

WoH 450

Learning Difficulties/God's Love

Ros: Everyone is born with the ability to learn. Some of us learn more quickly than others. I've always been fascinated by our natural desire to learn. First in a baby...then a toddler...then a growing child...and as adults. Even if we tried to, we couldn't stop a young child from learning. From a baby, to a grown adult, everything we hear, see, smell, taste and touch teaches us something.

Tammy: Hello – welcome to *Women of Hope*. I wonder what you've learned today? Did you see something you'd never seen before? Did you hear something new? Learning new things is exciting isn't it! Hi Carol...

Carol: Hi Tammy. It sounds like we have some interesting things to learn today – about learning!

Tammy: Yes – Ellen's with us today, because she's a teacher who's worked a lot with children who have *difficulty* learning. Welcome Ellen...

Ellen: Thanks Tammy. Hi Carol...and hello to *you*... If you're a parent I'm sure you'd agree with Ros when she said: 'Even if we tried to, we couldn't stop a young child from learning.' That's so true, and every parent wants their child to do well, to learn to read and write, to do maths, and to do well at school.

Carol: Oh yes – we *do*. We compare our child with other children to reassure ourselves that our child is doing ok. If they're doing really well we're proud of them...and we just want to tell someone how well they're doing.

Tammy: But on the other hand, if they seem to be a bit slower than other children their age we begin to worry. We worry that they may have a problem...perhaps a learning difficulty of some kind. Do you ever worry about *your* child and how they're learning?

Ellen: It's very natural to be proud of a child who's doing well...and it's also natural to worry if you think they might have a problem with their learning. But of course in *any* group

of children of the same age there'll be quite wide differences in what each child *can* or *can't* do. One may be a very good reader and be reading books with difficult words while another at the same age may be just beginning to read words and sentences. One child may be able to count to 100 or higher while another may only be able to count to ten.

Tammy: If it's *your* child who's struggling to learn to read or can only count to ten what can you do? Will they always struggle to learn? Do they need some extra help? Ellen, what can we do if we're worried about our child?

Ellen: Just because one child is not as fast to learn as another child it doesn't necessarily mean they have a learning disability.

Carol: So when *should* you worry about your child?

Ellen: It's only when your child's ability is *below* the wide range that's considered normal that you need to be concerned.

Carol: So how can a mother know when her child needs help? And what can she do?

Ellen: If your child hasn't started school yet but you think they're not responding the same as others, have a chat with your community health care worker. First they will probably check the child's eyes and ears to make sure they're hearing and seeing clearly. If not this will slow them down in their learning.

If all is well with their hearing and sight, the health care worker may suggest a special test to find out whether your child is learning at the normal rate. The test will show whether your child needs extra help. If so, the healthcare worker may suggest some activities that you can do with your child at home.

Tammy: What if the child you're worried about is already at school?

Ellen: Then it's important to go and talk to the teacher. They may reassure you that there's nothing to worry about. Or they may suggest a visit to the school learning specialist for some tests. If they *do* think that your child might have a learning difficulty they'll give you some advice about what can be done to help him or her.

Carol: So what might they do to help?

Ellen: The classroom teacher may design an individual program for your child. Or your school may have a special teacher or assistant who can work with your child alongside the classroom teacher. In some schools your child may be taken out of the classroom at times for extra learning sessions. This extra help may not be available in your school, so you could ask for special activities that you can do at home with your child.

Carol: Welcome back to *Women of Hope* where today Ellen is talking with us about learning difficulties in children. Ellen, what kinds of things can the school do to help the child who has a learning difficulty?

Ellen: There are many different ways to give special help. The school can work out a program to help the child improve in the things they find difficult.

For early reading problems they may teach different ways to recognise the letters. For example - match letters with pictures...trace around the letters. Listen for the sound of a particular letter as the teacher reads to them. Play simple games with letters like looking for a certain letter in a page of sentences. Listen carefully and put letters together to make simple words.

At the same time they'll probably help your child to read simple books with lots of repeated sentences and clear pictures. The teacher may ask the child to repeat the sentence after her – or read with her. As the child is reading the teacher will usually help them with difficult words to keep the flow of reading going. This means they can hear themselves reading sentences well. As they get better at reading, the teacher will help them with fewer and fewer words.

The class teacher, or special teacher can show you the best way to help your child with reading at home too. Talk about the pictures on the cover and, with your child, try to decide what the story *might* be about. This might help your child want to hear the story. The meaning of the story is just as important – or more important than stopping and trying to work out each word.

