

raising great kids

TAP INTO THE MANY RESOURCES & PROFESSIONALS AVAILABLE TO HELP IF YOUR CHILD IS STRUGGLING AT SCHOOL

By resident expert **Perk Musacchio** and guest contributor **Bill Reichle**



“I love homework time in my house!” said no parent ever. Yes, some kids will sit right down and do their schoolwork quickly, correctly and with no supervision. However, that is not the case in all homes! You are not alone if your kids (and you) hate homework. So, what are parents to do when their child is struggling with homework or any school-related problem?

First, communicate directly with your child’s teachers. They see your child every day and will be able to give you honest feedback. Depending on progress and concerns, a conversation with the school counselor may also be helpful. When the concerns are ongoing and/or more significant, despite informal strategies and support, the next step is to make a referral to your school’s Instructional Support Team. A systematic collection of data and input from many sources, including you, will give a very detailed and complete profile of your child’s strengths and weaknesses. An action plan will be designed and implemented, and progress will be monitored over the next several weeks. If little or no progress is made, the team may recommend a psychoeducational evaluation.

And parents—while you may feel frustrated, helpless, and perhaps a little scared about the testing

process—the more information you have about how your child learns, the better equipped you will be to help. If there ends up being a diagnosis, it can actually be a gift. While a label doesn’t define who your child is or what their potential can be, it can be an explanation of why they struggle, and may also open doors to services, resources, and financial help. Labels can also change and don’t have to be forever.

Fortunately, we live in an area with excellent public and private schools that employ a variety of highly qualified staff members. Consider that most public schools employ the following professionals:

1. Teachers with at least a BS/BA in Education, with many having Master’s and/or Doctoral degrees.
2. School psychologists (Ed.S)
3. School counselors (M.S.Ed, MEd)
4. Speech and language therapists (MA, MS, MEd)

5. Occupational and Physical therapists (MSOT, DOT, MPT, DPT)
6. Social workers (LSW, LCSW)
7. Behavior specialists (BA/MA, BS/MS)
8. Mental Health Specialists (LSW)
9. Crisis Intervention Specialist (LCSW)
10. The Chester County Intermediate Unit, which is accessible to all school districts, employs many professionals, and offers a variety of programs.

Given all the amazing resources our schools do provide, they simply cannot do everything. For more individual and ongoing therapy, parents will need to access a private practice therapist rather than expect those services from the school counselor. But how does a parent know when to reach out to community resources? Most parents will go through challenging times with one or more of their children; sometimes it’s part of growing up,

but sometimes professional help is required. Here are other resources that are available:

- Private practice therapists can provide ongoing, intensive individual and/or family therapy to identify problems, make a diagnosis, reframe negative thoughts, develop a toolkit and possibly utilize cognitive behavior therapy. However, therapists cannot prescribe medication.
- A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who can incorporate both the psychological and medical origins of behaviors. They can order bloodwork to rule out underlying illnesses, facilitate genetic testing, make mental health diagnoses, and prescribe medications, if warranted. They monitor the response to medications

based on the systematic feedback shared by parents and teacher(s) until a therapeutic dose and/or the right medication is prescribed. Typically, many psychiatrists work in conjunction with a therapist. In a perfect world, all providers, school personnel and parents will work together to provide a cohesive team approach with the student’s best interests in mind.

- Occasionally, parents will hire an education consultant. These professionals should have experience in the school setting and be well versed in working with children with learning struggles. Sometimes tutoring in a challenging subject can be beneficial. Other times, parents may need someone to help them identify the reasons behind their child’s struggle and acquire the appropriate services from the school district and/or outside resources.
- Many struggling readers have benefitted from a thorough vision evaluation to assess acuity and visual processing. For example, children may have a hard time telling the difference between letters or words that look similar, or they may lose their place when reading. They may experience eye fatigue, headaches or tell you that the letters look blurry, shaky or run together. They may have trouble with hand-eye coordination or copying from the board, and often, these are the kids who cannot read in a car due to carsickness.

As you travel down the road of parenting your children, there will probably be some detours along the way. But you will get there! As a parent, you are your child’s best advocate. It might just take that village of caring family, friends and professionals who will make the difference.

*Perk Musacchio is a retired educator and the co-author of **A Student’s Guide to Communication and Self-Presentation and No Manual, No Problem: Strategies and Interventions to Help Your Child Thrive in Today’s World** and originator of the **PeaceWalk®**. For more information, visit her website at www.skillstosoar.com.*

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NOTE: For UCFSd parents, here are two excellent parent support groups:

- U-PRISE
<https://www.ucfsd.org/departments/special-education/u-prise>
- FOCUS
<https://sites.google.com/ucfsd.net/focus/home?authuser=0>