



Supporting Your Child with Learning Disabilities (LDs) and ADHD

A Guide to School Partnerships, Policy, and Advocacy

Parents, guardians, and caregivers know their children in deep and important ways. They see their strengths, interests, frustrations, questions, and day-to-day experiences across home, school, and community. Educators bring knowledge of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school-based supports.

When families and educators work together, they can build a fuller understanding of a child's strengths, needs, and next steps. For students with learning disabilities (LDs) and ADHD, these partnerships can help create a more consistent and supportive experience across home and school.

This resource is intended to help parents and caregivers better understand LDs and ADHD, ask helpful questions, navigate school policies, and build partnerships that support their child's learning and well-being.

Learning About Learning Disabilities and ADHD

Families may begin learning about LDs and ADHD in different ways. Some parents, guardians, and caregivers first hear this language through conversations with educators. Others may encounter it through an Individual Education Plan (IEP), another school-based support plan, a school team process, or a psychoeducational assessment completed through the school board or privately.

When an assessment report is shared, the time available to speak with the professional who completed it may feel short. There can also be a lot of information to take in at once. Families may be trying to understand new terminology while also wondering, "What does this mean for my child?" and "What happens next?"

Before Your Next School Conversation

When reviewing an assessment, IEP, or school-based support plan, it can help to write down a few notes before meeting with the school team.

Write down:

1. One strength you want the school team to know about your child.
2. One area where your child needs support.
3. One question you want answered in plain language.
4. One strategy that seems to help your child at home.
5. One next step you would like to understand before the meeting ends.

These notes can help families make sense of the information they receive and begin building a shared understanding with educators. They also support conversations that focus not only on areas of difficulty, but on the child's strengths, learning profile, and next steps.

Where Do I Begin?

Parents, guardians, and caregivers do not need to understand everything at once. A helpful first step is to begin with trusted information about learning disabilities and ADHD, then use that information to support conversations with educators.

Families can begin by exploring resources available through the [Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario \(LDAO\)](#), including [LD@home's "What Are LDs?"](#) section, which provides parent-friendly information about learning disabilities, ADHD, assessment, accommodations, and learning at home. [Local LDA chapters](#) may also offer community-based information, support, and connections for families of students with LDs and ADHD.

If your child has received a psychoeducational assessment, a glossary or plain-language explanation of common terms can help make the report easier to understand. As you review the report, it may be helpful to note words or recommendations you want to ask about during school meetings.

Families may also wish to explore practical tools, such as graphic organizers, checklists, visual supports, or other learning strategies. If you try a strategy at home, sharing what you notice with your child's teacher can help build consistency across home and school.

Additional webinars, resources, and learning opportunities may also be available through LDAO platforms on topics such as the Disability Tax Credit, accommodations, advocacy, and levels of support.

Understanding the Policies That Shape School Support

Policies can sometimes feel far away from everyday family life, but they shape many of the ways schools communicate with parents, guardians, and caregivers and organize support for students. Policies influence the forms families receive, the information shared before meetings, the language used in school documents, and the expectations placed on families as partners in their child's education.

In Ontario, parent engagement has long been supported through *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools*, which recognizes parents and guardians as valued partners and active participants in their child's education. The Ministry of Education also provides parent-facing information through [Stay involved in your child's education](#), which outlines ways families can participate in and support their child's school experience.

More recently, [PPM 170 – School Board Communication with Parents](#) outlines expectations for school boards to provide families with clear information and to respond to parent inquiries in a timely and accessible way. These policies are important for families of children with learning disabilities and ADHD because meaningful support often depends on clear communication, shared planning, and opportunities for families to understand and contribute to decisions.

In Ontario curriculum documents, parents are often encouraged to talk with their child about what they are learning and to help connect school learning to life outside the classroom. For many families, this means that supporting a child's learning involves work that is not always visible to the school. Parents, guardians, and caregivers may be reviewing school messages, preparing for meetings, helping their child use strategies or assistive technology, organizing paperwork, following up about supports, or trying to understand unfamiliar school language. This work often happens at kitchen tables, during car rides, while making dinner, or in small moments throughout the day.

