

# Fact Sheet

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC)  
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## Skills for Academic Success

It's never too early or too late to help your child develop the skills for academic success. Learn how to build these skills and stay on track all year long. It takes a combination of skills — organization, time management, prioritization, concentration and motivation — to achieve academic success. Here are some tips to help get your child on the right track.

**Talk to your child.** To find out which of these skills your child has and which he can develop further, start a simple conversation that focuses on his goals. Ask him about his favorite subjects, classes he dreads and whether he's satisfied with his latest progress report.

**Listen for clues.** Incorporate your own observations with your child's self-assessment. Is your child overwhelmed by assignments? She may have trouble organizing time. Does your child have difficulty completing her work? She may get distracted too easily. Is your child simply not interested in school? She may need help getting motivated.

**Identify problem areas.** Start here to help your child identify which of the five skill areas are trouble spots. Most children say they want to do well in school, yet many still fail to complete the level of work necessary to succeed academically. The reason is often motivation. Tapping into your child's interests is a great way to get him geared to do well in school.

**1. Organization** Whether it's keeping track of research materials or remembering to bring home a lunch box, children need to be organized to succeed in school. For many students, academic challenges are related more to a lack of organization than to a lack of intellectual ability.

### Tips to help your child get organized:

- Make a checklist of things your child needs to bring to and from school every day. Put a copy by the door at home and one in his backpack. Try to check with him each day to see if he remembers the items on the list.
- Find out how your child keeps track of his homework and how he organizes his notebooks. Then work together to develop a system he will want to use.
- Shop with your child for tools that will help him stay organized, such as binders, folders or an assignment book.
- Conduct a weekly clean-up. Children should be encouraged to go through and sort out book bags and notebooks on a weekly basis. Old tests and papers should be organized and kept in a separate file at home.

**2. Time Management** Learning to schedule enough time to complete an assignment may be difficult for your student. Even when students have a week to do a project, many won't start until the night before it's due. Learning to organize time into productive blocks takes practice and experience.

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### **Tips to help your child manage time:**

- Track assignments on a monthly calendar. Work backward from the due date of larger assignments and break them into nightly tasks.
- Help your child record how much time she spends on homework each week so she can figure out how to divide this time into manageable chunks.
- Together, designate a time for nightly homework and help your child stick to this schedule.
- If evenings aren't enough, help your child find other times for schoolwork, such as early mornings, study halls or weekends.

**3. Prioritization** Sometimes children fall behind in school and fail to hand in assignments because they simply don't know where to begin. Prioritizing tasks is a skill your child will need throughout life, so it's never too soon to get started.

### **Tips to help your child prioritize:**

- Ask your child to write down all the things he needs to do, including non-school-related activities.
- Ask him to label each task from 1 to 3, with 1 being most important.
- Ask about each task, so that you understand your child's priorities. If he labels all his social activities as 1, then you know where his attention is focused.
- Help your child change some of the labels to better prioritize for academic success. Then suggest he rewrite the list so all the 1s are at the top.
- Check in frequently to see how the list is evolving and how your child is prioritizing new tasks.

**4. Concentration** Whether your child is practicing her second-grade spelling words or studying for a trigonometry test, it's important that she works on schoolwork in an area with limited distractions and interruptions.

### **Tips to help your child concentrate:**

- Turn off access to email and games when your child works on the computer.
- Declare the phone and TV off-limits during homework time.
- Find space that fits the assignment. If your child is working on a science project, she may need lots of space; if she's studying for a Spanish test, she will need a well-lit desk.
- Help your child concentrate during homework time by separating her from her siblings.

**5. Motivation** Most children say they want to do well in school, yet many still fail to complete the level of work necessary to succeed academically. The reason is often motivation. Tapping into your child's interests is a great way to get him geared to do well in school.

### **Tips to help motivate your child:**

- Link school lessons to your child's life. If he's learning percentages, ask him to figure out the price of a discounted item next time you shop.
- Link your child's interests to academics. If he's passionate about music, give him books about musicians and show how music and foreign languages are connected.
- Give your child control and choices. With guidance, let him determine his study hours, organizing system or school project topics.
- Encourage your child to share his expertise. Regularly ask him about what he's learning in school.
- Congratulate your child, encourage him and celebrate all his successes.

Often what holds children back from trying is the fear of failure or the memory of a time they didn't do well. You can help break this cycle by celebrating your child's successes, no matter how small, and by giving him opportunities to succeed academically.

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## Homework Tips for Parent and Child

The primary purpose of homework is to reinforce the information and skills your child learns at school. It has been reported that teachers of all grades are increasing the amount of homework they assign. This makes homework time-consuming both for parents and children. It is helpful when parents can help their children develop strategies to complete homework assignments in stress-free and learning-friendly ways. It is important that parents and children find a plan that works for their family and stick with it. Here are some tips to use when developing homework strategies:

***Set a designated study space.*** Children often find it helpful to study in the same place every night where supplies and materials are close at hand. This space does not have to be a bedroom, but it should be a quiet, well-lit place with few distractions. Make sure that the television is turned off and that if music is requested, it does not create a distraction.

***Set a designated study time.*** Children should know that a certain time every day is reserved for studying and doing homework. The best time is usually not right after school as most children benefit from time to unwind first. Parents should include their child in making this decision. Even if your child does not have homework, the reserved time should be used to review the day's lessons, read for pleasure or work on an upcoming school project.

***Use a Homework Box.*** Keep all homework supplies in one place, ready to be used. Keep them organized, and you won't need to waste your time searching for supplies.

***Prioritize homework assignments.*** Before beginning a homework session, encourage your child to number the assignments in the order in which they are to be completed. Some children prefer to start with one that's not too long or difficult. Others prefer saving the easy ones for last and starting on the longest or hardest assignments. Be sure to set realistic goals and stop along the way to check progress.

***Use checklists.*** Help your child get into the habit of using checklists for keeping track of homework assignments. A small pad or notebook could be dedicated to listing homework assignments. Once assignments have been completed, crossing off items will help children feel a sense of accomplishment. Some children prefer using a calendar or even a personal digital assistant (PDA) to keep track of due dates and to help prioritize assignments.

***Schedule Long Term Projects.*** Larger projects need to be broken into smaller components to make them manageable. For example, these components could be such things as gathering notes, writing a rough draft, making corrections or additions, writing a

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bibliography, and completing the final copy. Set a deadline for completing each component in a calendar and make sure you stick to it.

**Avoid Doing a Marathon.** If you've followed the previous tips, this last one should never happen. However, you need to know that marathon study sessions are the least productive way to study.

**Show interest in your child's assignments.** Ask about the subject and work to be accomplished. Try to relate homework to your child's everyday life. For instance, fractions and measurements can be reviewed as the child helps to prepare a meal.

**Be a role model.** Take the opportunity to read a book or newspaper while your child studies. Reading together helps encourage a life-long love of learning for your children.

**Check over homework assignments.** Take time to review your child's homework with them, but make sure you are not doing it for them. Point out mistakes and help your child correct them. (Note: be sure to discuss with your child's teachers how best to provide feedback, because they might prefer to see uncorrected work to guide their lessons in class.) Being familiar with your child's work will help you identify areas of strength and weakness.

**Meet with your child's teachers.** Be sure you understand the goals that the teachers have set for the class. You should consider yourself and your child's teachers as partners. Also be certain that you understand the teaching methods the teachers are using in the classroom.

**Take your child's struggles seriously.** If you notice your child is struggling with assignments in particular subjects be sure that you discuss this with your child's teachers. This is especially important in the early grades when children are learning how to read and comprehend. Early help works and will save your child the pain of falling behind in school.

**Give praise.** Applaud your child for successfully completing homework. Nothing builds self-esteem like praise from parents.

For many parents, finding a tutor is another way to offer additional academic support for their child.

*Adapted from "Homework Tips for Parents" by the Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities.*

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## Home Strategies for the LD Child

Parenting a child with learning disabilities is quite a challenge — Learn about every day strategies and tips you can use with your child, in several areas of life, including home, play, homework and in daily routines that can help with their dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

### **Attention**

- Plan activities both inside and outside the home for short time periods. For example limit playing board games to thirty minutes or plan for frequent breaks if played longer.
- Make sure your demands are realistic. If you want your child's room cleaned, and the room hasn't been cleaned in months, start small and work at it every day. To start with, have your child pick up all the books and store them on the shelf. The next day, get your child to sort through the clean and dirty clothes, and place them into bags, etc.
- Give your child a specific start time and finish time when doing a chore or activity and make sure they know how to do the chore. For example, after dinner from 6:15 to 6:30, have your child prepare their lunch for the following day.

### **Auditory Processing**

- When speaking with your child, reduce noisy distractions such as fans, air conditioners, television, open windows, barking dogs, or move to a quieter location. Make eye contact or stand face to face; limit the information to a few items or one item broken down into its parts. Ask to have the information repeated.
- Turn listening into a fun game. Find simple food recipes for kids. Read aloud the directions and have your child do the task. If your child likes building things, find age appropriate models such as airplanes, kites, action figures, toys or crafts. As you read the instructions, have your child remember the task sequence and have him/her make the model.
- Make your child part of the solution. Ask, "When mommy or daddy talks to you, what do you think will help you remember?" Some children like writing in a little pocket notepad or putting a sticker on their hand, others prefer writing notes, putting them on the refrigerator, or on the bathroom mirror.

### **Coordination**

- Have your child wear clothing that is easy to get on and off at school, at play, in sports, etc. Things such as Velcro shoes, sweat pants and shirts, t-shirts, leggings or sweaters work well. Use Velcro fasteners instead of buttons, snaps or zippers. When not in a rush, teach your child how to manage difficult fasteners.
- Encourage your child to participate in games and sports that are interesting to him/her.

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- On an individual basis, introduce the child to new sports activities or a new playground. Review any rules, objectives, goals or routines associated with the activity. Be aware of any motor challenges.
- As you supervise your child have him/her participate in household activities like setting the table, putting dishes away, making lunch, etc., that use fine motor skills. Focus and guide the sequence of steps such as body and hand placement, turning around, grasping items, etc.
- Provide toys and materials like crayons and paper, play dough, modelling clay, dolls and doll clothes, large and small blocks, to practice fine motor skills. Supervise playtime and be aware of any challenges that come up.

### **Math**

- Make math apart of every day life by counting household items. For example count toys, food taken from the refrigerator, kitchen utensils, or clothes going into a washer or out of a dryer. Count the items out loud either forwards or backwards. For variation, add, subtract, or multiply.
- To learn shapes, have your child look for circles, squares, or triangles, inside and outside the home. Do the same for three-dimensional objects such as cylinders, cones, or cubes. For example, as you collect the daily mail, point out that letters come in different sizes rectangles or squares. When you are outside with your child, point to different shapes like street signs, doors, windows or garbage cans.
- Coupons and other store ads are an excellent way to learn math skills. With your child, read store ads and price the cost of items to be bought. Compare store prices and figure out the best price and how much money you would save. Have your child buy some items and figure out the change to be received.

### **Organization**

- Set up a regular homework routine. Schedule homework for the same time and place. Start using a homework assignment book. Have your child identify a class friend he or she can call if the book is forgotten at school. Reward your child with praise, "Well done!", "Way to go" or "A special treat", etc., after the homework is completed.
- Use a colour code such as pens, markers, paper, or folders to highlight key information, instructions, activities or storing information. On a calendar, mark all outside activities in green such as sports, lawn work and inside activities in blue such as homework, house cleaning, swimming class, etc. Organize your child's dresser drawer by colour such light and dark colours. Put a corresponding colour sticker on each drawer.
- Provide your child with a daily schedule, broken into time slots for the tasks the child must do that particular day along with a timer. The structure will help your child focus as he/she can anticipate times required to complete a task.

### **Procrastination**

- Beware that procrastination is a habit and that positive habits need to be created. New habits take time to develop. When you child accomplishes a task within the appropriate timeframe, you child earns the reward. Rewards can be verbal praise, special foods for lunch, etc.
- For complex activities, break large tasks into smaller, more manageable ones. No matter how small the task, complete all tasks. Reward your child when it's completed.
- Define your expectations with your child. Avoid using general terms or phrases such as "clean your room" but rather say, "Can you please pick up the books off the floor". Make sure that they are measurable, one at a time, and are short-term

### **Reading**

- If your child makes reading errors such as word substitutions or leaving words out, read aloud to your child as you purposefully make the same type of reading errors. At first, make it very obvious, and gradually make it less obvious. Encourage him/her to catch you making your errors. Count them and over time, see if there are less errors being made.
- Make a recording of your child reading and play the recording as he/she rereads the same text silently. Have him/her circle all the words that were omitted in the original recording.
- If your child is reversing the order of letters or words such as "I saw in the library" rather than "I was in the library" you need to help him or her learn to make sense of the sentence. Try this type of exercise. **Words:** (saw, was); **Sentences:** "John \_\_\_\_\_ home"; "The women \_\_\_\_\_ the car"; "I \_\_\_\_\_ going home".

### **Self-esteem**

- Focus on strengths by maintaining a file of your child's successes like, academic work, awards, honours, pictures of friends, etc. Use this to celebrate by highlighting his progress and development when he is feeling emotionally low.
- When correcting inappropriate behaviour, reject and point out the child's behaviour as inappropriate, but never reject the child.
- Provide opportunities for children to help others by showing them that they have something to offer to people around them. Encourage your child to get involved in neighbourhood projects like, picking up litter in the park, or other charitable work. Being involved in cooperative group activities provides the child with memorable shared experiences that enhance friendships and social belonging.

