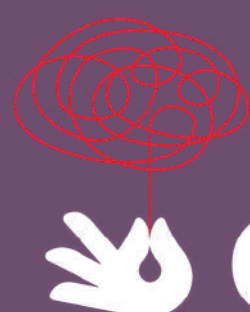


IS SOMETHING MORE GOING ON?

**A parent's guide for when
something feels off**



**tutor
doctor**

How learning hits home.

YOU KNOW YOUR CHILD BETTER THAN ANYONE...

If something starts to feel off at school, trust your instincts. It might be homework that takes three hours, reading that isn't clicking, your bright child suddenly saying they're "stupid," or you noticing 'avoidance' behavior when it comes to certain academic tasks. If you notice something seems to have changed, ask yourself, "Is this just a hard year, or is something else going on?"

This guide is intended to help you understand the difference between typical school-related bumps in the road and the indicators that something is worth looking into. It'll also explain the different assessment options available and help you figure out where to start with getting your child the support they need. It can all feel overwhelming, but remember, you don't need to have it all figured out right now; you just need to know the next step.



THE SIGNS WORTH PAYING ATTENTION TO

Every child faces school struggles at some point. Sometimes it's a tough teacher, a teacher whose teaching style doesn't align with your child's learning style, a unit that just doesn't land, or a challenge mastering a new skill. Other times it's something more. But how do you tell the difference? Here are some things that may indicate your child's struggles are worth taking a closer look at.



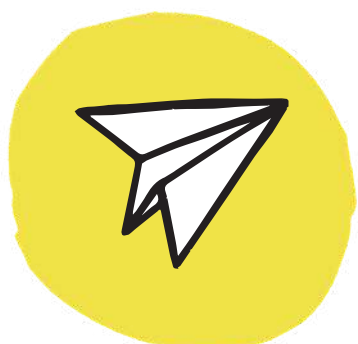
There's a gap between effort and results:

If your child is clearly trying, doing the work, and putting in the time, but their results don't match their level of effort, that mismatch could be a sign that your child's challenges aren't something they can overcome on their own.



One area lags way behind the others:

Your child might have great verbal skills, but melts down over reading, or strong math skills, but writing a paragraph feels almost impossible. If you're seeing significant differences between their academic abilities, it might be worth exploring further.



The basics aren't sticking the way you'd expect:

If your child continues to struggle with foundational skills long after their peers have mastered them, it may be a sign that they need additional support. For example, they might sound out familiar words as though they're seeing them for the first time, or continue to struggle to recall math facts despite regular practice.



Academic struggles are starting to cost too much emotionally:

If your child's academic difficulties are affecting their confidence, self-esteem, or emotional well-being, they're worth taking seriously. For example, they may complain of stomachaches before school, say things like, "I'm dumb," or end up in tears over homework that takes longer than it should.



Focus or organization is a daily battle:

If your child consistently struggles to get started, stay organized, or complete schoolwork, and those challenges are regularly getting in the way of learning, it may be worth exploring why.



A capable student suddenly starts struggling:

Some children are able to compensate for underlying learning challenges so well that their difficulties don't become obvious until school demands increase. If your child has always done well but is suddenly struggling, it doesn't necessarily mean they've stopped trying. It may be that the strategies they've relied on are no longer enough, and that may be worth investigating.

If you're recognizing several of these signs in your child, take a step back and look at the bigger picture. What matters most is the pattern.

- ✓ Have these challenges persisted over time?
- ✓ Are they showing up across different subjects, settings, or situations?

If the answer is yes, it may be time to talk with your child's teacher or seek a professional evaluation.



SCHOOL ASSESSMENT OR CLINICAL EVALUATION?

If you're considering having your child assessed, it's helpful to understand the options available to you. School assessments and clinical evaluations both play an important role in understanding your child's learning needs, but they answer different questions. Knowing the difference can help you save time, avoid confusion, and choose the right starting point for your family.

1 What is a school assessment?

A school assessment answers the question: What educational supports does this student need to access learning? When you request an assessment, your school district evaluates your child to better understand how they're learning and whether they may be eligible for supports such as an IEP or a 504 Plan. School assessments are provided at no cost and help identify the accommodations, services, or specialized instruction your child may need to be successful at school.

2 What is a clinical evaluation?

A clinical evaluation answers the question: Why is this student experiencing these challenges? Is there an underlying condition contributing to them? Conducted by a qualified healthcare professional such as a licensed psychologist or neuropsychologist, a clinical evaluation provides a comprehensive understanding of your child's cognitive strengths, areas of difficulty, and learning profile. It may also determine whether your child meets the criteria for conditions such as dyslexia, ADHD, or a specific learning disorder. Depending on the findings, this may result in a diagnosis. Unlike a school assessment, clinical evaluations may involve out-of-pocket costs, depending on your insurance coverage.