Understanding the policies that shape school support can help families see where expectations are coming from and how to ask clearer questions. It can also help families recognize that they are not simply “helping with homework.” They are often doing important coordination, communication, and advocacy work that supports their child’s access to learning. Families with greater access to time, flexible schedules, language support, transportation, technology, or familiarity with school processes may be better positioned to respond to school expectations than families without those same resources.

Parent Engagement and School Partnerships

Schools often communicate with many families in consistent ways. These communication opportunities may include emails from the school, parent-teacher meetings, school board communication platforms, Individual Education Plan (IEP) conversations, curriculum information, phone calls, forms, and requests to support learning at home.

Parent engagement becomes most meaningful when families and schools use these communication opportunities to build shared understanding, plan supports, and respond to a child’s strengths and needs. It can also include less visible work, such as organizing paperwork, helping a child use strategies or assistive technology, preparing questions for a meeting, noticing how a child responds to support in daily life, and carrying the ongoing care work that often happens outside the view of the school.

For families of students with LDs and ADHD, this partnership matters because support often needs to be understood across settings. Parents, guardians, and caregivers may see patterns at home that are not immediately visible at school, while educators may see how a child responds to curriculum, assessment, classroom routines, and peer interactions. When both perspectives are brought together, the team can build a clearer picture of how the child’s strengths and needs can inform next steps.

Strong family–school partnerships are built through clear communication, respect, and shared responsibility. Parents, guardians, and caregivers do not need to know all the technical language to contribute meaningfully. Their knowledge of their child is essential, and school teams have a responsibility to make conversations about learning, supports, and decisions as clear and accessible as possible.

Agency and Advocacy: One Size Does Not Fit All

Agency is the ability to make choices and take action in ways that influence our lives. Advocacy is the ongoing practice of speaking up, asking questions, seeking support, and working toward fair access to opportunities. For parents, guardians, and caregivers, agency and advocacy often involve acting on behalf of their child while also helping their child gradually understand and express what they need.

It is important to recognize that advocacy does not look the same for every family. Some families may feel comfortable contacting the school, asking questions, requesting meetings, or using formal school language. Other families may face barriers related to time, work schedules, transportation, language, previous experiences with schools, uncertainty about whom to contact, or fear that speaking up could negatively affect their child.

Having the ability to advocate also does not always mean that a family will experience the outcome they hoped for. Advocacy is shaped by access to information, relationships, confidence, time, and the way school teams respond. When these conditions are supportive, families may feel more able to participate in decisions. When they are not, advocacy can feel confusing, exhausting, or out of reach.

For families of students with learning disabilities and ADHD, it can help to begin with small, clear steps: writing down questions before a meeting, asking for unfamiliar terms to be explained in plain language, bringing someone trusted to a school conversation, or following up in writing after a meeting. These actions can support clearer communication and help families stay connected to decisions about their child's learning.

At the same time, schools and systems have a responsibility to make advocacy less dependent on insider knowledge. Families should not have to know the "right words" or have extra time, money, or professional connections to access support. Strong family-school partnerships make information easier to understand, invite families into the conversation, and recognize that each family's circumstances are different.

Recognizing Barriers and Building Community Support

Not all families experience school systems in the same way. Some parents, guardians, and caregivers may have more time, flexibility, language access, confidence, or familiarity with school processes. Others may be navigating work schedules, financial pressures, language barriers, previous negative experiences with schools, or uncertainty about how decisions are made.

Schools sometimes unintentionally assume that all families can participate in the same ways. For example, a family may be expected to attend meetings during the school day, read complex documents, understand special education language, respond quickly to messages, or advocate confidently for services. These expectations can create barriers when families do not have the same access to time, information, translation, technology, transportation, or support.

Recognizing these differences is an important part of building more equitable family–school partnerships. It helps us move away from assumptions about what families “should” be able to do and toward a deeper understanding of what families may need in order to participate meaningfully.

Community support can also make advocacy less isolating. Families may benefit from connecting with other parents, local LDA chapters, school councils, community organizations, or trusted people who can help them prepare questions, understand school language, and navigate next steps. When families share knowledge and support one another, advocacy becomes less dependent on one person having insider knowledge or extra resources.

A helpful question for families who have had some success navigating the system is: What helped me advocate successfully, and how could that knowledge help another family? Sharing what you have learned can make the path clearer for someone else.

