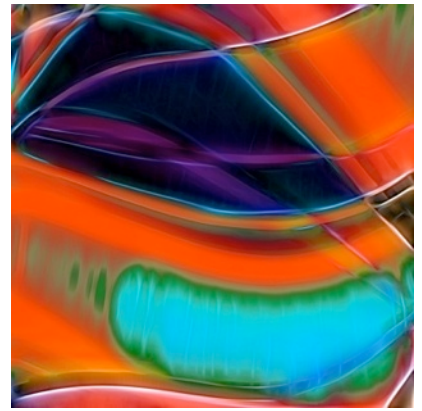


SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REGULATION IN CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES



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Parents and educators often wrestle to find a good middle ground between not asking / expecting enough of their kids or students, and asking / expecting too much. The ground is even harder to find when a child has some kind of emotional or learning disability or other special educational and/or psychological need. Some questions that come up are:

- How will I know how hard to push?
- What if she says she can't?
- Do I let him off the hook too easily?
- She says I'm unfair. Am I?
- When can I stop feeling sorry for him?
- When can I *start* feeling sorry?
- When can I stop serving as his memory bank?
- When is it okay for me to feel angry?
- When I do, can I tell him?

Enabling:

- doing something for your child that she could do for herself
- doing something that she can't do for herself yet, but needs to begin learning to do
- lowering standards so that she "makes the grade"
- telling your child she doesn't need to do it because of her disability/problem
- protecting your child from the consequences of her choices

Helping:

- providing the support your child needs in order to do the task
- demonstrating faith in the child's ability to manage the anxiety or frustration
- remaining warm and emotionally accessible while also holding the child accountable for how she chooses to handle herself while trying to meet the expectations (or when trying to avoid them)

The important thing is separating out *what the child is being asked to do* from *how hard it is or will be for him or her to do it*. It is also important to not allow how you feel about the child's struggle (empathic, pained, guilty) to lower your expectations and compromise her ability to master things that may always be harder for her than they are for others, but that she'll need to do in order to grow up feeling good about herself and ready to face the world on her own.

7 Tips for Parents Making the Shift from Enabling to Helping

1. Express to your child/teen that you really are on his side, even if it doesn't look like it at the time.
2. Tell him that the other way of handling things (over-accommodating, protecting from stress, shielding from the consequences of his actions) seemed like a good idea at the time, and that maybe it was for a while but it's not any longer, and that you're going to try some new ways to help him take better charge of his life and responsibilities.
3. Remind him that you will always be available to help, but that there will be times when he won't like the help you are willing to offer.
4. Explain that you are willing to let him struggle with something, or even fail at something very important, in order to help him get over the idea that he can't do something, or shouldn't have to, or doesn't need to do it as well as others have to.
5. Assert that you are willing to insist on things you think are important, even if it causes conflict.
6. Be prepared for your child or teen to carry out his threat to make life miserable around the house or embarrass you in public. Let him know that if he follows through with it, you will define it as a choice he's made, and impose some type of consequence in order to incentivize alternative, more constructive responses.
7. Go back to communicating that over-helping him does him a disservice in the long run and that it's better if he struggles now—when you and others are right there to help him—then later (college freshman, first job after school) when he'll be more on his own.