingness. Support and understanding help rebuild motivation.

### 3. Learning Goals

#### Ages 6–7

Children are expected to recognize most letters and their sounds, begin reading simple words and short sentences, and write basic words with emerging spelling skills. They can usually follow simple instructions and start to complete short tasks with support. These early literacy and language skills form the foundation for later reading development (National Reading Panel, 2000; Shanahan & Lonigan, 2010).

#### Ages 7–8

Children are expected to read short texts with increasing fluency, understand the main idea of what they read, and write simple sentences independently. They begin to remember learned information more consistently and follow multi-step instructions. At this stage, fluency and comprehension start to develop together and support overall academic progress (National Reading Panel, 2000; OECD, 2019).

#### Ages 8–9

Children are expected to read with understanding, including basic comprehension of longer texts, and write short paragraphs with clearer structure. They can recall basic math facts, stay focused for longer periods, and complete homework with less support. The development of comprehension, working memory, and numeracy skills becomes increasingly important for school success (OECD, 2019).

#### Ages 9–10

Children are expected to read more independently and understand more complex texts, organize their ideas in writing, and manage school tasks with increasing responsibility. They begin to plan their work, manage time more effectively, and show greater confidence in learning. At this stage, self-regulation and higher-order thinking skills play a key role in learning (OECD, 2019).

Go to Chapter 4 for reference “How to support learning at home”.



## 4. Difference between “delay” and “LD markers”

### Developmental Delay

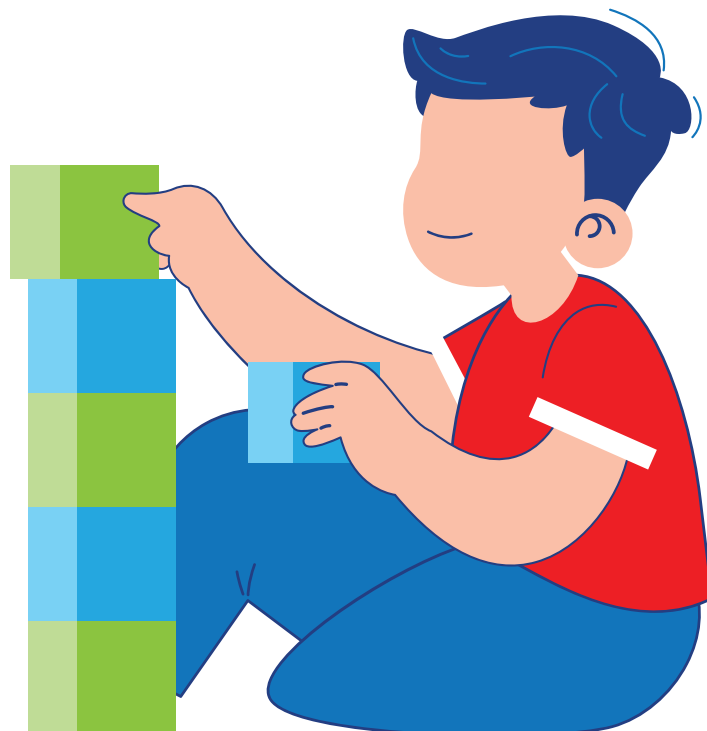
A developmental delay refers to a temporary lag in skill acquisition. In this case, skills emerge later but show steady improvement, progress becomes noticeable with practice and exposure, and difficulties tend to be inconsistent across situations, while the emotional impact is usually limited. For example, a child may read slowly at age 6–7 but improve significantly within a few months. Such variation falls within typical developmental ranges when progress continues (National Reading Panel, 2000).

### Learning Difficulty (LD) Markers

LD markers indicate persistent and patterned difficulties that may suggest an underlying learning difficulty. In such cases, difficulties persist for six months or more (Snowling & Hulme, 2012), appear across multiple settings such as home and school, and effort does not result in proportional progress; they are also often accompanied by emotional signs such as avoidance, anxiety, or low confidence. For example, a child may continue to struggle with decoding words despite regular practice and support. This pattern aligns with research-based descriptions of learning disorders and highlights the importance of early identification and support (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Snowling & Hulme, 2012). The key message for parents is that early support improves outcomes. The goal is not to label your child, but to understand how they learn so the right support can be offered.

### When Should Parents Seek Professional Advice?

Parents are encouraged to consult teachers or specialists when difficulties persist over time, affect the child’s emotional well-being, interfere with daily learning routines, or are observed both at home and at school; collaboration with teachers is always the first recommended step (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020). As a reflection prompt, parents may consider what their child keeps trying at even when it is hard and which strengths they notice beyond academic performance. Early collaboration between parents and teachers improves identification and access to support, and early intervention is consistently associated with better academic and emotional outcomes (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020; OECD, 2019; Snowling & Hulme, 2012). Seeking advice is not a sign of failure – it is a sign that you are actively supporting your child’s learning journey.





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## Chapter 3 | How to Talk With Your Child

Developed by Ethos Hub

### Introduction

This chapter helps parents learn how to talk with their child about learning struggles in a supportive way, strengthen self-esteem and motivation, respond to frustration without increasing pressure and build resilience and a growth mindset at home.

Research shows that the way adults talk about learning strongly influences children's confidence, persistence, and emotional regulation (Dweck, 2017; OECD, 2019). Communication that supports autonomy, structure and warmth is consistently linked to better self-regulation and school functioning (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Joussemet et al., 2008).

### Definition of Communication

Communication can be defined as the process through which thoughts, feelings, needs, and information are shared between people. In parenting, communication includes:

- What we say (words and language)
- How we say it (tone, volume, pace)
- What we show (facial expressions, body language)
- How we respond (listening, validating, guiding)

Effective communication with children is not about giving perfect answers, but about creating connection, understanding, and emotional safety (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 2014).

Communication is at the heart of the relationship between a parent and a child. It is not only about the

words we use, but also about tone, timing, body language, and emotional presence. For children who experience learning difficulties, communication becomes even more important, as it shapes how they see themselves, how safe they feel, and how willing they are to try.

Supportive communication helps children feel understood, reduces anxiety, and creates a sense of safety that allows learning to happen. When children feel judged or pressured, they may withdraw, avoid effort, or become frustrated. When they feel heard and supported, they are more likely to engage, persist, and develop confidence (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Joussemet et al., 2008).

Research shows that emotionally supportive and autonomy-promoting communication is associated with better self-regulation, motivation, and academic engagement (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Pomerantz et al., 2009).

### Why Communication Matters

Children with emerging learning difficulties often believe they are “not smart”, compare themselves negatively to peers, avoid tasks to protect themselves from failure and interpret correction as criticism.

These patterns are more likely when children view ability as fixed, and when mistakes feel like a verdict on “who I am” rather than “what I tried” (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). In contrast, parents’ use of process-focused language (effort/strategy/help-seeking) predicts more adaptive “growth” beliefs over time (Gunderson et al., 2013), and parents’ attitudes toward failure (treating it as informative vs. shameful) predict how children cope with setbacks (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016).

Supportive communication helps children feel safe to try, persist longer, accept mistakes as part of learning and develop internal motivation. Furthermore, positive parent communication is linked to higher academic persistence and emotional resilience (Dweck, 2017; Handler & Fierston, 2011).

Feeling safe with you makes learning feel possible.

**Tip:** *You don’t need perfect words – you just need supportive ones.*



### Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, parents will better understand how everyday communication shapes their child’s motivation, confidence, and response to learning. They will learn how to use supportive language, respond calmly to mistakes or frustration, and encourage effort, progress, and problem-solving. The chapter also helps parents strengthen their child’s self-esteem, support resilience during challenging tasks, and recognise when it may be helpful to seek additional support from teachers or specialists.



### Duration

1 hour.





## Content-training material

### 1. Scripts for motivation & emotional support

#### When the child says: “I can’t do this.”

**Instead of:** “Yes you can—try harder.” (can feel like dismissal)

**Try:**

- “This looks hard. Which part feels tricky?”
- “You don’t have to know it yet. We’re learning.”
- “Show me where you got stuck, and we’ll pick one next step.”

**Why this helps:**

These phrases do two research-supported things: (1) they *validate* emotion (linked to better regulation), and (2) they shift attention to process and problem-solving, which supports persistence (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Adding autonomy (“pick one next step”) supports motivation better than pressure (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Joussemet et al., 2004).

*You don’t need to fix the problem – your calm presence is already support.*



#### When the child makes mistakes

**Instead of:** “You should know this already.”

**Try:**

- “Mistakes show your brain is learning.”
- “Let’s see what this mistake can teach us.”
- “That strategy was a good start—let’s adjust it.”

**Why this helps:**

Praising “being smart” or implying competence should be effortless can push children toward performance goals and avoidance after failure, while process feedback supports learning goals and resilience (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Parents’ process praise (effort/strategies) predicts children’s later growth-oriented beliefs (Gunderson et al., 2013).

*You are teaching resilience every time you respond to a mistake calmly.*

#### When the child refuses homework

**Instead of:** “Stop being lazy.”

**Try:**

- “Something about this feels difficult. What is it?”
- “Do you want help starting, or do you want me to sit nearby while you begin?”
- “Let’s choose the smallest step to start.”

**Why this helps:**

Homework conflict often escalates when parents become controlling or evaluative; autonomy-support paired with structure is linked to better self-regulation and school competence (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Pomerantz et al., 2009). Observational work also shows the quality of parent involvement during homework-like tasks relates to children’s engagement and achievement (Doctoroff et al., 2017).

*Connection before correction makes cooperation easier.*

## When the child compares themselves to others

**Instead of:** “Don’t worry about others.” (often doesn’t reduce the feeling)

**Try:**

- “Everyone learns in different ways and at different speeds.”
- “Your progress matters more than speed.”
- “Let’s compare you to you—what improved since last week?”

**Why this helps:**

Children persist more when success is framed as growth over time (mastery focus), rather than as ranking or proving ability (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Parents can support this by repeatedly directing attention to progress, strategy, and practice (Gunderson et al., 2013; Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016).

*You help your child measure growth, not worth.*

## 2. Self-Esteem Reinforcement

Self-esteem and confidence grow most reliably when adults notice effort (trying again), strategy (how they approached it), help-seeking (using support effectively), progress (growth over time), not just results (Mueller & Dweck, 1998; Gunderson et al., 2013).

**Daily confidence builders:**

- Notice effort specifically: “You kept going even when it felt hard.”
- Praise strategies, not ability: “Breaking the word into sounds helped you.”
- Highlight progress over perfection: “This took less time than last week.”
- Separate the child from the difficulty: “The task is hard—not you.”



**Why this helps:**

Person-focused praise (e.g., “You’re so smart”) can increase fear of failure; process-focused praise supports challenge-seeking and persistence (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). Longitudinal research suggests early process praise predicts later academic outcomes via children’s incremental beliefs (Gunderson et al., 2018).

*You are helping your child build a voice inside their head that sounds like yours.*

## 2-minute reflection routine (after homework)

**Ask:**

1. “What’s one thing you tried today?”
2. “What felt easier than before?”
3. “What helped you keep going?”

*Small conversations build strong learners.*

This strengthens self-monitoring and reinforces controllable causes of success (strategy/effort), which supports motivation and resilience (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

### 3. Techniques for building resilience

#### Technique 1 – Normalize struggle

##### Say:

- “Learning feels messy at first.”
- “When something feels tricky, your brain is working.”
- “Confusing doesn’t mean you can’t—confusing means you’re in the learning zone.”

*Struggle is not a sign of failure – it’s a sign of growth.*

According to the research normalizing difficulty supports adaptive beliefs about learning and reduces the threat response to mistakes (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Parents’ “failure-is-enhancing” views predict more supportive responses to setbacks (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2016).



#### Technique 2 – Break Tasks into Small Wins

**Instead of:** “Finish all your homework.”

##### Try:

- “Let’s do the first question together.”
- “Circle the words you know first.”
- “Work for 5 minutes, then we check.”

*Progress builds motivation faster than pressure.*

Children do better with clear structure and manageable goals, especially when structure is delivered without controlling language (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Joussemet et al., 2008). This is particularly important for students who shut down when overwhelmed (Pomerantz et al., 2009).

#### Technique 3 – Model Calm Problem-Solving

##### Narrate your coping:

- “This is tricky. I’m going to slow down.”
- “I’ll try another way.”
- “Mistakes help me see what to fix.”

*Your child learns more from how you react than from what you say.*

According to Eisenberg et al. (1998), children learn emotion regulation partly through parents’ real-time responses to stress (emotion socialization), and supportive responses are associated with better emotional competence and regulation. Emotion-coaching approaches are linked with children’s self-regulation skills in early school years (Wilson et al., 2014).

#### Technique 4 – Use the “Yet” Strategy

Child: “I can’t read this.”

Parent: “You can’t read it **yet**.”

*Adding “yet” keeps the door to learning open.*

Research shows that small language shifts that imply skills can grow support resilience-oriented beliefs and persistence during challenge (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). This aligns with evidence that how adults frame ability (fixed vs. developable) changes students’ responses to setbacks (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

## 4. When Communication Signals a Need for Extra Support

Early identification, supportive intervention, and school collaboration improve long-term outcomes for learning difficulties (Handler & Fierston, 2011; Jeynes, 2007). According to Handler and Fierston (2011), pediatric guidance also emphasizes early recognition and referral to qualified educational professionals for suspected learning difficulties.

