

Expectations

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What advice can we give to parents? A fair amount of advice is contained in the bulk of this article, but highlighting some key areas may be useful. Always remember that all children are individuals and that strict adherence to general advice may be inappropriate for your child. Try to gather information and appraise and evaluate the information by considering its source, objectivity and accuracy. Sometimes information which seems, on its own, to be trivial or unimportant can be a valuable contribution to a global picture.

It is not always necessary to outline specific expectations. Many expectations are never articulated. However, they can help a child to have pride in himself and his capabilities, especially if they are made to be within his grasp and backed up by help when needed. Expectations that are perceived to be unreasonable and out of reach can be devastating. Watch and listen, compare others' expectations with yours and the child's and try to balance them all into a useful and constructive influence.

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"The Dyslexia Handbook 1996"

I have been a teacher for twenty eight years, half of that time in mainstream schools and then the other half as Head of three specialist dyslexia schools, two in the UK and one in the USA. I have learned far more about education in the second half of my career. I have also learned far more about learning and the factors which influence the learning of all pupils from my work with dyslexic students.

If we can be aware of the factors which influence a child's learning, then we are more likely to be able to maximise learning. I have learned that one of those factors is expectation. Expectations pervade much of a child's academic life.

Expectations are powerful. If they are realistic then they can encourage and motivate. If they are unrealistic (too high or too low) then they can create stress, poor self image, under achievement and failure. For dyslexic pupils expectations are a greater influence than for children with a more secure and confident self image.

A child is exposed to expectations from a variety of people and sources. These will include themselves, parents, siblings, grandparents, teachers, peers, examinations and even governments. It would be quite remarkable if all these expectations were consistent. It is more likely that the child will have to cope with constantly adjusting his reactions to different expectations throughout each day with little or no advice or help.

As with so many aspects of education and development, being able to achieve continuity and maintain a balance of expectations is the key to success. This balance applies to all concerned as each interaction affects the balance.

Parents

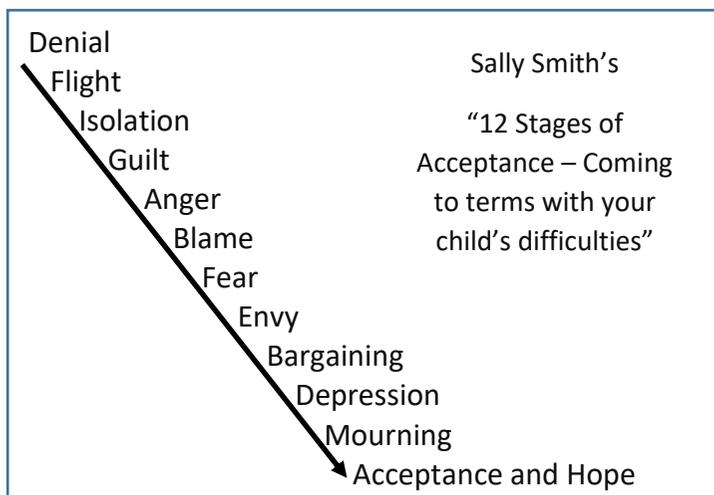
A baby is, usually, a great source of joy. It is also a great focus of expectations and hopes for its parents. The parents will have some

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level of expectation for their child even as a baby though they may be hard to predict. For example, some parents expect their child to follow in their footsteps. Others may wish the child not to make the same mistakes they made and therefore expect him not follow in their footsteps. There will, however, always be a dream and that dream may well have to develop and change as the child grows.

One of the reasons that that dream may have to develop and change is the realisation that your child is not learning as others do. He starts to struggle with the basic requirements of school. Perhaps he finds making friends' a little harder. Children of your friends seem to fly over every hurdle whilst your child struggles and trips. These realisations can have an enormous impact on expectations and at this stage it is so important for the child that the new expectations are realistic and encouraging. The child needs to feel that life's challenges and his efforts to cope with those challenges are appreciated and supported.

Sally Smith in 'No Easy Answers' writes about the stages of coming to terms with your child's learning difficulties. The stages are self explanatory and, in our experience; valid and useful.



Think what this does for the expectations of all involved. For example, teachers expect families to be uniformly intelligent. Relatives expect both children to write neatly and legibly on birthday cards. Parents find it hard to give realistic praise to the boy.

Family stresses can easily arise from situations such as this.

For the dyslexic pupil himself, peer relationships will be as important, if not more so, as for his non-dyslexic peers. He will seek compensatory success wherever he can. He will expect to be on an equal level with his peers, yet inescapable comparisons in so many areas of school are telling him this is not the case. The solutions to this problem are classic. The pupil becomes the class clown, or withdraws into himself, or rebels. We all need to achieve some of our expectations, so compensatory gifts such as Sport or art are wonderful, when they are there.

Provision, Environment and Expectations

When the child is in the wrong educational environment, then expectations become eroded and anxieties set in for all concerned. The pupil starts to lose motivation and the parents and teachers start to despair. One of the most shameful and devastating effects of inappropriate provision is this erosion of expectations.

If appropriate provision is made, then one of the joys for teachers and parents is to see expectations reappear. Indeed after a time with minimal expectations it is sometimes hard to adjust to realistic and positive expectations.

Conclusion

It is manifestly obvious that all those people involved with the child should have the right levels of expectation. This requires a lot of listening, filtering, fact gathering, negotiating, communicating, accepting and constant adjusting. None of which is easy, but then growing up is rarely an easy process for child or parent.