“Talking to your child about their disability or learning difference”

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Feelings First
- Why Talk to your child
- How to talk to your child
Feelings First - all parents react differently

- Grief
- Denial and frustration
- Depression
- Hopelessness/Helplessness
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Relief
- Adjustment and Acceptance

Your Child has a Disability, Mark L. Batshaw, MD (1991)
Pre- and Post questions for participants

1. Self-determination is
   a) a program my child can enroll in.
   b) a type of accommodation for my child.
   c) too complicated for my child to understand.
   d) a process whereby my child learns to take greater control of his/her life.
2. When I talk to my child about his or her disability, I should:

a) focus on the disability and talk about the many barriers they face; it’s a very realistic approach.

b) overlook or excuse behaviors or poor performance; it’s not their fault.

c) refrain from encouraging or complimenting my child; it only leads to frustrations.

d) have high expectations and praise his/her talents and strengths; modeling good self-esteem will help my child.
Why is it important to talk to your child about their disability or learning difference?

- To teach your child to advocate for themselves
- To help them develop a positive attitude about their differences
- To help them become self-determined individuals
Self-Determination...

refers to both the right and the capacity of individuals to exert control over and direct their lives.

(Wehmeyer, 2004)
To your child, self-determination means...

- Knowing and believing in themselves
- Knowing what they want their future to look like and how to plan for that future
- Knowing the supports they will need to have control of her life
What can **YOU** do to encourage self-determined behavior in your child?

- Encourage your child to make choices about everyday activities.
- Encourage your child to set priorities.
- Help your child identify their interests, preferences and strengths.
- Educate yourself and your child about rights.
What can **YOU** do to encourage self-determined behavior in your child?

- Talk to your child about the process of goal setting including barriers that might be encountered.
- Help your child understand the concept of accommodations and how they can help or hinder educational and career goals.
- Talk to your child about their disability. Get teacher(s) involved to the extent you feel warranted.
How do I talk to my child about his or her disability or learning difference?
Suggestions for Talking to Your Child

- Focus on the child and not the disability:
  - love and cherish your child and his unique characteristics.
  - recognize that your child is more like his/her peers than different.
  - use first-person language that your child will understand.
Suggestions for Talking to Your Child

- Be knowledgeable about your child’s strengths, talents, gifts, interests and learning differences.
  - Begin discussion by talking about the strengths, gifts interests and learning differences of everyone in the family.
Suggestions for Talking to Your Child

- Educate don’t excuse:
  - Stress coping and learning strategies.
  - Know that the expectations that you have for your children greatly influence their achievements for themselves.
  - Children with disabilities are often unmotivated due to feelings of failure, frustration and false labels (crazy, lazy, dumb).
Suggestions for Talking to Your Child

- **Provide feedback for your child**
  - Praise progress and effort as well as results.
  - Give honest and specific compliments.
  - Provide corrective criticism when warranted.
  - Know that by talking to your child you are modeling skills they will need to be self-determined.
References

This power point was adapted from a PPT on Self-Determination www.imdetermined.org


