***NOW THAT YOUR CHILD HAS HAD A PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL EVALUATION,***

***…WHAT’S NEXT?***

 **By CAROLE J. SYMER, Ph.D.**

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**1)** Take a deep breath and know that whatever the results are, **you will undoubtedly continue to love your child unconditionally**.

 **2)** **Whatever the results and/or diagnosis**, there will likely be different courses of action from which you will choose to address the areas needing strengthening.

 **3)** In all likelihood, you will **not want to do anything drastically different tomorrow**.

 In fact, before you do anything, take time to **read the report in detail**. Get in touch with the evaluator, if needed, as you may have more questions (e.g., about your child’s specific test scores, overall impressions, as well as specific recommendations). You may want to ask the evaluator for recommendations of books, websites or organizations that you could refer to for more information about your child’s specific areas of weaknesses, if these were not provided. Learn more before embarking on any major changes in your child’s educational plan.

**4)** **Research your options for ‘treatments’**….both locally and beyond. Getting more information about your child’s areas of difficulty takes time. Putting together a team that you can rely on to help you make decisions about your child’s education is crucial and should not be done overnight. Even if you have been provided a lengthy list of recommendations, you probably will not want to implement them all at once. Choose two or three to start with and reassess the gains in three months or so.

**5)** **Your child’s motivation** for any strategy or therapy is essential. A child’s willingness to try something new is often dependent on his or her appreciation of their potential benefit. If you witness a drop in your child’s motivation, consider that this may be due to a variety of reasons, including an expected reaction born out of a need for more information. Your child may be feeling frustrated or embarrassed about why he is seeing a tutor or learning specialist. Providing him a little more information about what specific learning needs he or she has may go a long way in restoring his ‘spark’.

**6)** You will need to gauge **how much information from the evaluation your child needs**. This will vary from child to child and will change as your child develops in emotional maturity, as well as skill. For example, if your seven year old has been upset about his reading difficulties, reassure him that “Now we understand more and know what to do to help.” On the other hand, if your child seems genuinely unaware of his or her areas of weakness, it may be necessary to provide information more slowly. Start by saying something like, “You are an important part of your school’s learning team” and “We are in the process of finding out more about how you learn best.” Adding something like “Not everyone learns the same way” can provide your child a context for appreciating his or her unique strengths and weaknesses as a learner.

**7)** Keep in mind that **demystification** is a ***process***. It will take time for your child to understand his strengths and weaknesses.

**8) Periodic psychoeducational re-evaluation** is imperative to update and/or **clarify the picture** **further** as your child grows. Most schools require re-evaluation every three years. Occasionally, a brief re-evaluation of specific areas every 12 to 18 months may provide important feedback to know if the remedial plan is working.

 Keep in mind that as your child benefits from the remediation or support s/he is receiving, some of her current challenges may start to fade. Nevertheless, any increase in academic demands at various phases of your child’s educational life usually requires revising the approaches used. **Confer with your team regularly** for their observations and share with them your own**. They may not know how your child is feeling about the strategies they are using and you may be pleasantly surprised to hear how much progress he is making**.

**9)** If your child is showing **an increase in emotional ‘fall out’**, confer with the team, as well as the evaluator in order to find out if this is expected or if a change in the educational/treatment plan is needed.

**10)** Don’t forget to **celebrate every success** your child achieves along the journey. Congratulate yourself as well for all of your effort! You are both an essential part of your child’s learning team!

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***NOW THAT YOUR TEEN HAS HAD A PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL EVALUATION,***

***…WHAT’S NEXT?***

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**1)** Take a deep breath and know that whatever the results are, **you will undoubtedly continue to love your adolescent son or daughter unconditionally**.

 **2)** **Whatever the results and/or diagnosis**, there will likely be different courses of action from which you and s/he will choose to address the areas needing strengthening.

 **3)** In all likelihood, you will **not want to do anything drastically different tomorrow**.

 In fact, before you do anything, take time to **read the report in detail**. Get in touch with the evaluator, if needed, as you may have more questions (e.g., about your adolescent’s specific test scores, overall impressions, as well as specific recommendations). In all likelihood, your teen will need to receive some feedback directly from the evaluator. This is an essential step in fostering your teen’s growing independence and can serve to relieve his or her worries about his difficulties (e.g., as he may be wrongly concluding that he is not bright and/or overgeneralizing his areas of weaknesses).

