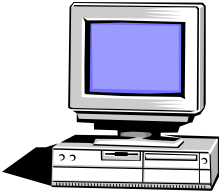


## Chapter 7:



*“To be thrown on one’s own resources is to be cast in the very lap of fortune.”*  
– Benjamin Franklin

# Keeping Informed

This handbook provides some of the information you need to help support your child with special needs, but this is just a starting point. The more information you have about your child’s learning needs, programs and issues, the better you will be able to positively impact your child’s future. The information you acquire through further research could help you understand, support, guide and mentor your child with greater confidence and skill.

Researching educational issues may provide you with valuable information to consider when making decisions about your child’s education.

## How do I choose issues to research?

During your child’s schooling, you may seek information on a variety of topics, from developmental issues to instructional strategies. Sometimes, figuring out what question to ask is a difficult task. Try brainstorming to create a list of questions. Here is a sampling of specific types of questions that parents of children with special needs might research.

- How can I help improve my child’s reading skills?
- Does homework really help children? And if it does, how can I help my child?
- How could my child benefit from computer technology?
- How do FM sound systems affect student performance?
- What are some ways to support my child’s spelling skills?
- What should I do if my gifted child is underachieving?
- How can I help my child plan for a career?

## Narrow down your questions

Pare your list down to the most important questions and try to specify exactly what you need to know. For example, if you decide to research more about attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), your questions might focus on current medical research and educational literature. Think about the kinds of information you need. Are you looking for screening information? Do you want to know how AD/HD affects learning and behaviour? What are the controversial issues? Are some treatments more effective than others? What kinds of things can you do at home? What can you expect the school to do? What are the long-term educational and health implications? Write down these and other questions you have about attention deficit disorder.



### Tips for finding information

- **People** can be excellent resources to direct and focus your inquiries. Consider staff from schools, parent groups, community agencies, government institutions and librarians.
- **Libraries** should be one of the first places to start your research. Often just phoning the reference desk at your local library will provide enough information to focus your research. In addition to the local public library, there are libraries in universities, colleges and government departments. The credibility of print material found in a library is good because these resources are selected by librarians. As well, librarians may be able to recommend reliable sources elsewhere, such as good sites to visit on the Internet.
- **Print resources** can provide a variety of information. Newspapers are accessible and current, and provide

For more information see:  
Appendix D: Provincial Parent Groups

generalized information. Magazines or periodicals provide information that is more specialized than newspaper information. Your local library's copy of the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* or the *Canadian Periodical Index* provides the names of publications in your subject area. Books, though often less current than periodicals, cover topics in greater detail. Other printed material, such as pamphlets, annual reports and newsletters, provide information of a general nature that may help direct your inquiry.

- The **Internet** has a huge amount of information about almost every topic imaginable. The cautionary note to any user of the Internet is that you must check the reliability of the source. Anyone can set up a Web site and offer information. Try to determine the source of the Web site and the credentials of the Web site owner. If the Web site is owned by a government or well-known source, the information may be more credible than if the site is owned by someone without credentials or who is anonymous. Online resources are often linked through a library's home page to other virtual online resources. Going from the library's Web site out into the Internet can save time and help ensure reliability.
- **Television, film and audiocassettes** provide information on both general and specific topics and issues.



## Tips for checking the reliability of a source

You can use the 5Ws + H to evaluate the source of information by asking the following six questions.

- *Who is the author?* Where does the author work—at a recognized institution or government? Have other people mentioned the author? For Web sites, is the author or organization clearly stated?

- *What is the purpose?* What is the author’s purpose for writing the article? Who is the audience? Is the information factual or propaganda—does the author use facts or emotions to get his or her point across?
- *When was the material created?* For print material, check the publication date and whether this is the first edition or a revision of the material. For a Web site, check whether links still work and look at the last time the site was updated. Out-of-date material may present information and statistics that are unreliable.
- *Where was the source published or created?* Is the publisher or journal reputable? Is the journal reviewed? Books or periodicals that are self-published may have a hidden agenda. For Web sites, certain domain names may indicate greater reliability. For example, the ending “.edu” signifies an American university and “.gov” is reserved for the Canadian government, both of which are reliable sources.
- *How can you tell if the source is accurate?* Double-check your facts and sources by comparing them with other facts and sources. Can you find the same information in three other sources? Consider whether the source might be biased or uninformed. Authors or Web sites might be speaking about something that is beyond their level of expertise. They may have used unreliable sources in the first place and passed this information on to you. Or they may have hidden agendas, for example, trying to sell you a product. If the material is a book, see if you can find a review of the book to determine how others have assessed it.
- *Why should I use this source?* You may be able to get information quicker from another source. If you can’t verify the source, you might want to leave it and search for a piece by a known author.

## Compare sources

The more information you find, the better your understanding of the issue will be. When you use only one source of information, you can't be sure that it is current, accurate or complete. Some information presented as fact may be unsupported opinion. As a general guideline, try to gather information from at least three sources.

When you feel you have enough information, review your notes. Reread the print material you found. You may note that some of the information is contradictory or does not support what you have learned. With controversial issues, where people have taken sides, you have to determine the reliability of the supporters for each side. Make your decision about which side to support by evaluating the reliability of the sources.

## Using the Internet

Most information on the Internet is stored using a tree structure, just like the information stored on your computer. The root directory leads to directories and subdirectories like the trunk and branches of a tree. Hypertext links let you jump to related subjects; when you click on these words, you move to a new section of the Web site, or to a new Web site.