### Parent reflection prompt

- What words did I use today that helped my child feel capable?
- Did I focus more on effort/strategy/progress or results?
- Did my child leave the interaction feeling safe to try again?

**Parent reminder:** “Asking for extra support doesn’t mean your child is failing – it means you are building the support system they need to succeed.”



### Dialogue Examples (Parent–Child Communication)

#### Example 1: When the child feels incapable

Child: “I can’t do this. I’m just bad at it.”

Parent: “I hear that this feels really hard right now. Let’s look at it together. Which part is the most confusing?”

Child: “This part... I don’t understand it.”

Parent: “Okay, that’s a good place to start. You don’t have to understand everything at once. We’ll take it step by step.”

*Why this works:*

The parent first validates the child’s emotional experience and then supports problem-solving. Emotional validation is linked to better emotion regulation, while process-focused guidance supports persistence and learning (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

#### Example 2: When the child avoids homework

Child: “I don’t want to do it.”

Parent: “Something about this is bothering you. Is it too difficult, or just tiring today?”

Child: “It’s too hard.”

Parent: “Thank you for telling me. How about we just try the first question together, and then you decide the next step?”

Child: “Okay... maybe.”

Parent: “That’s enough for now. Starting is already progress.”

*Why this works:*

The parent avoids criticism and instead uses autonomy-supportive language combined with structure. This approach is associated with better engagement and self-regulation in children (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Pomerantz et al., 2009).

## 5. Psychoeducation: Talking to Your Child About a Diagnosis

When a child receives a diagnosis related to learning difficulties, the way this information is communicated is crucial. Children often interpret such information in personal ways, sometimes believing that something is “wrong” with them. Parents play a key role in shaping a healthier understanding.

Research highlights that clear, supportive explanations reduce anxiety, improve adjustment, and promote adaptive coping in children with developmental or learning differences (Handler & Fierston, 2011; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020).



### Key principles for communicating a diagnosis:

#### 1. Be honest but simple

Use clear, age-appropriate language.

“Your brain learns in a different way, and that’s why some things feel harder.”

#### 2. Normalize and reassure

“Many children learn this way, and there are ways to help you.”

#### 3. Separate identity from difficulty

“This is something you experience, not something you are.”

#### 4. Focus on strengths and possibilities

Strength-based communication supports self-esteem and resilience (Dweck, 2017).

“You are very creative and curious, and we will use these strengths to help you learn.”

#### 5. Emphasize support and teamwork

“We will work together with your teachers to make learning easier for you.”

#### 6. Allow space for emotions and questions

Emotion coaching supports children’s emotional adjustment and coping (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 2014).

“It’s okay to feel however you feel about this. Do you want to ask anything?”



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## Chapter 4 | How to Support Learning at Home

Developed by LeGO

### Introduction

Children with Learning Difficulties may find it hard to stay focused, remember information, organize their materials, or manage their time. They might struggle to follow long instructions, remember the steps of an exercise, or plan their homework independently.

It is important to remember that every child is different. Even with the same diagnosis, each child has their own strengths and areas of difficulty. For this reason, the strategies used to support learning should be flexible and adapted to the individual child.

This guide offers practical and easy-to-use strategies to support learning at home. It focuses on helping children become more independent, organized, and confident. Special attention is given to simple techniques to improve attention and memory, including multisensory learning (learning through seeing, hearing, moving, and doing), which can make studying more effective and engaging.

The goal is not only to help children complete their homework, but also to help them understand how they learn best and gradually become more autonomous.



## Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, parents will be able to:

- Better understand the common learning challenges related to attention, memory, organization, and time management.
- Create a calm and organized study space with fewer distractions.
- Help their child plan homework and prepare the necessary school materials.
- Support their child in organizing study time using simple weekly schedules.
- Use short and planned breaks to improve attention (for example, using a timer or dividing study time into small blocks).
- Break tasks into smaller, more manageable steps.
- Recognize how memory difficulties can affect learning (for example, forgetting instructions or steps in an exercise).
- Use simple strategies to support memory, such as colors, images, songs, flashcards, and games.
- Encourage learning through different senses (seeing, listening, moving, touching).
- Help their child reflect on how long tasks take and what strategies work best.
- Choose helpful tools (such as digital books, text-to-speech, concept maps, or calculators) when appropriate.
- Support their child in becoming more independent and confident in their learning.



## Duration

1 hour



## Content-training material

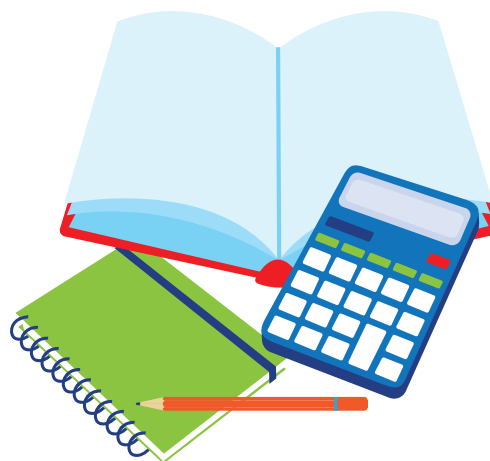
### 1. How can learning at home be supported?

Children and adolescents with Learning Difficulties may experience difficulties with self-regulation and organization, particularly in planning materials and managing time. It is important to emphasize that each individual, despite having the same diagnosis, is unique, with their own strengths and weaknesses.

The first key aspect is the development of an effective study method tailored to the individual student's characteristics. The effectiveness of such a method requires a metacognitive approach, in which the student gradually learns to reflect on their own mental processes—in other words, to become aware of how they learn and, consequently, to monitor and self-regulate their cognitive strategies.

First of all, it is important to create an appropriate study setting by identifying a place to do homework with minimal distractions.

It is also important to prepare all the materials needed to complete homework: check the school diary or online register to see which subjects and tasks are assigned, and prepare the necessary materials. If this is difficult, it may be helpful to create a table listing subjects and corresponding materials as a reminder, possibly including images.





| Example  |                                |
|----------|--------------------------------|
| SUBJECTS | MATERIALS                      |
| Maths    | Textbook, notebook, calculator |
| History  | Textbook, notebook             |

Regarding difficulties in planning and managing study time, it may be helpful to create a weekly timetable indicating extracurricular activities and study periods (also using images), so that the student can also set aside some free time.

| Example |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
|---------|--------|---------|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
|         | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday | Sunday |
| MORNING |        |         |           |          |        |          | Sport  |
| 3-4 pm  | Relax  |         | Relax     |          | Relax  |          |        |
| 4-5 pm  |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |
| 5-6 pm  |        | Sport   |           | Sport    |        | Friends  |        |
| ...     |        |         |           |          |        |          |        |

For a student with LDs, as well as for one with ADHD, breaks are important. There are no fixed durations; they depend on the individual's characteristics. Some students need short and frequent breaks, while others benefit from longer but less frequent breaks or breaks at the end of each activity. For this reason, it is important to visually structure study time and scheduled breaks, deciding in advance how long they will last. A table can be created, and tools such as an hourglass or timer can be used to track the passing of time. During breaks, the student should be free to choose what to do, while respecting the predetermined time limits.

Another useful tool for learning to manage time effectively is a daily "learning log," in which the student notes:

- the subjects to be studied (from the quickest to the most demanding, or vice versa),
- the type of task (studying/exercises),
- the estimated time needed,
- the actual time spent,
- personal reflections ("I took longer than expected because...", "I finished sooner than expected because...").

Through this technique, the student gradually learns to self-regulate.

| SUBJECT | TYPE OF HOMEWORK | EXPECTED DURATION | ACTUAL DURATION | REFLECTIONS |
|---------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1)      |                  |                   |                 |             |
| 2)      |                  |                   |                 |             |
| 3)      |                  |                   |                 |             |

As for studying itself, it is important to begin by analyzing textual features: read the title, look at the images, read the paragraph subtitles, and then the bold words. For each of these, the student should try to make predictions (e.g., What is this about? Why is there this image?). The subsequent reading (independent or supported, depending on the student's characteristics) will serve to confirm or revise these hypotheses and to integrate prior knowledge. At the end, creating a concept map of the topic may be helpful.

In the case of reading and text comprehension exercises, it may be useful to start by reading the questions first, so as to focus attention on finding specific information. One may decide to have the student read certain parts of the text and read other parts aloud to them, or support independence through the use of text-to-speech tools.

Additional tools may be used depending on the student's characteristics and the recommendations provided by the specialist during assessment. These may include text-to-speech software, concept maps, formula sheets, tables, calculators, procedural guides, digital textbooks, and specific software programs.

It is advisable to activate the digital textbook by following the guided procedure usually indicated on the book cover and entering the provided code.

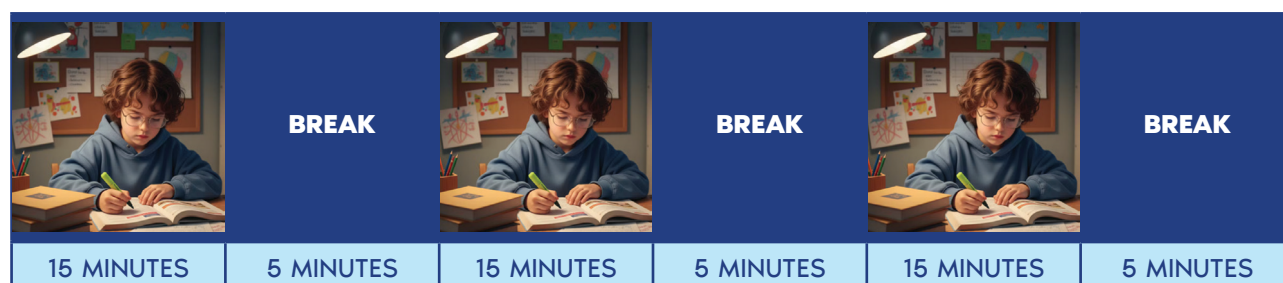
Regarding software for creating concept maps or supporting study, both paid and free downloadable options are available.

## 2. Strategies to Strengthen Attention and Memory

Attention and memory are two areas that are often weaker in children with Learning Difficulties.

To support attention, as described previously, it is advisable to prepare a tidy and distraction-free environment. It is also helpful to organize time by deciding in advance the duration of activities and breaks, creating a visual schedule (such as using the Pomodoro technique), and using a visual tool (like an hourglass) or an auditory tool (such as a timer) to mark the passing of time.

It can also be useful to break larger tasks into smaller, more manageable micro-goals.



Working memory in children with Learning Difficulties may be weak and, as a result, can affect their ability to learn. This difficulty can show itself in different ways: some children may struggle to follow complex instructions, others may find it hard to remember the steps needed to complete a specific task or to carry out mental operations. Weak working memory can also make it difficult to plan activities or to organize and manage school materials.

To strengthen memory, it is helpful to use a multisensory approach. For example: creating concept maps using colors and images chosen by the child, listening to songs or rhymes related to the topic to be learned, using flashcards, playing memory-based games (for example, if the child needs to learn the names of animals in English, they can match the card with the word to the picture of the corresponding animal), and/or using a hands-on experiential approach (learning and remembering by doing).

It is always important to remember that every child is different, and strategies should be personalized.

## Multisensory Learning Approaches

Multisensory learning is a method that involves engaging different sensory channels (sight, movement, hearing, touch). It is an effective approach for children with LDs—and not only for them—because it can improve understanding and memory. In addition, by making study activities less monotonous, it can increase attention and motivation. This approach therefore supports inclusion.

Examples of multisensory learning include creating concept maps using colors and images, using rhymes or songs for memorization, working with tactile materials such as modeling clay, repeating or writing words while jumping or walking, and carrying out practical experiences such as experiments or hands-on activities.

Summary Table on supporting learning at home

| Area                                  | Common Challenges                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Key Strategies                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Organisation &amp; Study Setup</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty organising materials and planning homework</li> <li>• Struggles with managing time across subjects</li> <li>• Trouble following multi-step instructions</li> </ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a subject–materials checklist</li> <li>• Build a weekly timetable including activities, study blocks and free time</li> <li>• Use a daily learning log to track tasks</li> <li>• Analyse textbook features before reading (title, images, bold words, subtitles)</li> <li>• Use concept maps to consolidate topics after reading</li> </ul>                                            |
| <b>Attention &amp; Focus</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty sustaining focus during homework</li> <li>• Easily distracted by environment or internal thoughts</li> </ul>                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set up a tidy, distraction-free study space</li> <li>• Decide duration of work blocks in advance</li> <li>• Use the Pomodoro technique</li> <li>• Use a visual timer or hourglass to track time</li> <li>• Break large tasks into smaller micro-goals</li> </ul>                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Memory &amp; Retention</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak working memory affecting task completion</li> <li>• Difficulty remembering multi-step instructions</li> <li>• Trouble retaining information studied previously</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use colour-coded concept maps with images chosen by the child</li> <li>• Learn with songs, rhymes, or chants linked to the topic</li> <li>• Use flashcards for key vocabulary or facts</li> <li>• Play memory-based matching games</li> <li>• Apply a hands-on, experiential learning approach (learning by doing)</li> <li>• Repeat information through multiple sensory channels</li> </ul> |
| <b>Multisensory Learning</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional study methods may not suit all learning styles</li> <li>• Monotonous activities reduce motivation and attention</li> <li>• Difficulty processing information through a single channel</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combine sight, hearing, movement, and touch in study activities</li> <li>• Use tactile materials (e.g. modelling clay for letter shapes)</li> <li>• Carry out practical experiments or hands-on activities</li> <li>• Use text-to-speech, digital books, or audiobooks as needed</li> </ul>                                                                                                   |



## Useful references

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Chadd. (2006). *ADD and your adolescents: Practical strategies for success*. Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (2021). *ADHD 2.0: New science and essential strategies for thriving with distraction—from childhood through adulthood*. Ballantine Books.

