

Exercise your mind

An alternative to traditional training

By Mary E. Hart

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With back to school time in full-swing, you'll soon be coordinating your child's school day as well as after school activities like soccer, football, or gymnastics. During practices for sports, your child will be getting plenty of exercise to ensure being in the best shape for games and meets. Have you thought about exercise for your child's mind? Probably not, right, but you should. How can you help your child be in the best mental shape for school – from participating in class to being ready for a quiz or test?

Cognitive training is the answer. LearningRX offers an alternative to traditional tutoring, for when traditional tutoring techniques aren't helping. Kate Walsh, Director of LearningRX in Andover, offers a great analogy about cognitive training: "If you're on a sports team and you work out in the gym, you'll be stronger, more flexible, and you'll play better in the game. However, if you don't work out and are unfit, you'll be wheezing and not as strong and won't play well when it's game time. The same rule applies to your brain – you need to work out your brain to improve how you perform at school. Cognitive training does for your child's mental abilities what exercise does for your child's body."

This one-on-one training, which goes from 12 to 24 weeks, benefits students in grades K through 12 and adults who struggle with learning or reading problems; ADD; AD/HD; leaning disabilities; Dyslexia; and Sensory Integration Dysfunction (SID), which has been diagnosed in more and more children these days. Children and adults with SID need extra help in processing information they're receiving because their sensory systems become easily overloaded by noises or lights. "If your child has a slow processing speed, they'll wind up missing recess at school because they have to stay in the classroom to finish a writing assignment," says Walsh.

"Children need that recess time as a relaxation break, so we work to help them bring their speed on writing assignments and the like up to the proper level. Rather than accommodating someone and keeping them where they are, we help them reach where they should be. Our one-on-one training helps them go beyond their comfort level by finding out where they currently are and then pushing them forward to the next step. Consider the process as like a child starting to play soccer. On the first day, he's wheezing and feels exhausted at the end of practice, but he continues on and feels better and more confident as time progresses so that at the end of the season, he's excelling at soccer and feels great."

One exercise that is used by LearningRX is called Visual Tic Tac Toe. "In this exercise," says Walsh, "the child imagines a game of Tic Tac Toe in the air and has to remember throughout the game where they are on the board; where their opponents are; and consider what the next step should be based on the visualized board. This exercise is a great way to train in visualization and memorization skills."

How can you find out where your child needs help? Contact LearningRX to have your child take an assessment test, which costs \$149 and takes about an hour or so. “This assessment, the Woodcock Johnson III Cognitive Test, is a national cognitive test that helps see how your child processes information,” says David Caiati, Associate Director for LearningRX, “and it has value even outside of our program. The results you’ll receive are much more understandable than a report you’d get from neurological testing and more helpful to you. After your child takes the assessment, either Kate or I will have a one-on-one session with you to go over the results. You may find that your child simply needs a tutor, or that LearningRX could help your child immensely.”

All of the students in the LearningRX program have experienced dramatic change. “We’ve had students come in who are significantly below grade level reading and are, for example, reading at a 1<sup>st</sup> grade level in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade,” says Caiati. “After 24 weeks, that child is now reading at grade level and, even more important, now wants to read.” Imagine a child who doesn’t really read at all to one who now wants to go to the bookstore or library to get more books because reading is no longer a struggle and is now fun. That is amazing progress.

Parents of children in the LearningRX program have offered nothing but praise and gratitude to the center for helping their children. “Our most common comments from parents are that their children are more confident as students and far more willing to try new things; and that homework now takes half as much time at night,” says Caiati. “Another benefit of the program is that it reduces tensions at home because the nightly or weekly struggles through homework or when the child forgets to take out the trash due to a memory issue are no longer problems.” To find out more about LearningRX (16 Haverhill Street, Andover) and have an assessment test done on your child, call 978-470-1556 or visit them at [learningrx.com](http://learningrx.com).