

The First Few Years Of School

As a preschooler, your child was well behaved and didn't exhibit any particular problems. Next your child enters school, perhaps Kindergarten, and then Grade one. Slowly issues with some classes and subjects appear. Maybe you think nothing of them in Grade one, but along comes grade two and trouble worsens. Now your child's grades begin to suffer and there may be some issues with behaviour. By grade three and almost as school begins so too do behaviour concerns and they outweigh the academic issues.

Children who surface with behaviour problems early in the school year and in early grades, may have an undiagnosed learning disability that increasing educational demands aggravated. There are clinical scenarios that can quickly lead to suspicion. Children whose challenging behaviour occurs more in groups or unstructured settings, may have an auditory processing disorder. If the medical history includes recurrent ear infections, the risk of an auditory processing disorder heightens. If behaviour presents more during certain subjects or learning demands (visual, auditory, motor), other learning disabilities may be present. Even in the case of a bonifide diagnosis of ADD/ADHD, statistically 50% have a co-concurring learning disability.

Notwithstanding biologically determined problems, children who are exposed to arguing or fighting in the home or domestic violence or serious conflict between their parents will appear behaviourally similar to children with academic difficulties or problems. These children often go to school worrying about one or both parents and even their marriage. This alone is distressing and distracting from schoolwork. It can make children irritable and that can cause them difficulty in getting along with others. Girls in these situations sometimes appear behaviourally similar to children with ADD while boys sometimes appear behaviourally similar to children with ADHD.

In still other instances, a child who is victim to bullying may also appear behaviourally similar to children as above.

A good assessment will be vital to determining the appropriate intervention. Accordingly then, the assessment should look at the child's developmental and medical history as well as family history and any issues between the parents. Further, the school situation should be assessed to make sure there are no problems such as bullying. Medically, the child should be screened for vision and hearing problems and finally, a psychoeducational assessment to explore for learning disabilities can be in order. A good assessment will help uncover problems contributing to behaviour and academic issues. A good assessment will then lead to proper intervention. Intervention may include special education or at least recommendations to remedy learning needs, couple counselling for the parents, or even intervention by school authorities as in the situation of bullying.

The earlier a child's schooling problems are caught and addressed, the better for the child. The longer problems continue, children can get further behind in their learning and behaviour problems can escalate to become separate issues in their own right. Further as these problems continue and behaviour and failure occur, the child's self-esteem diminishes bringing on other psychological/emotional concerns.

In the early years, at the beginning of each school year, track your child's performance carefully. Read report cards thoroughly and attend all parent-teacher meetings. Good information and good communication between parent and teacher will help to identify any academic problems so they can be addressed before they get too big.

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