Hannaford, C. (2005). *Smart moves: Why learning is not all in your head* (2nd ed.). Books Alive.

Shaywitz, S. E. (2003). *Overcoming dyslexia: A new and complete science-based program for reading problems at any level*. Knopf.

### Other resources:

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Ideas for parents: Helping your child with language difficulties at home. <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/sld/>

Learning Links. Homework strategies for learning difficulties. <https://www.learninglinks.org.au/resources/homework-strategies-for-learning-difficulties/>

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## Chapter 5 | Emotion & Behaviour Guide

Developed by Ethos Hub

### Introduction

Many parents notice changes in their child's behavior before they fully understand the learning difficulty behind them. Avoidance, frustration, and shutdowns are often confusing and worrying, especially when parents don't know how to respond to such behaviors.

This guide was created to offer clear, practical support for everyday situations at home. In this guide, parents will find simple ways to understand their child's emotional reactions, support calm responses during difficult moments, and strengthen effort and confidence over time.



### Learning outcomes

After reading Chapter 5, parents will be able to

- Recognize emotional and behavioral responses linked to Specific Learning Difficulties and understand their underlying meaning.
- Use simple and practical strategies to support their child's emotional regulation
- Know when to seek for professional support, while strengthening their own supportive role.



## Duration

1 hour



## Content-training material

### 1. Avoidance, frustration, shutdowns

#### i. Theoretical Background

Children with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) usually experience higher levels of stress, anxiety and emotional difficulties compared to their typically developing peers.

Research over the past five years has shown that psychological distress and anxiety levels are significantly higher in children with SLD (Adi et al., 2024). This is further supported by the research of Stein et al. (2024), emphasizing that their emotional well-being is negatively affected by repeated academic failures, stigma and social comparison. All the above contribute significantly to increased anxiety levels.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that according to Kargiotidis and Manolitsis (2023), longitudinal evidence supports that “early literacy difficulties” are associated with subsequent elevated levels of both generalized and social anxiety, with the latter being strongly associated with difficulties in emotional regulation and lower emotional self-efficacy (Rostami et al., 2024).

Taken together, this body of evidence contributes to a better understanding of children’s behavior in the context of SLD. Behaviors such as avoidance of homework, emotional shutdowns, unwillingness to attend school and strong frustration reaction should be primarily understood as anxiety related symptoms rather than laziness or lack of motivation (Adi et al., 2024).

Thus, observable behavior can be more accurately conceptualized as a stress-related response to academic and emotional challenge, highlighting the importance of examining underlying emotional processes associated with SLD.



#### ii. Misbehavior or Stress response?

Many parents report that their child becomes irritable and exhibits challenging behavior. The child may resist going to school, avoid academic tasks, and display intense frustration, crying or aggression. As a result, parents often believe that their child is “disobedient” or “doesn’t behave properly”

But is this truly the case?

Educational and school psychology literature increasingly conceptualizes such behaviors as “adaptive-stress responses” arising from repeated academic failure and negative learning experiences (Adi et al., 2024; Mahak et al., 2025)

It is crucial for parents to understand that frustration represents an emotional reaction to cognitive overload, failure and repeated difficulty, all of which are strongly associated with heightened stress and psychological distress (Stein et al., 2024; Adi et al., 2024). Similarly, emotional shutdowns could be understood as a protective coping response emerging from emotional exhaustion and are associated with anxiety and reduced self-efficacy (Rostami et al., 2024; Kargiotidis & Manolitsis, 2023).

Viewing children’s behavior through this perspective is essential, as it enables parents to better recognize their children’s difficulties as challenges rather than disobedience, which may intensify conflict, reduce self-confidence as well as emotional safety

### iii. Learning Difficulties and Emotional Wellbeing: Understanding the Mental Health Risk

Children with SLD are often understood primarily through the lens of academic performance. However, educational challenges and learning difficulties are closely linked to children's self-perception, school experiences, social environment and overall emotional wellbeing, shaping their emotional development over time. Understanding the broader dimension is crucial for recognizing how early learning challenges can be associated with later anxiety, emotional distress and other mental health vulnerabilities.

According to Kargiotidis and Manolitsis (2023) early learning difficulties (LD) may increase the likelihood of developing anxiety symptoms later in development, functioning as a risk factor for mental health difficulties. Moreover LD (particularly Dyslexia and comorbidity with ADHD) are associated with a significantly higher risk of both internalizing (e.g., anxiety, social withdrawal, psychosomatic symptoms) and externalizing (e.g., impulsivity, aggression) difficulties during adolescence (Morte-Soriano & Soriano-Ferrer, 2024).

Adolescents with dyslexia, in particular, demonstrate elevated rates of anxiety and depression compared with peers without dyslexia (Morte-Soriano & Soriano-Ferrer, 2024).

## 2. Emotional Regulation Techniques

Emotion regulation is defined as *“the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them”* (Gross, 1998).

Self-emotion regulation involves the interaction between executive functions (e.g., goal setting and monitoring), cognitions (e.g., self-appraisals and self-efficacy) and emotional responses (e.g., inhibition, control, and expression). Behavior and emotion are closely linked and as a result, the ability to regulate emotions is essential for children's psychological adjustment and daily functioning (Bridgett et al., 2012; Tajik-Parvinchi et al., 2021).

Emotion regulation involves changing where we focus attention, how we think about a situation and finally how we emotionally respond to a situation (Gross, 1998).

The strategies below translate evidence-based principles into practical strategies suitable for children.



#### a) Body Regulation & Calm Breathing based on Gross (1998)

*Regulating bodily arousal is the first step for emotion regulation before the usage of cognitive strategies.*

**Activity:** Ask the child to take a moment and then place one hand on the belly. Ask him/her to inhale for 4 second, hold for 2 and exhale for 6. Repeat as many times as the child needs.

**Tip: Do the activity along with your child!**

**Success:** reduced intensity or crying, ability to speak calmly, slower breathing.

#### b) Attention Shifting based on Gross (1998)

*Shifting attention when intensity is too high for thinking strategies reduces emotional load.*

**Activity:** Play a 30-second sensory search. “Find 6 red things”, “Name 4 big animals”, “Name 3 sweet fruits”

**Tip: Do the activity along with your child!**

**Success:** Reduced emotional intensity

### c) Thought reframe cards based on Gross (1998)

*Transforming negative self-talk into supportive, realistic thinking*

**Activity:** Create small cards with pairs

- “I can’t do this” = “This is hard, but I’ll try”
- “I always fail” = “I am still learning”
- “I am not good at school” = “I learn in different way”

**Success:** Willingness to retry, reduced negative self-talk

### d) Recognition, Identification and Acceptance based on Lindsay and Creswell (2018)

*Help the child to recognize, identify and accept emotions without panic or suppression.*

**Activity:** Adult says calmly: “What feeling showed up today”, “How did you feel when...?”, “I see this is a strong feeling. Let’s sit with it for a moment”, “How do you feel? Let’s discuss it”, “it’s OK to feel that way”

**Tip: Speak about your emotions as well**

**Success:** Child tolerates “uncomfortable” feelings, speaks about a wide range of feelings, faster emotional recovery

### e) Small Successes based on Rostami (2024)

*Rebuild confidence after frustration or shutdown. Repeated mastery experiences are linked to higher confidence, self-efficacy and lower social anxiety.*

**Activity:** Provide opportunities for manageable achievements. Break tasks into small steps and focus on effort rather than outcome. Ensure immediate success (“Read one line”, “Solve one step of the exercise”)

-Use helpful language: “You did this before, you can try again”, “I’m sure about you/I believe in you/I’m proud of you” etc.

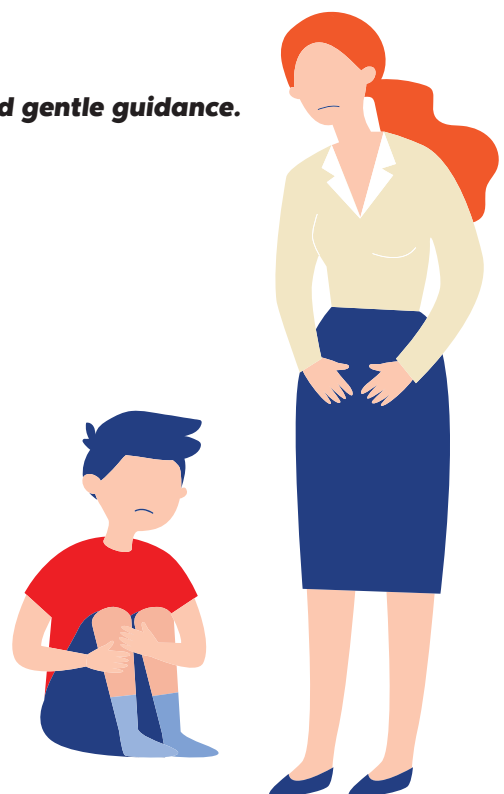
**Success:** Child continues the task for a few more times, reduced frustration if “failure” comes

### Note to parents:

*Emotional regulation does not grow in a hurry.*

*It develops in small, repeated moments of **patience, safety, and gentle guidance.***

*A quiet moment together often teaches more than many words.*





### 3. When to seek professional help

Many parents often wonder: *Is my child's behavior normal and manageable, or is a sign that additional support is needed?*

Avoidance, frustration and shutdowns may be particularly common in children with SLD, as they may reflect emotional reactions related to the learning process and the need for support.

Parents should pay attention when behaviors are:

#### Persistent:

- School refusal or avoidance of academic tasks occurs most days
- Frustration doesn't decrease after the task is completed
- Withdrawal from peers or previously enjoyed activities is observed

#### Intense:

- Behaviors are very strong and frequent such as repeated crying, anger, or panic.
- The child presents psychosomatic complaints such as headaches and/or stomach aches.
- High levels of distress or anxiety are evident, with avoidance of school and difficulties across different settings

#### Affecting self-image or daily functioning:

- The child frequently expresses thoughts such as *"I will never do this," "I can't do this,"* or *"I am useless."*
- Decline in confidence and motivation appears.
- Difficulties emerge in sleep, eating or general daily functioning.

The above patterns indicate the need for **emotional support** and, in some cases, **professional guidance**.

Whether a child requires professional support, or can be supported within everyday family life, the role of the parent remains irreplaceable and central.

Child's emotional growth is primarily shaped by the presence of an adult who can listen, understand and respond with patience and consistency.

Professional guidance may offer direction and strategies but is the daily relationship with the parent and consistency that nurtures safety, confidence and resilience.

***"A supportive environment can help emotional regulation and resilience to be strengthen"*** (Rostami et al., 2024).





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## Chapter 6 | Parent – Teacher Collaboration

Developed by LESTU

### Introduction

When a child is experiencing learning difficulties, one of the most powerful things that can happen is for parents and teachers to work together – as a team, with the child at the centre. Research consistently shows that children whose parents and teachers communicate openly, share observations, and set goals in partnership make better progress than those whose support systems remain separate (Epstein, 2010; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Yet for many parents, approaching a teacher about concerns can feel intimidating. And for teachers, receiving concerns can sometimes feel like criticism. This chapter helps you, as a parent, to bridge that gap confidently – knowing what to say, when to say it, and how to work together on a shared plan that truly supports your child.



### Learning outcomes

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Express your concerns to your child’s teacher clearly and calmly.
- Identify the right questions to ask during a parent-teacher meeting.
- Recognise communication approaches that help – and those that can create barriers.
- Co-create a shared support plan with the teacher, with specific, realistic goals.
- Follow up effectively after meetings to monitor progress together.



## Duration

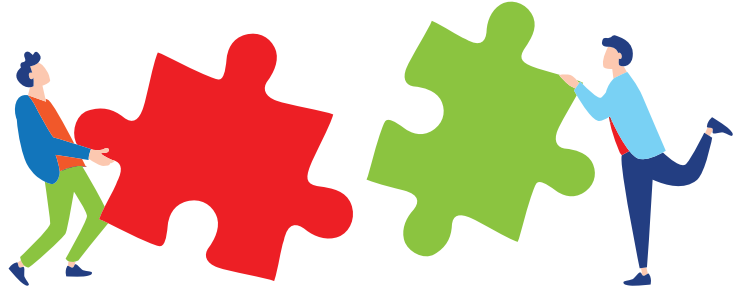
Approximate reading and activity time: 45–60 minutes (approx. 3–4 pages of reading + reflection activities).



## Content-training material

### 1. Why Collaboration Matters

Children aged 6–14 spend a large part of their waking hours at school. When a child is struggling – with reading, attention, writing or maths – that struggle does not stay at school. It comes home in the form of frustration, avoidance, low self-esteem or difficult evenings over homework.



