

Let's Talk Learning Disabilities

EPISODE 19

Welcome to Let's Talk Learning Disabilities with Laurie Peterson and Abbey Weinstein. Laurie & Abbey spend their days talking about dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and ADHD. They talk to parents of struggling students and adults who have had a lifetime of academic challenges. They want to share those stories, along with their own insights with you. So, *let's talk learning disabilities.*

Laurie: Hello. Welcome to episode number 19 of let's talk, learning disabilities. This is Laurie,

Abbey: and this is Abbey

Laurie: and we are excited that you're here today. We are recording this a little bit early, but we are going to hopefully release this just in time for back to school. Some people find that time. Very exciting. And others find it little stressful and overwhelming.

Abbey: There's already school supplies out in stores.

Laurie: Seriously. This is like, we just got through the 4th of July. So yeah, exactly. They're pressuring you to start thinking about school or, right.

Abbey: Yeah, because they got to hurry up and get this stuff out of the way so they could put the Christmas decorations out.

Laurie: That's right. All right. So we are going to cover kind of three main areas today of back to school. When it comes to learning disabilities, we could spend hours talking about all the back to school preparedness, but we're

going to focus on learning disabilities and receiving support services. So we're going to talk about if you've already been receiving them like you or your student were receiving them in the spring, and you're just continuing on this year, or if you have been newly diagnosed or your child has been newly diagnosed since school ended and you're starting new support services in the fall. And then finally, we're going to talk about. What's going to happen when you go to college this fall. So I'm going to let Abbey start with reviewing some really important information about if you've already been receiving services or your child this past spring.

Abbey: So, um, in order to help prepare for school, I think one of the most important things is to make sure you have a current copy of your plan or your student's plan, whether that be a 504 plan or an IEP, an individualized education plan, make sure you have a current copy. The most current copy at some point last school year, the plan was probably reviewed and it may have been amended or revised or whatever. So make sure you have a copy of that plan and you know what's in it. It's also make sure that you don't need to make any changes. Have things changed. For example, over the summer, has your students started struggling in an area they didn't struggle in before, or have they made progress in areas and maybe no longer need a certain type of accommodation or support? Did they go through a dyslexia therapy program? Did they do remediation and tutoring, occupational therapy, patient on therapy, therapy, age therapy, have they gained new skills? Because if you feel like their services and supports need to change, then you can contact the school and schedule a meeting. Whether it be an IEP team meeting or a 504 meeting to revise the student accommodation plan, that individual accommodation plan.

Laurie: And here's the thing, last year services were wanky, right? We were, it was a weird year. A lot of kids didn't probably get the services that they needed. So you may be looking at things the other direction, too, right? Like we were doing fine until last year, but because we didn't get the support we needed now we're struggling in this area too. So we need to address that.

Abbey: Right. You might need more support than you've needed previously.

Laurie: We just got to make sure we address it.

Abbey: That's right. Exactly. So you can send a copy of that plan to the new teachers. Once you find out your students or your teachers, or course instructors, you can send them a copy of your individual accommodation plan or your IEP plan, and just make sure they're going to get that at some point. School starts, but sometimes it takes a few days or even a week or two for those to be distributed to new teams.

Laurie: And usually they're put in the teacher's mailbox with a bazillion other things for the beginning of the year. And so in the app for the IEP be specific. So not the whole thing. Not the whole 700 pages on that.

