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Helping Kids Learn

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Information Sheet 12

Practical Strategies to Assist Learning

By Tracey Webster, Specialist teacher

Learning difficulties or disabilities can sometimes be helped at home and school just by altering the learning environment or the way a child is taught.

At Learning Links we assess each child to firstly discover the exact nature of any learning problem. We then develop an individual education plan for each child that focuses on the child's strengths and weaknesses and includes teaching strategies that are most likely to succeed for that child.

Sometimes we find that parents are also looking for help at home – ways they can help their child have the best chance of success.

The more experienced you are as a parent, the more likely you are to have a collection of ideas gleaned from other parents, teachers and reference material. Unfortunately not all learning strategies work with every child. The key is finding the right technique that works for your child.

Just as parents have varying degrees of experience, so do teachers. Teachers learn from other teachers and their own experiences with different children.

We have found that our Professional Development Seminars have a valuable secondary role as forums for teachers to share ideas and strategies for the classroom.

This article is a compilation of some of the best strategies and tips drawn from the combined teaching experience of a large number of specialist teachers. Not all suggestions will work with every child and you will no doubt find some more useful than others.

Before School

Any parent will tell you that one of the most stressful times of the day is the morning rush to get to school on time.

Getting breakfast finished and everyone dressed is only part of the process.

Children need to make sure they have everything that is needed for the day's activities such as sport and library.

Organising a child's belongings before school each day helps avoid potentially stressful situations that can distract a child at school.

Make sure your child takes the correct materials each day and they are clean and well maintained. Simple things such as ensuring pencils are sharp, pens work and clothes are labelled can help avoid anxiety.

A chart on the fridge or noticeboard at home will help children (and parents) remember each day's activities and requirements.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Swimming (towel, goggles, costume) Tuckshop Pencil Case		Sport (joggers, towel) Tuckshop	Library (library bag, books, card)	Homework News Tuckshop Bring home pencil case

Learning Links is a non-profit charity assisting children who have difficulty learning and their families.

We raise funds to help children from birth to 18 years by offering a range of services including the following.

Early Childhood Services for children from birth to six years.

- Early childhood intervention and support for very young children.
- An inclusive preschool for children with and without special needs.
- An assessment and consultancy service for families who are concerned about their young child's development.
- Specialist early childhood teaching and therapy.

School Age Services for children from Kindergarten to Year 12 who have low support needs.

- Comprehensive assessments.
- Small group tuition and therapy.
- Occupational and speech therapy programs combining specialist education services and therapy.
- Outreach programs.
- The Ronald McDonald Learning Program for seriously ill children and the Reading for Life Program for children falling behind in their reading.

Family Services helping and supporting families and health professionals.

- Centre and home-based family counselling.
- Parenting Programs and groups for families.
- Case Management Services.

Professional Development for teachers and health professionals.

Presentations, workshops and advice on identifying and helping children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and developmental delays.

Learning Links has branches in six Sydney locations at Peakhurst, Penshurst, Fairfield, Miller, Dee Why and Randwick. We also offer some services to children in country NSW, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand. A complete list of branch locations and contact numbers is on the back cover.

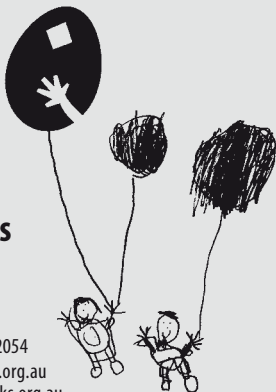
Learning Links

Head Office

12-14 Pindari Road
Peakhurst NSW 2210
Tel: 9534 1710 Fax: 9584 2054
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au
Website: www.learninglinks.org.au

Enquiries regarding this Information Sheet should be directed to Robyn Collins
Tel: (02) 9534 1710 Fax: (02) 9584 2054 Email: rcollins@learninglinks.org.au

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The Environment

At home and in the classroom ensure the learning environment is free from as many distractions as possible.

In the classroom children should sit in rows front on to the board when explicit teaching is taking place. Inattentive children are better sitting at the front of the classroom. Teachers can give them cues such as putting a paper clip on the student's desk as they walk past to let them know they will be asked the next question on what has just been said.

At home it is a good idea to do homework at the same place in the house and at the same time each day. Comprehensive tips for homework later in this article talk in more detail about the environment and getting organised at home.

Teaching Strategies and Techniques

The following teaching strategies and techniques are equally useful in the classroom or at home one-on-one.

1. Model a concept being taught, talk it through and allow self-talk.
2. Allow plenty of time for a child with a learning difficulty to respond to a question.
3. Let a child with a learning difficulty copy another child's finished work (or a parent's work) where appropriate.