Parents and teachers each hold a piece of the puzzle. You know your child’s emotional world, their history, what motivates them, and how they behave when no one is watching. The teacher knows how your child performs compared to peers, where the learning gaps appear, and what strategies are available at school. Neither picture is complete without the other.

What does good collaboration look like?

- Regular, brief contact – not only in a crisis.
- Both parties sharing observations, not just problems.
- A tone of mutual respect and shared purpose.
- Actions agreed together, with follow-up built in.
- The child knowing that adults are working together on their behalf.

### 2. How to Communicate Concerns

Many parents delay raising concerns because they are unsure how to begin, worry about being seen as “difficult,” or hope the problem will resolve itself. In reality, early communication – even about a vague worry – is almost always better than waiting.



#### Step 1: Prepare before you meet

- Write down your specific observations (not feelings alone). Use concrete examples: “For the past three weeks, she has cried before every maths homework” is more useful than “she hates school.”
- Note when the difficulty started, whether it is getting better or worse, and any patterns you have noticed.
- Think about what you would like to achieve from the conversation – information, support, a plan, or all three.
- Keep notes brief: two or three key points are enough for a first meeting.

## Step 2: Request a meeting calmly and directly

### How to request a meeting:

"Hello, I would like to arrange a short meeting when it is convenient for you. I have noticed some things at home that I think would be worth discussing. I would value your perspective too."

This opening sets a collaborative tone from the start. It signals that you are there to share, not to accuse.

## Step 3: In the meeting – share, listen, then discuss

- Start by sharing what you have observed – describe behaviour, not character.
- Invite the teacher's perspective: "I wonder if you have noticed anything similar at school?"
- Listen actively, even if what you hear is surprising or difficult.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions or solutions before you have heard each other fully.
- Acknowledge what the teacher is already doing: "Thank you for telling me about the extra reading support – I wasn't aware of that."

## Step 4: Keep a written record

After any significant conversation, briefly note what was said and what was agreed. This helps both sides remember commitments and provides a useful reference if concerns escalate or a specialist assessment is needed later.

### Useful phrases for common situations

| Situation                        | Example phrases you can use                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Opening the topic</b>         | <i>"I have noticed something at home that I'd like your thoughts on – I don't want to jump to conclusions."</i>      |
| <b>Describing difficulty</b>     | <i>"He seems to find reading very tiring. He often avoids it, and when he does try, he gets frustrated quickly."</i> |
| <b>Asking for perspective</b>    | <i>"Has anything like this come up in class? I would really value your observation."</i>                             |
| <b>Acknowledging the teacher</b> | <i>"I can see you are already trying different approaches. I appreciate that."</i>                                   |
| <b>Wrapping up</b>               | <i>"Could we agree on one or two things to try, and check in again in a few weeks?"</i>                              |

### 3. What to Ask / What to Avoid

The quality of a parent-teacher conversation depends heavily on the questions asked and the way concerns are framed. Below are practical guidelines to help you get the most from any meeting.



#### Questions that open dialogue

- What does my child's day typically look like in your class?
- In which situations do he/she seem most engaged or most withdrawn?
- What strategies have you found helpful so far?
- Are there things I could do at home that would align with what happens at school?
- What does a good day look like for him/her – and what tends to make a day harder?
- Has the school considered any additional assessment or support?
- Who else at the school could I talk to if I need more information – for example, a special educational needs coordinator?

#### Do / avoid – communication guide

The table below shows communication choices that either build or break productive dialogue

| ✓ SAY / DO                                                                                  | ✗ AVOID SAYING / DOING                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Focus on specific, observable behaviours: "He avoids writing tasks and puts his head down." | Label or diagnose your child: "He definitely has dyslexia / ADHD."                  |
| Use "I notice" and "I wonder" language: "I notice she is very tired after school."          | Use blaming language: "You are not doing enough for her."                           |
| Invite the teacher's view before proposing solutions.                                       | Arrive with a fixed solution and push the teacher to implement it.                  |
| Thank the teacher for their time and existing effort.                                       | Compare your child unfavourably to others: "His friend manages fine, why can't he?" |
| Ask what the next step is and who is responsible for it.                                    | Leave the meeting without any agreed follow-up.                                     |
| Express your worry calmly: "I am concerned and want to understand better."                  | Minimise the issue to avoid confrontation: "It's probably nothing."                 |
| Accept that the teacher may need time to gather information before answering.               | Expect immediate answers or solutions in the first meeting.                         |

#### A note about your emotions

It is completely natural to feel worried, frustrated, or even angry when your child is struggling. These emotions show how much you care. However, try to process the strongest emotions before the meeting rather than during it – for example, by talking to a trusted friend first. A calm, curious tone will get you much further than one driven by urgency or blame. Both you and the teacher want the same thing: for your child to thrive.

To learn more about **how to handle your emotions after assessment** please see also **Chapter 7**.

## 4. Shared Goal-Setting

The most productive parent-teacher meetings end not just with a better understanding of the problem, but with a clear, shared plan for moving forward. Shared goals prevent misunderstandings, reduce duplication of effort, and give your child the security of knowing that the adults around them are working together.

What makes a good, shared goal?

Goals should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic, and Time-bound.

- Specific: “We will practise reading aloud for 10 minutes each evening” is clearer than “we will read more at home.”
- Measurable: Both you and the teacher need a way to know whether the goal is being reached.
- Agreed: Both sides commit to it – the child can also be included in age-appropriate ways.
- Realistic: One or two small goals are more effective than a long Wishlist.
- Time-bound: Set a date to review progress together – two to four weeks is usually sufficient for a first check-in.



### The three-column plan

Below is a simple framework you can complete together during or after a meeting.

| Goal                      | Who Does What                                                                                       | How We Know It's Working                                    |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Improve reading fluency   | Parent: 10 min daily read-aloud at home. Teacher: paired reading in class twice a week.             | Child reads target text more smoothly after 4 weeks.        |
| Reduce homework avoidance | Parent: consistent homework time + short breaks. Teacher: shortened written tasks where possible.   | Fewer meltdowns reported; homework completed most evenings. |
| Build confidence in maths | Parent: use game-based maths apps for 10 min. Teacher: seat near supportive peer; allow extra time. | Child volunteers an answer in class at least once a week.   |

To learn more about how **to support learning at home** please see also **Chapter 4**.

### Including your child in the plan

Wherever possible, share the agreed goals with your child in simple, positive language. Children who understand what they are working on – and why – are more likely to engage with the plan. For example:

“Ms. Žukauskaitė and I have been talking about ways to make reading feel easier for you. We thought we could try reading together every evening, just for a little while – no pressure, just practice. What do you think?”

## Following up

- Contact the teacher briefly after two to four weeks – a short email or a word at drop-off is enough.
- Note what has changed (even small improvements count and should be shared).
- If goals are not being met, revisit them together – sometimes the goal itself needs adjusting, not the child.
- Celebrate progress explicitly with your child: “I noticed you sat down to read without complaining this week – that is real progress.”

## Reflection Activity

**Take 5 minutes to write your answers:**

1. What is one specific concern about my child’s learning that I have not yet raised with the teacher?
2. How could I describe this concern in one or two concrete sentences (using behaviour, not labels)?
3. What is one thing I would like us to do differently at home or at school?
4. When could I realistically request a meeting or send a message to the teacher?



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- European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (2022). Involving parents in supporting their children’s learning. <https://www.european-agency.org>

## Useful references

### Videos:

- TED. (2011). Brene Brown: The power of vulnerability [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/iCvmsMzIF7o>
- Harvard Graduate School of Education. (2019). How to talk to teachers [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=example>

### Digital Library:

Refer to the ACCESS project Digital Library (WP3) for additional tools, checklists, and translated resources: <https://access-edu.eu/digital-library/>

### Books for parents:

- Greene, R. W. (2014). The explosive child. Harper Paperbacks.
- Morin, A. (2014). The everything parent’s guide to special education. Adams Media.





## Chapter 7 | Understanding Assessments

Developed by LeGO

### Introduction

This chapter is designed to guide parents through the process of evaluating specific learning difficulties: from identifying the first signs of difficulty to the moment when the family receives a diagnosis. In addition to practical and informational aspects, the chapter also gives space to the emotional dimension—often overlooked—that parents experience during this process. Understanding what happens, who is involved, and what to expect is the first step toward becoming an effective ally for your child.

**Attention!** This guide is for informational purposes only and does not replace the advice of a professional. For information about rights in your country, please contact your local health or school services.



### Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, parents will be able to:

- Understand what an SLD assessment is, when it is needed and why it is important for the child's academic and emotional well-being.
- Recognize the role of the different professionals involved in the assessment process.
- Understand how to interpret the results and how to activate a personalized support pathway in collaboration with the school.



## Duration

1 hour



## Content-training material

### 1. What evaluation is and when is needed

In many European countries, the law recognizes and protects students with learning difficulties, guaranteeing their right to an appropriate educational pathway through the adoption of supportive educational and teaching measures. A very important step in the support process for students with specific learning disorders (SLD) is the **assessment**.

The purpose of the assessment is to determine **whether a specific learning difficulty is present and to distinguish it from other possible conditions that could explain school difficulties**, such as medical or neurological factors (e.g., vision or hearing problems) or cultural factors (e.g., limited exposure to the language of the country where the child lives). The goal is to promote academic success and the full development of students' potential. The assessment makes it possible to identify both areas of difficulty and the child's strengths and skills. As we will see in this chapter, the results of the assessment provide practical guidance to schools for planning appropriate educational support, but their importance goes beyond that. Assessment is also important for the child's overall well-being, because how a child feels in the school environment can influence their well-being in other areas of life as well—at home, in sports, and in other everyday contexts.



#### **When assessment is needed?**

It is advisable to request an SLD assessment when a child's school difficulties are persistent and significant, despite the effort and support provided by the family and the school. Teachers are not specialists and cannot carry out diagnostic evaluations, but their role in identifying children's learning difficulties is very valuable, and discussing concerns with them is very important.

The assessment is usually carried out after basic academic skills such as reading, writing, and basic arithmetic have been taught, typically from the second grade of primary school onward, so that it is easier to determine whether the observed difficulties are temporary or more persistent. If early signs of difficulty emerge, it is still useful to consult with teachers or specialists.

Although learning times and rhythms vary from child to child, it is important not to wait too long once the difficulties appear persistent, in order to prevent them from becoming a source of frustration or loss of self-esteem for the child. It is always important to remember that requesting an assessment does not mean labeling your child, but rather trying to better understand their needs.

## 2. What specialists do

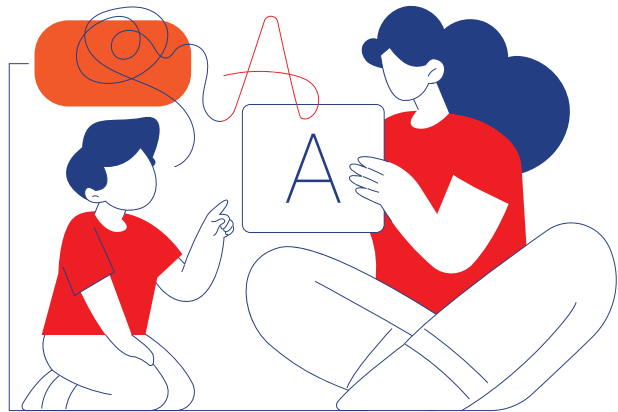
The assessment is carried out by a multidisciplinary team made up of qualified professionals who work together. Generally, the evaluation involves a child neuropsychiatrist, a psychologist, and a speech and language therapist, working either in public services or in accredited private centers.

The **child neuropsychiatrist** is responsible for framing the case from the perspective of the child's overall health, ensuring that there are no other medical or neurological causes that could explain the child's difficulties.

The **psychologist** mainly evaluates cognitive functioning (memory, attention, reasoning, etc.).

The **speech and language therapist**, on the other hand, assesses skills involved in school learning, such as reading and writing.

It is important to know that although the basic scientific criteria are internationally shared, the specific procedures for assessment, the professionals involved, and the rights guaranteed vary from country to country. If you have recently moved, it is important to check how the system works in your country of residence.



### **How the assessment is structured**

The assessment usually includes **several stages**, which may include:

- An initial interview with the parents to gather information about the child's history
- Sessions dedicated to the assessment itself, which may include standardized tests or age-appropriate evaluation tools
- Possible collection of information from teachers
- A feedback meeting with the parents

A final stage is dedicated to **sharing the diagnosis with the family**. This is a very important step and consists of a meeting between the professionals who conducted the assessment and the child's parents. It is not simply a matter of communicating a result, but of offering the family an in-depth understanding of the child's functioning, including both difficulties and strengths, helping them to better understand the situation.

The feedback meeting also plays a very important supportive role for the family, as it helps give meaning to the child's school difficulties. It often reduces doubts, concerns, or incorrect interpretations, such as the idea that these difficulties are due to a lack of effort or motivation. Even though the professional leading the meeting should use the clearest language possible, it is important for parents to feel free to ask for clarification if something is not fully understood and to ask any questions they may have.

During the meeting, guidance is also provided for the child's future educational pathway. The specialist may suggest support strategies, possible intervention programs, and ways of supporting the child that can promote both learning and well-being. From this perspective, the feedback meeting also represents a moment of orientation for collaboration between the family, the school, and professionals—an essential element for building a coherent and shared support plan.

