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## Tips for Parents and Q&As

*Frequently asked questions, tips, and advice on how to help a child with learning disabilities and/or ADHD.*

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## Help Your Child Choose A Career and Find A Job

***Dale S. Brown***

*Adapted from an article that originally appeared in "Newsbriefs", the newsletter of Learning Disabilities Association of America."*

Parents of children with learning disabilities should be involved in helping their children think about work and explore careers. Academic achievement is important, but it should not be considered the most important part of the child's life. It is a means to an end. The end is a satisfying adulthood where your child can make a contribution.

During adolescence, your child should be developing his strengths. He might be athletic, academic, attractive, good with his hands, or socially adept. Whatever the strengths, effort and encouragement can help them to grow.

His career choice will be based on his strengths and you should encourage him to think about future jobs. Can he fix items so they can work? Can he wash small, delicate items without breaking them? Coordination and mechanical ability is useful in many careers from car mechanic to dentist. Has he always been expert at knowing which parent to approach first to get what he wants? Can he charm grades out of his teachers? These skills are also important for many jobs from salesperson to diplomat.

It's not easy to determine which career uses your child's strengths. Many books about job hunting have practical exercises to help your child make that match. Private job placement firms can administer tests and advise adolescents. Vocational rehabilitation counselors can also help. Vocational skills tests can serve as a valuable guide, but they are not accurate for everyone. Some school systems offer career education, systematically exposing the students to the world of work. If your child's school doesn't have such a course, perhaps you could recommend establishing one. After the teenager thinks of a potentially interesting job, he should learn more about it and try to talk to people doing that job. If possible, he should visit the actual office, factory, or worksite. Volunteering, internships, apprenticeships, and part time jobs will enable him to experience the work and find out if he can do it well and enjoy it.

Careful career exploration is especially important to learning disabled youth since they must be careful to avoid their areas of disability. For example, Carla, who is talkative and friendly, thought she might want to be a telemarketer who would sell over the phone. She volunteered to help a community group set up appointments to pick up furniture for sale in a thrift store. She found that she couldn't do the job, because it required staying in the same seat for hours at a time. She was hyperactive and needed to move more than the job allowed. James wanted to enter the field of television production. He became an intern at a neighborhood cable TV station and found that the mechanical aspects of production were difficult for him. Now he is thinking about scriptwriting.

Your child should know about his disabilities. It will help him avoid his weak areas. Without clear information on his disabilities, he may still think of himself as stupid, lazy, crazy, or personally weak. These explanations lead to a low self-image and paralyze the desire to improve. Tell your child what you know. If you feel uncomfortable about this, ask a professional to talk to him. Let him know the exact nature of the learning disability and how it affects him. Teach him the scientific words. Be sure he knows about what he has to overcome. Improvement should be ascribed to his efforts, not to "outgrowing it," upbringing, or treatment. Most learning-disabled people feel relieved when they find out about their disabilities, although some initially deny them.

They deserve to be proud of what they have overcome, a pride that will make them feel good about themselves. A strong and realistic self-image is one of the most important qualities in success. It will be vital during the time your child is looking for work.

### **Looking for work**

Looking for work is difficult for everyone, especially when high unemployment allows extreme selectivity among job applicants. Chances are strong that your child will face this challenge while living at your home. How can you make your home a supportive place for job hunting? Here are some ideas:

1. *Insist your child actively look for work.* Do not let him spend extensive time watching TV, reading, shopping, or entertaining friends. If necessary, tell him that looking for work is full-time job, which he must do in order to earn your financial support. Help him by not overloading him with chores during working hours on the weekdays when employers are in. Help him overcome his failures, but do not accept lack of effort.
2. *Help him to organize himself.* Some learning disabled people do not know how to look for work. There are many books about job-hunting, each with a slightly different approach. Together, you might decide on a plan of action. Or help might be needed with the fine points of planning and scheduling. You could remind him of necessary follow-up telephone calls or letters.
3. *Be a good listener.* Ask him how the day went. Listen carefully to his adventures. Let him express his feelings of frustration, anger, and nervousness. Emphasize his actions and behavior, rather than the results. If he is actively seeking work, he deserves your respect and praise, even if he does not succeed in finding work. For example, praise your child if he does a good job of describing his qualifications at an interview, even if he is not selected for the opening.
4. *Help with reading and writing.* You may have to read classified ads for her and check addresses of her letters. Some job banks have computer printouts on a screen, which are especially difficult for dyslexic people to read. It might be helpful if the parent types or handwrites job applications since childish handwriting and misspellings tend to disturb employers. If the employer uses online job kiosks, a new barrier for people with reading and writing difficulty, you may have to sit with them and key in the words of the application.
5. *Help with transportation, if necessary.*
6. *Grooming is important.* Learning-disabled people with visual perceptual problems are often unaware of tears and stains on their clothing, sloppy hair, or dirt on their hands. It helps if someone looks them over before an interview.
7. *Use your social network to help your child find work.* Talk to your friends, co-workers, and other

parents of learning disabled children. Tell them about your child. Stress your child's positive qualities and describe her as a capable worker. Don't spend a lot of time describing her learning disability. Ask her to follow up any leads that you discover.

8. *Be aware of community resources.* Know the applicable civil rights laws. Consider government programs such as vocational rehabilitation and job service. If you know of other parents whose children are job hunting, you may want to form a support group for yourselves and/or your children.

With your help, your child will be able to locate a satisfying job. However, this is only half the battle. Your child will have to work hard in order to keep that work. Be sure your child gets a complete job description and check for problem areas. If your child might have difficulty with any task because of his disability, he may want to consider trading that task with a co-worker in return for a task that he can do. Equipment such as calculators, tape recorders, and self-correcting typewriters can solve problems. A learning disabled person should not accept a job that includes many tasks in his area of disability.

Social skills are important to job success. Help your child to understand the point of view of co-workers and to adjust to the many hidden rules of the organization. Look at the "**Social Skills**" section in "LD-Indepth " for more information.

Many learning-disabled adults are successful. Learning-disabled people work in every conceivable job – salesperson, optometrist, pilot, doctor, psychologist, computer programmer, janitor, and waiter. Remember to pay as much attention to your child's abilities as to his disabilities. Teach him to feel pride in his achievements. Help him to select an interesting career that does not emphasize his area of disability. And support him as he hunts for a job. With your help and your clear belief that your child can succeed, he can "make it." Good luck!

## ***7 more listings about/by Dale S. Brown:***

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- 1 - Get Your Child Ready for Work*
- 2 - How to Have a Good Relationship with Your Child's Teacher*
- 3 - Learning to Dance*
- 4 - Making the Most of the Telephone Network Keep your purpose clear and a realistic image of the person at the other end of the line.*

### ***Books/Media/PDFs:***

- 1 - I Know I Can Climb the Mountain*
- 2 - Job-Hunting for the So-Called Handicapped or People Who Have Disabilities*
- 3 - Learning a Living: A Guide to Planning Your Career and Finding a Job for People With Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Dyslexia*

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