3 How do school assessments and clinical evaluations work together?

School assessments and clinical evaluations often complement one another, but they aren't interchangeable. A school may determine that your child qualifies for educational supports without a clinical diagnosis. Likewise, a diagnosis from a clinical evaluation doesn't automatically determine what supports a school will provide. The school may still conduct its own assessment before deciding what accommodations or services are appropriate.

4 Which one is right for your child?

That depends on your goals. If your primary concern is accessing supports at school, requesting a school assessment is often a good first step. If you're looking for a more comprehensive understanding of your child's learning profile, or you have concerns that extend beyond academics, a clinical evaluation may also be worth considering.

You may also want to consider cost and timing. Clinical evaluations may involve out-of-pocket costs, depending on your insurance coverage, but can often be scheduled and completed quickly. School assessments are provided at no cost but can take longer to schedule and complete. Ultimately, many families decide that pursuing both a school assessment and a clinical evaluation is the right choice for their child.



WHERE TO BEGIN

If you feel your child's struggles deserve a closer look, here are some practical steps to help guide you through the process. You don't have to do all of them, and you don't have to do them all at once. Just start with the step that's right for your child.



Write down your observations

Start by writing down what you're noticing, including what happens, when it happens, how often it occurs, and where you're seeing it.

For example:

- ✓ Reading homework that should take 20 minutes takes more than 2 hours
- ✓ Cries before spelling tests

Specific observations are much more helpful than simply saying, "My child is struggling." Having concrete examples will help your child's teacher or evaluator better understand your concerns.



Start a conversation with your child's teacher

They see your child in a different setting and may have noticed things you haven't seen at home, or they may have helpful context for what you're seeing. This isn't a confrontation—it's an opportunity to compare observations and work together to better understand your child's needs.



If you want to request a school assessment, ask in writing

In California, submitting your request in writing starts the formal timeline for the school to respond. An email is sufficient. Be sure to keep a copy for your records, and refer to the timeline below for an overview of the process and timing.



Consider a private evaluation if the picture is complex

If you're looking for a deeper understanding of your child's challenges, or you'd like answers sooner than the school process may allow, a private psychologist or local assessment centre—like Vista Del Mar's Reiss-Davis Program—can provide a comprehensive evaluation. See our Community Resources page for trusted local options.



Understand how your child learns

A school assessment can help identify the supports your child needs. A clinical evaluation can determine whether there's an underlying condition. A cognitive assessment like MindPrint provides insight into how your child learns.

Unlike academic and standardized tests, which primarily measure what your child knows, MindPrint evaluates cognitive skills such as reasoning, memory, processing speed, and attention to create a personalized learning profile. The results include practical strategies that can help support learning at home and at school.

MindPrint does not diagnose learning disabilities or other conditions. Instead, it provides an affordable way to better understand how your child learns and to identify strategies that often start helping right away.

Some families begin with MindPrint to gain insight into how their child learns, then pursue a comprehensive clinical evaluation, such as one provided by Vista Del Mar's Reiss-Davis Program, if they need additional answers or a formal diagnosis. The right path depends on your child's needs and your family's goals.



MindPrint
learning

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doctor**



A QUICK WORD ON SCHOOL SUPPORT RIGHTS

If you're considering requesting school-based support for your child, California has specific special education processes and timelines that may apply. Because rules, timelines, and individual circumstances can vary, we recommend using current official resources and speaking directly with your school district or a qualified special education professional.

For a parent-friendly overview, see our guide "Your IEP & 504 Rights in California." For the most current information, you can also review resources from the California Department of Education and Disability Rights California.

This information is provided as a general starting point only and is not legal advice.

ONE LAST THING

If you're reading this, you've already taken an important first step by paying attention to your child's needs and looking for answers. Whatever you discover—a learning disability, ADHD, another underlying condition, or simply that your child learns differently—the answer is rarely that your child can't. More often, it's that they need the right support, strategies, or learning approach to help them succeed.

The right support is out there—and you don't have to find it alone.



Tutor Doctor Santa Monica

When your child is ready to rebuild confidence, one session at a time, we're here.

TailoredSupport@TutorDoctor.org

 **(310) 694-8033**

This guide is for general information and isn't medical or legal advice. Every child and situation is different; a licensed professional can give you guidance specific to your family.

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