Consider using the services offered on the Internet for your research, e.g., the World Wide Web, chat rooms, or live events using video and audio. You can also use e-mail to write to contacts as well as to send queries using mailing lists, newsgroups and Web forums.

## Search engines

A search engine is an index of information on the Internet. Since different search engines access different areas of the Web, learn how to use three or four. Whenever you use a search engine, read its tips for advanced research to learn how to limit the search.

Search engines conduct searches using keywords. The best way to choose the word or words is to select the rarest word in your phrase. For example, instead of typing “choosing a tutor,” you would simply use “tutor” for your search. If you have the choice, specify the range of dates you expect the material to have been produced. This will ensure you get current research.

The following is a list of commonly-used search engines:

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

[www.hotbot.com](http://www.hotbot.com)

[www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com)

[www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com)

[www.beaucoup.com](http://www.beaucoup.com)

[www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)

[www.journalismnet.com](http://www.journalismnet.com)

[www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com) (presents information taken from a number of search engines).

You may also wish to access media sites, such as [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca), [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) and [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com).

## Evaluating Internet information

Because the material available on the Internet ranges from fiction to opinion to fact, it is up to you to evaluate the source of information. As a general rule, assess the author’s credentials and the quality of the publication or Web site, determine if the material has been reviewed before publication, and consider the comprehensiveness and tone of the material.

## Using the Library

The reference librarian at your local library can show you how to use library resources, and which database or periodical index to use to continue researching on your own. Periodical indexes provide authors, titles and abstract information for articles published in magazines, newspapers and other periodicals. The broadest index of popular consumer magazines is called the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. To access more specialized information, use indexes that are organized according to subject areas, for example, the *Education Index*, *Index Medicus*, *Psychological Abstracts*, *Social Science and Humanities Index* or *Applied Science and Technology Index*.

To find the articles you want to read, make a note of the information listed in the index:

- title of periodical, volume number, issue date
- author's name
- title of article
- page numbers of article.

You will then need to locate the specific periodical within the library.

Many libraries have connected their databases together into a virtual library where you can locate information outside the four walls of the library. From online resources, you may access encyclopedias and dictionaries, Canadian sources like *Electric Library Canada Plus*, and magazine or newspaper articles. Through the *Canadian Periodical Index*, you can access specialized newsletters, the Health Reference Centre, the General Reference Centre, CPI.Q (a list of Canadian and international journals, magazines and other reference material), and the Business Index. For example, to find recent articles about "self-advocacy skills," type the phrase into a number of search areas in the periodical index.

The NEOS Library Consortium is a collaboration of libraries across Alberta. NEOS has a Web site at [www.neoslibraries.ca](http://www.neoslibraries.ca) that allows you to access collections from government departments, college and university libraries, and hospital libraries. This powerful Web site offers Albertans access to a wide range of materials, from conference proceedings to government documents. To get a NEOS card, contact one of the libraries listed on the Web site.

## Contacting community agencies

Through your research, you may find associations and community agencies that are available for further information. For example, many community associations have their own Web sites, often with specific contact information. Keep a record of those that interest you. Make contact by phone, e-mail or letter to find out more about their services and how they could help you with your search. Always be sure to describe your project and offer to provide them with your findings. This type of communication encourages dialogue and makes it easier for you to return to the association with further requests. Consider writing a brief script of what you want to say and keeping it by the phone as you speak. Keep a pen handy to jot down the person's answers.



### Tips for tracking your research

There are different ways to organize and store research, so choose the method that works best for you. Consider the following options.

- Keep all news articles, phone numbers and accumulated research in a labelled, legal-size file folder or large envelope.
- Use an expanding file divided into sections to separate data by subject.

- Store information in a three-ring binder by taping or gluing articles to hole-punched paper, or use clear plastic sleeves to hold information.
- Record your findings onto audiocassette.

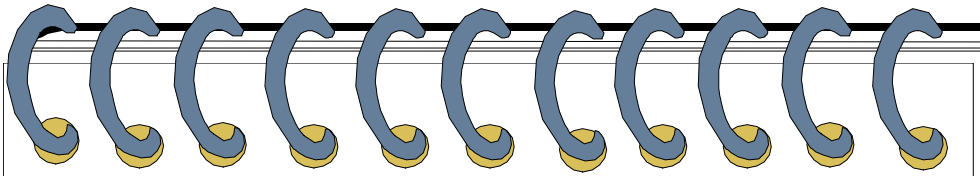
You may also consider the following tips to keep organized.

- Make a list of contact names and phone numbers, and staple it to the front of your folder or envelope.
- Record the date, time and place for each piece of research you collect, including notes taken while you are on the telephone. Write this information directly onto articles.
- Record your own ideas, thoughts and feelings about the information you find as you go along.
- Create a chart to track key information.

Topic	Contact name and number	Date	Notes

## Sharing information

What is your goal for sharing your research? Do you want to create awareness? Do you want to start a dialogue? Do you want to prompt some specific action? Once you determine your goal, write down the steps to reach it. Who you share your information with, and in what context, will depend on your purpose.



# Parent Notebook

Questions I would like to research:

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Possible sources of information:

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**Sample questions I might discuss with my child's teachers about researching issues:**

- ◆ Can you suggest any resources and other references related to my child's special needs?
- ◆ Is there a specific area of research that might hold promise for my child, now or in the future?