Now What?

There are many small ways families can begin building stronger school partnerships and community-based support. You do not need to do everything at once. Starting with one conversation, one question, or one connection can make a difference.

Families may wish to begin by strengthening relationships with the educators and school staff who support their child. This could include introducing yourself early in the year, asking how communication will happen, sharing what helps your child at home, or requesting clarification when school language or processes are unclear.

For families looking for more practical guidance, [Supporting the Home-School Partnership: A Navigation Guide for Parents](#) offers information about working with your child’s school, preparing for meetings, understanding IEP and IPRC processes, supporting communication, and building advocacy skills.

School events, meet-the-teacher nights, school council meetings, and community gatherings can also create opportunities for families to connect with one another. These

informal conversations can become important sources of shared knowledge, encouragement, and support.

Families who have had some success navigating school systems can also support others. This might include helping another parent prepare questions for a meeting, sharing a helpful parent-friendly resource, explaining a school process in plain language, or encouraging someone to ask for the support their child needs.

You may also consider:

- Sharing parent-friendly LDAO or LD@home resources with your school council or parent network to help build awareness of learning disabilities, ADHD, and inclusive support.
- Asking whether translation or interpretation support is available for families who need it.
- Using translation tools, assistive technology, or other accessible formats to help families access and understand school documents or websites.
- Encouraging school councils to include LDs and ADHD as part of parent engagement or LD Awareness Month activities.
- Checking in with another parent or caregiver who may be trying to find their way through the system.

Advocacy does not have to happen alone. When families share information, build relationships, and support one another, they help create school communities where more students with LDs and ADHD can be understood, supported, and included.

Conclusion

Supporting a child with LDs and ADHD can involve learning new language, asking questions, building relationships, and navigating systems that may not always feel easy to understand. Families should not have to do this work alone.

When parents, guardians, and caregivers share what they have learned, they can help make the path clearer for others. A conversation, a resource, a translated document, a meeting tip, or a simple “I know a way to get there. Let me show you how” can make a meaningful difference for another family.

All children with LDs and ADHD benefit when families, educators, schools, and communities work together. When adults use their knowledge, voice, and access to support one another, they help create more equitable conditions for children to be understood, included, and supported in their learning and well-being.

Author's Note

In this resource, I use terms such as parents, guardians, caregivers, and families to recognize that family structures are diverse and unique.

In my scholarly work and community engagement, I bring a deep commitment to making visible the work that happens in homes to support children's learning and well-being. This includes the often unseen and traditionally gendered labour of organizing, communicating, cooking, cleaning, soothing, encouraging, advocating, and helping children and youth navigate school systems.

I am also guided by the tireless labour of my foremothers, whose intergenerational aspirations and deep commitment to community continue to inspire my work in support of students' educational outcomes and well-being.

Resources

[Supporting the Home-School Partnership: A Navigation Guide for Parents](#) |

LD@home

Provides practical guidance for families on working with schools, preparing for meetings, understanding IEP and Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) processes, supporting communication, and building advocacy skills.

[What Are LDs?](#) | **LD@home**

Offers parent-friendly information about learning disabilities, including how LDs may affect learning, school experiences, and daily life.

[Local LDA Chapters](#) | **LDAO**

Helps families find local LDA chapters and community-based supports that may offer information, advocacy, programs, or connections for families of students with LDs and ADHD.

[PPM 170 – School Board Communication with Parents](#) | **Ontario Ministry of Education**

Outlines Ministry expectations for school boards to provide families with clear information and to acknowledge and respond to parent inquiries in a timely and accessible way.

[Stay Involved in Your Child's Education](#) | **Ontario Ministry of Education**

Provides accessible information for families about staying connected to their child's learning, communicating with schools, and participating in school life.

[Shared Solutions](#) | Ontario Ministry of Education

Offers strategies to help families, educators, and students prevent and resolve conflicts related to special education programs and services.

Author Bio



[Dr. Rashmee Karnad-Jani](#) is a mother of two kind people, a poet, a policy scholar and an avid gardener. Through her intersectional feminist lens, she advocates courageously and fluently for authentic experiences of educational equity and social change in six languages, including Konkani, her mother language.