



Beverly H. Rohman



HELP FOR PARENTS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO STRUGGLE
WITH AD/HD OR OTHER LEARNING DIFFERENCES

Celebrating Learning Differences

How can you be happy when you struggle with learning differences or disabilities?

“Lifelong joy is within the grasp of most people. It is within the grasp of everyone who is not mired in poverty or trapped in horrific situations ---- and even many of those have found lifelong joy.” says Dr. Edward M. Hallowell, noted child and adult psychiatrist and best selling author of *Driven to Distraction*. Too often well intentioned parents or individuals try to foster happiness by giving their children or themselves pleasurable experiences. But, pleasurable experiences alone won’t bring happiness, especially if you don’t have a positive sense of who you are and how you learn. Most people don’t know how to use the magical tools that reside in their minds ----- tools that can turn almost any life into a joyful one. These magical tools, or strengths, hold the key to build a lifetime of positive self-esteem, confidence and joy.

The key to happiness and joy for children and adults with learning differences, AD/HD or other learning disabilities is not to feel ashamed of who they are, and not to feel afraid of learning or trying something new. Shame and fear are what destroy our children’s spirits and lead to unhappiness in adulthood. When you or others concentrate on your negatives or weaknesses it is easy to be discouraged. **Instead of letting the negatives eat at you, you need to let the positives feed you.** One talent can become a lifelong source of joy, not to mention income or success. Finding and nurturing a talent is more important than concentrating on a weakness. Focusing on what is strong, talented and positive in your life will ultimately bring much satisfaction and joy.

In his books, *The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness* (2002) and, the recently released, *Delivered from Distraction* (2005), Dr. Hallowell talks about a five step plan to help create and sustain lifelong joy. Originally recommended for parents, teachers and coaches to use with children, Dr. Hallowell now realizes these steps are equally applicable to adult life and for people who have AD/HD or learning differences.

The five steps are:

Connect: This is the most important part of the cycle --- feeling rooted gives a foundation of security, a feeling of being a part of something positive, something larger than oneself. Creating a connected life is the key to happiness and health.

Play: Something deeply and profoundly formative – any activity in which you become imaginatively involved. When you play, your brain lights up – you can invent scenarios and solve problems, discover hidden talents and use your gifts and resources.

Practice: When you find something you enjoy and are good at, you want to do it over and over again. Practice that emerges out of play is something you want to do – you don't have to be hounded to do it. Here is where habits of discipline develop that will last for a lifetime.

Mastery: As you practice, you naturally achieve mastery. When you get better at some skill or desired activity, you are further motivated to tackle new challenges. This leads to a can-do attitude, higher self-esteem and confidence.

Recognition: Approval and support from one's parents, teachers, and peers for a job well done reconnect us to the wider world. When people think what they do affects their family, classmates, team and co-workers, they're more likely to exhibit moral behavior and, ultimately, feel good about themselves.

The five steps constitute a cycle, one step naturally leading to the next and the cycle repeats itself. As you set this cycle in motion in a child's life, or in your own, you will see positive developments immediately. These qualities will grow in strength and depth over time and you will greatly increase the chances of leading a joy-filled and meaningful life.

The Learning Connections offers consulting and coaching services and a support group for individuals who have AD/HD or other learning differences. **Dr. Hallowell** will be a featured speaker at Wye River Upper School on March 9, 2005 at Chesapeake College. For more information call 410-763-7097.

Send your questions to *ASK TLC*, 101 Bay Street, Suite 6, Easton, MD 21601, or write to info@thelearningconnections.net and look for answers in our upcoming columns.

Beverly Rohman is the Executive Director and founder of The Learning Connections LLC as well as an AD/HD Coach and Learning Consultant.

As published in Healthwise, for the Star Democrat February 2005