



Introduction

*“Why did I choose this profession? Why am I here?
Simply put, I’m here to make a difference.”*

—Tommie Lindsey, educator and author of *It Doesn’t Take a Genius*

How many hats are you wearing today? As an educator, of course, you have many. It’s your job to teach a diverse population of students—many who have difficulties with learning. Add to this the fact that children come to you with a wide variety of social and emotional issues and your job becomes considerably more difficult. Some students may have problems with self-control, mood, or socializing that interfere not only with their learning but also with your ability to teach.

You’ve got a tough job—one of the toughest there is. That you’re reading this book shows your deep concern for students’ learning and mental health. In my work with children and their families, I’ve come to know and admire many dedicated teachers. Like you, they are hungry for information they can use to help students who struggle with various problems. That’s why I wrote this book. I wanted to provide practical classroom strategies that teachers can use to best teach and support all students—especially those with mental health and learning disorders.

TODAY’S MAINSTREAMED CLASSROOMS

What is it that makes your job so demanding? Without a doubt, you are expected to teach a wide spectrum of students. Some of your students come to you with academic and behavioral difficulties. This is, in part, the result of the practice of mainstreaming

children with special needs. Gone are many of the special education classes of the past, in favor of keeping these students in the regular classroom.

While good intentions underlie mainstreaming, you can imagine, or may have experienced, some major challenges: How can I help all kids succeed academically? How do I deal with children's social and emotional development? What about training for me? How can I respond to children with mental health problems?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

Only about 25 percent of children needing mental health care receive necessary professional attention, and 70 to 80 percent of those children receive that attention in a school setting.

The task of helping students with mental health, behavioral, and learning problems may seem daunting. The good news is that there are many strategies you can use to support students. *Teaching Kids with Mental Health & Learning Disorders in the Regular Classroom* provides interventions for the regular classroom teacher as well as advice for determining when students may need the help of other school staff or outside professionals.

HOW COMMON ARE MENTAL HEALTH AND LEARNING DISORDERS?

The number of children being diagnosed with learning and mental health disorders is increasing. Up to 10 percent of students have a learning disability. About 20 percent have a mental health problem that interferes with daily life—and half of those children meet the criteria for a diagnosable mental disorder. Add these numbers and you have up to 10 million young people with challenges that can make it difficult for them to learn or behave properly in the classroom. Many of these students have more than one area of difficulty.

More and more it's being acknowledged that academic problems are often grounded in significant differences in *how* students learn, as well as in social and emotional difficulties they may be facing. Multiple learning approaches and innovative instructional techniques are being used to engage learners. Rather than simply penalizing students for misbehavior or low achievement, educators are looking more deeply into what might be causing problems. They're finding that when psychological or learning problems are identified and addressed, students not only feel and behave better, but achieve at a higher academic level.

Providing attention to students' differences can seem to be a great challenge when, at the same time, you're accountable for the performance of your entire class. You might fear that giving too much attention to certain children will keep you from helping the majority of your class achieve state standards and reach grade-level proficiency. The information and strategies presented in this book are meant to allow you to provide individual attention to those students who need it

with minimum negative impact on the rest of the class. You will also learn ways to address problems with student behavior that can interfere with teaching.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

My goals in writing this book are to provide current information on mental health and learning disorders and make it easy for you to apply this knowledge in the regular classroom. Here's what you'll find:

Part I. The Role of Schools in Addressing Mental Health and Learning Disorders

The first part of the book provides background to help you meet the needs of students with mental health and learning disorders. “The Changing Nature of Special Education” features a discussion of the recently revised Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and how it continues to change special education services in schools. You can use the section titled “Assessing Student Needs” to identify students who may need academic help, emotional support, or behavioral interventions. “Effective Classroom Policies and Procedures” offers classroom management guidelines—including recommendations for setting consistent rules and positive, proactive disciplinary measures. You can use “Effective Teaching Strategies for Meeting Diverse Student Needs” to incorporate into your school day best practices for motivating all students to learn. “Establishing a Safe and Caring Classroom” gives you suggestions for making your classroom a place where students feel respected, valued, and safe. The last section of Part I, “Building Social Skills in Students,” provides ideas for fostering social development in children—an area of growth often affected by mental health and learning disorders.

