Avoidance Behavior Patterns Exhibited By Children with Suspected Learning Problems

Avoidance behaviors are common "tools" utilized by children who are experiencing problems in learning. Children will often exhibit these symptoms at home and at school to avoid loss of parental approval, peer humiliation or fear of failure.

Examples include:

Selective forgetting
The selectivity of the forgetfulness usually centers on areas of learning that may be creating frustration.

Forgets to write down assignments day after day
The avoidance of a perceived failure experience is accomplished through the use of this behavior.

Takes hours to complete homework
This symptom also occurs if a child is under tension and cannot concentrate for long periods of time. He/she will tend to "burn out "quickly and day dream the night away.

Finishes homework very quickly
In this type of symptom the child's major objective is to get the ego-threatening situation (homework) over as quickly as possible. Every attempt is made to "rush " through the assignments with little if any care or patience.

Can't seem to get started with homework
When a child’s anxiety level is very high it makes it very difficult to "start the engine." He/she may spend a great deal of time getting "ready " for the homework by arranging books, sharpening pencils, getting the paper out, opening the textbooks, getting a glass of water, going to the bathroom and so on, but never really starting assignments.

Frequently brings home unfinished class work
Students for several reasons frequently exhibit this symptom. The first possible reason is due to a low energy level with problems dealing with tasks involving sustained concentration. The second reason may involve the concept of “learned helplessness” and may arise when a parent constantly sits next to a child when he/she is doing homework. The child becomes conditioned to this assistance and feels helpless without it. The third reason may involve the child's need for attention. Bringing home unfinished class work necessitates some parents’ need to sit with them and complete the work. This "captive audience" of parent attention is reinforced when a parent tries to leave.
Consistently leaves long term assignments until the last minute
Avoidance of school related tasks, especially long-term ones, is a frequent symptom of children with low energy levels

Complaints of headaches, stomachaches and other physical ailments before or after school
Very high-tension levels over an extended period of time may result in somatic (bodily) complaints. These complaints, while real to the child, may indicate an avoidance of an uncomfortable or ego deflating situation. When a child has a pattern of these types of complaints, then the teacher needs to see this "signal" as a symptom of a more serious problem.

Exhibits "spot light "behaviors
"Spot light" behaviors are any behaviors that bring the focus of attention to the child, e.g., calling out, laughing out loud, getting up out of seat, or annoying other children. When this occurs it is usually a release of tension. Some children use "spot light" behaviors to alleviate the tension of academic inadequacy and may even hope to get into trouble to leave the room. Another reason for "spot light " behaviors is control. However, keep in mind that the more controlling a child is, the more out of control they feel. The third reason for "spot light" behaviors is for the sole purpose of gaining the teacher’s attention. However, in this way, the child is determining when he/she gets attention, not the teacher.

For more information visit The National Association of Parents with Children in Special Education (www.napcse.org)