### 3. How to interpret assessment results

It is important to remember that **receiving a diagnosis of a specific learning difficulty is not a failure, but the first step toward understanding how to support your child in the right way.** In fact, it is often the beginning of a successful path. A diagnosis does not define your child as a person. Rather, it helps ensure that they receive the support they deserve and explains why certain tasks may require more effort for them. Through a personalized support plan, many children with specific learning difficulties develop effective strategies and achieve excellent results.

Learning that your child has a specific learning difficulty can lead to different reactions from one parent to another. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and whatever emotions you experience are understandable. Some parents feel a sense of relief: finally there is an explanation for the child's struggles, and with it comes the hope of a clearer path forward. Others may feel sadness, worry about the future, or guilt—wondering whether they could have noticed earlier or whether they might have done something wrong. Some parents may also feel overwhelmed by the amount of information they receive, or disoriented when facing a school and healthcare system they may not yet know well.

All of these reactions are normal. A diagnosis can challenge the expectations parents may have had about their child's educational path, and it takes time to process it.

Your child's well-being is closely connected to your own. Here are **some tips** that may help:

- **Give yourself time to process.** You do not need to have all the answers right away. It is normal to feel confused or emotionally tired in the first weeks after the diagnosis.
- **Talk to someone you trust.** Whether it is your partner, a friend, a family member, or a psychologist, sharing what you feel can lighten the emotional burden.
- **Look for information, but carefully.** Learning more can be helpful, but not all online sources are reliable. Prioritize the guidance of the professionals who are supporting your child and official institutional resources.
- **Seek psychological support if you feel the need.** Turning to a psychologist is not a sign of weakness; it is an act of care for yourself and, therefore, for your child as well.



### 4. After the assessment

The diagnosis allows the school to prepare an **individualized educational plan**, a fundamental tool to ensure that the student receives instruction suited to their specific learning characteristics. In this sense, the results of the assessment are not simply the end of the diagnostic process, but rather the beginning of a shared support pathway aimed at helping the child in both their school experience and personal development. Once the evaluation has been carried out, the school prepares this plan in collaboration with the family, defining tools and strategies, as well as personalized methods of assessment and evaluation to ensure the student's right to learning is fully supported.

An accurate assessment is a very important tool for ensuring the student's school well-being—and beyond. A clear and well-founded diagnosis helps reduce the risk of school failure, as it makes it possible to adopt targeted teaching strategies and compensatory tools that facilitate access to learning content. At the same time, identifying the difficulty helps prevent



situations of frustration and demotivation that, in the long term, could lead to school dropout or personal distress. Understanding the origin of one's difficulties and receiving appropriate support can help students develop greater awareness of their own learning style, strengthening both self-esteem and motivation at school. In this sense, the diagnosis is not only a clinical tool but also an important factor in protecting the student's emotional and relational well-being.

In a nutshell, an SLD diagnosis is not an endpoint but the beginning of a shared journey between you, the school, and the professionals involved. Your presence and support can make a great difference in helping your child. It is important to:

- **Ask professionals for clarification** if something is not clear.
- **Actively participate** in the preparation of the personalized plan with teachers.
- Recognize and value **your child's abilities**, not only their difficulties.
- **Avoid comparisons** with other children: every learning journey is different.
- **Take care of yourselves** and seek support if needed. If you need help understanding or accepting the diagnosis, asking for support is important—your family's well-being begins with yours.

## 5. Post-diagnosis pathways across countries

### Basque Country (Spain)

Once a diagnosis has been issued by the relevant health or clinical services, it is essential that the family submits it to the school in order to adjust the educational response to the student's needs. From that moment on, the school counselor forwards the documentation to the advisory service of the corresponding Berritzegune, a support service of the Basque Government's Department of Education that provides guidance and assistance to schools in responding to diversity.

Through this advisory service, the application process is carried out with the Department of Education, following the established procedures and including all necessary documentation for the recognition of specific educational support needs and the possible allocation of resources, in coordination with the school.

When the diagnosis corresponds to a specific learning difficulty, the procedure is different, as it generally does not involve the allocation of additional personal resources. However, it is still recorded in the official Basque Government application, NEE (Specific Educational Support Needs), ensuring that the student's situation is formally documented. This registration guarantees recognition of their needs and, therefore, their right to receive an appropriate educational response, mainly based on methodological, organizational, and curriculum access adaptations within the mainstream classroom, as well as coordination between teaching staff and the school counseling service to ensure proper monitoring and adjustment of the measures adopted.



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Gobierno Vasco. (s. f.). *Atención a la diversidad en el sistema educativo vasco*. Departamento de Educación. <https://www.euskadi.eus>

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## Greece

In Greece, following the diagnosis of learning or developmental difficulties, the public education system—primarily through the services of KEDASY—conducts a formal interdisciplinary assessment and issues an official report outlining the student’s educational needs. This report typically includes recommendations for appropriate support measures, such as individualized educational interventions, curriculum adaptations, and school-based accommodations.

Based on this assessment, students may receive support within mainstream educational settings, including parallel support or placement in resource rooms, while, in more complex cases, referrals to specialized services may be made. The process emphasizes a collaborative approach involving parents, educators, and multidisciplinary professionals, aiming to ensure a holistic response to the child’s needs (Law 3699/2008; Law 4823/2021; Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs).

This framework is aligned with international principles of inclusive education, which promote equitable access to learning, early identification of difficulties, and the provision of individualized support within mainstream schooling environments (UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2019).



### References

Law 3699/2008. (2008). *Special education and education for persons with disabilities or special educational needs*. Government Gazette, Greece.

Law 4823/2021. (2021). *Upgrading the school and empowering teachers*. Government Gazette, Greece.

Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (Greece). (n.d.). *Special education and support structures*.

UNESCO. (2017). *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*.

OECD. (2019). *Education policy outlook 2019: Working together to help students achieve their potential*.

## Italy

The first step after receiving a diagnosis of a Specific Learning Disorder (SLD/DSA) is to communicate the diagnosis to the school as soon as possible. In the presence of a diagnosis (even provisional or pending definitive certification), the school is required to provide immediate support through a Personalized Learning Plan (PDP), with compensatory tools and dispensatory measures. Note: In some regions, private diagnoses (from accredited specialized centers) are accepted, but only if issued by multidisciplinary teams.

The PDP is the mandatory document that defines interventions for the educational success of students with SLD/DSA. It must be shared with the family, prepared within the first trimester (ideally within 30 days of the start of school, as per Ministry of Education guidelines), and updated periodically (at least twice a year). Parents read it, propose changes, and sign it: it is not binding on them, but essential to activate support.

The diagnosis must be reevaluated when the school cycle changes (e.g., elementary school → middle school → high school), no earlier than three years after the previous one, or at the school/family’s request to adapt tools. Since 2022, a simplified “confirmation” without a complete new assessment is possible if needs are stable. Always keep updated copies for smooth transitions.



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Legge n. 170 dell’8 ottobre 2010 “Nuove norme in materia di disturbi specifici di apprendimento in ambito scolastico”

Decreto Ministeriale n. 5669 del 12 luglio 2011

Accordo Stato-Regioni del 25 luglio 2012

Direttiva MIUR del 27 dicembre 2012 e Circolare n. 8/2013

Legge 107/2015 – La “Buona Scuola”

## Lithuania

In Lithuania, the procedure after a child is diagnosed with specific learning difficulties (SLDs) is fairly clearly regulated, although in practice it may vary slightly depending on the school or municipality. After receiving an assessment from specialists (usually the Pedagogical Psychological Service or the school's Child Welfare Commission), parents are expected to contact the school and submit the evaluation documents.

The school, in cooperation with educational support specialists (such as a special education teacher, speech therapist, and psychologist), prepares an individualised education plan and adapts the learning process to the child's needs. If necessary, additional support is provided (such as special lessons or consultations). Parents are also actively involved in the process—they are advised on how to support their child at home and collaborate with teachers. If needed, adjustments to assessment methods or other accommodations may be applied to ensure more effective learning outcomes for the child.



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## Romania

In Romania, following the identification of learning, developmental, or behavioral difficulties, a formal interdisciplinary assessment is conducted by specialized public institutions, primarily the County Centers for Educational Resources and Assistance (CJRAE/CMBRAE). This process results in the issuance of an official evaluation report and a school orientation certificate, which outlines the student's special educational needs (SEN) and recommends appropriate educational support measures.

Based on this assessment, students may benefit from inclusion in mainstream education settings with specific support services, such as itinerant and support teachers, speech therapy, counseling, individualized educational plans (IEPs), and curriculum adaptations. In certain cases, depending on the severity and complexity of the needs, additional specialized interventions or placement in special education settings may be recommended. The process promotes a collaborative approach involving parents, teachers, school counselors, and other specialists, ensuring a coordinated and individualized response to each child's needs (Order no. 6552/2011; Order no. 5574/2011; Law no. 198/2023).

This framework is aligned with international principles of inclusive education, emphasizing equal access to quality education, early identification of difficulties, and the provision of personalized support within mainstream educational environments (UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2019).



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Summary Table on the steps of the assessment process

| Step                                            | Who is involved                                                         | What happens                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Tips                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1</b><br><b>Notice Signs</b>                 | Parents & Teachers                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Persistent school difficulties despite effort and support</li> <li>Struggles with reading, writing, spelling or maths</li> <li>Early signs in preschool (see Chapter 1 for indicators)</li> </ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observe the child during homework</li> <li>Talk to teachers and share concerns</li> <li>Do not wait: early action prevents loss of self-esteem</li> </ul>                                |
| <b>2</b><br><b>Request Assessment</b>           | Family                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Request a formal SLD assessment (usually from Grade 2 onward)</li> <li>Contact public health services or an accredited private centre</li> <li>Gather relevant school observations and reports</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requesting an assessment is not labelling your child</li> <li>Check national/local procedures – they vary by country</li> </ul>                                                          |
| <b>3</b><br><b>Multidisciplinary evaluation</b> | Child neuropsychiatrist<br>Psychologist,<br>Speech & Language Therapist | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial interview with parents</li> <li>Standardised tests: cognition, reading, writing, maths</li> <li>Possible collection of information from teachers</li> <li>Other medical/neurological causes are ruled out</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feel free to ask professionals to explain any step</li> <li>Bring any previous assessments</li> <li>Your child's emotional wellbeing matters throughout</li> </ul>                       |
| <b>4</b><br><b>Feedback Meeting</b>             | Multidisciplinary team & Parents                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results explained: both difficulties and strengths</li> <li>Guidance for future support pathway</li> <li>Suggestions for strategies, tools and possible interventions</li> </ul>                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask questions – nothing is too small to clarify</li> <li>A diagnosis is the beginning of the right support, not an endpoint</li> <li>Allow yourself time to process the news</li> </ul>  |
| <b>5</b><br><b>After Diagnosis</b>              | Family, teachers and professionals                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School prepares an individualised educational plan with the family</li> <li>Compensatory and adaptive tools are identified</li> </ul>                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psycho-education for parents (see Chapter 3)</li> <li>How to support learning at home (see Digital Library &amp; Chapter 4)</li> <li>Daily regulation at home (see Chapter 8)</li> </ul> |





## 6. Useful References

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## Chapter 8 | Daily Regulation Tools for Home

Developed by LeGO

### Introduction

This chapter provides practical strategies to:

- Promote self-regulation and emotional control
- Manage transitions between school levels
- Integrate sensory and breathing exercises to improve focus and reduce anxiety

These strategies are designed for parents, educators, and caregivers who want concrete, easy-to-implement tools to support children's learning and well-being.



### Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, parents will be able to:

1. Implement sensory breaks and breathing techniques to reduce stress and increase focus.
2. Support smooth transitions between school levels and foster autonomy.
3. Recognize the importance of personalized strategies tailored to each child.



## Duration

1 hour



## Content-training material

### 1. Sensory breaks

Sensory breaks are short, planned pauses that help reduce sensory overload and improve concentration and learning.

These breaks can include movement exercises (walking, jumping), deep breathing, or the use of manipulative tools, stress-relief objects, or a relaxation corner. Activities can be tactile, auditory, visual, movement-based, or breathing-focused.

#### Examples of proprioceptive activities to calm:

- Squeezing stress balls or modeling clay
- Stretching or practicing yoga poses
- Pushing heavier objects like chairs or books
- Giving oneself a firm hug

#### Examples of tactile activities to reduce anxiety:

- Manipulating modeling clay, playdough, fake sand, or slime

#### Examples of visual activities to reduce anxiety:

- Relaxation corner or room with dim lighting
- Soap bubbles

#### Examples of auditory activities to calm down:

- Listening to relaxing sounds
- Using headphones to block out noise

#### Examples of movement activities to regulate or energize:

- Walking
- Jumping rope or jumping in place
- Sitting on a fitness ball (fitball)

Deep breathing exercises, described in the next chapter, also aim to reduce anxiety. It is important to schedule these breaks in advance to prevent emotional overload.



## 2. Breathing techniques

Breathing techniques are tools that can reduce anxiety and stress and promote relaxation by consciously controlling inhalation and exhalation.

