

Identifying Specific Learning Disabilities in the School Setting

by Kathryn Huls, Psy.D, HSSP - Clinical Psychologist/School Psychologist



Parents have probably noticed an increase in school assessments over the past few years, as often times “Dibels,” “mClass,” STAR Reading or STAR math or other testing results are sent home with report cards. Progress monitoring allows for differentiated instruction; that is, students who are exceeding expectations receive more challenges and those who are below expectations obtain additional assistance.

The advantage to more frequent assessment is the schools’ ability to identify struggling learners early and to offer corrective interventions rather than “waiting for failure” to implement intensive plans and accommodations.

A child who is struggling will receive specific interventions for his or her areas of weakness; these interventions are implemented by general education teachers or interventionists, and have been

chosen based on educational research. Subsequently, rather than a “general education” vs. “special education” model, students have a continuum of interventions available to them, with special education services occurring at the far end of the continuum.

Parents should be notified and involved in planning meetings (often called “Response to Intervention/ Instruction” or “Problem Solving” Teams) if a child is receiving general education interventions that are not provided to all other students. When this occurs, the child should have more frequent monitoring of his/her progress with this intervention, as often as once or twice weekly.

Typically, after 6-12 weeks, if one intervention is not helping a child catch up with peers, a second intervention is attempted. Usually, significant progress is made once a child consistently receives a research-based intervention specific to his/her areas of weakness.

Sometimes, however, a child does not make progress, or his progress will not be sufficient for him to meet educational expectations within a reasonable amount of time. When this occurs, a child is

typically referred for a special education evaluation to determine whether she has a Specific Learning Disability. At this point, a representative from the special education department (usually a School Psychologist or Educational Diagnostician) contacts the parent to explain the process, discuss parents’ rights, and request written permission for the evaluation. Parents will be asked to complete a developmental history, and factors such as attendance, health history and vision/hearing screenings will be reviewed.

While the diagnostic staff may request some additional testing to supplement the progress monitoring already in place, it is possible that the data available is sufficient to make a case conference decision. A case conference is scheduled with the parents, general education teachers, school administrator and diagnostic staff. Diagnostic staff provide parents with a copy of the written report with recommendations about a week prior to the conference.

Few parenting situations provoke more anxiety than a child’s academic difficulties. If you have concerns about your child’s progress, ask your child’s teacher or principal about the school’s Re-

When to request a Special Education Evaluation

- A child is receiving consistent interventions for an area of difficulty, but is making no or very slow progress.
- The student has a medical or psychiatric condition that is significantly interfering with his or her academic performance, and a 504 Plan has not been effective.
- After a traumatic brain injury.
- At age 3 years, if a child is exhibiting developmental delays or significant speech/articulation difficulties.
- When a child has a suspected autism spectrum disorder.

sponse to Intervention program and request a meeting. If you are unsure whether your child is making adequate progress, contact the school psychologist to

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Our Mission

New Leaf Resources promotes healthy relationships and personal growth through counseling, education, and consultation from a Christian perspective.



Therapist Linda Culver, MA, LMHC, MAC, who works with clients on parenting issues, often recommends these two children's books:

Identifying Disabilities

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review progress monitoring data with you and discuss recommendations. It is important to note that a Specific Learning Disability is only one of thirteen possible special education disabilities; a school psychologist or a clinical psychologist may be able to alert you to other factors interfering with your child's education. Also, parents always have the right to request a special education evaluation at any point; remember, however, that the school may refuse if data suggests the child is unlikely to be eligible for services. Further, a diagnosis from a physician or clinical provider does not always indicate special education eligibility. Watch for more information on identification of special needs in future newsletters.

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day by Judith Viorst

"This is one of my all time favorite books for children old enough to sit through it (and even for all adults!). It's really helpful to acknowledge that sometimes we all have days when everything that could go wrong does, and can help a child to talk about the things that go wrong in their world and how they feel about it. As a counselor, I've come to firmly believe that when we talk about problems and concerns, we are then better able to cope with them; the burden is acknowledged and shared. Children do not instinctively know how to deal with feelings, so this book is a tool for helping them talk and normalizing a really bad day-

-and a great choice for the children you buy for at Christmas!"

Secret of the Peaceful Warrior by Dan Millman

"Is ideal for school age children. It tells the story of a boy who encounters a school bully and learns to work through his fear, but peacefully and without resorting to violence. He makes a few helpful friends with insights along the way.

It shows how one can learn problem-solving and is helpful to see things a different way. This book is also good for adults and it's a Benjamin Franklin Award winner."

See more listings on our website at www.newleafresources.org.

Special thanks to...

Thank you to those generous donors who quickly responded to our request for "Wish List" items in our last newsletter:

- **Illiana Christian High School** for two TV/VCR carts
- **Rev. Gerrit Veenstra** for the small toys used for child therapy positive reinforcement

And we give "a shout out" to:

- **Tom Visser** for volunteering his time and talent to photograph the therapy staff for our website.
- The staff at **Great Lakes**

Bank for their time and effort preparing our quarterly newsletter mailing.

