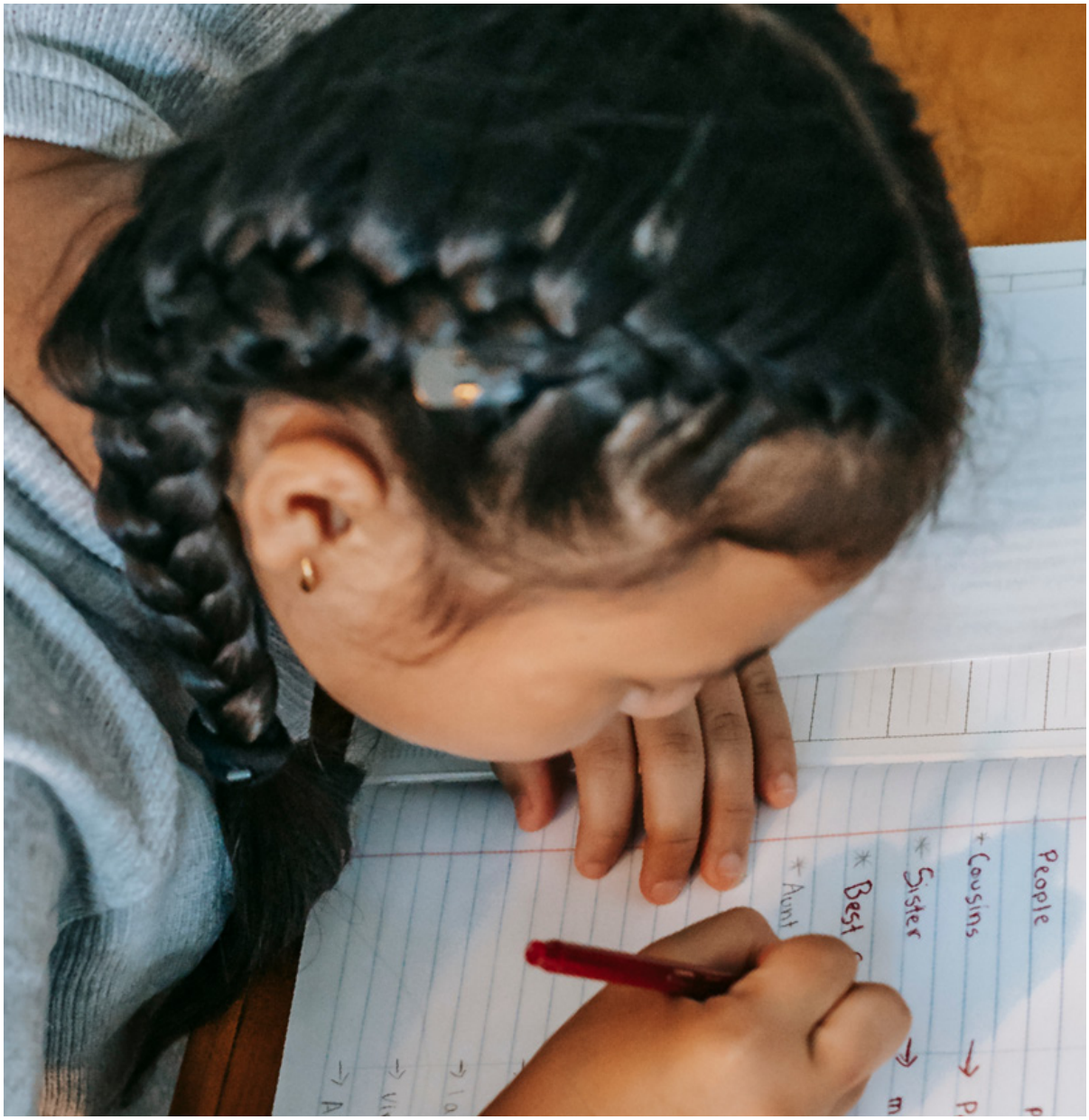


The GENIUS they Overlook.