Abbey: Yeah, I think from the IEP, um, oftentimes the IEP document is usually about 20 to 30 pages in it. A description of present levels of academic achievement and functional performance. It includes all of them. Topics about services, supports graduation plans, um, some relevant, some relevant, right? The most important pieces of an IEP to send to teachers would be the accommodation pages that list all the accommodations you or your student receives and the schedule of services that out. The services they receive. For example, if they're in special education and they receive say speech therapy, 30 minutes, twice a week, or they go to the resource room for support every day for 45 minutes or twice a week for 30 minutes, whatever it be. I think the accommodations and the schedule services are the most important pages to send to the teachers from that IEP, along with the, um, state testing accommodations section that outlines those accommodations that, it has been agreed upon that your student is going to be able to receive on state testing because you want to ensure that they're receiving those accommodations throughout the school year and for tests just regular six weeks, nine weeks tests or benchmark tests in order to be able to receive those accommodations for state testing. So send those appropriate doctors. To the teachers, when you find out who those new teachers are, additionally, it's a great way to introduce yourself and open up that line of communication to show. This is me. And I'm going to be communicating with you often. This is my student, little Johnny or little Lori has a learning disability in this area or has ADHD. These are the types of supports he or she needs. Um, this is the type of environment he thrives on. This is the type of structure he needs to be successful. He does best sitting next to this type of student or sitting away from this type of student.

Laurie: Teachers appreciate that information. They don't know these kids. They've got 20 to 30 new little bodies coming into their room and they don't know any of these kids unless you've, they've had a sibling, but, you know, chances. They don't know him. So any little bit of information like that, I love that kind of extra information. That's not maybe in your 5 0 4 plan or your IEP.

Abbey: Really. I love to know that information too, about my students. And before school starts is when they're going through a lot of in-service training. Meetings. They're not spending a ton of time setting up their classroom and looking at paperwork for their upcoming students, but they will get time to prepare for those students and even arranging desks and there the layout of their classroom, um, knowing the types of students you're going to be having in your classroom can help kind of drive the way you structure your classroom, schedule the way you set up that physical environment, even. So the more information you can share with the teacher. Within your special needs or different learning challenges or your student can be really helpful to the teacher.

Laurie: Maybe also review some of what worked and what didn't work the year before. Now, obviously again, this year, last year was weird and everyone's going to say, well, online school didn't work for us, but you know, in another. And if you did go to in person school or in another year, you know, giving them some information like, Hey, this is kind of what we did last year. It seemed to be really, it worked really well. We saw some success. Um, maybe talk to that teacher about it, you know, maybe you might want to connect with his fourth grade teacher and just get some more information from her, but again, more information the better.

Abbey: Absolutely. I agree. Um, and then make sure that your student actually knows about their own difficulties and their own accommodations that they have in their accommodation plan, because it's important for them to learn to advocate for their own needs, to be able to say, Mrs. So-and-so, I'm supposed to go to the testing center for my test or a small group setting, or I'm supposed to get the test read to me, or I'm supposed to get extra time.

Laurie: I need a copy of those notes.

Abbey: Exactly. I need frequent. I need to take a break right now. So it is important for you to have, um, to know all about your own needs and your accommodations that are in your plan as well as your students. So that's important. And for those younger kiddos, I think that, you know, sometimes parents don't want their stuff, their children to know that they have a learning disability and at a very young age, it might be hard for them to understand. And they can't grasp that you are bright, you just learn differently. Right? Past, you know, I would say second grade, third grade, I think it's perfectly okay to explain to your child, you have a brain that just learns a little bit differently. You're very smart. You're very capable. You just need a little bit of support to help level the playing field and make things fair and equal for you.

Laurie: I totally agree. And I feel like it's almost a disservice. By not sharing that information because it doesn't allow them to advocate for themselves, for those, for those accommodations. And so if they are just sitting there and they don't know that they should be getting something and the teacher misses it, then they're not being provided the opportunity to show what they know and give their very best effort. So I think it's important for them. We all have things we advocate for, you know, it doesn't have necessarily always end up in a plan, but even as an adult, we have things we advocate for. So I think it's important to be okay. Stating your needs. So with all of the scenarios we're gonna talk about today, I think it's important for the student to be aware of their accommodations and be okay asking for them.

Abbey: I think so too, at any age, be comfortable with that. That's right. So those were pretty much the most important pieces. If you're already, if you've already been receiving services under special education or 504 in preparing for the school year and getting ready for those supports.

