

# Helping Teens with LD Develop Daily Living Skills

by Arlyn Roffman, Ph.D.

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## **Helping Teens with LD Develop Independent Living Skills** By Arlyn Roffman, Ph.D.

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# Expert Answers



## Helping Teens with LD Develop Daily Living Skills

### Toward Independence: Helping Teens Prepare For Life on Their Own

For teens and young adults with learning disabilities (LD) or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), having a disability is more than an academic matter; the effects of these disorders regularly spill into life beyond the classroom — at home, at work, and in the community. Whether heading off to college or to employment, all young people must develop an array of community living skills to successfully adjust to adult life. These daily living skills fall into six areas:

- meal preparation
- housekeeping
- money management
- getting around (transportation)
- self-care (e.g., hygiene, medical care)
- planning leisure time and activities.

Unfortunately, many teens and young adults with LD and AD/HD find it difficult to acquire these skills. Some of these difficulties derive from the LD itself; others stem from environmental factors, such as an overly protective parenting style. However, with awareness of the potential for difficulties, instruction in the areas of challenge, and careful planning, youth with LD and/or AD/HD can acquire needed skills and move successfully into independent life.

#### What the Research Says

A variety of studies suggest that young adults with LD and/or AD/HD participate less in community life and remain reliant upon their parents long after their peers have achieved independence. One major research study, the National Transition Longitudinal Study-I (Wagner et al., 1991), investigated 8,000 special education students in grades seven and higher as they moved through the next several years in terms of their engagement in work or school, residency outside their parents' home, and social activities. Only 27% of those with learning disabilities were found to be independent in all three domains, and only 50% were independent even in two when they were 3-5 years out of high school. Data from the second round of the National Transition Longitudinal Study (NTLS2) are gradually being released and will continue in the coming years to paint a picture of the transition process for youth with LD and/or AD/HD.

The trend toward extended dependence upon parents may be attributed in part to the tendency for parents of youth with LD and AD/HD to assume too much responsibility for scheduling and arranging their children's lives well into the adolescent years and beyond. Although these parents mean well, their overprotectiveness contributes to a "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 1975) that limits their children's growth. When kids have few chances for decision-making, they miss out on the opportunity to learn from failure, and are unable to develop the self-determination and skills needed to plan and fend for themselves.

“Most teens with LD and AD/HD eagerly anticipate a more independent life beyond the high school years. [Thus] they benefit from opportunities to learn ... independent decision-making.”

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## Toward Independence: Helping Teens Prepare For Life on Their Own

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Like their non-disabled peers, most teens with LD and AD/HD eagerly anticipate a more independent life beyond the high school years. They benefit from opportunities to learn and demonstrate new skills and independent decision-making. The following case histories describe two young women with LD, both 19 years of age and high school graduates, both scoring similarly on measures of intelligence, and illustrate how different parenting styles can help or hinder a teen's development of daily living skills:

### A Tale of Two Teens

One was energetic and outgoing and had led an exciting life during her teen years. She had a driver's license, had held several part-time jobs, and enjoyed spending her salary at the mall, which she frequented with her many male and female friends. She did her own laundry, made her own lunches, and occasionally cooked simple suppers for the evenings when she was on her own. Her history stood in stark contrast to that of the second young woman, whose parents admitted to being "a little overprotective." She had never been expected to assume any responsibility for chores at home, had never, in fact, even made herself a sandwich. She had never held a job, had neither a driver's license nor friends. Even on her bicycle, she had always been restricted to the block on which the family lived. (*Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood*, Roffman, 2000, p. 164)

Denied the opportunity to blossom, the second young woman was caught in the stranglehold of dependence. As soon as she had the opportunity to learn daily living skills, she grew enormously; clearly, she had been ready to move forward toward an independent adult life. Her major constraint had been not the learning disability itself but the attitude of her parents, who had cultivated a prolonged dependence. In contrast, the first young woman had been eased along with both high expectations and a great deal of support from her parents and had developed a number of skills that would serve her well as she left home and began life in an apartment.

### How Learning and Attention Difficulties Impact Life Skills

Even young adults with LD and/or AD/HD who have supportive parents experience challenges in daily living, often directly related to the specific characteristics of their disability. Their challenges continue to ebb and flow throughout their adult years. Consider these examples:

- The young woman who spells poorly will have difficulty filling out forms at her doctor's office.
- The young man who has trouble reading will find it challenging to decipher the washing machine directions at the local laundromat.
- The fellow who is disorganized is likely to lose his keys over and over again.
- The woman who is distracted may start to clean the living room and fail to finish when she picks up a magazine from the floor and stops to read an article that catches her eye.

### The Role Parents Play in Fostering Independence in their Children

If challenges in daily living are predictable and persistent as youth with LD and AD/HD move out of their family homes into the community, why don't schools include more life skills goals in students' transition planning? Middle and high school students with LD and AD/HD would clearly benefit from direct instruction in such practical daily living skills as housekeeping and money management. However, in these days of high-stakes testing, schools tend to be reluctant to commit valuable teaching time to these less academic — though certainly not less essential — areas.

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## **Toward Independence: Helping Teens Prepare For Life on Their Own**

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What are the specific challenges teens with LD and AD/HD face as they move into life beyond the care of their parents, particularly in terms of meal preparation, money management, housekeeping, self-care, leisure planning, and getting around (transportation)? And what can parents do to help them prepare for this major transition? The next articles in this series will focus on essential life skills needed for successful transition to an independent life and will suggest strategies parents can use during their children's middle and high school years to ease them toward that goal.

# Expert Answers



## Helping Teens with LD Develop Daily Living Skills

### Tablespoons and Teaspoons: Teaching Teens the Art of Meal Preparation

The multi-step process of planning and preparing a meal is a daunting prospect for many young adults. For individuals with learning disabilities (LD) and/or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), even organizing a trip to the grocery store can be trying, as it requires putting together a grocery list, locating house and/or car keys, and finding one's checkbook, debit card, or enough cash to pay for purchases.