- **Shari Krajewski**, who volunteers her time to process our payroll.
- **Jack & Carol Elzinga** and **Ken & Elaine Van Dellen** for preparing the Annual Fund Mailing
- **John Stob** for trimming the bushes at the Lansing office.
- Our **generous and faithful supporters**, who continue to provide the necessary support for hundreds of clients.

Free From the Chains That Bound Her

A former client recently shared how her experience at New Leaf Resources has given her hope, help and healing.

"Therapy has made all the difference in my life. It has saved my sanity and has given me the balance to function in a healthy full life. I have an understanding of my

self that I didn't have before. I have gained the ability to trust myself and to trust life.

I am able to distinguish the past from the present when I'm triggered and I have the skills to take care of myself with compassion. I have come to know that I'm absolutely normal and because of this I'm connected to people in a

way that I wasn't before in my life.

When I finished therapy, I felt I had processed through all my issues and it was a huge relief to simply move forward with my life beyond therapy...to be free of the chains that bound me."

- Kathy, age 61, in therapy for repressed memories



What's "New" at New Leaf Resources

Joining the therapy staff in the Lansing office, New Leaf welcomes **LaSaundra Gordon**, a Licensed Professional Counselor who sees children, adolescents and adults. Her areas of specialization include bipolar disorder, depression and mood disorders, anxiety and stress, among others.

Although she acknowledges that counseling itself is a stressful profession, she felt like God led her here. "I felt like I came home when I came here," LaSaundra said, "I'm exactly where God wanted me to be."

A resident of Chicago, LaSaundra had recently worked for Metro Family Services as a Clinical Case Manager. In her spare time she enjoys gardening, reading fiction and playing with her Lhasa Apso, Teddy.

Linda Culver, Addiction and Mental Health Counselor, was named a member of the

Northwest Indiana Symphony Chorus. Culver who is an Alto 1, was very excited about the opportunity to join such a prestigious group. "The Northwest Indiana Symphony vocalists are an extremely committed and talented group of 'volunteer professionals' and they are amazing to hear. I am truly honored just to practice with them and I am looking forward to relearning things from college and community concert choir."

During the 2010-2011 season, the Chorus will perform throughout Northwest Indiana. For their schedule, visit www.nisorchestra.org.

Clinical Psychologist **Angie Valente**, who is a member of the Indiana District One & Two Mental Health Teams, recently completed training at the Center for Domestic Preparedness (CDP), in Anniston, Alabama. The CDP provides training for emergency responders in ten re-

sponse disciplines including Emergency Medical Service, Hazardous Materials and Public Safety Communications.

Angie also participated in civilian training exercises in a true toxic environment using chemical agents. This advanced hands-on training enables responders to effectively prevent, respond to and recover from real-world incidents involving acts of terrorism and other hazardous materials.

"Therapy has made all the difference in my life. It has saved my sanity and has given me balance..."
- a former New Leaf Resources client

Save the Date!
Annual Celebration Banquet
Thursday, May 5, 2011
The Center for Visual & Performing Arts,
in Munster, Indiana

Featuring the comedy & testimony of Jeff Allen

Interested in hosting a table? Sponsorships? Please call Terri at (708) 895-7310.



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Let's Eat! New Leaf Sells Cookbooks

Just in time for your holiday baking and entertaining needs, New Leaf is selling its "Favorite Recipes" cookbook.

Chocked full of delicious family favorites from staff, supporters and friends, this unique cookbook features 183 recipes from appetizers to desserts including this easy and tasty Frozen Cranberry Salad that's perfect for Thanksgiving (see recipe at right).

Cookbooks will be available at all three New Leaf Resources' offices for \$10 each. To reserve yours, contact Terri Kasper at (708) 895-7310 or terri@newleafresources.org. They make a perfect Christmas or Hostess

gift. All proceeds from the sale of the book benefit the Marty Doot Client Assistance Fund.

Frozen Cranberry Salad

June Messana

1 can whole cranberries
1 can cranberry sauce
1 cup crushed pineapples, drained
1 lrg. Container whipped topping
Chopped walnuts to taste

Mash whole cranberries with a fork and mix with cranberry sauce and pineapple. Put into a 9 x 13 x 2 glass dish. Cover with whipped topping and sprinkle on walnuts, then freeze. Serve frozen. Great with Thanksgiving Dinner.

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hope. help. healing.

New Leaf Resources is...

A **professional mental health agency** which provides counseling services to individuals, families, couples, children, churches, schools and businesses.

A **ministry** which brings the best possible care to those we serve, striving to reflect God's grace and love to all who seek help.

A **community resource** offering educational services, prevention programs, training, support and coaching.