Laurie: Just reiterating it with the school.

Abbey: Exactly. Making sure everyone has a current copy or that they're not there doesn't need to be any changes made. If you feel like back to that for a moment, if you do feel like things need to be looked at again, you have every right as a parent, or if you're over 18 to say, I want to review my

accommodation plan and let's look at it. And talk about what I might need place for this upcoming year. Exactly. You want it to be the most appropriate.

Laurie: Absolutely. Okay. So if you are, had just been diagnosed since school got out or towards the end of the school year and the school really hadn't put a plan in place. Things are going to look a little bit different because you're not going to have that plan then to share. So what you really, the very most important thing that we tell parents when we, when we do testing over the summer, is that probably now or within the next week or two. Staff's back on campus. They're there, they're working, especially the administrative staff, which is who you're going to need to contact. So usually 98% of the time, it's the school counselor. So you want to go ahead right now, if you haven't already and send that school counselor an email and say, Hey, we had some testing done. It turns out that Johnny, you know, has ADHD. And we'd like to set up a time to meet, to put together an accommodation plan under 504 or. We feel like maybe he might need special education. We need to get that ball rolling. You want to get that going as soon as possible? Because one school. It takes forever. That's what you're going to get the year. You got kids moving in from other cities and there's all kinds of stuff happening. So to get those, you don't want to, you don't want it to be October before they're getting any kind of support. So you want to get that in now. See if you can even meet before school starts, that would be an ideal plan put together so that when your child, or when you show up on the very first day of school, It's there it's done.

Abbey: And that is feasible. Like you said, staff administrative staff are back even well before the teachers come back. So if you contact the school, the school counselor and make it known in writing that you're requesting a meeting to occur. As soon as possible. So that little Johnny does have a good plan in place. On the first day of school, when he steps foot on that campus, when he steps foot in those new classes, they can do everything in their power to make that happen.

Laurie: And too though, you'll find out teachers and schedules just like everybody. Still email those teachers and say, we don't have a formal plan in place yet, but we've had this testing done. I'm waiting for our meeting to

happen. Here's some things I'd like you to be aware of in the interim, you know, until we get that going and is still okay. Again, to share that same level of information with the teacher, um, or teachers. And, and let them know that you're happy to answer any questions that they have about it, or, um, usually the report, the diagnosis report that you have has a page with a, you know, recommendations, maybe share that page with the teachers until you have a formal plan, but you definitely want to keep communication, I think is going to be our biggest key for all of these days. You can't give them too much information, be that naggy parent, it's your child, it's their, you want their school year to get off to the very best start ever. So really, and that good communication is, is key to success between home and school. And so let them know that you're going to be a parent, that you're open to communication, and you want that open communication back and forth. And again, make sure that your student understands their accommodations and that they know the kinds of things. That they're going to need. They understand their challenges and their strengths too. Right. But why are they going to need some of the support so that they can be a part of that conversation as well. So it really isn't all that much different than if you already had services last year. Other than that, You just don't have a plan to share. Right? You're still working on making one, but don't let them drag it out.

Abbey: Don't let them drag it out. Exactly. And also, you know, you want to communicate regularly with the teachers about ongoing progress throughout the school year. Um, whether you have a new diagnosis and you're just starting to receive support services, or you have existing support services in place. I think it is important. For parents to communicate regularly with the teacher about the student's progress, rather than waiting until you get that report card. And you find out that little Johnny is failing a class, or you get the progress report halfway through the nine week grading period, and you find out there's six missing assignments, and then it's overwhelming to try to catch up and complete those assignments. And you're having to do it at home. As, as, as current work is still coming home and new skills are being taught every day.

Laurie: And that is another really great thing to think about. Find out. If you're not familiar with the online system for the school, where do they post grades? Where do they post assignments?

