



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS WITH A CHILD IN A LEARNER SUPPORT CLASS

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What is the purpose of the learner support class?

The learner support class offers individual assistance to children who struggle to learn effectively in a mainstream classroom situation. The children are able to work and learn at their own pace without feeling the pressure of having to keep up with faster learners. They are given work that is appropriate to their ability regardless of their previous grade or their age. The class provides opportunities for children who have fallen behind in various learning areas to catch up on the concepts and skills necessary for future learning. Children who cannot read are re-taught phonics so that they can start reading and those who cannot do mathematics are taught basic addition and subtraction so a true understanding of the concepts can be formed.

Individual assistance is possible because there are no more than twenty children in the class. Most children placed in the learner support class are two to three years behind their peers as far as academics is concerned. As the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is unable to accommodate different classes for each age group or academic level on a special needs basis, the children vary in age from 7 to 12 years.

The children are grouped according to a level rather a grade and do not follow the mainstream curriculum as set out by DBE. The children have to master the same skills as mainstream children, but they do so at their own pace. All the children are taught at different levels according to their academic ability, ranging from Level R to Level 4. As there is no set curriculum with time constraints, the children master the work without feeling the additional emotional pressure to perform within a certain period. The emphasis is on understanding what they are doing.

What does the support class teach the learners?

English: To read, write and spell

Mathematics: To add, subtract, multiply and divide

Life Skills: To develop life skills that will enable the child to reach their full potential as well-adjusted members of society





Why are additional professional services needed?



Teachers teach basic educational skills but they rely on other professionals to assist children in areas when they need specific therapy or social services. These are the people who could help your child on an individual basis, depending on their needs.

My child needs help	Who can help my child?
My child is hyperactive and unable to concentrate or focus on work long enough to learn anything in class.	Psychologist, educational psychologist or psychiatrist
My child has emotional problems that are preventing them from concentrating and learning in class.	Psychologist, educational psychologist or psychiatrist
My child has behavioural problems.	Psychologist, educational psychologist or psychiatrist
My child has problems with speaking and learning phonics.	Speech therapist
My child needs to improve their fine-motor skills (holding a pencil, cutting out or drawing) or gross-motor skills (running, climbing, jumping, skipping lifting, rolling)	Occupational therapist
We have problems at home and my child needs help in coping with everyday life.	Social worker

ADHD – Red Flags

A child who is hyperactive appears to be forgetful, has difficulty organising tasks, won't sleep, fidgets constantly, acts without thinking, talks excessively, loses things, is unable to listen to or carry out instructions, constantly changes activity or tasks, is easily distracted, interrupts conversations, shows impulsiveness, can't wait for their turn, is anxious, shows little or no sense of danger, has a short attention span. (www.worksheetcloud.com)

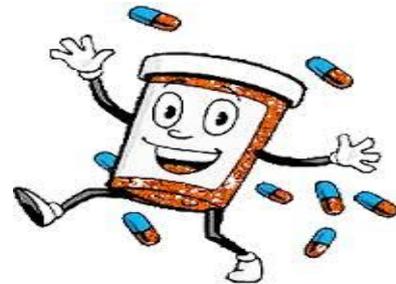
ADHD: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder



Children who get help from professionals such as a psychologist, usually improve at a faster rate as their particular disorder is dealt with. For instance, if your child cannot concentrate and is hyperactive, they will not be able to settle down and work. This will then prevent your child from learning and achieving the necessary requirements to pass at the end of the year. However, if your child's disorder is dealt with, your child stands a better chance of settling down and doing the work, making it possible for them to improve substantially and pass.

What about medication?

If your child is placed on medication for ADHD it is essential that they take it daily, even over the weekend. The medication should be taken after their breakfast in the morning and before they come to school so that they are settled when work starts. Some medication should be left with the teacher in case your child forgets to take their medication, but it is best to take the medication before school as it takes time to become effective.



Why can't my child cope in a mainstream class?

The mainstream classes are much larger which makes it virtually impossible to give individual attention. Children in mainstream classes have to work according to a set curriculum within set time limits. If your child is a slow learner they will not be able to keep up with the pace and will fall behind their peers and fail. If your child is not coping in a mainstream class, they may need to be sent for assessment by an educational psychologist who is trained to identify the areas in which they need additional help.

LSEN: learners with special education needs



How long do children stay in the learner support class?

Children usually stay in the learner support class until they turn 12 years old. There are a number of options after this.

Your child could attend a vocational school where they can learn practical skills to assist them to find jobs when they leave school. A school for the practically minded child offers subjects like woodwork, mechanics, electrical skills, hairdressing, child-minding, designing and cooking.

If your child is doing better academically they will be placed back into the mainstream academic programme where they can complete their matric. They can also apply to attend other LSEN schools that assist children with special needs to complete their matric. These classes are smaller so teachers can offer your child better assistance. In order to get into a school that focuses on academics but caters for special needs children, your child needs to show enough academic ability to cope with the subject matter taught at a matric level.



Does the learner support class carry a stigma?

