

## **Learning Disorder ? Not my child!**

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One of the first challenges to identifying learning and other mental disorders in children is the difficulty experienced when working with the parent or adult caretaker of the child.

Many times the significant others in the child's life are in denial. Denial is a defence mechanism put up by our ego (reality base) in which we ignore or deny that a problem exists. We all want our children to be perfect, so that any thought that our children might not be, is sent way back into the deep recesses of the psyche or mind, buried there and totally ignored. Then we behave as if everything is all right.

There are many reasons for this, among which are, embarrassment, guilt, pride and irresponsibility to name a few. Many young adults and some older ones may not have been ready to have children, therefore after the child is born, he or she is treated as if she/he does not exist.

The parent somewhat denies the child's existence. This makes any observation and possible identification of learning and other mental disorders difficult or impossible as such a parent will not be able to say whether their children are developing physically, psychologically or emotionally along the normal growth patterns.

Infants and children follow what is called a developmental growth pattern. They age one year at a time. Years, ages and stages of development cannot be skipped so that at birth there are expected behaviours, which should be exhibited.

A child should be walking by a certain age, should be talking by a certain age and should be able to help himself or herself by a certain age. However, because each human being is a unique individual, the age and the developmental stage need not follow a fixed pattern.

There are some children who take a little longer to walk or talk or tie their shoelaces. This is all right. I know some parents who were so concerned that their children were not talking by age two when the older brother or sister was, but by age three, the talking began and the child could not be stopped. Growth patterns are flexible. So this is another challenge to identifying disabilities or disorders.

Children are very good at "masking". Children think that their parents or caretakers are "Gods". They want to please them, so they will say what they think will please the adult. This is why children lie - they want to be in the good graces of the adult.

Children learn to lie and manipulate especially if the adults around them are very critical, punitive and dishonest. Children learn to "put up a front" or to wear a "mask". Children

learn to fool people. Parents who are not open, encouraging, genuine, honest and pleasant have children who “put up a front”.

This is another challenge to identifying learning disabilities and mental disorders. Parents who do not face reality have children who do not face reality. This makes identification difficult.

As caretakers of children and caregivers of adolescents it is imperative that we find ways to face these challenges. We must face them within ourselves for as James Baldwin says, “we cannot fix what we will not face.”