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Introduction by the Author

Does your bright child struggle in school despite obvious intelligence? You're not alone, and your child is not lazy or unmotivated.

A learning disability is a neurological disorder that affects how the brain processes information
- how it organizes, remembers, and expresses what it knows. This has nothing to do with intelligence. In fact, according to Jamaica's Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information, "Children with learning disabilities are intelligent beings with unique learning styles. Some have average or above average intelligence and are gifted people."

The key word here is "gifted." With the right support and accommodations, these children can - and do - excel academically, achieving distinctions and honors. My own children are proof of this. But getting there required understanding, patience, advocacy, and refusing to give up.
If you're reading this, you may be at the beginning of that journey. Here's what I've learned as a mother walking this path.

Practical tips for living with a child with Learning Disabilities

By a Mother who wants to share her journey.



"A Learning disability is a neurological disorder which causes difficulty in organising, remembering and expressing information."

Recognising Learning Disabilities.

Sounds familiar? Does your obviously bright child fail to live up to his potential? Does he struggle with seemingly simple tasks like reading or writing or understanding basic math? He may have a learning disability (LD). Time to have him evaluated by a special education professional.

Your school can usually advise you on how to get this done. There are many helpful resources in Jamaica including the Mico Child Assessment and Research in Education (CARE) and The Learning Centre (The Jamaica Association for Children with Learning Disabilities) .

After the evaluation and the receipt of a long, thorough report from the expert, you now have details of the diagnosis, and recommendations for support. You are now officially the parent of a child with an LD and will be facing some challenges you may not have dealt with before. I am not a professional in this area but I am a mother of such a child, and there is a lot that I've learned over the years. Here is my best advice, based on mistakes made, things I've done right and advice from many people.



01

Know your child.

You have already had her evaluated, then that is an excellent start. It means you already have a good sense of when something may be wrong versus her just feeling lazy, tired or naughty. Your bright, beautiful LD child is fully capable of being all the above and you must learn to recognise and cope with each state. In addition to an education expert, you may also need to have your child see a counsellor as anxiety and other social and psychological problems are not uncommon when an LD child struggles to keep up with her peers.



02

Learn to be patient with your child.

You may be thinking: “if only he would try harder!” You will feel frustrated. This doesn’t help, however. It only creates the problems mentioned above. Learn to calm yourself down, whether by taking a time out, counting to 10, deep breathing – whatever works for you - and stick with the program that the expert has developed. Above all, make sure he knows that you love him and that he is NOT a disappointment to you.

03



Learn patience with your child's teachers.

Since the evaluation, you have bought every book you can find on the subject and read pages and pages of Google search results. You now know a lot! Do not expect that your child's teachers also have the same level of understanding as you do. Over the years, I have found that most teachers are genuinely interested in going the extra mile to work with special needs children, but they are not necessarily experts in that field. Some teachers may not even be aware that there is a difference between an LD and an intellectual disability. I cannot tell you how often I have heard the words " But he isn't stupid! He is a bright boy!" in response to being told about the LD. Speak up, be your child's advocate, but don't get angry. Unless you plan to change schools, these are the people you have to work with. Make lots of copies of the evaluation report. Please print or save useful articles you have read and share them freely.

Part of my routine for many years was to give every one of my child's teachers a copy of the latest evaluation at the beginning of the school year. Meet with them frequently. Be polite. Always remember the really important ones on Teachers' Day, Christmas, or when you just feel like baking a bread pudding. A teacher who is willing to work with your child is worth their weight in gold.
Ignorance can be dealt with. The right attitude is priceless.

04



Work closely with the school.