 Together, you and your teen may want to ask the evaluator for recommendations of books, websites or organizations that you could refer to for more information about your teen’s specific areas of weaknesses, if these were not provided. **Learn more before embarking on any major changes** in your adolescent’s educational plan.

**4)** **Research your options for ‘treatments’**….both locally and beyond. It is important to involve your son or daughter in that process. Putting together a support team that you both can rely on to foster her independence and help her learn to self-advocate is crucial. Even if you have been provided a lengthy list of recommendations at the time of the evaluation, you probably will not want to implement them all at once. Have your teen choose two or three to start with and reassess with him the gains in two or three months.

**5)** **Your teen’s motivation** for any strategy or therapy is essential. His or her willingness to try something new is often dependent on his or her appreciation of the potential benefit. If you witness a drop in his or her motivation, consider that this may be due to a variety of reasons, including an expected reaction born out of a need for a deeper understanding of himself. He may be feeling frustrated or embarrassed about why he is seeing a tutor or learning specialist. Providing her more information about her specific learning challenges may go a long way in restoring her ‘spark’ and sense of personal agency.

**6)** You will need to gauge **how much information from the evaluation your adolescent needs**. This will vary from adolescent to adolescent. However, the general ‘rule of thumb’ is that as he or she develops in emotional maturity and as the academic demands increase, he will need more information. For example, a sixteen year old preparing for college will likely need more details than a pre-teen might. In either case, however, the goal is to help him internalize a clearer picture of himself in order to be able to negotiate for his educational needs in high school and beyond. Ideally, as she understands himself more, your expertise, as a parent, will be less needed. This may be difficult to imagine right now, but with the input of a team, you will be able to foster your teen’s growing need to self-advocate.

**7)** Keep in mind that **demystification** is a ***process***. It will take time for your adolescent to understand his strengths and weaknesses. However, it is crucial that his or her self-knowledge and capacity for self-agency be fostered to enhance his sense of confidence and self-esteem.

 Consider what skills he or she needs to acquire by the time he graduates high school (i.e., to prepare for college, a job, and life in general). These needs may include academic and social/relationship skills, as well as the ability to meet job responsibilities. Your teen may be acutely aware of her shortcomings—an awareness that may be interfering with her confidence in asking for support or clarification on assignments. Although he may have been openly upset earlier on about his areas of difficulty, now as a teen, he may have ‘turned off’ entirely and given up trying. S/he may have developed a level of denial as a means of self-preservation. Likely, he will need your tactful support and reassurance in order to help him think about himself in a different light. There may be a point where professional help is needed. Encourage your teen to speak with an empathic, knowledgeable school counselor or teacher knowledgeable about the impact of learning challenges on self-esteem. If needed, consider arranging another conversation between your adolescent daughter or son and the psychological evaluator. Such a conversation can go a long way to enhancing your teen’s self-knowledge and appreciation of his learning discrepancies.

**8) Periodic psychoeducational re-evaluation** is imperative to update and/or **clarify the picture** **further** as your teen develops. Most schools require re-evaluation every three years. Occasionally, a brief re-evaluation of specific areas every 12 to 18 months may provide important feedback to know if the remedial plan is working. An updated evaluation may also be required for obtaining extra time on SATs and other national college-preparatory tests.

 Keep in mind that as your teen benefits from the support s/he is receiving, some of her current challenges may start to fade. Nevertheless, any increase in academic demands at various phases of your teen’s educational life usually requires revising the approaches used. **Confer with your team regularly** (i.e., together with your teen) for their observations and share with them your own**. They may not know how your teen is feeling about the strategies they are using and you and your teen may be pleasantly surprised to hear how much progress he is making**.

**9)** If your teen is showing **an increase in emotional ‘fall out’**, confer with the team, as well as the evaluator in order to find out if this is expected or if a change in the educational/treatment plan is needed. It is important to include your teen in those meetings, in order to enhance his growing need for independence and autonomy.

**10)** Don’t forget to **celebrate every success** your teen achieves along the journey. Congratulate yourself as well for all of your effort! You are both an essential part of your adolescent’s learning team!

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