How, where's the teacher's website, all that kind of stuff that your school offers. Every school right now is posting something online. And we all know that some teachers are great about getting it up. You know, very efficiently and quickly others are not. So if you're noticing a grade hasn't posted, you know, making sure you email the teacher, but you've got to know where to find that stuff, where to find the syllabus. You know, it's really easy for us to keep up with our kids these days because everything's online. I can go online at any time and see what my child has due, what's missing when the test is. And while I'm not going to do that forever. Up to a certain point. It's totally okay. To help support them that way. So start familiarizing yourself. If you haven't already with what's out there, what your school offers and how they get that information out there.

Abbey: Some of those student management systems even have alerts where the parent can get an alert that Hey. Posted or, Hey, there's a failing grade or, Hey, there are missing assignments.

Laurie: Can I just tell you how glad I'm we didn't have this kind of stuff?

Abbey: No, I am so glad. I mean, it probably would have benefited me and I would have done better, but I am glad as well.

Laurie: My parents didn't really know what they're sending the mail for the report card.

Abbey: Exactly. Anyway, so now let's talk about, um, The transition from high school to college for students with learning disabilities. If you're just starting out college, what are some things, Laurie that you think would be crucial to do over the summer before school starts mostly universities. Aren't starting til the end of August, right? August to the end of August. So there's time to prepare for starting college.

Laurie: So if you have not already contacted disability services, that is the absolute first thing you do. And here's the thing. If you've got a student that has a learning disability of any kind, and even if they didn't really use a lot of accommodations in high school, Put them in place in college. College is a different beast. The expectations are different. The workload and the demands are different. You know, I tell students all the time, you may only

have one class that you want this one particular accommodation for, but you'll be really glad you have it. So reaching out to disability services, which is the name of the office on 98% of the campuses, disability services, disability support, student access services, somewhere in that. Um, and try to get in and meet with them before school starts. It's going to be sending them a copy of your documentation of your disability. Sometimes they want to see what you got in high school, if you had anything in high school, but if you didn't have anything in high school, that's okay, they'll still accommodate you. And I think that's the best part about college is that it doesn't matter what happened in the past. You have documentation of a disability and it shows that you would benefit from these accommodations. You're going to get them. So put them in place. It can't hurt and, and you don't have to use them for every class, but they're there. So that's number one is to get in contact with them set an appointment, get your documentation over to them. They're busy. There's a lot of kids there that are using these services. So you may not get an appointment before school starts. If you're already. At a place where you haven't contacted them. I always tell parents during orientation is the time to do it. When you go for orientation, you set up that time and you're done. But if you've missed that, then now is the time to call.

Abbey: And I was going to add too, it would be really beneficial for the student and it would look really good for the university to the university and to those that are going to be working with your student, if the student is the person that initiates that contact with disability services, rather than the parent, because they're now their own advocate for their own needs. They're the person that's going to share their disability documentation. That's going to talk about what they need as far as accommodations and the school is going to want to work with the student.

Laurie: Oftentimes they won't talk to the parents, because of the fact that the child is now an adult.

Abbey: Exactly. Once you're over 18, you're an adult.

Laurie: They have to sign permission to allow the parents. Access to any of that information, which is crazy to me, but it's how it works. So yes. Encourage your student to make that appointment and start that ball rolling. Here's the thing about college though, that I think most of the transition is

that where it is the hardest is that in high school, you've got mom and dad that are keeping up with things. You've got a case manager, you've got all your teachers have a plan everybody's on the same page, lots of reminders. Oh, don't forget you get your test in the, you know, I'm sending your test down to the learning lab. And getting in college, nobody does that. Right? If you don't use it, you lose you. Nobody else cares. Nobody's going to chase you down to make sure that you remember where your test is or that you get this copy of notes. So this is where you learn how to be an advocate for you. Really comes into play. It's so important because we've seen students that we've sent off with accommodations and they don't use them and they struggle and they struggle.