Part II. Mental Health and Learning Disorders

The second part of the book opens with “Terms Used in This Book”—a section with general information on disorders and terminology used by different professionals to describe these problems.

Next you'll find detailed information on mental health and learning disorders. All of the sections are laid out in a consistent way so you can easily reference the information you need. Each section defines the disorder with its symptoms, and then it gives helpful strategies for working with students. Also included are statistics on how common disorders are among children, in-the-trenches stories, treatments professionals may use, and other information that can be helpful in your work with children.

The book concludes with sections you can use to find out more about conditions. “Resources” are organized by disorder and include information on related books, organizations, and Web sites. The “Notes” section provides sources for statistics and information that appear throughout the book.

This book can be used whether or not you know a child who has a disorder. In cases where you already know what disorder a student has, you can find relevant information by referencing it in the contents. When you're not sure about the

existence of a disorder, you can identify potentially helpful strategies by consulting the index and referencing behaviors you have observed. A child who is always disorganized, for example, may benefit from some of the strategies that you'll find for helping students who have ADHD—even though other symptoms might not match up.

I have written this book with regular classroom teachers in mind, but the information can be helpful to many personnel at school. School counselors and psychologists will learn techniques they can use with students in guidance settings. Classroom aides and special educators who work in pull-out settings will find strategies they can use with students to improve academic performance and promote appropriate classroom behaviors. Administrators can benefit from the information on legal responsibilities a school has in the education and care of students with certain problems. Parents and others involved in the care and education of children can also gain insight into the difficulties that may underlie a child's behavior.

THE POWER OF LABELS

Throughout this book, labels are used in a way that accounts for a child being more than a mental health or learning disorder. This means that children are not called "ADHD," "autistic," or "obsessive-compulsive." Instead those affected by disorders are referred to, for example, as "children with ADHD," "students with autism," or "young people with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder." Labeling children ("He's learning disabled," for example) may seem more convenient, but it does a disservice to human beings who are complex individuals with specific strengths and weaknesses. In short, calling people by labels implies that their entire being is characterized by a condition and doesn't allow for the complex nature of their being.

YOUR POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Our youngest daughter was about seven years old when a teacher told us she was concerned because she thought Lisa looked sad. The teacher suggested that maybe Lisa was depressed. Another teacher asked us if Lisa was afraid of teachers. When we asked why, she said that Lisa didn't talk to her as much as other students did.

These comments came as quite a surprise to us—we were used to a bubbling chatterbox at home. As it turns out, we found out that Lisa had considerable anxiety in the classroom. Her anxiety was showing up as shyness. While this story demonstrates the importance of avoiding diagnosing students (Lisa was not depressed), we benefited from knowing that something was not "right." A school counselor helped Lisa with her shyness and anxiety, and Lisa was able to be more comfortable and successful in school.

This story highlights the important role you play in the lives of students. As an educator you may spend as much waking time with children as their parents do. As a result, you'll often be among the first to observe potential problems. While it's important to avoid rushing to judgment, your ability and willingness to share concerns with parents is crucial. Early intervention in mental health and learning disorders can mean fewer and less severe academic, emotional, or behavior problems.

Like most teachers, you probably came to this job knowing that it wouldn't always be easy. Instead, you probably knew about teaching's challenges but chose it because you recognized its importance and couldn't pass up the opportunity to enrich children's lives. Along the way, you've probably realized another truth of the trade: Teaching is one of the most rewarding professions there is. Your work with children makes you a very influential person in a child's future. Lisa can attest to this—she recently received her master's degree in school counseling and is employed at an elementary school.

I hope this book helps make your work even more rewarding. I'd enjoy hearing about how you're using the strategies in your classroom with challenged (and challenging) students. I'd also like to learn about any other methods you have found effective. You may share your thoughts in care of my publisher:

Free Spirit Publishing Inc.
217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200
Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299
help4kids@freespirit.com

Keep up your important work.

Myles L. Cooley, Ph.D.