### **Social Skill**

- Focus on the specific skills such as "Saying hello", "maintaining eye contact", or "not standing too close to someone" that require improvement. Pick one item to improve at a time. Encourage your child to practice them at every opportunity. Once one skill is accomplished, move onto the next skill.
- With your child, observe other children at the playground, the library, etc. Point out other kid's social behaviour such as the way they cooperate, interact with peers and adults, respond to rejection or joy, etc.
- Establish a reward system to reinforce, recognize and support appropriate social behaviour. Recognize and reinforce both small and large progress and growth in your child.

### **Spelling**

- Play word games with your child. Scramble a word and have your child unscramble it. Other games you can play are hangman, crosswords, or store bought games such as Boggle or Scrabble.
- Make or buy flash cards that include prefixes, suffixes, and root words. Colour prefixes red, suffixes yellow and roots green. Place several of each on a table or floor. See how many words your child can make in a minute.
- When spelling or memorizing a word, have your child say it out loud. Cover it up, and have your child remember how the word is spelled in his/her mind. Have him/her write it out.

### **Time**

- Try a different approach like, hand signals, visual and verbal cues, etc., to indicate changes in time.
- Use a timetable that list the activities in order and the time allocated to each. For example, 7:00 - 7:15 a.m. "Get out of bed and dress"; 7:15 - 7:30 a.m. "wash face and hands". Until the routine is established, use a kitchen timer to remind your child to move onto the next task.
- Each Sunday, set time aside to plan the upcoming week with your child. Make a "to do" list. Note when school tasks, chores and activities must be finished. Get your child to anticipate the amount of time it might take to complete each task. At the end of the week, assess with your child whether the amount of time was correct and if more or less time is needed per task for the following week.

### **Visual Processing**

- Make a "window frame" by cutting out the center from sturdy paper like an index card or construction paper. Place the cut out center of the frame over words, numbers, pictures, etc., which keeps the important information in the center while blocking out peripheral material which is distracting to your child.
- Use letter tiles such as those found in commercial games. Have your child find and arrange the correct spelling of a word being studied. Or have the student unscramble letters to form words. In both exercises, the student must concentrate on the correct order of letters.
- Practice estimating distance with your child by throwing a ball and have him/her estimate its distance, then measure it together. You can also practice social distance by having your child judge the appropriate closeness to other people.

### **Writing**

- Encourage your child to use proper hand grip, body posture and positioning of paper when writing. It's important that you reinforce this structure at every opportunity such as doing homework in writing, spelling or math or in play as in colouring or painting.
- Practice with your child writing letters, words or numbers in the air to improve motor memory of these shapes. Start with the arm in big wide movements. As he/she improve, switch to the hand to make smaller movements, then the finger to make even smaller movements of letters, words or numbers. As the child practices this skill, have he/she say out loud the letters, words or numbers with each movement.
- Encourage your child to practice writing with low-stress and fun opportunities. Write a letter or post card to friends or relatives. Get him/her to post a daily or weekly calendar of chores or homework. Make a shopping list, write an email or write in a journal or diary.

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## Tips on Selecting a Tutor for your Child

Hundreds of thousands of children having difficulty with a subject in school are currently being tutored in the Canada for a variety of reasons:

- Many students didn't master basic skills which need to be re-taught to them;
- Some have a learning disability which poses challenges to the mastery of information and slows down progress in school;
- Others have weak organizational skills which result in difficulty with keeping on schedule with studying and completing assignments;
- Some students have medical, social, emotional, behavioral and/or family problems which result in their struggling to keep up with their peers
- And still others simply desire to get ahead.

Whatever the reason, tutors can both reinforce subject matter that is taught in school and teach students how to work independently. Students often become more self-confident after working with a tutor.

