

Advocating For Your Child At School

Public education is a "one size fits all" model. There is a traditional way that children are taught: the students sit in rows and listen to the teacher who stands in front and lectures and uses audio-visual aids. Sometimes the students are given assignments, such as worksheets, to complete at their desks. This model in some form is adopted by most private schools as well.

The problem is, of course, that every child is different and every child has a unique learning style. There are so many dedicated and gifted teachers, but they have to teach 20, 25 and sometimes 30 children at a time, so they simply cannot address the individual needs of each student. Therefore, they use a model that we know works for many students. We also know it doesn't work for many others.

If we recognize that the problem needing to give teachers the ability to do their jobs by drastically reducing class sizes and providing more resources, we have to change the way our society and our government spend money. We'd have to really prioritise children, instead of just talking about prioritising children. But our society doesn't want to make those hard choices, so instead, we blame the students for whom the "system" doesn't work. We say they have vague "learning disabilities" or unexplained "mental illnesses" or that they are simply "naughty" and "don't fit in".

If your child is having difficulties of any kind at school, it's not helpful to look at it as anyone's "fault". Usually, terrific teachers and wonderful administrators are doing the very best they can with the resources and restrictions provided. But it's also not your child's fault. I like to think of these situations as "maladaptations"; the school and the child don't fit well, but no one is "wrong" and no one is "sick" or "abnormal".

Parents who raise their children non-traditionally are especially likely to find that their children and traditional education might not be a good fit. This is when it becomes necessary for parents to be strong advocates for their children. Don't fall into the trap of letting "the system" blame or label your child. This is a real opportunity to celebrate your child's unique and beautiful learning style, which is probably "perfect" for him or her. Then you can try to work with the school to modify curriculum and methods so the "fit" is better.

NOTES

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