This article will explain how the characteristics of LD and AD/HD may present challenges for kids who are learning to plan and prepare meals. I will also offer strategies for teaching your child the various skills involved in meal preparation, from planning a menu through kitchen clean-up.

#### Meal Planning

Some people enjoy planning a meal; others find it a chore. The process of planning a balanced and tasty meal requires imagination, a basic understanding of nutrition, a sense of whether the meal being planned is within the limits of one's budget, and the ability to obtain the necessary ingredients.

The table below illustrates some of the ways various characteristics of LD and AD/HD can result in challenges to meal planning.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges when Planning a Meal
Reading	Trouble reading through cookbooks for recipes
Receptive language (understanding written or spoken language)	Problems understanding common meal planning terms, such as "appetizer" or "main course"
Math	Trouble adjusting recipe ingredients to suit the number of people to be served (e.g., "doubling" a recipe)
Writing	Problems making a list of items to be purchased for the meal
Distractibility	Difficulty staying focused during the meal-planning process (e.g., while making up a shopping list of groceries needed to prepare the meal)

#### Grocery Shopping

The chaotic environment of a grocery store can be overwhelming, and working one's way through the aisles and the checkout line can be very stressful. The process of shopping for food is complicated by specific deficits associated with LD and AD/HD.

## Tablespoons and Teaspoons: Teaching Teens the Art of Meal Preparation

The table below illustrates how various types of learning and attention problems can result in challenges at the grocery store.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges when Shopping
Reading	Trouble deciphering aisle signs and food labels
Math	Difficulty understanding unit pricing, calculating the cost of sale items, and tracking the accumulating costs as items are selected and placed in the shopping cart
Visual memory	Remembering the layout of the store and which aisle to go to for certain items
Visual figure-ground discrimination (trouble focusing one's vision on a single item within a "busy" visual background)	Trouble finding a specific brand of bread or cereal among the dozens of choices on the shelves
Distractibility	Trouble staying focused and on task while shopping
Impulsivity	Difficulty controlling "impulse buying" of items that are not on the shopping list

### Meal Preparation

Once food is purchased, it must be prepared. Cooking presents a number of challenges to individuals with LD and/or AD/HD, as outlined below.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges when Shopping
Executive function (organizing, prioritizing)	Difficulty planning the preparation of several different items so they can all be served at the appropriate time during the meal
Receptive language (understanding written or spoken language)	Problems understanding common cooking terms, such as "sauté" or "dice"
Reading	Difficulty decoding (reading the words in) recipes
Math	Trouble measuring ingredients

Chart Continued on Next Page

## Tablespoons and Teaspoons: Teaching Teens the Art of Meal Preparation

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges when Shopping
Visual discrimination	Problems telling the difference between look-alikes (e.g., a teaspoon and a tablespoon)
Fine-motor coordination (ability to use one’s hands and fingers effectively)	Difficulty peeling, slicing, and chopping
Temporal perception (sense of time)	Trouble planning enough time for various parts of a meal to cook, resulting in burnt or under-cooked food
Distractibility	Difficulty maintaining focus and following all of the steps involved in preparing a meal

### Serving and Cleaning up after a Meal

Serving a meal — and cleaning up afterward — requires coordination. It entails choosing appropriate serving dishes and utensils, providing any necessary condiments, and socializing during the meal. Once the meal is over, the dishes must be cleared and washed, any leftovers safely stored, and the table and kitchen cleaned up.

LD and AD/HD can present challenges in these aspects of meal preparation, as described below.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges when Shopping
Executive function (organizing, prioritizing)	Difficulty deciding the order in which food should be served
Spatial perception	Trouble choosing appropriate serving dishes for the quantity/type of food prepared; difficulty washing dishes and pans thoroughly and wiping down the counters and table
Social skills	Difficulty demonstrating good table manners and conversation skills during the meal

### Tips for Teaching Your Teen Meal Preparation Skills

Meal preparation can be introduced very early, with children as young as toddlers getting involved in baking and making simple sandwiches. As your child with LD or AD/HD matures, you should gradually involve him more in the food preparation process.

As you practice the following strategies, keep in mind that it is very helpful for children to hear “think alouds” from adults as they reveal their thought process. While teaching your child to plan and prepare meals, try to model your decision-making by actually saying what you’re thinking as you make your



## Tablespoons and Teaspoons: Teaching Teens the Art of Meal Preparation

choices. For example, you might explain, “We’re having company to dinner, so I’ll buy the big box of rice instead of the small one that we usually buy just for the three of us.” Thinking aloud about each step of the meal planning and preparation process will help your child learn steps that might seem obvious to you.

Here are strategies for teaching meal planning and preparation skills during your child’s middle and high school years:

### At the Grocery Store:

- **Point out the categories of foods and household items and the layout of the aisles.** Note, for example, that all the breads are grouped and that spaghetti and sauce and other food items that tend to be used together are placed in close proximity. As your child catches on, take the next step and ask him to help you locate items throughout the store.
- **Explain unit pricing** and how you make decisions about purchases with unit prices in mind (e.g., “The big box is cheapest, but we rarely eat this, and it’ll just get stale, so I’ll spend a little more per unit and buy the smaller size.”).
- **Have your teen use a calculator to track the accumulating cost of the food being placed in the cart.** Explain that particularly for those shopping within a budget, tracking purchases when shopping is a very helpful habit.
- **Point out the differences among the various checkout lines.** Explain when it is appropriate to use the express lane versus and the regular line.
- **Explain how to use coupons and store membership or discount cards** to save money.

