

# Tips for Parents: Parenting Children with Disabilities



Resources Developed by:



National  
Dissemination  
Center for Children  
with Disabilities

# Table of Contents\*

<i>Disorder</i>	<i>Page #</i>
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD).....	3
Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD).....	5
Learning Disabilities.....	6
Mental Retardation.....	7
Traumatic Brain Injury.....	8

\*The tips for teachers were excerpted from documents developed by the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. To see the complete set of fact sheets, please visit the NICHCY website, <http://www.nichey.org/disabinf.asp#fs19>. The full fact sheet defines the disability, describes its characteristics, and offers tips for parents and teachers. Each ends with a very helpful list of resources in print or video and disability organizations that can offer more information and assistance.

# **Tips for Parents:**

## **Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**

### **(AD/HD)**

-Learn about AD/HD. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child.

-Praise your child when he or she does well. Build your child's abilities. Talk about and encourage his or her strengths and talents.

-Be clear, be consistent, be positive. Set clear rules for your child. Tell your child what he or she *should* do, not just what he shouldn't do. Be clear about what will happen if your child does not follow the rules. Have a reward program for good behavior. Praise your child when he or she shows the behaviors you like.

-Learn about strategies for managing your child's behavior. These include valuable techniques such as: charting, having a reward program, ignoring behaviors, natural consequences, logical consequences, and time-out. Using these strategies will lead to more positive behaviors and cut down on problem behaviors. You can read about these techniques in many books.

-Talk with your doctor about whether medication will help your child.

-Pay attention to your child's mental health (and your own!). Be open to counseling. It can help you deal with the challenges of raising a child with AD/HD. It can help your child deal with frustration, feel better about himself or herself, and learn more about social skills.

-Talk to other parents whose children have AD/HD. Parents can share practical advice and emotional support. Call NICHCY to find out how to find parent groups near you.

-Meet with the school and develop an educational plan to address your child's needs. Both you and your child's teachers should get a written copy of this plan.

-Keep in touch with your child's teacher. Tell the teacher how your child is doing at home. Ask how your child is doing in school. Offer support.

## **Tips for Parents:**

### **Autism/Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)**

-Learn about autism/PDD. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child. Your State's PTI can be especially helpful.

-Be mindful to interact with and teach your child in ways that are most likely to get a positive response. Learn what is likely to trigger melt-downs for your child, so you can try to minimize them. Remember, the earliest years are the toughest, but it does get better!

-Learn from professionals and other parents how to meet your child's special needs, but remember your son or daughter is first and foremost a child; life does not need to become a never ending round of therapies.

-If you weren't born loving highly structured, consistent schedules and routines, ask for help from other parents and professionals on how to make it second nature for you. Behavior, communication, and social skills can all be areas of concern for a child with autism and experience tells us that maintaining a solid, loving, and structured approach in caring for your child, can help greatly.

-Learn about assistive technology that can help your child. This may include a simple picture communication board to help your child express needs and desires, or may be as sophisticated as an augmentative communication device.

-Work with professionals in early intervention or in your school to develop an IFSP or an IEP that reflects your child's needs and abilities. Be sure to include related services, supplementary aids and services, AT, and a positive behavioral support plan, if needed.

-Be patient, and stay optimistic. Your child, like every child, has a whole lifetime to learn and grow.

# **Tips for Parents:**

## **Learning Disabilities**

- Learn about LD. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child.
- Praise your child when he or she does well. Children with LD are often very good at a variety of things. Find out what your child really enjoys doing, such as dancing, playing soccer, or working with computers. Give your child plenty of opportunities to pursue his or her strengths and talents.
- Find out the ways your child learns best. Does he or she learn by hands-on practice, looking, or listening? Help your child learn through his or her areas of strength.
- Let your child help with household chores. These can build self-confidence and concrete skills. Keep instructions simple, break down tasks into smaller steps, and reward your child's efforts with praise.
- Make homework a priority. Read more about how to help your child be a success at homework.
- Pay attention to your child's mental health (and your own!). Be open to counseling, which can help your child deal with frustration, feel better about himself or herself, and learn more about social skills.
- Talk to other parents whose children have learning disabilities. Parents can share practical advice and emotional support. Call NICHCY (1.800.695.0285) and ask how to find parent groups near you. Also let us put you in touch with the parent training and information (PTI) center in your state.
- Meet with school personnel and help develop an educational plan to address your child's needs. Plan what accommodations your child needs, and don't forget to talk about assistive technology!
- Establish a positive working relationship with your child's teacher. Through regular communication, exchange information about your child's progress at home and at school.

# **Tips for Parents:**

## **Mental Retardation**

- Learn about mental retardation. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child.
- Encourage independence in your child. For example, help your child learn daily care skills, such as dressing, feeding him or herself, using the bathroom, and grooming.
- Give your child chores. Keep her age, attention span, and abilities in mind. Break down jobs into smaller steps. For example, if your child's job is to set the table, first ask her to get the right number of napkins. Then have her put one at each family member's place at the table. Do the same with the utensils, going one at a time. Tell her what to do, step by step, until the job is done. Demonstrate how to do the job. Help her when she needs assistance. Give your child frequent feedback. Praise your child when he or she does well. Build your child's abilities.
- Find out what skills your child is learning at school. Find ways for your child to apply those skills at home. For example, if the teacher is going over a lesson about money, take your child to the supermarket with you. Help him count out the money to pay for your groceries. Help him count the change.
- Find opportunities in your community for social activities, such as scouts, recreation center activities, sports, and so on. These will help your child build social skills as well as to have fun.
- Talk to other parents whose children have mental retardation. Parents can share practical advice and emotional support. Call NICHCY (1.800.695.0285) and ask how to find a parent group near you.
- Meet with the school and develop an educational plan to address your child's needs. Keep in touch with your child's teachers. Offer support. Find out how you can support your child's school learning at home.

# **Tips for Parents:**

## **Traumatic Brain Injury**

-Learn about TBI. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child.

-Work with the medical team to understand your child's injury and treatment plan. Don't be shy about asking questions. Tell them what you know or think. Make suggestions.

-Keep track of your child's treatment. A 3-ring binder or a box can help you store this history. As your child recovers, you may meet with many doctors, nurses, and others. Write down what they say. Put any paperwork they give you in the notebook or throw it in the box. You can't remember all this! Also, if you need to share any of this paperwork with someone else, make a copy. Don't give away your original!

-Talk to other parents whose children have TBI. There are parent groups all over the U.S. Parents can share practical advice and emotional support. Call NICHCY (1-800-695-0285) or find resources in your state, online at ([www.nichcy.org/states.htm](http://www.nichcy.org/states.htm)) to locate parent groups near you.

-If your child was in school before the injury, plan for his or her return to school. Get in touch with the school. Ask the principal about special education services. Have the medical team share information with the school.

-When your child returns to school, ask the school to test your child as soon as possible to identify his or her special education needs. Meet with the school and help develop a plan for your child called an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

-Keep in touch with your child's teacher. Tell the teacher about how your child is doing at home. Ask how your child is doing in school.