

**I**ntegra, founded in 1967 by parents and professionals, is an accredited Children's Mental Health Centre dedicated to helping children and adolescents who experience social, emotional and behavioural problems related to their learning disabilities.

We are a registered charitable organization administered by a Board of Directors comprised of dedicated volunteers from the community.

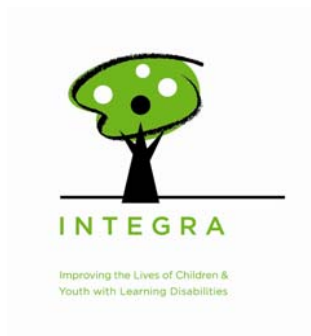
Integra has an experienced and multidisciplinary professional staff that is dedicated to creating and implementing a range of programs.

We serve as a centre for research, practicum placement and continuing education.

Integra is committed to the promotion of a community-wide understanding of the mental health needs of children and adolescents who have learning disabilities, and to improving community-based services for them and their families.

A range of clinical services is provided by Integra, as well as related activities in research and evaluation, and in training, consultation, collaboration and advocacy.

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*tips*

for parents

## Promoting a Healthy Family Environment: 10 Simple Tips

Integra produces a series of *tips* for parents, children and teens. All *tips* are written by Integra staff and can be viewed online at: [www.integra.on.ca](http://www.integra.on.ca)

## A Child's Most Valuable Resource:

Families are considered to be a child's most valuable resource. Family members know each other in ways that other people cannot.

Families:

- Spend time together
- Play together
- Work through hard times together
- Share life experiences

Raising children is rarely easy, but raising kids with learning disabilities (LDs) can be particularly stressful. These kids often need more academic and social support than kids who don't have LDs.

Creating and nurturing a healthy family environment will help kids with LDs to become:

- More confident
- More independent
- Better able to problem solve when facing life's challenges.

## What can you do to create and maintain a healthy family environment?

### 1 Know your child's strengths and difficulties:

Try to understand how difficulties impact day-to-day life while finding ways to build on your kid's strengths in family life. Support activities that play to those strengths.

Also, help extended family (grandparents, aunts and uncles etc) to understand how LDs affects your child so they can be sensitive and understanding. Similarly, in a non-judgmental way, help kids with LDs to understand the impact of their behaviour on family members. This will help kids with LDs to modify their behaviour.

### 2 Try not to think of yourself as the family with a kid who has LDs

Try to keep the LDs in perspective. Look at it as only one part of your child's and family's life.

### 3 There is more than one person in a family:

All family members have their own challenges, and need support and understanding.

Often, kids with LDs require different types of support than siblings who do not have LDs, but all family members have their own needs. Being fair does not mean parents have to treat their kids equally. Parental consistency and family meetings can help families understand and meet everyone's needs. If your family is having difficulty with problem solving, it may be helpful to talk with your family doctor or see a family therapist.

### 4 Parents/ Guardians are important!

Parents/guardians are important because they are the leaders of the family. Taking care of a kid with LDs can be stressful and a healthy person is better able to cope with stress.

Try:

- going to a fitness class,
- going for a walk or
- Sharing a daily phone call with a friend.

If you feel that your stress is getting in the way it may be time to seek professional support.

### 5 Look after your marriage or significant partnership:

Healthy communication between partners is important for many reasons, it can:

- Offer comfort and support
- Help create a more consistent parenting unit.
- Serve as a model for your kid's relationships

It is important for partners to take time to communicate with and enjoy each other. Partners need to listen to each other, validate each other's feelings and accept that sometimes you might not agree or might have different ideas from each other.

### 6 Single Parents need supports too:

Being a single parent can be a highly rewarding but challenging experience. If you are a single parent, it's important to identify resources that you can turn to for parenting and family support, these could be:

- extended family members
- friends
- professionals

### 7 Communication is important:

Kids feel like they matter when their significant adults listen to them. Take time to talk with your kids. Remember that siblings may feel stress even if they don't have LDs. It's important to acknowledge and validate siblings' feelings too.

Some great opportunities for family members to talk with each other include: • Meal times • Bedtime • Traveling in the car • Walking the family pet • Doing something you both enjoy

### 8 Be sure to have fun as a family:

Laughter can be a great remedy to stress.

Try to find humour in situations and find out what makes family members laugh. Find way that your family can have time that is free from the stress of day to day tasks (homework, housework, office work, school etc).

You could: • Watch a movie together • Go on a day trip to a place every on can agree on • Cook • Make crafts • Play games together • Just hang out

### 9 Pay attention to everyone's self-esteem:

Feeling good about oneself lets us try our best and feel hopeful. Self-esteem gets us through life's more difficult times. Try:

- Making a positive comment when a kid is doing something right
- Offer meaningful praise regularly.

Notice your kid's effort even if the outcome isn't what you (or they) hoped it would be.

### 10 Learn to cope and carry on in the face of outside judgments and criticisms:

Comments from the school system, extended family, strangers in public places and suggestions from well-meaning friends can be hurtful, no matter how healthy your family is. Try to find ways to develop a "thick skin":

- Increase your knowledge and expertise about your kid and his/her LDs
- Learn to separate your sense of competence as a parent from how others perceive your child's public behaviour or academic ability.
- Develop confidence in your parenting.
- Join a parent support group to share your experiences with others who have common concerns and who may have new ways of addressing issues.