No, this shouldn't be the case. The children from the learner support class can contribute to the school by joining the netball and soccer teams as well as participating in athletics. Many of the children are talented in other ways and enjoy participating in the cultural activities offered by the school. Once they have overcome their setbacks, most children from the learner support class move back into mainstream classes. The learner support class is known as a class that helps children who have difficulties in learning, but this does not mean that the child cannot achieve in other fields.





Does my child have to do homework?

Yes, doing homework is very important if you want your child to improve. As a parent, you must show an interest in your child's school work. This will motivate your child to do better. Research shows that if a father takes an interest in their child's school work then the child usually does better at school. Most children do not like to do homework but if you provide a comfortable spot and a set time for doing homework and insist that homework must be done, you will find that they get into the routine and it is less of a problem. Speak to your child's teacher and ask what you can do at home to support your child's learning process.



How can I ensure a better future for my child?

Encourage your child to do things that they really enjoy doing or show a talent for outside of the classroom. Involve your child in sport, art, drama or other extramural programmes to develop skills unrelated to academic achievement. Success in one area leads to greater self-esteem and confidence which in turn leads to success in other areas. Try to develop your child's academic skills based on their capabilities. Discuss your child's progress with the teacher so that you can both work at assisting your child to reach their full potential.





Do the children get awards?

Yes, children are offered rewards for achievements and should work towards attaining an award at the end of the year. Some of the awards given are for the achievements in English, maths, art and sports. Others recognise effort and diligence in class.

When should my child go to bed?



It is important for your child to get enough sleep so they do not fall asleep in class. School-going children up to the age of 13 need 9–11 hours of sleep per night.

Getting a child to bed at a regular time ensures that they get enough sleep. Lack of sleep results in mood swings, illnesses, infections and obesity as the body does not have enough time to recover from the day's activities.

Sleep also reduces injuries as tired children are more impulsive and reckless.

Sleep has a positive effect on learning. Sleep is as important as exercise and the food the child eats. Studies have shown that if a child with ADHD sleeps for an additional 27 minutes per night, it helps the child to control their moods and they are less impulsive, which helps them to concentrate on their school work.

Avoid evening activities on school nights and don't allow electronic gadgets such as smart phones, tablets and computers into your child's bedroom. These activities stimulate the brain and upset their internal clock which allows them to relax and get restful sleep. Sleep deprivation is noticed if the child goes to bed one hour later for four nights running. Children with undiagnosed sleep disorders experience problems in learning. Sleep disorders include breathing disorders and difficulties in falling asleep and waking. Snoring disorders should also be seen to as children who snore are more likely to have learning impairments.

(Mahoney, 2014)



How important is breakfast?

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

Research shows that children who eat a nutritious breakfast regularly score higher at maths, are absent less often and have fewer psychological and social problems. Children who do not eat breakfast have more learning problems, they have difficulty making decisions as they cannot concentrate or remember, and they get tired easily. Tiredness leads to moodiness and other emotional problems, which can cause behavioural and social problems.



Foods every child should eat:

Children must eat a variety of foods including:

- Fruit
- Vegetables
- Whole Grains (whole-wheat bread, porridges, cereals).
- Protein (meat, fish, chicken, eggs, nuts, seeds, beans).
- Dairy products (milk, cheese, plain yoghurt).





What foods should a child with ADHD or with hyperactivity avoid?

Children react differently to different foods but avoiding most unhealthy food, leads to a healthier diet. (Vale, 2015)

Packaged and processed foods are loaded with preservatives, artificial flavourings and colourants. These ingredients affect the child with ADHD negatively as they increase hyperactivity and reduce concentration. Parents often notice that when sugar is removed from the child's diet, the symptoms of ADHD are reduced. ADHD children are often sensitive to gluten (found in wheat products) and to dairy products including milk, cheese, yoghurt and ice-cream. Soy can be a good substitute. It is recommended that children with ADHD are removed from these products for two weeks to see what effect it has on the child.

Other foods to avoid include sugar, coffee, chocolate, chips (as they are full of preservatives and colourants), swordfish, fizzy drinks, frozen pizza, yellow vegetables (such as corn and squash), boxed fruit juices with preservatives, fried fast foods (including burgers and sausages) and too much red meat. (Ayles, 2012)

Why a WhatsApp group?



WhatsApp groups are helpful for parents who want to share information and receive information on group get-togethers and activities such as civvies or sports days. They also offer support to parents facing similar challenges.



Helpful websites

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Support Group of Southern Africa (ADHASA)

Email: info@ADHASA.co.za (011) 888-7655

<http://www.adhasa.co.za>

Autism South Africa

Email: info@autismsouthafrica.org (011) 484-9909

<http://aut2know.co.za>

Intellectual Disorders South African Federation for Mental Disorders

Email: info@safmh.org (011) 781-1852

<http://www.safmh.org>

Gauteng Education Department

Email: gdeinfo@gauteng.gov.za

<http://www.education.gpg.gov.za>

(011) 355-0000

Toll free number: 0800 000 789

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