### In the Kitchen

- **Ask your child to be your cooking assistant.** Give him increasing responsibility for unwrapping, slicing, and measuring as he grows old enough to tackle these aspects of the process. Read through recipes together and explain cooking terms (e.g., “chop” versus “slice”) as they are introduced in recipes.
- **Teach your child how to use kitchen knives safely.** Supervise as he practices slicing and chopping until he’s comfortable handling and using knives for various food preparation techniques.
- **Show your child how to use the appliances needed for basic cooking.** Introduce one appliance at a time (e.g., oven, stovetop, microwave oven) and let him practice using it until he can do so safely and comfortably, without your coaching. If he has difficulty remembering the steps involved in using an appliance, write them neatly in a notebook or on a Post-it note near the appliance for him to refer to as long as he needs the extra support.
- **Use cookbooks with photographs and step-by-step diagrams.** Novice cooks with LD and/or AD/HD benefit from step-by-step diagrams that show how a recipe should be prepared as well as photographs that show how the recipes they are preparing will look when they are completed.
- **Color code measuring spoons and cups.** Marking the 1/4 teaspoon and 1/4 cup with red, the 1/2 teaspoon and 1/2 cup with blue, etc. provides an additional visual clue to help differentiate similar-looking items while cooking.

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## Tablespoons and Teaspoons: Teaching Teens the Art of Meal Preparation

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- **Model with think-alouds as you cook, walking your child through the process of planning the timing of different parts of the meal.** Be sure to mention any ancillary needs (e.g., "Since we're having burgers, we'll need ketchup and mustard too."). Planning ahead exactly when each part should be prepared and cooked and creating a chart that outlines the entire process eliminates the need for on-the-spot decision-making, which can be very stressful for any new cook, particularly those with LD and/or AD/HD.
- **Give guidelines for storing leftover food.** Discuss how long foods can safely be stored in the refrigerator and how to properly store leftovers in aluminum foil, plastic wrap, or food containers. Demonstrate how to label and date leftovers to be refrigerated. As foods go bad, show your child how they look and smell before you throw them out.
- By the time your teen is nearing completion of high school, you might **assign him to cook one meal per week for the family.** Many teens find it helpful to verbally walk through the full meal planning process beforehand with a parent and make lists of all steps, from shopping to cooking to setting the table to cleaning up. The need for your supervision will taper off as he becomes more experienced and comfortable in the kitchen.
- **Collect your child's favorite recipes** in a file box to take along when he moves out on his own!

### Recipe for Success in the Kitchen

Planning and preparing a meal is a complex process that requires a broad range of skills. Your teen with LD and/or AD/HD will benefit from explicit instruction in each step of the process as he develops the skills and confidence to tackle this crucial aspect of daily living.

# Expert Answers



## Helping Teens with LD Develop Daily Living Skills

### Playing House the Grown-up Way: Teaching Teens the Art of Housekeeping

Many adults with learning disabilities (LD) or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) struggle in their efforts to maintain tidy living spaces. They admit to having stacks of papers on their tables and desks, food wrappers and soft drink cans on their car floors, and bathrooms that are not cleaned often or thoroughly enough.

Housekeeping entails a variety of skills, including cleaning, laundering and mending clothes, and — in some cases — general upkeep of the grounds. This article will focus on how the characteristics of LD and AD/HD create challenges for teens who are learning how to manage their living areas. I will also offer strategies for parents to help their teens prepare for this aspect of daily living.

The table below illustrates some of the ways various characteristics of LD and AD/HD can result in challenges to housekeeping.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges when Housekeeping
Impulsivity	Tendency to drop belongings “here and there” and to feel overwhelmed by the resulting clutter
Disorganization	Problems with losing belongings when their living space gets cluttered; a tendency to forget to separate dark from light clothes when doing laundry
Temporal (sense of time) problems	Trouble allocating enough time to do a household chore completely
Visual-motor (eye-hand coordination) problems	Clumsiness when washing dishes or dusting; difficulty threading a needle and sewing
Spatial perception	Problems fitting and tucking the sheets while making a bed; difficulty sweeping or vacuuming the floor thoroughly or setting the table with the utensils placed where they belong
Distractibility	Tendency to become distracted in the midst of a chore and to fail to complete it within a reasonable time frame

### Tips for Teaching Your Teen Housekeeping Skills

You can introduce housekeeping skills when your child is very young by having him help with simple chores. As your child with LD or AD/HD matures, you should start asking him to take on additional chores. You may want to create step-by-step checklists for multi-step housekeeping tasks which can be quite stressful for individuals with LD and AD/HD. A checklist will help your child focus on one task at a time and avoid becoming distracted or feeling overwhelmed.

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## Playing House the Grown-up Way: Teaching Teens the Art of Housekeeping

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Here are strategies for teaching housekeeping skills during your child's middle and high school years:

### Cleaning

- **Have him help in the kitchen.** Teach him how to clear dishes from the table; how to wash them by hand or load them in the dishwasher, fill the detergent dispenser, and set the dial to the appropriate cycle; and how to wipe down the stovetop and counters. Later, have him return all washed items to the appropriate shelves and drawers.
- **Introduce cleaning products and techniques** for tackling the floors, toilet, sinks, and shower or bathtub. Point out the directions for use and read them together, making sure your teen understands any key terms (e.g., "toxic"). Demonstrate and talk your way through one cleaning task at a time, and then have him do as you've done. Verbally coach him through each task the next few times until he can complete it without your cues.
- **Think aloud as you dust.** For example, explain, "I'm being especially careful to hold on tight as I move this vase to dust it because it's so breakable" or "I'm using this kind of polish because this shelf is wood, but this polish would ruin the chrome table in the den."
- **Model how to methodically sweep or vacuum a small space**, thinking aloud as you go (e.g., "I'm starting at each corner and sweeping toward the middle so there'll be only one pile to pick up, then I'll know I've covered the whole floor.") Be patient as you observe your child practicing; while these tasks may seem simple to you, they present a very real challenge to those with spatial difficulties.
- **Demonstrate how to make a bed**, particularly how to handle the corners of a fitted sheet. Have your child follow your demonstration until he can do it on his own. Suggest a schedule for washing the sheets.