4. Ask children to draw their own pictures to match the work or sentence.
5. Make activities into games so children are more at ease. Consider 'physical' activities as much as possible where children can manipulate pieces and place in order using colour and matching graphics as children seem to remember more from physical and visual activities.
6. Use sensory experiences to develop attention to tasks and extend concentration.
7. Use visual prompts to assist understanding.
8. Work in 10 minute blocks. Consider running short related games then back on task for another 10 minutes.
9. Have a weekly timetable with regular and specific activities represented in photos. Move the photographs around to show changes.
10. Use Blu-tac for children experiencing difficulty writing as it moulds comfortably to assist children to hold pencils correctly.

Classroom Teaching Techniques and Strategies

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities respond well to structure and knowing what will happen next.

We suggest the following:

1. Make sure students are in place and you begin with the same structure such as books out, pens out, pen on desk, count to 3, now it is time to begin to listen. Use visual cues to remind children of the process.
2. Ensure there are no surprises for students with learning difficulties.
3. Keep teaching structures familiar.
4. Use different coloured pens or chalk for each sentence or paragraph when writing on the board to help children copy the work more easily. Teachers can also mark the beginning of the line or underline where they up to, helping children track the work. Better still, provide a copy of the notes for the children so they don't need to copy from the board.

Mnemonics – tips for learning tricky words

Mnemonics are words, short poems or sentences designed to help you remember things such as spelling rules. You can use Mnemonics or tricks to help children learn to spell tricky words or letter combinations.

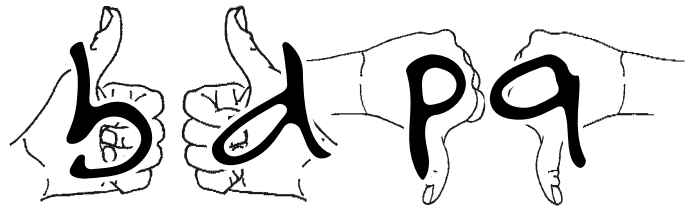
A few examples are listed to help you get started.

1. Said **Sally Anne Is Dead** said Fred
2. Friend **Fri** your friend to the **end**
3. Busy The **bus** is **busy**
4. Believe If you **lie** I will not **believe** you
5. Guilty **Gee U** make me feel **guilty**
6. Island An island **is land** surrounded by sea
7. Knife, etc Say it as it looks – **Kernife, Kernit, Kernock**.
The **knaves** **knew** the **knights** had stolen the **knives**.
8. Because **Boys Eat Cakes And Usually Spew**
Everywhere.
9. Beautiful Sing it.
10. Sure **So U R Easy** (so you are easy)
11. 'ould' ♥ **Oh you lovely darling could** you help me spell would, should etc
12. 'ight' **I Give Him Trouble** when I **fight**
13. 'ough' **Oh you gorgeous hero** you are so **tough!**
or oe, ew, uf, off, or, ow (**Oh you uff off or you're out**)
'oe', 'ew', 'uf', 'off', 'or', and 'ow' are the six different sounds OUGH can make in the order of frequency. By teaching students 'OH YOU UFF OFF OR you're OUT' they can then look at a word with this phoneme and go through the possible sounds to determine which one it is.
The sounds are as follows:
'oh' as in though
'ew' as in through
'uf' as in rough
'off' as in trough
'or' as in thought
'ow' as in bough
14. There, their, they're:

There	The there of placement: where? Here? No there.
Their	The their of ownership: I own things. They left their money where?
They're	Contraction of they are: ' They're are jolly good fellows.'
15. For an extra sensory sensation let children write their spelling words in shaving cream. This works really well if done on a dark coloured place mat to provide strong contrast of colour (it also helps contain the shaving cream to one area).

Extra Hints for Spelling Difficulties

1. Confusing 'b' and 'd' or 'p' and 'q'?
Try 'big deal pretty queen'



2. Repeating content three times:
1st time you never knew it
2nd time you review it
3rd time it's as if you always knew it.
3. Use Lindamood Techniques and 'feel' the sounds in words. Look in the mirror at how the sounds are made. Where are the lips/ tongue? What are they touching? How are they moving? Are they noisy or quiet sounds?

4. Vowels and Actions

Vowels are the hardest sounds for children to learn as they can offer limited visual cues and hearing the difference between the sounds is difficult and requires very fine auditory discrimination. It is hard to see and hear the difference between 'e' and 'i'.

The following actions have been very successful when teaching the five short vowels sounds.

