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Mitigating the Emotional Toll of Dyslexia

October 31, 2017 Christine Davis



By Don M. Winn





One constant in the universe is that human beings don't like doing things we're not good at. When we put forth our very best effort and still struggle or fail, many of us will be reluctant to engage in that activity again. These events—especially if repeated—can spin off into further complications: we compare ourselves with others who don't struggle, and then we feel broken, inadequate or lacking in some way, thereby introducing shame into our inner dialog. Shame is defined as the feeling of humiliation that accompanies the belief that our troubles are caused by being defective, and therefore, there's no way out or through. When hard work and personal best effort don't result in success, discouragement follows.

But what if the bulk of our days—in fact, our lives, month after month, year after year, is comprised of tasks that we're not good at? Such is the life of a dyslexic student. The final coup de grâce occurs when parents and teachers send the message that the student just isn't trying hard enough.

Most adult dyslexics who share their personal stories mention that their feelings of shame created a significant barrier to living with dyslexia. That was certainly my case. Children fear to reveal to parents and teachers that they cannot read. If they don't know they are dyslexic and don't understand dyslexia's many implications, they feel ashamed. Most think that they are stupid because they can't keep up with their classmates in reading, writing, and spelling. Also, the challenges in memorizing things in sequence affect many aspects of learning and performance. Shame has a crippling effect—if we're failing because we're defective, and working harder hasn't worked, we may feel like there's no solution.

Dyslexic pupils were particularly vulnerable to negative reactions from parents, teachers, and peers. Most educational models value results, not effort, and when results are not forthcoming from the dyslexic student, most parents and educators express disapproval. The easiest thing for observers to conclude is that the student simply doesn't care enough to do the hard work that will get the job done. Here's the thing: character assassination rarely leads to an efficient support system.

What can parents and teachers of a dyslexic child do to help lessen the feelings of shame that the child might be dealing with? Here are some suggestions:



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Contest

September 30, 2017



Diono Fall Baby contest

Don't make dyslexia a big secret. If something is a secret, it's scary. It is human nature to fill information voids with worst-case scenarios. Ironically, a decision made to protect a child from a diagnosis of dyslexia can often breed shame and fear.

When a student who has been tested for dyslexia sees parents and teachers whispering together, it screams of shame. Parents and teachers can help prevent this by discussing a diagnosis of dyslexia openly with the child in a way that won't cause them embarrassment.

With the right information, parents and teachers can develop an academic plan to help dyslexic students minimize their weaknesses and maximize their strengths. Students can be involved in crafting this plan as well.

Help your children be their own advocates. In time, they will have to speak up for themselves in order to receive the assistance or accommodation they need in a learning environment, so get them involved in their own education at an early age, keeping their level of involvement age-appropriate.

If your child shows signs of dyslexia at a young age, consider having them tested. It may be easier for them to know early in their school careers that they have an actual, specific problem that many other people share than to spend years feeling stupid or bad about themselves because, for some unknown reason, they can't keep up with other students.

Encourage your children to speak openly about their dyslexia.

Help your children discover and focus on their strengths.

Identify and address the obstacles your child faces—dyslexia is a very personal experience, various difficulties present themselves in varying degrees and aspects, and a customized plan will maximize results and minimize stress on the child.

Help your children develop patience, tenacity, and perseverance.

Introduce your child to the multitude of successful dyslexics in our world. More and more adults are 'coming out' about their struggles with dyslexia: Steven Spielberg, Magic Johnson, actors Henry Winkler, Mark Ruffalo, and Tom Cruise, attorney David Boies, businessmen Charles Schwab and Richard Branson, and more! The more dyslexics your child can see having successful, fulfilling lives, the more they will believe they can succeed as well.

Effectively communicating the causes of your child's struggles helps defuse the foundation for shame, identifies the way through these challenges for the child,

September 30, 2017



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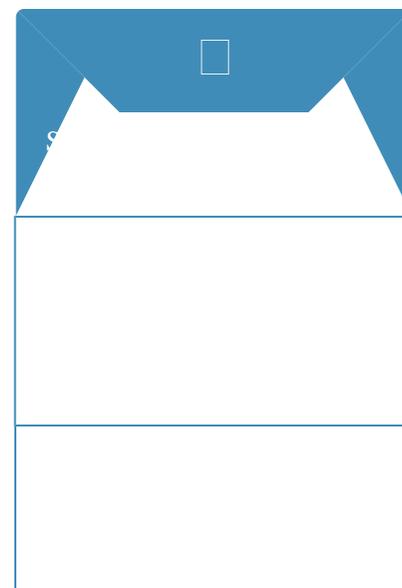


TSO

Contest

September 27, 2017

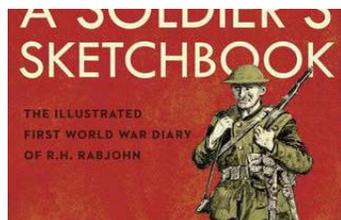
Tweets by CityParentMag



and clarifies the next steps they need to take. We can all contribute to an educational system that helps struggling readers believe they can succeed and that gives them needed tools and support.

Don M. Winn is an award-winning author and dyslexia advocate. He has written numerous articles about dyslexia and helping struggling readers. His blog archives are available at www.donwinn.com

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