### Laundry and Clothing Care

- **Use "think alouds" to demonstrate how to do laundry.** Model how to read the care tags on clothing for any special instructions, such as "dry clean only" or "lay flat to dry." Demonstrate how to separate laundry into lights and darks, how to measure and add detergent, and how to load and operate the washing machine and dryer. Explain that laundry wrinkles when it sits for more than a few minutes in the dryer after it completes its cycle. Finally, demonstrate how to remove, sort, and fold (or hang) the laundry and return it to the appropriate drawer or closet.
- **Teach your child how to replace a missing button or mend a simple seam.** Have him watch you thread a needle and sew until he feels ready to do it on his own. If your child has visual-motor problems, he will benefit from using a threader, available in the notions department of any fabric store or sewing center.
- **Demonstrate how to iron clothing.** Start with a flat item, such as a cloth napkin or handkerchief, and gradually advance to shirts and other complex articles of clothing.

Provide step-by-step instructions about temperature and steam settings. Demonstrate how to maneuver the items as you iron them. Supervise your teen as he irons items of increasing complexity until he's comfortable with the iron and can use it safely. Keep in mind that individuals with LD or AD/HD with spatial or visual-motor difficulties may require extended practice in this skill area.

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## Playing House the Grown-up Way: Teaching Teens the Art of Housekeeping

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- **Have your teen go with you to the dry cleaner** to observe the process of dropping off and picking up items that should not be washed at home.

### Miscellaneous Skills

- It may seem like a simple skill, but **supervise your child as he changes a light bulb**. If he has fine-motor coordination or directionality problems, this may be a challenge. Point out that bulbs go in by turning clockwise and come out by turning in the opposite direction. Caution him not turn too tight, as the bulb could break, and that he should look for directions about the maximum wattage that can safely be used in the lamp/light whose bulb is being replaced.
- **Teach your child to tend to houseplants**. By late elementary school, he should be able to care for a plant of his own. Start by having him water the plant. As it grows, show him how to remove dead leaves, fertilize, and re-pot his plant. If he shows interest, give him responsibility for other house plants.
- **Model how to perform yard work**. Show him how to mow the lawn, water plants and flowers, rake and dispose of leaves, and (if applicable), how to shovel snow from your walkway, sidewalk, and driveway. Teach him how to use equipment such as snow blowers and power mowers safely. Supervise your child closely until he becomes proficient in the use of any machinery.

### Independence Begins at Home

Housekeeping entails a variety of skills that your teen with LD and/or AD/HD can readily acquire if he is offered explicit instruction and supervised practice in each. Although he may not ask you to teach him to clean, rake, or do the other chores mentioned in this article, he will be much better prepared for adult life when he has learned these practical skills.

# Expert Answers



## Helping Teens with LD Develop Daily Living Skills

### Dollars and Sense: Teaching Teens Consumer Skills and Money Management

Becoming a responsible consumer is essential for successful adjustment to adult life, yet many adults with learning disabilities (LD) rank handling money and banking as the most difficult among the problems they encounter. Problems in this area are often tied to specific characteristics of LD or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). This article describes common pitfalls and offers parents strategies for launching their teens with LD and/or AD/HD into young adulthood with a foundation of consumer skills and money management know-how necessary for independent living.

The table below illustrates some of the ways various characteristics of LD and AD/HD can result in consumer and money management challenges.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges when Managing Money
Impulsivity	Problems with "impulse buying" beyond the limit of one's budget
Memory problems	Difficulty remembering to record bank transactions (e.g., ATM cash withdrawals)
Temporal (sense of time) problems	Problems remembering to pay bills on time
Organizational problems	Difficulty gathering all the items (e.g., monthly statement, check register, and calculator) necessary to reconcile one's checkbook
Distractibility	Trouble maintaining concentration during the process of reconciling one's checking account
Visual discrimination	Tendency to make errors in calculation due to number inversions (e.g., writing 61 or 19 instead of 16)
Spatial issues	Tendency to misalign numbers in the check register columns, leading to computation errors
Visual figure-ground problems (focusing on one image against a "busy" background)	Problems focusing on each individual line of the monthly bank statement
Reading	Trouble reading store signs (or price tags), notices from the bank, and contracts (e.g., for membership to a gym)

*Chart Continued on Next Page*

## Dollars and Sense: Teaching Teens Consumer Skills and Money Management

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges when Managing Money
Spelling	Difficulty spelling numbers correctly when writing out checks
Math	Problems performing mental math (e.g., estimating how much an item on sale at 25% off will cost, or knowing how much change to expect when making purchases); difficulty performing calculations involved in reconciling a checking account

### Tips for Teaching Your Teen Consumer Skills and Money Management

Consumer skills and money management can be introduced very early, with children in the lower elementary school grades learning the value of the coins and currency they save in their piggybanks and having your guidance when deciding how to spend their savings. As your child with LD or AD/HD matures, you should gradually introduce more complex skills, such as budgeting and managing a checking account.

Here are some strategies for teaching consumer skills and money management during your child's middle and high school years:

#### Consumer Skills

- **Orient your child to a variety of types of stores**, such as the drugstore, grocery store, and department store. In each store, note the layout and the groupings of items. Point out the aisle signs and conduct "think alouds" as you shop (e.g., "We need some Band-Aids™, so I'm going to the aisle that says First Aid. If I can't find them there, I can ask the clerk at the cash register where they are.") By middle school your child should be able to find items she commonly uses (e.g., school supplies, hair products, etc). By the end of high school she should be able to shop on her own at any of these stores for basic items.
- **Help your child learn the sizes of the shoes and clothing she wears.** Too many parents of middle and even high school students with LD and AD/HD continue to choose their children's clothing well beyond the point when this type of control is appropriate. By middle school, your child should be able to choose her own clothing, within guidelines you have set. This is one way you can foster the self-determination necessary for successful adjustment to adult life.
- **Discuss tipping with your teen.** List the kinds of people she might tip (e.g., waiters, bellhops) and how to determine the tip for each person based on the quality of service and the "going rate." When you dine out together, have your teen calculate the tip using a tip chart (available in most stationery stores).
- **Counsel her about credit cards.** Explain how credit cards work as well as the associated dangers of using them. When your teen reaches age 18, numerous banks will start sending her invitations to apply for credit cards. Choose one reputable bank, and have her apply for a card with a credit limit of \$500 or less. Discuss with her what may be charged, and walk her through the process of paying the monthly bills — preferably in full to avoid paying interest while still establishing her credit history.
- **Teach your teen about basic contracts**, such as rental leases, gym memberships, cell phone agreements, and Internet service contracts. Warn her about high-pressure sales tactics that offer a special price "only if you sign up today."