Reading good stories to children makes them want to learn to read. If you can, make time to read *to* your child as well as have *them* read to *you*. Choose exciting or funny stories. Or read about something they're interested in. It may be bikes, monsters, space, cooking or dancing, or anything else that will hold their interest. Maybe an older sister or brother can read to them sometimes.

Tammy: So what if your child is having difficulty with counting and numbers?

Ellen: Teachers will start by helping the child to count *real* things such as blocks and toys...and putting them into groups – matching them by shape or colour or size.

When the child can do this, they'll begin to count and do simple maths using *pictures* of things. For example the child may be instructed to draw four lots of five balls to learn how to multiply four by five.

Eventually they'll be able to do their maths with just numbers. But often a child with a learning difficulty will need to use real things and pictures for quite a long time.

Carol: How can parents help?

Ellen: One of the most helpful things a parent can do for *any* child is to encourage them and praise them. This is especially true for children with a learning problem. Ask the teacher how your child is progressing. Praise your child for every achievement they make, however small it seems. This will encourage them to keep trying to improve and to do their best.

When you talk to your child about how well they're doing don't compare them to other children. Never say anything like: 'You're *almost* as good as Tom now.' That's not a compliment. It will just make them feel bad.

Just compare them to *themselves*. You might say: 'That was much better than two weeks ago. You're doing really well.'

If your child is having difficulties with maths try to make counting fun. Count as you walk up steps together...count the animals in the field. Count bundles of pebbles – and put them into groups of the same number. Count anything you can together! Sing some number songs together. Make it a time of fun!

And play board games and games with dice that require counting, if you have them. You could make some games with cardboard and colour pens. The teacher may provide some take-home games and activities.

Carol: Children learn so much better if they're enjoying themselves don't they!

Ellen: Oh yes! But of course this all takes time – you may have to ask older siblings, or cousins to help too. Most children with learning difficulties can only work for a short time in one go without becoming frustrated or distracted. Make these times short and always be positive and encouraging.

Choose the best time to help your child. Make sure they're not too tired. And make sure there are no other children or adults around who might embarrass them. Try to find a quiet place to be alone and enjoy working together.

Carol: That's so important. If a child is struggling to learn at school, the last thing you want to do is to make them feel that they have to struggle at home as well! Try to make it a special time that they can look forward to.

Ellen: Yes, and you can *always* encourage them. When a child has really worked hard, even if they haven't achieved what we've set out to do, I always tell them they've done a good job and *worked hard*.

But most of all...remember that being good at school-work is only part of life. Your child may shine in other areas. What is *your* child good at? I'm sure there are many things... Perhaps they can sing well; maybe they're good at sports or running. Your child could be good at cooking, or gardening or drawing. Encourage him or her to do things that they enjoy doing and tell them that they've done well. Be sure that your child knows they're a worthwhile person and that you love them.

Tammy: Thanks for being with us today Ellen...yes our children are very precious. Let's listen to this song before Ros comes back to share some thoughts with us.

Tammy: Did you like that song? It says...

Ros: God has made us all unique...different from anyone else. We all experience life differently. Even children from the same family, living in the same environment, will see things differently:

The first-born child has time on his own with his mother and father. His parents do not have experience bringing up children yet. They're learning for the first time how to care for a new baby. They're concerned about all the little things that happen. This child learns to be 'responsible'.

The youngest child is born with older brothers and sisters. His parents are experienced now at raising children and will probably treat him with much love, but not so much concern over the little things.

A middle child is born with older brothers or sisters, and then has to learn to cope later with a new baby as well. He has to learn to cope with 'life in the middle', the older ones perhaps bossing him and the younger one getting more attention from his parents.

As well as experiencing life differently, God has given us different learning abilities, and disabilities. Just because a child has a learning disability – or any other disability it does not mean that he or she is any less valuable. God has made them *just as they are* – and he loves them – just as much as someone who's very clever.

And we're not just talking about children. A child with a learning difficulty may grow up always having difficulty learning. Or they may grow up with a physical disability. There are many different names for different disabilities – but each belongs to a unique person who has been made by God and who is loved by God.

Carol: That reminds me of a movie that my friend Stevie told me about called *50 First Dates*. We've heard from Stevie before – she has Cerebral Palsy – so she has a *physical* disability – but definitely does *not* have a *learning* disability. She loves to write poetry, especially about her relationship with God. Maybe we'll share one of those with you shortly.

