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10 SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

SOME difficulties with social and communication skills accompany all forms of special learning needs.

- **Learning Disabilities** affect the ability to process both visual and auditory information, affecting academic learning in every aspect - as we have discussed. These problems do not stop at the classroom door. They extend to every aspect of life: understanding dinner table conversations, parent or partner instructions, the jokes and sarcastic innuendo on the playground, small talk at social events or in the office, a friend's upset over a missed phone call.
- Individuals with Central Auditory Processing Disorders (**CAPD**) and **ADHD** often miss major chunks of verbal communication and may hastily jump to conclusions without all the required information. Others may need to blurt out questions or information without regard for the normal flow of conversation, fearing they may forget what they need to say.
- Those with **Asperger's** interpret verbal information or social "signals" according to very different criteria than the norm and become easily overwhelmed with both auditory and visual stimuli. Or they may just be oblivious to these stimuli on various levels.

As one of these people, you may be perceived as either detached and unfriendly, verbally aggressive, or just "weird" and unusual. When things



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GETTING ON TOP OF ACADEMICS: LANGUAGE SUBJECTS

YOU may be coming to this section before *Math and Science* because difficulties with reading and writing are the main focus of schools, and do indeed cause pervasive academic problems. But as you will discover, the strategies to deal with these issues are very dramatic and relatively easy to put into place. Most students using these strategies are able to quickly come up to grade-level or much higher achievement levels within just a few months.



For mathematics, the process is much more difficult and takes much longer. So once you have the beginning strategies in this chapter, you are strongly encouraged to put more intensive effort into mathematics remediation, in order to bring the student into more equalized achievement across all subject areas.

Having said this, what is the “magic formula” for reading and writing problems?

For bright students with reading and writing difficulties that persist after grade 2, remediation efforts are not usually very effective.



13 ADULTS IN THE WORKPLACE

MANY bright adults with special learning needs who find creative ways to compensate during school and along the way later also develop a “charm factor” that makes them well-liked by teachers and peers. This also helps them to wiggle out of difficult situations and to cover their tracks when things go wrong.

This factor can help some people shine during a job interview, only to disappoint the new employer or colleagues shortly after being hired. The individual is then perceived not as “charming” but as possibly deceptive, shifty, unreliable, and maybe even dishonest. Other adults have serious social skills problems and seldom get past the interview. Still others who did not receive adequate support as children and youth, may not have enough formal education to seek jobs at their true level of ability.



A few who receive excellent support and/or are also personally driven, may become over-achievers who then crash and burn at some point during their careers when unresolved personal issues and accumulated feelings of overwhelm may combine to cause the unstable edifice to crumble.



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SURVIVING AT HOME

RAISING a child with special needs can be compared to running a marathon - of about thirty years. When the challenges are clearly evident or medical in nature and children are learning Braille, adjusting to a new FM system or wheelchair, teachers, extended family and other connected adults have some awareness of the stress for parents. And are often actively supportive.

When the special needs are less immediately visible as in ADHD, ABI, Asperger's, various Learning Disabilities, or psychological concerns, there is far less understanding and support from others. Sadly, parents may even be blamed for the academic, social, and behaviour problems of their children. Parents may increase their children's frustration and anxiety by, in turn, blaming them for their inability to reach expectations at home and at school.

Many parents vastly underestimate the time and energy required for specialized parenting and advocacy and the resulting stress is a significant contributor to family dysfunction and divorce.

Awareness - Acceptance - Action - Advocacy

Parent *Awareness* is key to survival. Reading as much as possible and attending seminars gives you the background knowledge for *Acceptance* of the reality of these disorders and the commitment that will be required over many years.

Clinical experience has shown that emotional maturity is often delayed by up to five years or more for these kids.



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MAKING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WORK

THIS chapter is saved for last because adult personal relationships are the most complex aspects of living with ADHD, Asperger's, or Learning Disabilities. We have explored how to help children and teens develop the social and communication skills required for relationships in Chapter 10. Older teens or adults who have difficulty with any aspect of interpersonal relationships will find the information found there an essential prerequisite to the more advanced material here.



Even business executives, doctors, and other successful professionals with these special learning needs who may have found ways to compensate all through school and in their careers, often struggle terribly in the personal connections that mean the most to them.

Many individuals experience constant misunderstandings and conflict with both friends and family members. Turmoil and negative “drama” can be a daily reality, often ending in severed relationships and divorce – sometimes serial divorce.