



Worry About Labelling?

Better Focus on Support, Training and Interventions

“After the school knows about the special educational need(s) of my child, will they negatively label him/her?”

When parents learn that their child was diagnosed of having special educational needs or some developmental problems, it is common for them to feel worried and perplexed. On one hand, the parent may worry whether the child can catch up with his learning. On the other hand, the parent may be distressed about possible stigmatization...

The fear of being labelled

The aforesaid worries are common and understandable. No one hopes to be negatively labelled. Different people may interpret the term “labelling” differently. In general, negative labelling (or stigmatization) refers to (1) stereotyping, (2) prejudice, and (3) discrimination. Recent research shows us that, the fear of being stigmatized would make one readily conceal his/her problems. As a result, one would delay treatment or avoid help seeking behaviours. On the contrary, if parents could accept the diagnosis and assessment findings and be open to the option(s) of respective treatment, they would be able to understand the nature, impact and special needs of their child’s developmental disorder more thoroughly and precisely under the conjoint effort from school and other professionals. In turn, parents would be able to take care of their child more adequately.





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What is wrong with not disclosing my child's special educational need? I just want my child to be treated like any other child...

Concealing or denying special educational needs (SEN) would deprive your child from suitable support and interventions, and thus unable to make good use of the critical period for treatment. Besides, it may be difficult for others to understand the major developmental problems behind the child's behaviours. For example, if a teacher does not know the child had Autism Spectrum Disorder, he/she may not be able to provide assistance in accordance with the child's social problem at school. Similarly, if a teacher did not know the child has Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder, he/she may easily misinterprets the child's impulsive behaviours as a compliance issue and subsequently discipline the child with punishment without empathetic understanding.

What are the reasons to disclose my child's difficulty to the school or non-governmental organizations?

It is because the school may then understand the nature of SEN of the child and hence activates plausible special educational support services. With such services, the child would receive suitable and timely school-based support in order to facilitate the child's learning progress. School-based support include behavioural and emotional support, special examination arrangement and group training, etc. Furthermore, different NGOs would run specific courses or schemes that support children with provisional or confirmed SEN diagnoses as well as for their families. For instance, they may provide social skills group training, behavioural training, and word learning course etc. Therefore, disclosing the child's SEN to the school or suitable NGOs are key steps to solicit needed support.





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My child is now coping well at school so far. Can I let the school know only when necessary?

Facing your child's problem and helping them overcome the difficulties they encountered are long-term and challenging mission for parents. Collaboration between parents and school is an essential element that fosters happy and fruitful school life for your child. Open communication is an imperative component of parent-school partnership that leads to win-win situations. Concealing the child's SEN would delay school-based support and other plausible accommodation at school. Over time, problem may exacerbate. On the contrary, if the school knows the child's condition timely and offer suitable support / accommodation, it will minimize negative impact of the problem through parent-school partnership and conjoint effort. Findings from research suggests that timely and suitable support and interventions could reduce children's disruptive behaviours, as well as promote their overall school performance.

My child is already having school-based support. Why is it still necessary to attend consultation at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service? My child is not insane!

Apart from school-based support that focused on learning, your child may also need training or treatment that targets on behavioural and emotional aspects. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service provided by Hospital Authority renders multi-disciplinary and professional diagnosis / diagnoses, treatment and rehabilitation services. Scientific research revealed that early intervention, training and treatment might alleviate symptoms related to developmental problems, enhance social skills, promote





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further development, as well as reduce parenting stress in the long run.





In face of possible labelling, what can I do as a parent?

Facing possible labelling is indeed challenging for parents. First and foremost, parents are suggested to avoid concurrent “self-labelling”. The precious and beloved identity of your child would never change regardless of the kind of developmental problem or special need he/she may have, no matter if it is weak social skills or hyperactivity problem. Everyone would possess some positive traits while at the same time endure some weaknesses. The capacity to accept your child’s weakness or difficulty in specific area(s) is of utmost importance when in face of possible negative labelling. In addition, parents can also:

Educate yourself and others

- Negative labelling and discrimination usually stems from myth and misunderstanding of certain developmental disorder by the public. Parents are encouraged to start by educating themselves about their child’s issue on a knowledge level. This could be done through making reference to factsheet information, resource packages etc., so as to obtain accurate information before sharing them with school or other related parties in order to prevent misunderstanding or divergence.

Join a parent mutual support organization

- The support and company of fellow parents with special educational needs children allows the group to generate positive synergy. The platform facilitates information and resource sharing, as well as building a sense of belonging that combats loneliness.

Don’t take it personally

- Since negative labelling and discrimination usually stem from myth and misunderstanding, parents can try to consider labelling as the labeller’s problem, instead of yours or the child’s problem in case when labelling does occur.





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What can parents do to help a child who is in face of possible labelling?

When helping a child in face of possible negative labelling, a parent's understanding, support, as well as his/her assurance of the child's positive traits are all indispensable.

Educate your child to know themselves

- Impart accurate knowledge to your child about his/her condition, and at the same time accept his/her weaknesses and assure his/her strengths. These are all effective methods to build your child's resilience against negative labelling.

Set yourself as an example

- Parents are always the role model of their children. If the parent can face possible labelling with an open and unperturbed attitude, and at the same time avoid "self-labelling", over time, the child would follow the parent's example.

Support your child's emotion

- Your child would probably feel scared or uncomfortable when facing possible negative labelling. Parents can encourage their child to express their feelings so as to acknowledge any related emotion(s), then follow by accompanying and assisting them to explore ways to alleviate these feelings.





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