UNDERSTANDING LEARNED HELPLESSNESS AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Learned helplessness is the belief that our behaviour does not influence what will transpire next in our lives. One example among school children is when a student believes that he will get a good grade, study hard for it, and eventually earn it. A student who has learned helplessness, however, will think that even if he study hard, he will still or get a poor grade. Learned helplessness is synonymous to underachievement, poor grades, and behaviour difficulties in school.

Most prone to this condition are students who repeatedly experience failure in school. This student may become prone to develop learned helplessness. He may start doubt his abilities and what he can achieve. As a result, he may begin to lessen his effort to achieve academically especially when he face a difficult academic task.

What one can observe in a student with learned helplessness are he has low motivation to learn, expects poor results, does not display control over his own behaviour actions, and environmental events that can lead to success. He also displays lack of confidence in his skills and abilities. He thinks that he has low intelligence and that he does not have sufficient skills to accomplish tasks.

If by chance he gets a good grade, this student will attribute the success to lack or to other things or persons but never himself. He tends to generalize his failure everything else thus performs poorly most of the time. He focuses on his weaknesses rather than strengths and skills. Consequently, he develops passivity.

Of course, there is help for students with learned helplessness. It is crucial to understand that a learned helpless child is reluctant to seek help when he is having
difficulty performing a task in school. Learning strategies and strategic task behaviour are not very helpful. This means that it will be easier for them to solve a problem by giving them steps to follow to finish a task.

Bear in mind that the child, when successful, attributes the success to luck and still feel inadequate. To have a long term effect on improving the learned helplessness condition, teaching the child a compensatory strategy he can apply in doing task can do wonders. Refrain the child to focus on strategies that help them achieve their academic goals. For example, encouraging words such as “May be you can think another way to solve your Math problem.” So that the feedback stays on the effort which is within the child’s control and which can be changed as the need arises.

References:

