

## Appendix 2. Primary Care Approach to Children with Learning (School) Problems

### Step 1. Understand how problems can overlap

Learning disabilities, emotional and behavior disorders, cognitive impairment/retardation in intellectual functioning, etc.



### Step 2. Have tools to assess the complexity of the child

#### **History and examination:**

- Identify or exclude medical factors (e.g., impaired vision or hearing, childhood development with particular attention to speech and language, neurologic impairments)
- History of emotional or behavioural problems, family discord, etc.

**School Report:** Attendance, concentration/attention, behaviour in classroom, etc

Has cognitive testing been done? Is there a discrepancy between cognitive ability and achievement?

**Neurodevelopmental profile:** Be specific about the nature of problem. Teacher, parents, physician, psychologist, and (when appropriate) the student create the profile — a kind of spreadsheet that describes the student's strengths and weaknesses

**Developmental perspective:** Recognize importance of change over time

### Step 3. Know the resources available [to be able to make appropriate referrals for assessment and intervention]

Advise/assist parents in seeking a psychoeducational assessment -- through child's school or by a psychologist in private practice (cost is approximately \$1500)

### Step 4. Support the family and the child (this may involve advocacy)

**Strengthening Strengths** - Help kids get better and better at what they are good at

**Recommend that parents/child meet with the teacher and the psychologist** to ensure understanding of:

- (1) child's strengths/abilities, weaknesses and how these weaknesses impact both at home and at school and
- (2) the educational recommendations/plan.

**Sources:** Byrd RS. School Failure: Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention in Primary Pediatric Care. *Pediatrics in Review* Vol.26 No.7 July 2005; Levine, MD. Neurodevelopmental variation and dysfunction among school-aged children. In: *Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics*, 3rd ed, Levine MD, Carey, WB, Crocker, AC (Eds), WB Saunders, Philadelphia, 1999. [summary at [www.allkindsofminds.org](http://www.allkindsofminds.org)]; Manno M, Brown A. "Learning Problems in Children: The Family Physician's Perspective", Collaborative Mental Health Care Network, Oakville, June 18, 2005.; Silver LB. Learning disabilities. The primary care role in multidisciplinary management. *Postgrad Med*. 1986 Jun;79(8):285-96. PMID: 3714591; Stein MT, Lounsbury B. A child with a learning disability: navigating school-based services. *J Dev Behav Pediatr*. 2001 Jun;22(3):188-91. PMID: 11437195; Feigin JZ. Clinical features; evaluation; and diagnosis of learning disabilities in children. In: *UpToDate*, Rose BD (Ed), Wellesley, MA, 2004 <accessed March 2007>

