

Where to Start When Your Child Is Struggling at School

Step 1

Meet with the Child's Teacher (If the teacher hasn't already approached you)

- a. Share information about...
 - i. Are issues academic, behavioral, social, etc.?
 - ii. Are these issues new, old, constant, intermittent, age appropriate?
 - iii. What has the teacher done to try and intervene at school?
 - iv. What have you as a parent done at home?
- b. Sometimes a simple meeting with the teacher can help resolve these issues
 - i. Doing something simple, like a teacher giving a subtle prompt/cue to the child before things get difficult, a parent helping organize folders, giving a pep talk before school, etc. can set the child up for a good day
 - ii. If these issues cannot be resolved with the parent-teacher meeting...

Meet with the child's Pediatrician

- Your child's doctor knows them fairly well and can make some good recommendations for things to be put into place in the classroom that might fall into a 504 plan that could make things easier for your child

Step 2

After trying all the things you brainstormed in the parent-teacher talk

- 1) A parent can meet with a support professional at the school (with or without the child's teacher):
 - School psychologist
 - Guidance counselor
 - Social worker
 - Speech pathologist (language issues)
 - Occupational therapist (motor-related difficulty)
 1. More brainstorming may happen
 2. Support professional may recommend one or more classroom observation sessions to shed more light on the matter

Step 3

Several different approaches may follow Steps 1 and 2; these are dependent upon your school system's policies. Many schools use the "Response to Intervention" Model (RTI), which can include multiple tiers of support:

- 1) Tier 1 support
 - a. Initiated by teacher, but consulted with a school support professional
 - ii. Screening, group intervention, instructional support to determine if child makes progress (several weeks)
- 2) Tier 2 Support
 - i. Targeted; offered partially outside the classroom and in smaller groups
- b. Tier 3
 - ii. Evaluation, more intensive interventions

School Evaluation or Private Evaluation?

- School will often offer their own evaluation
 - o Extent comes down to available resources and district policy
 - o Psychological, educational, speech language, occupational/physical therapy evaluations
 - o Evaluations check to see if the child qualifies for an IEP (individualized education program) for more specialized support
- Private evaluations
 - o Neuropsychological evaluation – very comprehensive, covering all of the above-mentioned areas
 - One person looking at all of the information/data and putting it together into one uniform picture
 - Can include more specific and individualized recommendations than a school evaluation

Bringing an Advocate With You

- Can help parents navigate this overwhelming and confusing time
 - o Not an attorney, psychologist, etc. – Advocate is another parent who is very knowledgeable about the process, rules, options, etc. to help other parents get through the process with their child

504's and IEP's

- 504 Plan
 - o Creates accommodations for students in school with any difficulty they are having
 - o Changes that are made in the general education classroom to enhance the learning environment for the student
 - Facilitating better focus, organization, classroom comfort for physical disabilities...
 - o Pediatrician can fill out 504 Plan or give specific recommendations
- IEP
 - o Covers anything that might have a child leaving the classroom (more intensive special education interventions)
 - Learning differences – individual or group mediation (specialist)
 - Anxiety, social difficulties – counselor, social skills group

Diagnoses (Twice-Exceptional) – ADHD, Autism, Anxiety, Learning Differences

Classroom Supports:

- Not necessarily tailored to diagnosis, but tailored to child's specific needs
 - o Additional time to work – but needed for different reasons, depending on diagnoses
 - o Based on level of difficulty the child is experiencing

504 Accommodations:

Can include, but not limited to:

ADHD:

- Preferential seating near teacher
- Tolerating excessive movement
- Monitoring for fatigue
- Additional break times
- Adapting student's work area to work effectively
- Establishing non-verbal cues to help re-focus the child
- Non-traditional organization methods (modeling an organization system, alternative methods for handing in assignments...)

Asperger's:

- Multi-modal presentation
- Sensory diet (reducing sensory input)
- Increased opportunities for peer-to-peer cooperative learning

Dyslexia:

- Tailored reading assignments
- Modified homework

Anxiety:

- Reduced social interaction during certain aspects of the day (i.e.- taking a test in a different environment)
- Increased social interaction in certain times of the day

IEP Accommodations:

More intensive than the classroom.

Can include, but not limited to:

- Meeting with a school counselor to address anxiety or social skills trouble/social skills group
- Meeting with a speech/language pathologist if having trouble with social skills development or basic discourse, pragmatic language
- Individual or small group interventions in their area of academic difficulties
- 2E children may need any of the above-mentioned things, depending on their needs

Alternative Classroom Placement

- Adjusting for strengths and challenges
 - Elementary schools that offer enrichment to students advanced in one area in various areas (i.e. – allowing students to move to another classroom if they are ahead in math)

Outward Anger or Verbal/Physical Aggression

Why are these behaviors happening?

- This is a reaction to something else that's going on. What is the trigger to this behavior?
- School or

ABC Analysis (Antecedent Behavior Consequence)

- Studies a child's behavior to determine the driving factors of why (before) a child may be getting angry or aggressive, and examines what happens afterwards.
 - Behaviors happen to satisfy some sort of need. A child learns that if they act in an angry or frustrated way, something happens that gives them relief from their anger or frustration.
 - Identification and resolution at the "trigger" level causes resolution
 - Ross Greene's ALSUP form (Assessment of Lagging Skills & Unsolved Problems)
 - School behaviorist or outside school (BCBA credentials)

What happens when Tiers 1-3 Don't Work?

Questions to ask yourself as a parent:

- Is your school the right fit for your child?
 - Does the school have the right resources to offer your child?
 - Have resources been exhausted?
 - How much progress has been made?
- If no, does the school have recommendations for another placement for your child?
- Know your child's needs, and find a placement that can meet those specific needs
- Make sure that the next placement your child goes to is the one that will work for him/her; take your time
 - Learning is fun, they feel safe, school is a place they want to be
 - Don't bounce around to different placements
 - Look for a school placement consultant to help you find good options
 -
 - Is homeschooling an option?
 - Before looking into homeschool as the most appropriate option, look at the curriculum, socialization aspect, extracurricular activities available... everything that homeschooling groups in your area can offer. Every area is different.

Kids that remain in the wrong placement for a long time are not only at risk for continuing the struggles they're having, but developing new struggles. – Ken Schuster PsyD, Child Mind Institute in Manhattan