Make sure that not only the teachers but also the principal knows about your child. Ensure that copies of your child's report are on file in the office. Because of relationship building, we were able to meet with my child's principal near the end of each school year, to decide which of the several grade level teachers would be the best one in the coming year. My child zig-zagged his way through prep school, because of the brilliant advice of a sensitive principal. You also need to communicate with the school any special needs your child has, such as using a tablet or laptop in class, or submitting homework in print rather than by hand. Again, don't forget to be patient and polite.

05



Know what resources are available to you.

Does your school have a resource room? Make sure you meet that teacher and ensure that your child gets the time she needs with that teacher. Know what resources are available for doing external exams. This is very important. When my child was doing the GSAT exams, I had no idea what was available,

but luckily for us, my school principal did. I was resigned to just skipping GSAT altogether, but I learned that special needs children are allowed extra time, writers, readers, among other accommodations. Guess who got 96% in GSAT?!

Do your research to ensure that you know how to qualify and that the arrangements are made on time. Be prepared to do the running up and down yourself, as your school admin may be unable or unwilling to do it for you.
Keep track of dates and follow up when there is still time to correct errors. Work with and guide your school while remembering to be patient and polite. Very often, you are both learning together. By the time we got to CAPE, I had gone on the Caribbean Examination Council website, downloaded all the forms and guidance notes they have, ensured that the latest evaluation report we had was valid and volunteered to the school to do anything I could to help. The wonderful school team I was working with had never had to deal with this before and many things went wrong. But because of the relationship and their absolute willingness to work with us, it all turned out well. Guess who did well in all CAPE subjects taken?!

06

Be prepared to make alternative learning arrangements if necessary.

This may mean changing schools or going to special remedial classes after school. Seek advice. Network with other parents of similar children. This may be expensive, but do the best you can. Remember that an education is one of the best gifts you can give to your children and in the case of an LD child, this is especially important.





07



Don’t forget to have fun.

I still get tearful when I remember the day I went to pick up my seven year old at school and found him all alone in the classroom, struggling to finish writing off the homework from the blackboard, at least an hour after school. His teacher was sitting with him and said in a long suffering voice “and he missed break too!” I moved him from that school at the following half-term, had him evaluated and later placed in a small school where every child got individual attention. Yes, it was expensive, but I have no regrets. He wore nothing but Sun Island t-shirts and cotton shorts for years! Yes there will be extra time spent in classrooms but don’t leave out time with friends, extra curricular activities such as dancing, football, art. Life is many things, not just one thing. Don’t deny your brilliant LD child the ability to be anything they want to be.

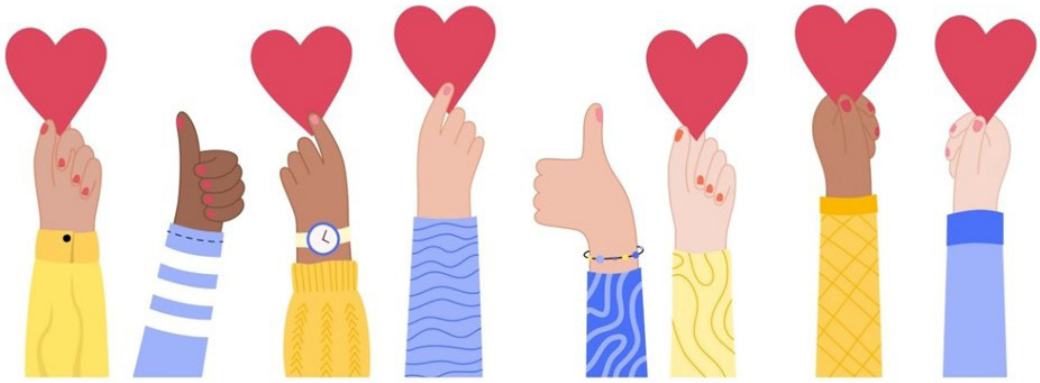


Finally, never ever give up on your child.

Rest, take a break but never give up. I don't know the statistics but my experience tells me that the outcome for a child with learning disabilities radically improves with consistent parental support.

08

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