Abbey: Exactly. And there's, it's a big transition to going from being surrounded and held up by a whole support system to being out there on your own with less structure, less support, less reminders, mom and dad. Aren't there now. You might be living in the dorm. There's a lot of distractions right around you. There's a lot of, um, Easily accessible distractors, like friends and parties and fraternity and sorority functions and different things. And no one's even making you go to class. So that in itself causes challenges when you're in school and I have a learning disability, um, you you're going to need those supports and you want them to be in place.

Laurie: I think that we see a lot with the kids that come here. After their first semester or first year, you forget that in high school, you have homework every day. There's all these daily grades. So you can bomb it test and still really do well in a class. Whereas in college, yeah, maybe like a paper and a midterm and a final, and maybe a project they're going to be four or five grades that make up your entire grade for that class. The studying is so much different than the time and effort you put into all of those things is so much different than just doing a homework assignment and getting a completion grade a 100. And now you've got a 100 daily grades. Exactly what happened in college. Right?

Abbey: Well, and also with studying, you know, when I was in school, a lot of times when I was in high school, I could study the night before a test and do well on the test because I was able to remember it now. I don't know if I were. For several weeks or months after, but I was able to retain that information well on the test, like you said, the level of the rigor of the

curriculum, the level of reading, the level of the test, let me just amount in college is so much higher. And so, yeah, you're going to find a lot of times there are students that were able to get by in high school and in middle school with barely test studying at all, easy breezy, just sitting in class, taking it all in and they can do well on tests. And that is a big shocker when they get to college. You know, that might not be the case. So start planning out, um, an organizational system for planning ahead. Once you get your syllabus or those syllabus, and you know, when you have upcoming tests, put them on a calendar and then backtrack plan. If it's the test is next Thursday or the third Thursday of the month, put some things on the calendar for study for this test again, study for this test review notes. Right. And so, you know, encourage your student, or if you are a college student, make sure you have a really good organizational system in place, whether it be a PA, a paper planner, a digital planner, or using your tools that are available on your smartphone. Um, that's something too that you can do to prepare for college, is make sure you have really good organizational system.

Laurie: That you can use if you don't, if these are not your gift, your child's gift, your gift as a parent, your gift as a student, then employ somebody that can help you because this is the key to your success. And so find someone who can help you now lay out some strategies that you can walk in day one. And you've got a plan you've got, you've got a system. I do believe that's probably the hardest of just knowing when to study what and how to use your time. And because you have all of a sudden, so much time. Yeah, it feels really good to not have to go to class all day.

Abbey: Yeah. And it's sometimes harder to manage time when you have. Um, sless filling it. Yeah. And they might have a schedule where they have a class in the morning and then they may not have a class again until 11:30 or 12:30 or 1:00pm in the afternoon. So it's easy to think. I'm going to come home and relax and watch TV and work out and do things. You know, go, they have to get into a routine of really establishing, okay. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday or Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday in between classes, I'm going to study, I'm going to go to the library. That's another thing. In addition to the organizational systems, I think it's important to. For college students, incoming college students, for sure. But all college students to already figure out where's going to be your best study area. You know, for me, I didn't do well at home because there was distractions. There were things I

could find drawers to clean out. I had a roommate there. I had dorm mates, suite mates, but I, I did best in the library or in a coffee shop. Wherever it may be for you try to find and designate what is going to be your perfect study area, a quiet area with minimal distraction, somewhere where, you know, you're going to do best and start using that area and getting comfortable with that area.

Laurie: The other thing to figure out too is what all does your school offer, right? Disability services is going to offer you some accommodations, some more services than others, but yeah. The university as a whole has things like the writing center and some tutoring centers. And that there's, this was a math center. So find out what they have outside of just what disability services offer that they offer to everybody and take advantage of them when you need them. Go familiarize yourself with them. And the other thing that we did talk about with the other two scenarios, but with this one, most importantly, Go talk to your professors or your instructors though. Talk to them. After the first class, go set up a time. Find out when their office hours are. Introduce yourself, tell them that you have an accommodation plan, that these are your accommodations that you're getting, and that you just, you know, you're, you're here to work hard and, you know, beat, make them familiar, make them know who you are. They see a bazillion kids and students, and so make sure they knew who you are. And because that, to me, I think also when you, when it comes to the end of the semester and your grade is teetering on a, on a hump. You know, if they know you and they know you've been in class every day, they know your face and they know that you've been taking advantage of those accommodations, then you know, that could help.