## Dollars and Sense: Teaching Teens Consumer Skills and Money Management

### Money Management

- **Establish a basic budget early in the teen years.** Have your teen list all of her anticipated expenses, including school lunches, entertainment, clothing, and miscellaneous items (e.g., CDs or snacks) and establish a weekly budget to manage her allowance and earnings from any jobs she may have.
- **Encourage her to use a “budget envelopes” book**, an inexpensive and handy tool, available in most stationery stores, which has separate envelopes for each specific budget category. She should place enough cash for her various budget categories in each envelope at the beginning of every week and make a commitment to spend the allotted funds only for the stated purposes. This is a very concrete way to develop the concept of budgeting and is a highly recommended first step in the process of learning how to manage money.
- **Toward the end of high school, teens need to learn how to manage a checkbook and pay bills.** Opening her own checking account is the best vehicle for learning this skill. Many youth with LD and/or AD/HD prefer carbon checks, which help ensure that transactions are recorded. After teaching your teen how to write a check, slip an example of a completed check into her checkbook to remind her of how it's done. Provide a "crib sheet" with correctly spelled numbers to be kept in her checkbook for easy reference when writing checks.
- **Help your teen set up a home office at a desk table** where she can keep all the items needed for successful money management and bill paying, including:
  - o supplies — paper, pens and pencils, tape, a ruler, paper clips, a stapler; stamps, and a calculator
  - o an accordion file, where important papers may be filed under separate headings, such as “bank statements” or “unpaid bills”
  - o a budget book in which she may record expenditures and realistically estimate future expenses
  - o a calendar, which can be used to note the receipt of monthly bills and to record when each is due (Posthill & Roffman, 1991).

### The Role of Technology in Managing Money

Teens who are comfortable with technology may find budgeting software (e.g., Quicken) and online banking services helpful in managing their money. If your teen has access to her checking and savings accounts online, she can check her transactions and balance — and transfer money between accounts — without having to wait for the monthly statement to arrive by mail.

### Building a Foundation for Your Teen's Financial Future

Parents who make a point of teaching their teens with LD and/or AD/HD consumer skills and money management skills will help them avoid many of the problems that surface for adults in this population. When your teen prepares to leave home after high school, assure her that you will continue to be available for support and advice as she puts her new money management skills to practice.

# Expert Answers



## Helping Teens with LD Develop Daily Living Skills

### On the Right Track: Teaching Your Teen to Manage Travel and Transportation

People with learning disabilities (LD) and/or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) often have difficulty getting from one location to another. They frequently lose their way, have trouble using public transportation, and struggle with driving-related issues. Contributing factors may include poor time management, problems with spatial and visual perception, and difficulties with eye-hand coordination. Diane Swonk, a successful economist who has dyslexia, admits, "Every time I get off the elevator in the place that I've worked for 17 years, I'm still lost. I still can't get on the right train going home from work unless I try really hard. Going from Point A to Point B is just not easy for me."

This article will explain many of the challenges individuals with LD and AD/HD face in travel and transportation. It will offer a variety of strategies for teaching your teenager how to get around effectively, which will further prepare him to function independently as a young adult.

The table below illustrates how various characteristics of LD and AD/HD can result in challenges to getting around.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges in Travel and Transportation
Reading	Difficulty reading road signs
Temporal perception (sense of time)	Problems planning enough time to get where one wants to go
Attention	Tendency to get sidetracked on the way to a destination
Spatial perception	Tendency to become disoriented easily; have trouble following maps; have problems navigating around new, unfamiliar areas
Directionality	Difficulty distinguishing east from west and right from left and a subsequent tendency to follow directions inaccurately
Depth perception	Problems gauging how fast cars are coming, when crossing a street as a pedestrian or when driving through an intersection
Receptive language	Difficulty understanding spoken directions

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## On the Right Track: Teaching Your Teen to Manage Travel and Transportation

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### Driving Presents Special Challenges

As I explain in my book, *Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood*, driving presents its own set of challenges:

With all of its complexities, driving can be of particular concern to individuals with LD and AD/HD. Difficulties vary and can develop for a multitude of reasons. For example, people may find it difficult to train their right foot to recognize the difference between the accelerator and the brake and, on standard [manual] transmission vehicles, to train their left foot to simultaneously work the clutch. They may find it challenging to develop a working understanding of the reactivity of the steering wheel, which must turn only so much to pass another car but must turn even more when it is time to round a corner. They may struggle to interpret what they are seeing in the rearview mirror. On cars with manual [standard] transmission, they may have difficulty moving from one gear to another, particularly to reverse, which generally requires an additional thrust. Further, they may have considerable difficulty learning how to parallel park. Indeed, many find it difficult to meld the many separate aspects of car handling into one coordinated driving experience. (Roffman, 2000, p. 191)

### Tips for Teaching Your Teen to Manage Travel and Transportation

The following strategies may be used during your child's middle and high school years to help him learn to get around safely and on track:

#### Planning Your Trip

- **Practice reading maps with your child.** Start by discussing simple routes; gradually make the hypothetical journey more complex. Teach him how to use online mapping tools, such as Mapquest.com, which offer written directions as well as maps between any two addresses. When he understands how to read a map, have him plan a short trip or two, first with your supervision and then on his own.
- **Teach your teen how to read transportation schedules.** If you live in a town with a local bus route, review the schedule together, pointing out the departure and arrival columns, the weekday versus weekend schedules, and any other pertinent information. If there's a map of the route, suggest marking the way from one location to another with a colored marker. Ask him travel-related questions until it's clear that he understands how to use the schedule. Send him on a short trip that requires him to practice both his ability to read transit schedules as well as his newly acquired map reading skills.
- **Discuss how to estimate the travel time between two places.** Many factors can cause delays, including traffic jams and mass transit problems. For important appointments, such as job interviews, encourage him to take a "dry run," to travel there beforehand in order to gauge how much travel time to set aside on the actual day. Suggest that he build in at least a 10-minute cushion of time for unexpected travel delays.
- **Teach strategies that will help your child avoid getting lost.** Many people who are prone to disorientation in new places write down simple directions (e.g., how to get from the front door of the medical building to his doctor's office or, when traveling, how to go from the elevator to the family's hotel room). Use a "think-aloud" to demonstrate taking note

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of where you've left the car when you go to a crowded parking lot (e.g., "Okay, we're in row 19, right in line with the main entrance to the mall").

- **If your teen carries a cell phone, help him program frequently called phone numbers (e.g., parents, friends, emergency roadside assistance) into his phone's directory.** If he finds himself lost or in an emergency situation, he may be nervous, so being able to call for assistance at the touch of a button will be a tremendous help.

### On the Way to Your Destination

- **Explain how to read Departure and Arrival boards** in train stations and airports. By the time your child is in upper elementary school, you can teach lessons during your family trips, talking through the steps of traveling from door to door. For example, you might explain, "Now that we're at this busy airport, we're going to hold on tight to our bags and wallets. The first step is to check in. We're flying on X Airlines. You tell me where the check-in counters are for our airline." Talk your way through checking the Departure board for your gate, going through security, etc. Point out who your resources are (e.g., employees behind the counters, people in airline uniforms). If you don't travel regularly, take your teen on a "field trip" to the airport.
- **Model tying a colorful item to the handle of your suitcase when you check your baggage on family trips,** and explain that practicing this strategy will make it easy for him to spot his own luggage in the baggage claim area when he travels on his own.
- **Discuss the importance of identifying appropriate resources in certain situations.** "Think alouds" will help him understand your thought process. For example, you might say, "Okay, we aren't sure where the train station is. There's a policeman; I'll ask him if we're headed in the right direction." Explain to your teen that we all get lost or disoriented at times, and that asking for help is a sign of resourcefulness rather than weakness. If he has memory problems, suggest that he repeat the directions back or, better yet, carry a notepad and pen so he can write down the directions he hears.
- **Review safe pedestrian habits,** particularly if your child has a problem with depth perception and may not be able to judge the speed of oncoming vehicles. Remind him that it's safest to use crosswalks and obey traffic signals to get from one side of a street to the other.

“Perhaps no one activity more clearly represents independence than being able to travel around on one's own.”

### Special Advice for Drivers

- **If your child would like to learn to drive but you're afraid that he might not be able to master the necessary skills due to the severity of his LD or AD/HD, contact a large hospital rehabilitation center in your area for an assessment.** By using simulators to test his reaction time, depth perception, and other related skills, professionals there can determine whether the disability is severe enough to prohibit him from getting his license. If he is found to have the potential to become a safe driver but in need of extra support as he learns, the rehabilitation center should be able to recommend a local driving school attuned to the needs of those who would benefit from special instruction due to disabilities.

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## On the Right Track: Teaching Your Teen to Manage Travel and Transportation

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- If your teen does get a driver's license, teach him that there are both low tech and high tech ways to avoid problems. One high-tech item, a **Geographical Positioning System (GPS)**, can help him avoid getting lost while on the road. A colorful cloth tied to the car's radio antenna is a low-tech aide that can help him locate a parked car.
- **Explain the importance of concentrating fully on driving at all times.** Talking on cell phones or changing CDs while driving are dangerous risks and illegal activities in an increasing number of states. Model safe behavior by pulling over when you need to talk on your cell phone or when you want to find a particular CD.
- **Keeping a directions file in the car is very useful**, particularly if directions both to and from the destination are explicitly spelled out. A folder of directions can be stored in the glove compartment.

### On the Road to Independence

Perhaps no one activity more clearly represents independence than being able to travel around on one's own. Although there are many complex skills involved in travel and transportation, most teens with learning disabilities and AD/HD are able to learn them if they're given explicit training and support.

# Expert Answers



## Helping Teens with LD Develop Daily Living Skills

### Helping Teens Develop a Healthy, Balanced Lifestyle

We all want our children to grow up to have a healthy lifestyle, wherein they maintain personal hygiene and good grooming, eat a nutritious diet, take care of medical and dental needs, and fill their leisure time with enough exercise and personal interests to create balance and quality of life. Adults with learning disabilities (LD) and/or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) often face challenges as they juggle the many components of healthy living. This article will describe some of the challenges they face and will offer parents of middle and high school children with LD or AD/HD strategies to foster development in this important area.

#### Personal Hygiene and Good Grooming

The table below illustrates how various characteristics of LD and AD/HD can present challenges to practicing personal hygiene and good grooming.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges to Hygiene and Grooming
Visual discrimination	Difficulty coordinating one's clothing (e.g., complementary colors, patterns, and styles)
Fine-motor coordination (ability to use one's hands and fingers effectively)	Problems tying a necktie; shaving without nicking skin; applying makeup; and styling hair
Spatial perception	Difficulty being thorough when shaving; problems turning faucets to the desired temperature when bathing/showering
Tactile defensiveness (over- or under-sensitivity to touch)	Trouble tolerating the irritation of having one's hair cut, the scratchiness of labels on clothing, and the seams inside socks
Distractibility	Tendency to become distracted and forget certain steps in personal hygiene (e.g., applying deodorant)

#### Tips for Teaching Your Teen about Hygiene and Grooming

Teen magazines feature articles about hygiene and grooming every month. If your child with LD or AD/HD shows an interest, help her select a few magazines with relevant articles, and discuss how she can use the tips they offer. Additional ideas to help you foster development of good hygiene and grooming are listed below:

- **By early middle school, show your teen how to attend to personal hygiene**, and explain the pros and cons of various products. By high school teens should regularly purchase the products they prefer (e.g., razors, deodorant, shampoo, tampons) within an agreed-upon budget.