**Examples include:**

- **Diaphragmatic breathing:** slows down the emotional system. Sit or lie down with one hand on the belly and one on the chest. Inhale through the nose, expanding the belly while counting 1–4; exhale slowly through the mouth, counting 1–8.
- **4-5-7 breathing:** inhale through the nose for 4 seconds, hold for 5 seconds, exhale through the mouth for 7 seconds.
- **Square or rhythmic breathing:** inhale 4 seconds, hold 4 seconds, exhale 4 seconds, then pause 4 seconds.
- **Pursed-lips breathing:** inhale through the nose, then exhale slowly through slightly parted lips while making a “pfff” sound.
- **Alternate-nostril breathing:** close the right nostril with the thumb, inhale through the left; close the left nostril with the ring finger, hold, then exhale through the right. Repeat.
- **Buzzing bee breath:** inhale counting to 4, exhale while making a humming sound, prolonging the exhalation.



## 3. Transition Tools

Transition tools for children with LDs include technological, methodological, and educational resources that help ease transitions between school levels (primary → middle school, middle → high school).

These tools ensure continuity in learning and reduce emotional impact when entering a new school environment. They can include:

- Technological and compensatory software tools
- Study strategies and methods
- Didactic and dispensatory tools

### Transition After Diagnosis

Immediately after diagnosis, it is important to:

- **Understand and accept the diagnosis:** recognize the difficulties, understand what SLDs are, see them as traits rather than illnesses, and accept that others share similar characteristics.
- **Accept the use of compensatory tools:** understand their purpose and importance. Using them during exercises or tests is not “cheating.” Move from not using tools to integrating them into study routines.



### Transition Between School Levels

Useful strategies include:

- Visiting the new school during open days or attending sample lessons to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Teacher meetings between school levels to share information on the child’s characteristics and effective learning methods.

- Sharing the Individualised Education Plan to outline the student's learning path, strengths, and tools used.

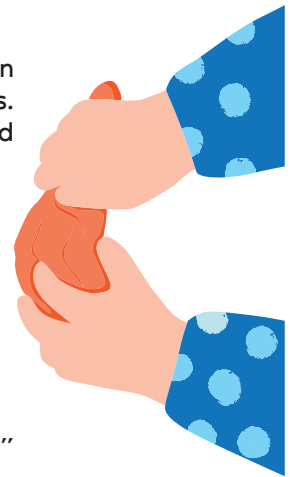
### Transitions for Greater Autonomy

- Moving from guided organization (time management, preparing materials) to autonomous planning through weekly or daily schedules.
- Transitioning from human readers (primary school) to text-to-speech software for digital books.
- Moving from teacher-provided maps to independently created maps, including software-supported ones.
- Learning to use word-processing software with spell check, especially in middle school.
- In math, transitioning from basic tools like number lines or multiplication tables to calculators and scientific calculators for higher levels.

Technological or compensatory software can support study load management but must be known and mastered.

## 4. Short Self-regulation activities

Self-regulation activities are active, conscious processes through which children manage emotions, thoughts, impulses, and attention to reach learning goals. Planning, monitoring, and evaluating study strategies improves autonomy and effectiveness.



### Activities vary by age:

#### Emotional Regulation and Calmness

##### Preschool:

- Calm corner with cushions to retreat
- Breathing exercises: “smell the flower” (inhale) and “blow out the candle” (exhale), bubble-blowing
- Manipulative activities: playdough, fake sand

##### Primary school:

- Calm corner
- Stress-relief objects/games: slime, pop-it
- Breathing exercises: flower/candle, bubble-blowing, pursed-lips breathing
- Emotion recognition: naming emotions, using an “emotion thermometer” or “emotion knobs” metaphor
- Manipulative activities: salt dough, fake sand

##### Secondary school:

- Non-judgmental self-observation: verbalize emotions (“What do I feel now?” “I feel... because...”)
- Breathing exercises
- Stress-relief objects

### Impulse Control Activities

##### Preschool:

- Games like “1,2,3, freeze” (motor control) or “full/empty bag” (opposite commands train attention)

- Turn-taking games such as memory
- Construction/puzzles for patience and planning

#### Primary school:

- Blocks/puzzles for patience and planning
- “Impulse traffic light”: red = stop, yellow = think, green = go
- Turn-taking strategy games like memory or board games

#### Secondary school:

- Puzzles, logic cubes, crosswords
- Turn-taking games, age-appropriate board games

### Structuring Time and Routines

#### Primary school:

- Organized, distraction-free study setting
- Weekly/daily schedule for predictability
- Planned breaks with visual timetables
- Timers or hourglasses to track time

#### Secondary school:

- Organized study environment
- Paper or digital agendas
- Scheduled breaks
- Timers for time management

#### Quick tips for daily regulation at home

#### Quick Tips: Daily Regulation Tools for Home

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sensory Breaks</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule breaks before overload – don’t wait for meltdowns</li> <li>• Try squeezing a stress ball, stretching, or a short walk</li> <li>• Use a relaxation corner with dim lighting or calming objects</li> <li>• Let the child choose their preferred sensory activity</li> </ul>                                                     |
| <b>Breathing Techniques</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rhythmic breathing: inhale 4s → hold 4s → exhale 4s → pause 4s</li> <li>• Diaphragmatic: belly rises on inhale, slow exhale through mouth</li> <li>• For younger children: “smell the flower” (inhale) / “blow the candle” (exhale)</li> <li>• Practise when calm so it becomes a familiar tool in stressful moments</li> </ul>        |
| <b>Transition Tools</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit the new school ahead of time to reduce anxiety</li> <li>• Gradually shift from guided to more independent organisation</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Self-Regulation Activities</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preschool: calm corner, bubble-blowing, playdough, freeze games</li> <li>• Primary: emotion thermometer, “impulse traffic light”, turn-taking games</li> <li>• Secondary: self-observation (“What do I feel? Why?”), logic puzzles, agendas</li> <li>• All ages: planned breaks + visual timetables + timers or hourglasses</li> </ul> |



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## Chapter 9 | Parent Action Cards (Printable)

Developed by Ethos Hub

### Introduction

Daily life can become particularly demanding.

Work, school, responsibilities, homework, and activities can sometimes feel challenging or overwhelming for both children and parents.

Children with Specific Learning Difficulties may react with avoidance, frustration, or emotional withdrawal, especially when tasks feel demanding or when repeated effort leads to disappointment.

The following cards were designed through everyday life experience and aim to offer simple, practical ideas that parents can use in daily life to support calmness, confidence, and emotional connection.

They focus on small, realistic steps that can make everyday situations more manageable, predictable, **and supportive for the child and the family**

**Tip:** Your child needs a present and emotionally available parent, not a perfect one!



### Learning outcomes

Parents will be equipped with small, realistic steps that can make everyday situations more manageable, predictable, and supportive for the child and the family.





## Duration

1 hour.

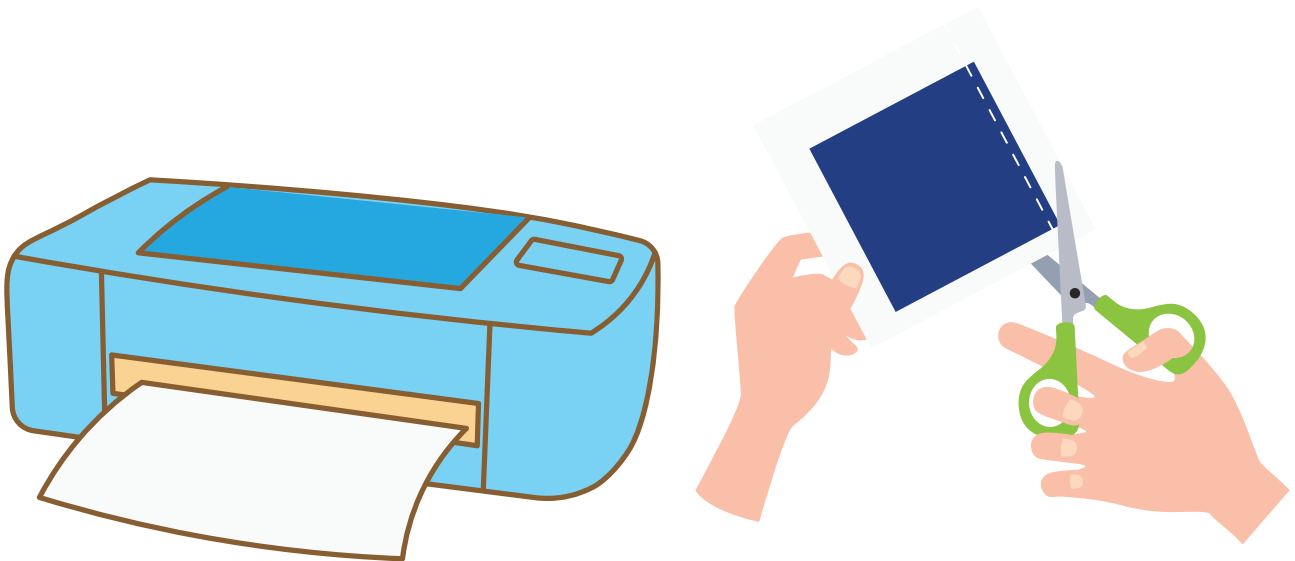


## Content-training material

### How to use the “Parent Action Cards”

You can use these cards in a simple and flexible way, so they become part of your daily routine:

- Print the cards on paper or cardstock for better durability
- Laminate them for everyday use
- Place them in visible spots at home (e.g., fridge, desk, notice board)
- Keep 1-2 cards each week as your “focus”
- Read a card before a challenging moment (e.g., before homework or bedtime)
- Use them as reminders, not as punishment rules
- Keep them on your phone as a quick reference



## 1. CARD 1 – Homework Frustration



### CARD 1 – Homework Frustration

#### What to notice:



- The child becomes easily irritated, even before the homework begins (crying, anger, shouting).
- The child systematically avoids doing homework.

#### What to try:



- Break the task into small steps.
- Use timer.
- Use the Pomodoro technique (see WP3).
- Let the child decide which task to start with.

#### Do:



- Speak calmly.
- Focus on effort, not perfection.



**Remember:** When a child starts homework in a tense and negative emotional state, he/she is more likely to develop a negative association with learning, which can lead to increased avoidance and irritability.

#### Don't:



- Pressure the child for perfection.
- Compare your child with other children.

#### Micro-action today:



- Start working together on homework for 10 min, then take a short break. Gradually and consistently increase the working time, as long as the child doesn't show signs of discomfort. Over time, slowly encourage the child to work independently, either on all homework or parts of it.

## 2. CARD 2 – Difficulty Staying Focused



### CARD 2 – Difficulty Staying Focused

#### What to notice:



- Hyperactivity.
- Unfinished tasks.
- Difficulty in remaining focused.

#### What to try:



- Brief, focused work sessions.
- Movement during breaks.
- A clean and quiet workspace free from distractions.

**Tip:** If it helps the child focus, he/she can use a fidget toy while doing homework.

#### Do:



- Give the child one instruction at a time.
- Stick to a consistent routine.



**Remember:** Homework should take place, whenever possible, at the same time each day, or according to a schedule that works best for the family, as long as it remains consistent. A stable routine helps children feel secure and supports his/her emotional routine.

#### Don't:



- Speak too quickly.
- Give too many instructions at once.

#### Micro-action today:



- Use timer.

### 3. CARD 3 – Morning Stress before School/ School Refusal

✂

## CARD 3 – Morning Stress before School / School Refusal

**What to notice:** 

- Distress or complaining before school.
- Prolonged delay or refusal to get ready.
- Refusal to attend school.

**What to try:** 

- Prepare the night before: Pack the school bag and choose together the clothes and shoes for the next day, so the morning feels calmer and more predictable.
- Keep a consistent morning routine.
- Use calm tone of voice.

**Do:** 

- If the behavior is persistent, consider seeking guidance from a mental health professional.
- Offer steady emotional support to the child.

**Don't:** 

- Need to wait for the behavior to resolve on its own, early support can make a meaningful difference.
- Blame the child.

**Micro-action today:** 

- Schedule a short, supportive conversation with the school to share concerns and decide next steps.

 **Remember:** *Collaboration with school is essential!*



#### 4. CARD 4 – Low Self-Confidence

✂

### CARD 4 – Low Self-Confidence

What to notice:

- The child says: “I’ll never make it”, “I’m not good at it”
- Fear of trying.
- Giving up easily.

What to try:

- Remind the child of previous successes.
- Set very small, achievable goals.
- Praise effort, rather than outcome.

Do:

- Use positive, encouraging language.
- Acknowledge your child’s progress.

Don’t:

- Avoid criticism.
- Avoid pressure for immediate results.

Micro-action today:

- Spend quality time together through shared activities and strengthen your connection.

**Remember:** *The quality of the parent-child connection strengthens children’s belief in their abilities and helps them face challenges with greater resilience and confidence.*



## 5. CARD 5 – Homework Refusal



### CARD 5 – Homework Refusal

#### What to notice:



- Child says: “I’ll do it later” repeatedly.
- Gets distracted by anything else.
- Becomes easily angry when reminded to start.

#### What to try:



- Offer a choice: “Math or language first?”
- Start with 10 min of work.
- Use a visual schedule.
- Use checkboxes.

#### Do:



- Speak calmly.
- Keep a consistent study time.

#### Don’t:



- Engage in long negotiations.
- Threaten punishment.

#### Micro-action today:



- Start with a few minutes of work and gradually increase the time.

## 6. CARD 6 - Too Much Screen Time After School



### CARD 6 – Too Much Screen Time After School

#### What to notice:



- Asks for a screen immediately after school.
- Has difficulty stopping screen time.
- Time for playing or homework is reduced.