Abbey: You've shown initiative. It's showing you care, that could help, that can push you over that hump into the higher grading. Absolutely whatever you got to do. Absolutely.

Laurie: But definitely, you know, knowing what all the school has to offer, what all. What all supports are available to not just kids with disabilities, but everybody.

Abbey: That's a good point because a lot of schools do have a lot of different supports in there, in place. And you know, a lot of libraries I found out throughout graduate school. Unfortunately, I didn't know this during my

undergraduate time, but the library. Also have small private rooms that you can reserve. So I might, might not have done well sitting in the middle of the library in the work area, but in a private room that I could reserve with a whiteboard, I could spread out all of my different materials, my notes, my teacher notes, my own notes, my textbook, some research articles. Everything I needed, my timer, my highlighters, my colored pens, everything that I use, all of my supplies. I loved all my office supplies, but yeah, that's another good thing to know is that the library is chock full of good reasons.

Laurie: And I feel like now we're in such a non-library age. You know, everyone just looked, you just look online, everything you need. So nobody's going to the library and really do the research like we used to have to do. It is a great place to start. I suppose, students are not used to going to the library for sure. Now.

Abbey: That's crazy, but once you get to college, it's a good resource for you.

Laurie: So as we get ready for back to school, taking advantage of all the services your school offers, whether you're in elementary, middle, high school or college graduate school. Doctorate level they're there. The services are there. You just have to know how to access them. You want to access them early for sure. And get, get something put in place and then community, I think really again, just to reiterate communication, communicating with teachers, with your student, with your professors, with the people at disability services, with your case manager, just keeping those lines of communication open to when something is working, isn't working. Progress updates. It's okay to communicate it. You can never communicate too much I don't think.

Abbey: I would agree. I think it's crucial. So hopefully this helps everybody kind of get a little bit of a jumpstart. Schools should be starting here in the next couple of weeks, by the time this episode releases. So we're going to be really in the throws of back to school. They'll already have everything clearanced at the store by them.

Abbey: I know it's so crazy to think about. So if you guys have any questions, don't hesitate to email us, Letstalklearningdisabilities@gmail.com or if you just have some suggestions for upcoming episodes that you'd like to hear, we'd

love to have some feedback. We have a Facebook group called let's talk, learning disabilities. Have we ever talked about that?

Abbey: I'm not sure if we have

Laurie: Our Facebook group, we kind of did it backwards. We did the Facebook group and turned it into a podcast instead of the podcast to the Facebook group. But whatever, come join us. It's fun. We post some neat stuff and have some really good discussions there as well.

Abbey: There are great resources and articles in there and videos, right. Links to the podcast and even videos of us doing our podcast, if you're ever interested. So that's on Facebook, let's talk, learning disabilities.

Laurie: And I think we're lining up some really fun stuff for the fall, so we should have some good, um, good podcasts. We've got some great guests coming in, so I'm excited about it. So you guys go have a great day. Oh, and don't forget about our YouTube channel. It's under diagnostic learning services. So we have a YouTube channel too, that has all of the podcasts videos with our, we also have some Facebook live videos that are out there. So those are kind of fun too. We just did one last week about MythBusters. So we busted some myths about learning disabilities. So you guys have enjoyed the rest of your summer. We'll be back in two weeks with a brand new episode. Thanks for joining us today.

Abbey: Thanks for listening.

Laurie: You guys come back and let's talk learning disabilities.

Abbey: Bye guys.

Laurie: Bye.

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