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- If you have a tactile-defensive teen, **encourage her to maintain a hairstyle that is easy to cut and style**, with a minimum of fussing and irritation. Enlist a trustworthy barber or hairdresser.
- **Buy an electric razor for your son with fine-motor problems or spatial difficulties**, and encourage him to double check with his fingers to make sure he has fully shaved the intended territory.
- **Buy light-colored lipstick or gloss for your daughter with fine-motor or spatial difficulties**, and explain that she will find it's easier to correct makeup "mistakes" with these products.
- **If your teen has visual discrimination problems, encourage her to enlist a friend or relative to act as a "clothing advisor."** Luckily, in today's fashion scene, almost anything goes! Even so, help your teen shop for garments that mix and match easily. A chart of matching outfits is helpful as well.
- **Encourage your child to keep her morning routine simple** and allow ample time for hygiene and grooming. Some find it easier to shower and set out clothing the night before school or work.
- **Have your teen follow weather forecasts each night** and lay out clothes and accessories appropriate for the next day's conditions.

### Routine Health and Medical Care

The table below illustrates how various characteristics of LD and AD/HD can present challenges to managing one's health and medical needs.

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges to Managing Health and Medical Care
Memory	Difficulty remembering medical and dental appointments; problems remembering medications taken and specifics of medical history
Receptive language (understanding written or spoken language)	Problems understanding doctors' explanations, diagnoses, and courses of treatment; difficulty understanding directions on medication labels
Expressive language	Trouble explaining one's symptoms and/or conveying medical history
Reading	Difficulty reading medication labels and nutritional labels on foods
Writing	Problems filling out forms at doctors' offices
Math	Difficulty calculating the time intervals for taking medication; trouble measuring liquid medicines
Visual discrimination	Problems discriminating between pills that look alike
Distractibility	Tendency to become distracted and forget to take medication at prescribed intervals

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### Tips for Teaching Your Teen Healthy Medical Habits

With regard to health care, you can help your child with LD and/or AD/HD to develop an understanding of his medical needs, how to convey his needs to others, and how to safely take medications. The following are some specific tips:

#### General Knowledge of Medical Self-Care

- **Discuss routine healthcare with your child.** Adults with LD and/or AD/HD often find it easier to remember annual physicals when they are scheduled around their birthdays; likewise, twice-yearly dental appointments may be easily remembered if they are tied to holidays spaced six months apart (e.g., July Fourth and New Year's Day).
- **Teach your teen basic medical vocabulary**, such as the names of key specialists (e.g., gynecologist, orthopedist) and terms for common symptoms (e.g., muscle spasm).
- **Discuss the symptoms of common ailments**, such as a cold or sore throat, **and the appropriate treatment** (including medication) for each. Show him how to use a thermometer, and explain what constitutes a fever.
- **Explain the purpose of hospital emergency rooms, and discuss circumstances that would warrant calling 9-1-1.** Review common illnesses and injuries (e.g., a broken ankle) that would not require an ambulance but might require a visit to the ER.

#### Medical and Dental Appointments

- **By late high school, your teen should start scheduling his own medical and dental appointments.** Coach him regarding the information he will need to have handy (e.g., any changes in address, phone number, insurance carrier), remind him to have his calendar available, and stay with him the first few times he takes on this responsibility.
- If possible, **have the office mail any forms to you ahead of time**, so you can help your child complete them prior to the appointment. This will save him the trouble of filling the forms out on his own — under pressure — in the waiting room.
- **Before you take your teen to the doctor, model how to write up a list of symptoms and questions** to present to the physician. Tell him this is a good habit to continue once he starts going to appointments on his own.
- **Take a tape recorder to each of your teen's doctor's appointments** to record and later review any discussion of symptoms, diagnoses, or treatments. Encourage him to continue this practice when he starts going to medical appointments by himself.
- **Compile a personal medical "fact sheet" for your child.** In list form, write out his medical history (including surgeries), your family's medical history, and any prescription medications he takes as well as any he's allergic to. Have him become familiar with his health history, and let him practice referring to the fact sheet for answers. Have him update it as needed.
- **Encourage your teen to disclose his learning or attention problems to his health care providers.** Explain that it's to his advantage for them to be familiar with his difficulties so they can provide accommodations (e.g., having him repeat the treatment plan back to the doctor to ensure understanding, or giving him a simply-stated written diagnosis and treatment plan with illustrations or charts).

## Helping Teens Develop a Healthy, Balanced Lifestyle

### Managing Medication:

- **Model how to consult with a pharmacist.** Point out that pharmacists are available to advise patients regarding correct dosages of new medications, possible side effects to watch for, and to help create a schedule of exact times when pills should be taken.
- **Encourage your teen to enlist trustworthy family members or friends to help him read medicine labels and directions.** Remind him of the importance of reading about each new medicine before taking it.
- **Show your child how to measure liquid medication** (e.g., cough syrup) using a hollow-stem medicine measuring spoon (available at most drug stores).
- **Demonstrate how to mark similar-looking medicine bottles** with brightly colored tape so your child can readily tell one from the other.
- Show your teen how to set his wristwatch or cell phone to alert him when it's time to take the next dose of medicine.

### Achieving Life Balance: The Importance of Leisure Activities

Most parents recognize that their teens with LD or AD/HD need extra support to learn how to manage their physical health. However, many fail to realize that their children would also benefit from help in learning how to plan and pursue leisure activities that contribute to good health, foster a sense of wellness, and bring balance to their lives.

Too often, teens with LD and AD/HD know quite well what they like to do but don't know how to translate interest into activity or have no one with whom to engage in leisure pursuits. If they are to have the quality of life we all wish our children to experience, it's important to help them identify their strengths and interests and find satisfying ways to pursue them.