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A a,a,a axe | Chopping motion with hand on arm. |
| E e,e,e egg | Left hand shaped like the top of an e and raised to the mouth |
| I i,i,i indian | Right hand straight with left indicating the dot on top |
| O o,o,o orange | Hands made to form a circle |
| U u,u,u up | Hands raised up above the head. Giving a U shape and signifying up |

5. Multi Sensory Approach: see it, say it, hear it, feel it, **Smell it!**

The sense of smell provides a very strong recall. When teaching the sounds for the first time ask children to smell the following to aid as a memory hook.

- | |
|--------------------|
| A apple |
| E egg |
| I ink (igloo, ice) |
| E egg |
| U umbrella (wet) |

Correcting Spelling

When correcting spelling, it is important to acknowledge the parts of each word the child got right. Correct a word as follows:

✓✓X✓✓✓
f r _ e n d

This shows that all but one letter was needed for a correct spelling and is very encouraging for most children.

By showing the child what has been spelt correctly you can now help the child by giving them hints.

This same technique can be used for correcting other work. Tick or highlight what is right as well as any part that is wrong. If you follow this method, your child will appreciate the things they did correctly as well as understand any errors.

Help for Nine Times Tables

Nine times tables can be difficult for children.

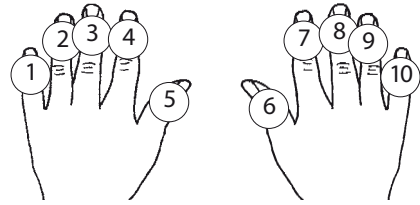
They can be taught in two easy ways:

- In the units column write down 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
In the tens column 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

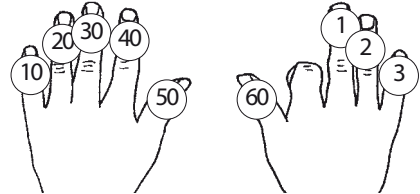
Line them up together and you have all the multiples of nine up to and including 90.

- eg
- 9 = 9x1
 - 18 = 9x2
 - 27 = 9x3
 - 36 = 9x4
 - 45 = 9x5
 - 54 = 9x6
 - 63 = 9x7
 - 72 = 9x8
 - 81 = 9x9
 - 90 = 9x10

- Use your fingers as numbers as follows:

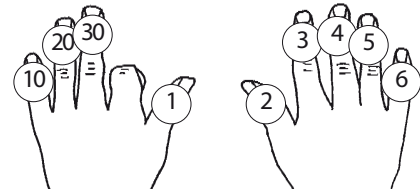


If you want the answer to 7x9, turn the 7 finger down:

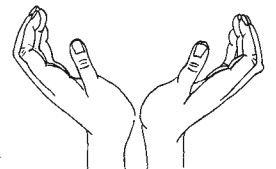
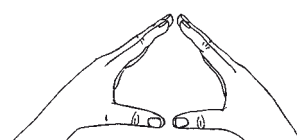
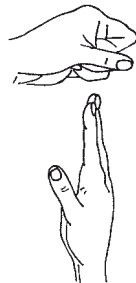
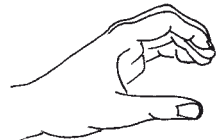
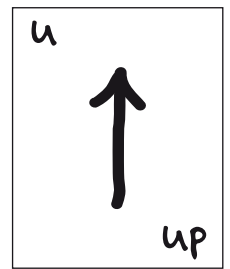
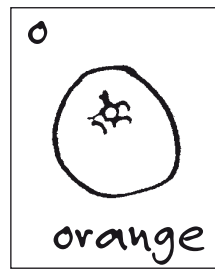
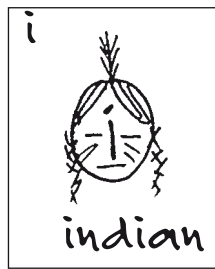
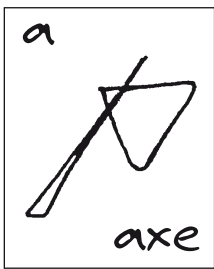


The fingers on the right of the bent finger are 10's and the fingers on the left are ones or units. We can then work out 7x9 by counting the six tens are on the left side of the bent finger and the three one's are on the right side and the answer is 63.