### ***The following is a series of tips for parents on choosing a tutor.***

1. Explain to your child why you think a tutor is needed and what a tutor does. Talk about what you hope will be accomplished with a tutor.
2. Ask your child's teacher or other parents for recommendations. Consider interviewing several tutors with your child. (If your child is a part of the process, he/she will be more open to accepting help.)
3. Check the tutor's credentials. Ask about training, experience and references. It is important that the tutor is a certified teacher or has expertise in the subject being taught. Find out whether the person has experience working with students at your child's grade level. If the tutor is working with a child with a learning disability, it is essential that he/she has been trained to use appropriate techniques that can address the student's special needs.
4. Set clear goals for the tutoring and request a description of the tutoring plan. Whenever possible, ask your child's teacher to participate in the design of this plan so that it links to school work. Try to create a partnership between you, your child's teacher and the tutor.
5. If possible, schedule tutoring for the times of the day when your child is ready to learn. After-school hours are the most common time for tutoring but this is also when students are tired or distracted by other activities. Allow for much-needed breaks from the school routine.
6. For students with a learning disability, consider scheduling more than one lesson a week. Students with learning disabilities often need practice and repetition to master skills. Also, remember that it takes time to see improvement, so don't expect a quick fix.
7. Observe your child working with the tutor. The session should include hands-on learning and be very interactive. The tutor should be guiding your child through direct teaching and guided practice.
8. Request periodic reports from both the tutor and your child's teacher. There should be noticeable academic improvement within a few months.

*From the Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities.*

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## Tips for Parenting Children with Challenging Behaviour

Challenging behaviour is any behaviour that interferes with children's learning, development and success at play; is harmful to the child, other children or adults; or puts a child at high risk for later social problems or school failure.

Parenting a child with challenging behaviour is a challenge -- but it is one that parents can overcome with the appropriate strategies. This resource sheet offers ideas that have been proven to work -- and which can benefit all children, not just those with challenging behaviour.

- Be sure your child knows that you love him even if you don't always like his behaviour. Every day -- perhaps at bathtime, perhaps when you're walking home from child care -- set aside time to have fun together. Give him your undivided attention, let him choose the activity, and make sure he knows you like playing with him. These positive moments nourish his self-esteem and point the way to more positive moments.
- Encourage appropriate behaviour, and minimize the opportunities for challenging behaviour. These tactics are important because in the first decade of life every experience, positive and negative, affects the permanent wiring of the brain. You can build appropriate patterns if you anticipate trouble, prevent the difficult situation from occurring, and help your child to remember what to do instead of correcting his mistakes.
- Make your home an environment where your child can succeed. Remove fragile objects, create comfortable play areas, select toys that interest him, and keep them well organized and within his reach.
- Plan activities around your child's needs. If John has tantrums when he's hungry, give him a snack before you go shopping. If you serve lunch on the kitchen table, suggest he do his puzzles on the coffee table so he won't have to put them away when it's time to eat.
- Set clear limits and enforce them consistently. Your child needs to know what you expect. But be sure that you have the time and energy to carry through. If you are already late for work, it's okay if he leaves the Legos on the floor.
- Create routines and stick to them. Children feel more comfortable when they know what's coming next. For the same reason it helps to give advance notice of changes in activity ("You can slide down three more times, and then it's time to go home").
- Learn to recognize anxiety in your child. When Irene whines, that is your cue to stop sorting laundry, give her a smile, ask if you can help, and listen closely. If you can catch the problem at this early stage, you can head off challenging behaviour.
- Provide outlets for releasing excess energy. Children need daily outside activities such as running, sports or long walks.

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- Offer a limited choice when you see trouble coming ("Do you want your milk in the red cup or the blue one?"), and guide your child's behaviour by telling him what to do instead of what not to do ("Ask Paul if you can play," not "Don't grab"). Be patient if he needs exactly the same directions an hour later -- he is young, he forgets and he needs to practice.
- Put yourself in your child's shoes and try to figure out what he gets from his challenging behaviour. Does he get your attention (positive or negative)? Does he avoid something he dislikes or isn't good at? Does the atmosphere become calmer (or more exciting)? Once you know what the challenging behaviour brings him, you can help him to get it in a more acceptable way.
- Periodically, get away from it all. Parents need a chance to rejuvenate themselves.
- Stay calm. When things don't go smoothly, take a deep breath and count to five. By showing your child that you can handle the situation with a cool head, you become his best role model.

### **When Mary is out of control**

When nothing seems to work and your child loses control, give her space to collect herself.

- Stand between her and the rest of the world -- but at a safe distance. Don't try to move her.
- Don't confront her. To keep her from feeling trapped, stand sideways, compose your face, and don't look her in the eye.
- Don't talk. She isn't ready to listen yet.
- When she's calm, talk to her quietly. Help her to name her feelings ("You were pretty angry") and to distinguish between feelings and actions ("It's okay to feel angry, but it's not okay to throw chairs"). Let her know that you love her, and help her to think about how she can solve the problem next time.

*Adapted from Meeting the Challenge: Effective Strategies for Challenging Behaviour in Early Childhood Environments by Barbara Kaiser and Judy Sklar Rasminsky (Ottawa: Canadian Child Care Federation, 1999)*