

When Learning Disabilities Arise

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As children begin school, parents expect that their child will progress through the grades with minimal issues. If learning issues should arise for their child, parents expect to resolve them by working with the teacher and supporting their child. Sometimes the child's learning needs are greater than what the teacher can provide. Most often, a learning disability is identified through the school's processes when a student needs more academic support.

The Student Study Team

When the classroom teacher, the parents, or other school staff, observe a learning problem that has not been resolved, they may request a Student Study Team (SST) meeting. This team is usually comprised of the parents, the classroom teacher, a school administrator, perhaps the school psychologist and any other specialists who could help evaluate the student's learning issue. They

review the situation and develop a plan of support to address the student's learning needs.

The Individual Education Plan

If the plan set up by the SST team is not effective over time, the team may initiate the Individual Education Plan or IEP process. In this process, the child is further evaluated to determine if a learning disability exists. If the child is diagnosed with a learning disability, the team develops an IEP. The IEP serves as the student's educational plan. It includes academic improvement goals. The plan could be in place for one to several years, depending on the student's learning needs.

Specialized Academic Support

Usually, the IEP will call for specialized academic support to be provided by a resource teacher. The student spends part of the school day with the resource teacher. If the learning disability is more severe, the student could be placed in a special day classroom. The special day classroom replaces the regular classroom placement for most of the school day. The IEP team reviews and updates the IEP twice a year. The team evaluates and modifies the IEP goals, and adjusts the specialized instructional support if necessary. The IEP remains in effect until the student can function in

a regular classroom without specialized support.

Parent Engagement is Critical

The role of parents is to oversee their children's academic development. This role cannot be understated. Parents are critical members of the IEP team. They know their child the best. Parents need to ask questions at IEP meetings to make sure they understand their child's academic progress and needs. They need to ensure that their child is receiving true academic support, and that the support is helping their child improve. Parents need to monitor the IEP process and be the critical eye because the future success of their child is at stake. It's OK to be a pest!

With love and affection,

Rosemarie

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