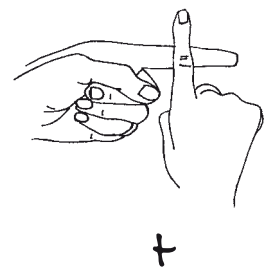
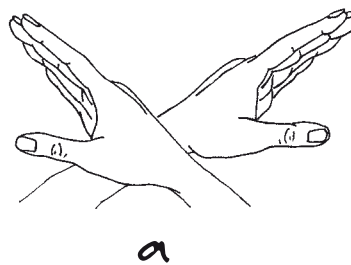
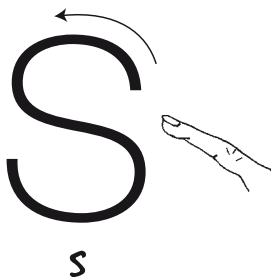
Using this method 9x4 = 36:



Vowels and Actions



To start blending use continuant sounds e.g. s, f, h, l, m, n





Using a Tables Grid

Use a tables grid to write your tables in under 5 mins. You can teach children to complete a blank grid for tables in under 5 mins by completing the grid in the following order:

- Start with the X in the top left hand corner of a 12x12 box grid – easy.
- Write the numbers 0 to 10 in the top row and left hand column – easy.
- Fill in the second top row and second left hand column with zeroes – easy.
- Write the numbers 1 to 10 in the third top row and third left hand column – easy.
- In the column and row starting with '5' write the numbers 5 to 50 counting by fives in the left over spaces (most children can count in 5's).
- In the column and row starting with '10' write the numbers 10 to 100 counting by 10's in the left over spaces (most children can count by 10's).
- In the column and row starting with '2' write the even numbers from 2 to 20 (two times tables) in the left over spaces (most children can count in 2's).
- In the column and row starting with '3' write the numbers from 3 to 30 in multiples of three (ask your child to do this on their fingers if they don't know these).
- In the column and row starting with '4' write the numbers that are two times the numbers in the columns starting with '2' – this gives you the four times tables.
- In the columns starting with 9 use one of the easy methods to write down the multiples of nine in the left over spaces starting with the number '9'.

(k) This leaves you to learn the following multiples:

6x6, 6x7, 8x7
7x6, 7x7, 7x8
8x6, 8x7, 8x8

Most children can remember the squared numbers (6x6, 7x7, 8x8), so we are now left with 6x7, 8x7 and 6x8 – a total of only three multiplications to be learnt.

X	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	0	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20
3	0	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27	30
4	0	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36	40
5	0	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
6	0	6	12	18	24	30	36			56	60
7	0	7	14	21	28	35		49		63	70
8	0	8	16	24	32	40			64	72	80
9	0	9	18	27	36	45	54	63	72	81	90
10	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

If you look at each row or column the times table answers are listed in a straight line across or down starting with 0.

Important things to remember . . .

- There's more than one 'right' way to do anything.
- Children's difficulties can't be solved in one year.
- There's never enough money – you continually have to make do!
- We don't all learn the same way.
- The value of games.
- Children with learning difficulties need constant repetition of a concept in a variety of ways.
- It is difficult to cope in classrooms with children's different skill levels.
- There's a lot of help out there – it's not all up to you
- You can't do it all by yourself – teamwork and specialists can achieve more and do it quicker.
- Sometimes the answer to a child's problem is not as complicated as you may have first thought.
- Listen more than talk.
- Parents are often and usually the best source of information.
- Gifted children are often under achievers.
- Children can learn in different ways.
- The importance of phonemic awareness.
- It is important to assess a child before we act/intervene.
- Early intervention is vital.
- Positive results can sometimes take a long time.
- Children can forget something simple so quickly.
- Children can be disorganised.
- Children don't seem to care about either of the above.
- There are a number of factors that influence a child's ability to read.
- There is a large range of difficulties children can experience.
- Older children with learning difficulties can often have a negative attitude.
- Programs should be followed through at home.



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– all enquiries to Head Office

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– contact your local branch

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All other enquiries
– Head Office

Head Office
12-14 Pindari Road
Peakhurst NSW 2210
Telephone: (02) 9534 1710
Preschool: (02) 9533 3283
Facsimile: (02) 9584 2054
Email: mail@learninglinks.org.au

Northern Suburbs Branch
2 Alfred Road
PO Box 634
Brookvale NSW 2100
Telephone: (02) 9907 4222
Facsimile: (02) 9907 4244
Email: nsb@learninglinks.org.au

Western Suburbs Branch
Unit 7/9 William Street
PO Box 1026
Fairfield NSW 1860 (2165)
Telephone: (02) 9754 2377
Facsimile: (02) 9755 9422
Email: wsb@learninglinks.org.au

Southern Suburbs Branch
10 Railway Parade
Penshurst NSW 2222
Telephone: (02) 9580 4888
Facsimile: (02) 9580 4788
Email: ssb@learninglinks.org.au

South West Sydney Branch
88 Shropshire Street
PO Box 42
Miller NSW 2168
Telephone: (02) 8783 7111
Facsimile: (02) 8783 7222
Email: sws@learninglinks.org.au

Eastern Suburbs Branch
1/20 Silver Street
Randwick NSW 2032
Telephone: (02) 9398 5188
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