There are a variety of ways having a learning disability or AD/HD might affect an individual's leisure time pursuits, including:

Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges to Social Life and Recreation
Reading	Difficulty deciphering game rules
Math	Trouble keeping score in games (e.g., bowling)
Receptive language (understanding written or spoken language)	Problems understanding what is said in interactive settings; difficulty understanding jokes and figurative language
Visual memory	Trouble remembering game plays, dance steps, or how to set up a board game
Visual motor	Problems executing dance steps or playing ball (catching, batting, kicking)
Auditory motor	Difficulty dancing or clapping to rhythm

Chart Continued on Next Page

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Learning or Attention Problem	Challenges to Social Life and Recreation
Auditory discrimination	Problems discriminating sarcasm from joking based on someone's tone of voice
Visual discrimination	Difficulty discriminating between sarcasm and joking based on a speaker's facial expression
Visual figure-ground discrimination (trouble focusing one's vision on a single item against a "busy" visual background)	Problems tracking the ball or puck in spectator sports; finding a friend in a crowd; finding one's seat again after going for refreshments in a theater or sports stadium
Social perception	Difficulty modulating voice volume/laughter/weeping in theaters, restaurants, and other public places where low voice volume is the norm
Hyperactivity	Problems sitting still during a performance or game
Distractibility	Difficulty maintaining concentration on the game or activity at hand

Tips for Teaching Your Teen to Pursue Rewarding Leisure Time Activities

- **Help your teenager identify her areas of interest** and how they might be pursued in the community. Throughout middle school and into high school, children's interests are likely to be in sports and activities sponsored by school or local clubs. As your teen matures, try to help her identify how she might continue to pursue her interests within the larger community after she graduates. Investigate membership at the local YWCA or at nearby gyms for physical activity. Look into the offerings at area centers for adult education or arts centers if she's interested in the arts. Your place of worship may have a chorus that could fill your teen's interest in music. If she's a hiker, check the membership requirements of such affinity groups as the Sierra Club. If she's an avid reader, check whether the local library sponsors a book club for community members. If your teen plans to attend college, help her investigate recreational/interest pursuits on campus.
- **Explore volunteer and community service activities** (e.g., the local food pantry or animal shelter) in your area, and discuss whether such volunteer work might be of interest to your teen. If so, consider going with her the first time or two to help her understand what's being asked of volunteers.
- **Teach your child how to compensate for difficulties that interfere with her leisure activities.** If she has trouble remembering dance steps she has seen, talk her through the actual movements, step by step, to provide auditory input that will help her recall where her feet should go. If she has difficulty finding her seat at the stadium after she goes for refreshments, advise her to find visual markers and jot them down on a pad of paper. If she worries about not being able to sit still during a performance, suggest that she squeeze a squishy-ball to expend some energy while she stays seated.

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## Helping Teens Develop a Healthy, Balanced Lifestyle

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- **Help your teen create a master monthly calendar on which to clearly schedule her routine tasks**, including school, work, chores, and extracurricular activities. Add non-routine activities, such as doctor's appointments. Note that empty space on the calendar represents free time. Young adults with LD or AD/HD benefit from this level of structure, which provides a visual sense of tasks and of free time for leisure pursuits.

### Looking Forward to Independent Adulthood

Children with LD and AD/HD grow into adults with LD and/or AD/HD. But with your support as they acquire the daily living skills addressed in this series, they needn't be handicapped by their disability. They can learn a broad range of skills, which promote a healthy, balanced lifestyle and can look forward to excellent quality of life in their adult years.

# Expert Answers



## Helping Teens with LD Develop Daily Living Skills

### Resources & References

#### General Resources

##### Books

Meeting the Challenge of Learning Disabilities in Adulthood

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1557664307/>

By Arlyn J. Roffman, Ph.D.

##### Related SL.org articles

Transition to Adulthood: Focusing on Life after High School

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=970>

Adolescents — Conducting the Experiments: An Excerpt from Ready or Not, Here Life Comes

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=983>

#### Toward Independence: Helping Teens Prepare For Life on Their Own

##### References

Roffman, A. *Meeting the Challenge of LD in Adulthood*. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing.

Seligman, M. (1975). *Helplessness*. San Francisco: W. H Freeman. Wagner, M. (1992).

Analytic overview: NLTS design and longitudinal analysis approach. What happens next? *Trends in postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities: the second comprehensive report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

#### Playing House the Grown-up Way: Teaching Teens the Art of Housekeeping

##### References

Posthill, S. & Roffman, A. (1991). The impact of a transitional training program for young adults with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 24(3), 619-629.

Roffman, A. Herzog, J & Wershba, P. (1994). Helping young adults understand their learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 27 (7), 413-4

#### Dollars and Sense: Teaching Teens Consumer Skills and Money Management

##### References

Posthill, S. & Roffman, A. (1991). The impact of a transitional training program for young adults with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 24(3), 619-629.

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## **Resources & References**

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### **On the Right Track: Teaching Your Teen to Manage Travel and Transportation**

#### **Related SL.org articles**

Teaching Kids with LD to Drive: A Complex Family Matter

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=852>

Teen Drivers with AD/HD: Realities and Risk Factors

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=855>

When Teens with AD/HD are Learning to Drive: Parent Strategies

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=856>

#### **Books**

AD/HD & Driving: A Guide for Parents of Teens with AD/HD

[http://addwarehouse.com/shopsite\\_sc/store/html/product245.html](http://addwarehouse.com/shopsite_sc/store/html/product245.html)

By Marlene Snyder, Ph.D.

### **Helping Teens Develop a Healthy, Balanced Lifestyle**

#### **Related SL.org articles**

Helping Your Child Find a Passion: One Mother's Story

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=715>

Self-Advocacy: A Valuable Skill for Your Teenager

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=522>

Learning Difficulties and Social Skills: What's the Connection?

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=513>