

The Starfish Flinger

As the old man walked the beach at dawn,
he noticed a young man ahead of him
picking up starfish and
flinging them into the sea.

Finally catching up with the youth,
he asked him why he was doing this.

The answer was that the stranded starfish would
die if left until the morning sun.

"But the beach goes on for miles and there
are millions of starfish," countered the
other.

"How can your effort make any difference?"

The young man looked at the starfish in
his hand and then threw it to safety in the
waves.

"It makes a difference to this one," he said.

-Author unknown

Outline for Karma Dogs Learning Disability Training

- I. Introductions
 - A. Ice Breaker
 - B. Why are we here?
 - C. Some questions and concerns?
- II. Disability Overview
 - A. Learning Disabilities
 - B. ADHD
 - C. Autism
- III. Activity- Learning Disabilities on Paper
- IV. Tips for Struggling Readers
- V. Closing
 - A. Are questions answered?
 - B. Any new concerns?

Signs of Learning Disabilities in Children

Preschool

- Speaks later than most children
- Pronunciation problems
- Slow vocabulary growth, often unable to find the right word
- Difficulty rhyming words
- Trouble learning numbers, alphabet, days of the week, colors, shapes
- Extremely restless and easily distracted
- Trouble interacting with peers
- Difficulty following directions or routines
- Fine motor skills slow to develop

Grades K-4

- Slow to learn the connection between letters and sounds
- Confuses basic words (*run, eat, want*)
- Makes consistent reading and spelling errors including letter reversals (*b/d*), inversions (*m/w*), transpositions (*felt/left*), and substitutions (*house/home*)
- Transposes number sequences and confuses arithmetic signs (+, -, x, /, =)
- Slow to remember facts
- Slow to learn new skills, relies heavily on memorization
- Impulsive, difficulty planning
- Unstable pencil grip
- Trouble learning about time
- Poor coordination, unaware of physical surroundings, prone to accidents

Grades 5-8

- Reverses letter sequences (*soiled/solid, left/felt*)
- Slow to learn prefixes, suffixes, root words, and other spelling strategies
- Avoids reading aloud
- Trouble with word problems
- Difficulty with handwriting
- Awkward, fist-like, or tight pencil grip
- Avoids writing assignments
- Slow or poor recall of facts
- Difficulty making friends
- Trouble understanding body language and facial expressions

Statistics for Disabilities in the United States

Learning Disabilities

50% of all students in special education in the public schools have learning disabilities -- 2.25 million children; Source: U.S. Dept. of Education 1992

35% of students identified with learning disabilities drop out of high school. This is twice the rate of their non-disabled peers. (This does not include the students who are not identified and drop out); Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study (Wagner 1991)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

According to the National Institute of Mental Health two to three percent of children have ADHD. This means that in a typical classroom at least one child is ADHD. The NIMH estimates that about 2 million children in the United States have ADHD

Boys are most likely to be diagnosed ADHD.

- 75% of boys with ADD are also hyperactive while 60% of girls with ADD are also hyperactive.
- 65 % of children with ADHD have discipline problems.
- 25% of children with ADHD have a serious learning disability.
- One half of ADHD children have poor listening comprehension.

Autism

- 1 in 150 births
- 1 to 1.5 million Americans
- Fastest-growing developmental disability
- 10 - 17 % annual growth

- \$90 billion annual cost
- 90% of costs are in adult services³
- Cost of lifelong care can be reduced by 2/3 with early diagnosis and intervention
- In 10 years, the annual cost will be \$200-400 billion⁴

Conditions affecting concentration

Anxiety, depression, stressful events, emotional trauma, and other conditions can all affect concentration and make learning more of a challenge. Difficulty in mastering certain academic skills can also stem purely from a neurological basis. Here is a list of neurological conditions that can affect a child's ability to learn.

- Visual processing disorder
- Auditory processing disorder
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Pervasive Developmental Disorders (Autism and Asperger's)
- Sensory Integration Dysfunction

Symptoms in school-age children

- Difficulty understanding and following instructions
- Trouble remembering what someone just told them
- Failing to master reading, spelling, writing, and/or math skills and therefore fails schoolwork
- Difficulty telling the difference between "right" and "left," problems identifying words or a tendency to reverse letters, numbers or words (e.g., confusing "b" with "d," 18 with 81, or "on" with "no.")
- Lacking motor coordination when walking, playing sports, holding a pencil or trying to tie a shoelace
- Frequently loses or misplaces homework, schoolbooks or other items
- Unable to understand the concept of time, confused by the difference between "yesterday," "today," and "tomorrow."
- Forgetting items, such as their KARMA DOGS bookmark

Juan loves to play games. His favorite game is chess because it requires a great deal of thought. Juan also likes to play less demanding board games that are based mostly on luck. He prefers Monopoly because it requires luck and skill. If he's alone, Juan likes to play action video games as long as they aren't too violent.

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To sense the reading experience of a person with dyslexia, read the following paragraph, and give it a title:

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ABBASID

Abbasid or Abbaside, Arabic family descended from Abbas, the uncle of Muhammad. They rose to power by massacring the ruling Umayyad family and held the Caliphate from 749 to 1258. Prominent Abbasid caliphs include al-Mansur and Harun Ar-Rashid, under whom the caliphate reached its greatest power. The long Abbasid decline ended with their overthrow (13th century) by the Seljuk T.



Tips for Struggling Readers

- Take a picture walk through the book
- Help child to choose books- If they cannot read more than 2 words on a page, pick another book (admin. staff)
- Start sentences with your dog's name (Tasha isn't sure what that word is. Can you tell her what it means?)
- Encourage use of context clues if child is stuck on a word.
Example- The child reads "The man went to the bark to feed the cows." Say, "Dirk is confused about that sentence. Do people go to barks to feed cows? Let's look at that sentence and see if we can help Dirk understand what it means."
- Please try to correct the child as if the correction is coming from the dog. It's ok to let them make a few mistakes from time to time. Each one does not need correction.
- Please do not read to the child. They have come to read to the Karma Dogs.
- Encourage the child to show the pictures to the dog
- Help them to sound out a word only if they ask for help
- Remember that children with disabilities may have a slower processing speed than typically developing children. You may need to wait a few extra seconds for them to answer a question, follow a direction or read a sentence
- You may want to help a child by moving your finger along the words as they are read or encouraging him/her to do the same.

Many children with disabilities have trouble tracking words on a page.

- The child may only actually read for a small part of the time he/she is with you. That's fine, but do try to extend that time by a few minutes each time you see the child, if he/she is a regular

The experience should be different from reading in school, where so many of these children are not successful. The most important thing that Karma Dogs can do is foster a love of reading in a child that will last a lifetime.

Thank you for being a volunteer! We couldn't do this without you.