#### What to try:



- Set a consistent daily screen-time limit.
- Prioritize food, rest and homework before screens.
- Offer an alternative activity (shared game, movement, playground, playing).

#### Do:



- Agree on rules together.
- Keep a consistent daily routine.

#### Don't:



- Remove the screen suddenly.
- Use screens as a reward.

#### Micro-action today:



- Set a clear, specific screen time and remain consistent.

**Important note for parents:** These cards are designed to offer practical guidance for everyday support for common emotional and behavioral situations. If the behaviors that concern you are repeated, persistent or interfere with your child's daily functioning, it is recommended to seek support from a qualified mental health professional for further guidance and assessment.

**Now, you have the cards.**

**You have the knowledge.**

**But more importantly...**

**You are already showing up.**

**You are already trying.**

**And that makes you exactly the parent your child needs.**

**Keep going! One small step, one calm moment, one connection at a time.**



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## Chapter 10 | Real-Life Scenarios & Case Studies

Developed by LESTU, San Felix Ikastola, FEG School, Saules School, EMVIO

### Introduction

Every child's learning journey is unique. Some children move through school with ease, while others face genuine challenges – in reading, writing, attention, communication, or numbers – that can be confusing and worrying for families. Often, parents are the first to notice that something is not quite right, but they may not know what they are seeing or what to do next.

This chapter offers something different from clinical definitions or theory. It presents real-life case studies drawn from classrooms across partner schools in our consortium – stories of real children, real families, and the practical steps that helped. Each story illustrates how early detection, thoughtful adaptation, close family-school collaboration, and a focus on emotional wellbeing can make a profound difference.

You will encounter children with dyslexia, dyscalculia, ADHD indicators, speech and language difficulties, autism spectrum traits, dysgraphia, and more. What unites all their stories is this: the difficulty was noticed, named, and addressed – and the child grew stronger as a result.

Each case study follows a consistent structure, so it is easy to navigate:

- The child's situation and difficulties – what was noticed and how
- What the school did – methodological and assessment adaptations
- What families can do – practical home strategies
- Reflection questions – to help you relate the story to your own child
- Key takeaway – a concise message to carry forward

You do not need to read every story – feel free to go directly to the case most relevant to your child's experience.



## Learning outcomes

**After reading this chapter, parents will be able to:**

- Recognise early signs of common learning difficulties in everyday situations at home and school
- Understand how schools adapt teaching methods and assessment to support children with specific needs
- Apply practical home strategies that reinforce school-based support without pressure or comparison
- Appreciate the importance of emotional wellbeing and self-esteem alongside academic progress
- Feel confident engaging in collaborative, respectful conversations with teachers and support specialists
- Encourage their child's self-advocacy, independence, and confidence as a learner



## Duration

1 hour 45 minutes.



## Content-training material

### CASE STUDY 1: Juan, Age 7 – Dyslexia

Primary Year 2 • San Felix Ikastola, Spain



#### The Child's Story

Juan had shown signs of difficulty from Early Years education – trouble recognising phonemes, developing syllabic awareness, and matching letters to their sounds. When formal literacy began in Year 1, these challenges became clearer, and by Year 2 they were causing him real frustration.

During reading, Juan would guess words rather than decode them, skip lines, reverse syllables, confuse letters that look similar (such as d and p), and omit sounds altogether. His handwriting was hard to read. What struck his teacher most was the gap between Juan's oral creativity and his written output. He could invent rich, imaginative stories aloud – but when he picked up a pen, the words on the page did not match the story in his head. As Juan himself put it: 'I think of the word, but when I write it, it's not the same anymore.'

Following assessment with the family's consent, Juan was identified as having a high risk of dyslexia and registered for specific educational support.

#### What the School Did

| In the Classroom                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Assessment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit, guided teaching with step-by-step task sequencing</li> <li>• Teacher models syllable-by-syllable reading before Juan repeats</li> <li>• Syllable cards and colour-coding to differentiate sounds</li> <li>• Shorter, adapted texts and advance content previews</li> <li>• Extra time for all tasks; spelling aids and spellcheckers in non-language subjects</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral responses accepted alongside written ones</li> <li>• Instructions read aloud during tests</li> <li>• Outlines and short tasks instead of long exams</li> <li>• Progress celebrated continuously – 'You read that word beautifully!'</li> </ul> |

## What Families Can Do at Home

### Reading

- Read aloud together daily – let your child hear fluent reading without pressure to perform
- Choose books slightly below their reading level to build confidence and enjoyment
- When they get stuck on a word, gently say it aloud rather than waiting in silence

### Writing & Spelling

- Focus on what they wanted to say, not how it is spelled – praise the idea first
- Let them use voice-to-text apps or dictate to you for homework when writing is exhausting
- Keep spelling practice short: 5 minutes a day of one rule or pattern is more effective than 30 minutes of frustration

### Emotional Wellbeing

- Avoid comparisons with siblings or classmates – every child's brain works differently
- Name their strengths explicitly: storytelling, creativity, curiosity, persistence
- Agree short, structured routines so homework does not become a battle

### Reflection Questions for Parents

1. Has your child ever said something like 'I know it in my head, but I can't write it'? What did that moment feel like for both of you?
2. Are there moments when your child shines verbally – storytelling, explaining, debating – that their written work does not show?
3. What is one small change to your homework routine that could reduce pressure for your child tonight?

### Key Takeaway for Parents

- Dyslexia affects the process of decoding written language – not intelligence. Juan's imaginative mind is fully intact.
- The most powerful thing a parent can do is protect their child's self-esteem while the brain learns different routes to reading.
- Short, positive daily reading sessions at home reinforce schoolwork more effectively than long corrective practice.

## CASE STUDY 2: María, Age 8 – Dyscalculia

Primary Year 3 • San Felix Ikastola, Spain

### The Child's Story

Since Year 1, María had struggled with numbers. She found it hard to grasp what comes before and after a number, to place numbers on a number line, to partition quantities, and to develop reliable addition and subtraction strategies. Despite classroom support, the difficulties continued and began to affect how she felt about herself.

By Year 3, the school's guidance team, in consultation with the family, carried out a specific assessment. The results identified difficulties with place value (confusing, for example, 23 and 32), calculation strategies, translating word problems into operations, and a growing sense of low self-esteem in Mathematics. The assessment concluded that María's difficulties were consistent with a specific learning disorder in Mathematics – dyscalculia.



### What the School Did

Each year, an Individualised Action Plan sets out the specific measures applied. In the classroom:

- Understanding is prioritised over rote procedures – María is encouraged to explain her reasoning
- Operations are shown graphically before any algorithm is introduced
- Visual supports, number lines, and concrete materials (counters, cubes) are used routinely
- Repetitive exercises are reduced; guiding questions help her structure problem-solving
- Real-life connections are made: 'If you have 23 sweets and share some...'

In assessment: extra time is provided, questions are read aloud when needed, visual supports are permitted, and process is valued above final answer.

### What Families Can Do at Home

#### Making Maths Everyday

- Count together naturally: stairs, fruit, coins, steps to the park
- Cooking is maths – measuring, doubling a recipe, timing – and it feels nothing like homework
- Play board games and card games that involve simple number sense and strategy

#### Building Number Sense Gently

- Keep practice sessions brief (10–15 minutes) and follow them with something enjoyable
- Focus on one idea at a time – do not mix place value and multiplication in the same session
- When she gets something right, name specifically what she did: 'You remembered that  $20 + 3 = 23$  – that's place value!'

#### Protecting Emotional Wellbeing

- Never say 'maths is not for girls' or 'I was terrible at maths too' – children absorb these beliefs
- Celebrate effort and method, not speed or perfect answers
- If tension rises during homework, stop. Five calm minutes tomorrow is worth more than 30 frustrated ones today

### Reflection Questions for Parents

1. Does your child feel anxious or upset when maths comes up at home? How does that anxiety show itself?
2. Are there everyday situations – shopping, cooking, games – where your child uses number sense without noticing?
3. How do you talk about maths in your home? What message do those conversations send your child?

### Key Takeaway for Parents

- Dyscalculia is a specific difficulty with number sense and mathematical reasoning – it has nothing to do with general intelligence.
- Maria's growing self-esteem is as important as her maths progress. Both need nurturing simultaneously.
- Everyday real-life maths – shopping, cooking, games – builds number sense more naturally than worksheets.

## CASE STUDY 3: Andrei, Age 7 – autism spectrum disorder & sound sensitivity

Primary Year 1 • FEG School, Romania

### The Child's Story

Andrei had been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) before starting school. He is generally a calm and engaged child – but certain sounds cause him intense distress. In particular, the xylophone used in music lessons triggers a physical reaction: screaming, crying, and jumping, which made music class a weekly source of anxiety for both Andrei and his classmates.

Andrei had no aggressive behaviour towards peers, but the sensory overload was real and significant. His speech therapy was addressing communication needs, but the sensory dimension required specific in-class management. The school's approach was to understand his triggers rather than simply manage his behaviour.



### What the School Did

| Sensory & Environment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Social & Emotional                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher collaborated with the music instructor to modify the curriculum and remove triggering instruments</li> <li>• A quiet corner set up as an alternative space during music lessons</li> <li>• Scheduled sensory breaks built into the class routine</li> <li>• Visual advance preparation: picture cards showing which instruments will be used</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotion charts and visual schedules to help Andrei understand and express feelings</li> <li>• Classmates educated about his needs in an age-appropriate way</li> <li>• Peer buddy system established – a classmate offers support during difficult moments</li> <li>• Progress assessed through observation of engagement and coping strategy use</li> </ul> |

## What Families Can Do at Home

### Managing the Sensory Environment

- Map your child's sound triggers at home – note which sounds cause distress and which are soothing
- Prepare your child in advance for environments with unpredictable sounds (parties, fireworks, busy restaurants)
- Offer noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs as a normalised, positive tool – not a punishment

### Building Communication & Emotional Literacy

- Use emotion cards or simple picture charts so your child can point to how they feel
- Create a safe 'calm-down' space at home – a quiet corner with soft textures and familiar objects
- Celebrate when your child successfully communicates a need, however they do it

### Working with the School

- Share a 'sensory profile' with the teacher – a simple list of what soothes and what triggers your child
- Ask the school to send advance notices of unusual events (assemblies, performances, fire drills)
- Align calm-down strategies between home and school so your child has consistency

### Reflection Questions for Parents

1. What specific sounds or situations most distress your child? Have you been able to map a pattern?
2. How does your child currently communicate that they are overwhelmed – and how do you respond?
3. What is one thing you could put in place this week to make transitions (school to home, quiet to busy) easier?

### Key Takeaway for Parents

- Sensory sensitivity in ASD is a neurological reality – Andrei is not misbehaving; his nervous system is genuinely overwhelmed.
- Preparation and predictability are the most powerful tools for sensory regulation.
- When families and schools share the same sensory strategies, children feel safe and understood in both environments.

## CASE STUDY 4: Maria, Age 9 – Undiagnosed Reading & Speech Difficulties

Primary Year 4 • FEG School, Romania

### The Child's Story

Maria has spent four years in school quietly struggling. She reverses letters, mispronounces words, and avoids reading aloud at all costs – not because she doesn't try, but because the anxiety of being misunderstood or judged has become overwhelming. When asked to participate in discussions, she freezes. When asked to share ideas, the words don't come. She has withdrawn from friendship groups, and classmates sometimes misread her silence as disinterest.



Her teacher has observed these patterns carefully and introduced supportive strategies – but without a formal diagnosis, the school cannot make a formal referral. This is a story many parents will recognise: a child whose difficulties are visible but not yet named, waiting for someone to look closer.

### What the School Did

Within the bounds of what an undiagnosed situation allows, the teacher introduced a range of inclusive strategies:

- Coloured overlays and dyslexia-friendly reading materials to reduce visual stress
- Open-ended questions and sentence starters to scaffold verbal participation
- Small group discussions rather than whole-class speaking to reduce anxiety
- Peer pairing with understanding classmates during reading and group tasks
- Visual aids and graphic organisers to help Maria plan her thoughts before speaking or writing
- A positive reinforcement system to celebrate effort and risk-taking

Assessment focuses on participation and growth rather than formal tests, with continuous observational records guiding instructional adjustments.

### What Families Can Do at Home

#### Creating a Safe Space for Language

- Make reading together an enjoyable, low-pressure ritual – audiobooks alongside physical books are a powerful combination
- When your child struggles for a word, wait patiently rather than finishing their sentence
- Play word games (rhyming, storytelling games, 20 questions) that build language confidence without feeling like practice

#### Raising the Concern at School

- If you see reading or speech difficulties persisting over several months, ask for a conversation with the class teacher
- Keep a simple diary of what you observe at home – this is valuable information for any assessment
- You can ask: 'What are you noticing in class? Is there a specialist I could speak to?' – you do not need to wait to be invited

#### Building Social Confidence

- Validate your child's feelings of embarrassment or worry – never dismiss them ('everyone finds it hard')

- Find contexts where your child feels articulate and confident: role-play, storytelling at bedtime, talking about their interests
- Remind your child regularly of specific times they communicated well

### Reflection Questions for Parents

1. Have you noticed your child avoiding reading aloud at home, or becoming anxious before school on days they know there is reading?
2. In which situations does your child communicate most comfortably – and what is different about those moments?
3. Have you already spoken to the teacher about your concerns? If not, what has held you back?