Ros: That's a good idea – but tell us what she said about the movie...

Carol: It's about a man named Henry who falls in love with Lucy, who loses her memory each time she goes to sleep. Every morning Lucy has no idea who Henry is! Henry spends each day with Lucy, taking care of her and showing her that he loves her. Each day she

falls in love with him again. Henry was so committed to Lucy. He must have *really* loved her.

Ros: That sounds like a beautiful movie! What a great thought – especially if we're struggling with difficulties – like being hurt, or being rejected, or beginning to lose our memory...or thinking we're not good enough. Sometimes we forget that God loves us, don't we...especially when difficult things happen in our lives. We might ask ourselves, 'Does God *really* love me?' But you know, God is so faithful and patient with us. Even when we doubt his love, he continues to love us.

Carol: God says in his word, the Bible: (Jeremiah 31:3 NIV) 'I have loved you with an *everlasting* love – I have drawn you with loving kindness.' Just like Henry who is in love with Lucy – every day he shows her his love again because she's forgotten who he is. God's love will last forever, no matter who we are, what we look like or what abilities or disabilities we might have.

Ros: Would you like to hear Stevie's poem now?

Tammy: We would. Will you read it to us Ros?

Ros: Sure...the poem is called 'I love you' Here it is...

I love you.

I loved you before you were born,
I'll love you forevermore.

I rejoiced when I created you,
After sincere and careful thought.
You could not begin to understand,
The happiness that filled my heart.

I smiled at your conception,
I delighted in your birth.
Nursed you closer than your mother,
You were just what I wanted.

I planned how you would look,
The things you'd love...and hate.
Your strengths and passions,
Your weaknesses and needs.

The people you would love,
The challenges you would face.
The things that would affirm you,
You're not who you are by chance.

Let's stop there for a moment and think about what Stevie has said in this poem so far. Who is speaking and saying, 'I loved you before you were born...I smiled at your conception; I delighted at your birth'?

Tammy: She's talking about God isn't she! She's saying that God knew just who he wanted us to be – and he loves us *just as we are*.

Carol: And she goes on to say that God even planned how you would look...your strengths, and your weaknesses. She's saying that God understands your weaknesses because he made you with them. He knew the challenges you would face.

Tammy: Did you notice the last line?... 'You're not who you are by chance.' Stevie knows that God's word says in Psalm 139 (v13 GNT) 'You created every part of me; you put me together in my mother's womb...'

...The almighty God, who made heaven and earth with his powerful hand, made all the delicate parts of your body – he made you look exactly right for you. He made your personality exactly right for you.

Ros: Stevie's poem goes on to say:

A special purpose, for you alone,
I need you to be yourself.
You have all you need for the journey,
Value, don't covet, what others have.

Carol: What does Stevie mean here? What do *you* think? ...Yes she says we need to value ourselves, and not be jealous of what other people have – their looks, or their abilities. God has made us with our own special purpose. No-one can do what God has planned for you to do...and he has given you everything you need to achieve his purpose for you. Isn't that a wonderful thought? Let's hear some more...

Ros:
I've planned, I foresee your future,
Every second I'll stay by your side.
Guiding you, helping you,
Trust me, be courageous...

Tammy: And here she's saying that God has actually planned our future even before we were born. In the same part of God's word, Psalm 139 (v16 GNT) it says: 'The days planned for me have all been recorded in your book before any of them began.' Wow!

Ros: And at the end of Stevie's poem she says...

I have never, and never will fail you.
I love you.
Infinitely, passionately, deeply,
Eternally...before, now, ever after.

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Stevie is telling us that God's love will *never* fail. Every day, his love for us is the same. Just like Henry's love for Lucy in that movie – each day he shows her in many ways how much he loves her. Each day, God shows us in so many ways how much he loves us. He created you just as he wanted you to be...and he has a purpose for your life. Does that make you feel very valuable? I hope so, because you are!

Carol: Thank you Ros for sharing that beautiful poem from Stevie. Would you like to pray with me and say thank you to God for his love?

Father God, thank you for creating me just as you wanted me to be. Thank you for giving me a unique purpose for my life...a purpose just for me. Thank you for loving me so much that you sent your son Jesus to give his life for me so that one day I will go to be with you in heaven – forever. Amen

Tammy: It's time for us to go now. You can contact us at...
Goodbye.

Ros: Goodbye and remember how much God loves you – and he *always will*.

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