### Key Takeaway for Parents

- The absence of a diagnosis does not mean the absence of difficulty – or the absence of a response.
- Parents are often the first to notice, and their observations are valid and important evidence.
- You do not need to wait for a label to start advocating for your child's needs at school.

## CASE STUDY 5: Gabija, Age 8 – Rhinolalia & Articulation Difficulties

Primary Year 2 • Saules School, Lithuania

### The Child's Story

Gabija speaks with a nasal quality that makes her harder to understand, especially when answering questions or reading aloud. She pronounces plosive and sibilant sounds inaccurately, and her breath control is weak – shorter exhalations affect sound quality. Gabija knows this. She speaks more quietly than other children, often looks down when addressing the class, and avoids verbal activities where possible.

Her comprehension is age-appropriate – there is nothing wrong with how she understands language. The difficulty is expressive: getting sound from her mind into the air in a way that others can follow. Speech-language assessment confirmed a nasal speech disorder (rhinolalia) with articulation inaccuracies.



### What the School Did

- Speech therapy sessions with systematic breathing exercises to improve airflow control and exhalation
- Articulation exercises targeting tongue, lip, and soft palate mobility
- Mirror, listening, and self-monitoring techniques to develop self-awareness of speech
- Classroom teacher ensures Gabija has time to prepare answers and is never rushed
- Differentiated tasks designed so that she regularly experiences success
- Game-based elements used to increase motivation and reduce tension around speaking

Progress is assessed on pronunciation quality, speech clarity, and willingness to speak – not on formal academic measures.



## What Families Can Do at Home

### Daily Speech Practice (Keep It Light)

- Short breathing exercises can be turned into games: blow a feather across the table, blow bubbles, blow out candles
- 5–10 minutes of playful articulation practice daily is more effective than infrequent long sessions
- Practice specific sounds through rhymes, tongue-twisters, or simple songs – never as drills

### The Way You Respond Matters Enormously

- Never correct Gabija mid-sentence – wait until she has finished, then model the correct sound gently
- Avoid finishing her words for her or speaking on her behalf – this reduces her opportunities to practise
- Praise every attempt: ‘That sounded much clearer!’ focuses on progress, not perfection

### Medical Consultation

- If there are concerns about anatomical reasons for the nasal quality, consult an ENT specialist
- Share any medical findings with the speech therapist and class teacher so they can adjust their approach
- Keep a simple record of what sounds or words Gabija finds hardest – this helps track progress over time

### Reflection Questions for Parents

1. Does your child avoid speaking in public settings, or become quieter when they need to perform verbally?
2. How do you currently react when your child mispronounces a sound – and could that reaction be changed?
3. What is one playful activity you could introduce this week that involves breath or sound without it feeling like practice?

### Key Takeaway for Parents

- Rhinolalia and articulation difficulties affect how speech sounds, not how a child thinks. Gabija’s comprehension is fully intact.
- Confidence and communication are inseparable – protecting one protects the other.
- Daily playful practice at home, coordinated with the speech therapist’s approach at school, accelerates progress significantly.

## CASE STUDY 6: Joris, Age 7 – Moderate Language Delay & Attention Difficulties

Primary Year 1 Saules School, Lithuania

### The Child's Story

Joris arrived in Year 1 with significant gaps in language development that were not immediately obvious. He cannot say his own surname or identify where he lives. He answers with single words or incomplete sentences. He cannot name many animals, fruits, or vegetables, or generalise concepts such as 'things you eat'. Basic geometric shapes are unfamiliar; seasons and times of day are not understood. Fine motor skills are delayed – colouring outside lines, struggling to trace or copy.

At home, Joris refuses homework because he genuinely cannot understand it. He gets distracted, and when asked to try again, he cries. Parents noticed his speech was unclear and difficult to understand, consulted the school, and a full evaluation was recommended. This revealed moderate language delay alongside attention and emotional regulation difficulties.



### What the School Did

| Language & Instruction                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Attention & Structure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One instruction at a time, in short simple sentences</li> <li>Visual schedule displayed throughout the day</li> <li>Instructions paired with actions, not words alone</li> <li>Multisensory methods for letter teaching</li> <li>Spatial and temporal concepts developed systematically (seasons, days, prepositions)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching material broken into small stages</li> <li>Short breaks during activities to allow refocusing</li> <li>Every task has a clear beginning and a clear end</li> <li>Content regularly reviewed using memorisation techniques</li> <li>Verbal communication actively encouraged and celebrated</li> </ul> |

### What Families Can Do at Home

#### Language-Rich Daily Routines

- Name everything together: during meals, walks, bath time – 'This is a carrot. This is orange. It feels bumpy.'
- Tell simple stories together every evening, even very short ones – 'Today we saw a big dog'
- Ask Joris about his day using simple questions he can answer: 'Was lunch hot or cold?' not 'What happened at school today?'

#### Reducing Homework Tension

- Sit beside him during homework – not to do it for him, but to break it into tiny pieces together
- When he cannot understand a task, speak to the teacher rather than pushing through: there may be a simpler version
- Celebrate starting. 'You sat down and tried' is worth more at this stage than 'you finished'

### Emotional Support

- Joris needs encouragement, not pressure – ‘You tried hard’ matters more than ‘you got it right’
- When he cries or refuses, meet the emotion first: ‘I can see this is really hard. Let’s take a break.’
- Consistent daily routines at home dramatically reduce anxiety and improve readiness to learn

### Reflection Questions for Parents

1. Does your child have difficulty following multi-step instructions at home? What does that look like?
2. How is your home environment set up for learning – is it calm, structured, and predictable?
3. What is one small routine you could introduce this week that might help Joris feel more settled?

### Key Takeaway for Parents

- Language delay means the brain has not yet developed certain language pathways – not that it cannot.
- Rich, everyday language at home is the most powerful early intervention there is.
- Early identification and support can prevent years of frustration. If something concerns you, ask.

## CASE STUDY 7: Nick, Age 6 – Attention & Self-Regulation Difficulties (Early ADHD Indicators)

Primary Year 1 • EMVIO, Greece

### The Child’s Story

From the first weeks of school, Nick’s teacher noticed that sitting still was not the challenge – staying connected to the task was. He would leave his seat, interrupt conversations, and abandon activities before finishing. Homework took far longer than it should, with frequent emotional reactions when he was asked to try again.

His parents had noticed the same patterns at home but initially assumed it was age-typical restlessness. When the consistency of these difficulties across settings became clear – at school and at home, across all subjects and contexts – the teacher suggested an early screening. The results indicated attention and self-regulation difficulties consistent with early ADHD indicators. The family felt both relieved to have a name for what they were seeing, and uncertain about what to do next.



### What the School Did

- Very short, structured activities with clear start and end points
- Simple, one-step instructions – never multi-part commands
- Visual cues and routines displayed prominently so expectations are predictable
- Frequent short breaks built in as a legitimate, positive part of the day – not as punishment
- Positive reinforcement consistently used to acknowledge effort and task completion
- Focus on small successes – completing one exercise fully is celebrated before the next begins

## What Families Can Do at Home

### Structuring the Home Environment

- Create a simple visual schedule for after-school time – snack, play, homework, dinner – so transitions are predictable
- Homework works best immediately after a physical break, not straight from the school bag
- Reduce environmental distractions during study time: screens off, phone away, a tidy space

### Short Bursts, Not Long Slogs

- Set a timer for 10 minutes of focused work, then a 5-minute physical break – repeat rather than push through
- Give one task at a time, not a list: ‘Do the first maths problem. Tell me when you’re done.’
- When he finishes something – celebrate it specifically: ‘You did all 5 problems without stopping. That’s amazing.’

### Responding to Frustration

- When Nick reacts emotionally, match calm with calm – your regulated nervous system helps regulate his
- Avoid ‘try harder’ – he is trying. The difficulty is neurological, not motivational
- If something is taking much longer than it should, contact the teacher for a simplified version rather than pushing through distress

### Reflection Questions for Parents

1. Does your child struggle to sustain attention even in activities they enjoy, or mainly in demanding ones?
2. How do you currently respond when your child loses focus or becomes frustrated – and could that response change?
3. What is one routine change you could make this week to build more predictability into your child’s afternoon?

### Key Takeaway for Parents

- ADHD indicators reflect a neurological difference in attention regulation – not laziness, bad behaviour, or poor parenting.
- Structure and predictability are the most powerful environmental supports for children with attention difficulties.
- A calm, patient parental response during moments of frustration is itself a form of intervention.

## CASE STUDY 8: George, Age 10 – Dysgraphia with Delayed Recognition

Primary Year 5 • EMVIO, Greece

### The Child's Story

George can talk for minutes about a topic he knows well – articulate, structured, full of detail. But ask him to write it down and something stops working. His written work is short, disorganised, and difficult to read. He avoids writing tasks whenever possible. The gap between what he can express verbally and what appears on the page has widened every year.

His parents, worried about labelling, delayed the assessment despite early suggestions from his teacher. By Year 5, George's emotional distress had increased significantly – avoidance had become a coping strategy, and his confidence was low. When the family finally agreed to an evaluation, it identified a written expression disorder linked to dysgraphia. George was relieved: the difficulty had a name, and it was not stupidity.



### What the School Did

| Classroom Adaptations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Assessment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written output reduced; oral responses accepted alongside written ones</li> <li>Sentence starters, writing frames, and visual organisers provided</li> <li>Focus on expressing ideas rather than producing long texts</li> <li>Effort consistently reinforced; tasks adapted to reduce frustration</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oral responses or structured templates used instead of extended writing</li> <li>Content and understanding assessed, not handwriting or spelling accuracy</li> <li>As pressure decreased, George's engagement and confidence gradually returned</li> </ul> |

### What Families Can Do at Home

#### Reducing Writing Pressure

- Allow voice recording or voice-to-text as a legitimate homework tool – capturing ideas matters more than how they are captured
- When helping with written tasks, let him dictate to you first, then help him write from what he said
- Focus your praise on the content of his ideas, not on neatness or length

#### Rebuilding Confidence

- Explicitly name the gap: 'You are brilliant at explaining. Writing is just harder for your brain – that doesn't mean what you're saying isn't brilliant.'
- Find contexts where his verbal intelligence shines: debates, storytelling, presentations, podcasts
- Remind him regularly that many highly successful people have found writing difficult – what matters is having ideas worth sharing

#### Engaging with the Assessment Early

- If your child's teacher has suggested an assessment and you have hesitated, consider why

- A diagnosis does not label your child – it explains them, and opens the door to support
- The earlier an assessment happens, the earlier targeted help can begin: George lost three years to uncertainty

### Reflection Questions for Parents

1. Is there a gap between what your child can explain verbally and what they produce in writing? How large is that gap?
2. If your child's teacher has suggested further assessment, what has made you hesitant – and what would help you feel more confident?
3. How do you currently react when your child struggles with written homework – and what does your reaction communicate to them?

### Key Takeaway for Parents

- Dysgraphia is a disorder of written expression – George's intelligence, creativity, and verbal ability are entirely intact.
- Delaying assessment does not protect a child. It allows frustration, avoidance, and low confidence to grow.
- When you seek an assessment, you are not labelling your child – you are opening a door to understanding and support.

### What All These Stories Share

Eight children, four countries, eight different learning profiles. And yet, when you read across these case studies, the same themes appear again and again:

| What helped every child                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | What made the difference at home                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being seen – someone noticed and didn't look away</li> <li>• Being named – a difficulty that has a name can be addressed</li> <li>• Adaptation over one-size-fits-all teaching</li> <li>• Emotional wellbeing as a learning prerequisite, not an afterthought</li> <li>• Families and schools working together with shared strategies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents who trusted their instincts and asked questions</li> <li>• Effort and courage rewarded – not just results</li> <li>• Short, positive, consistent practice replacing long, stressful sessions</li> <li>• Children's strengths named explicitly, often and warmly</li> <li>• Assessments sought early – not to label, but to understand</li> </ul> |

### A Final Word to Parents

You do not need to be a specialist to be the most important person in your child's learning journey. You need to observe – and trust what you see. You need to speak up – even when it feels uncomfortable. You need to collaborate – with teachers, specialists, and most importantly, with your child. And you need to protect your child's belief in themselves while the adults around them find better ways to teach.

**Every child in this chapter went on to make progress. Not because their difficulty disappeared – but because the people around them stopped waiting and started acting.**



## Useful references

**Understood.org** - Comprehensive, parent-focused resource covering all major learning and thinking differences, with practical tools and expert advice

<https://www.understood.org>

**Child Mind Institute** - Evidence-based mental health and learning resources for parents, with guides on assessment and school support

<https://childmind.org>

**SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC)** - UK standards for assessment of specific learning difficulties, useful background for parents seeking assessments

<https://www.sasc.org.uk>

**Dyslexia International** - International resources and training related to dyslexia in multilingual and multicultural contexts

<https://www.dyslexia-international.org>

**PATOSS (Professional Association of Teachers of Students with SpLDs)** - Guidance for parents on supporting children with specific learning difficulties through school

<https://www.patoss-dyslexia.org>

**Zero to Three** - Research-based resources on early childhood development, language, and learning (birth to age 5)

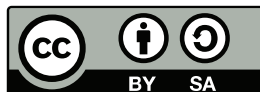
<https://www.zerotothree.org>



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