

Educational Therapy

What is Educational Therapy?

Educational therapy is an intervention for students with learning disabilities which focuses on strengthening a student's perceptual and cognitive skills. The goal of therapy is to help the student develop independence and responsibility in the classroom and in life.

What is a learning disability and how is it diagnosed?

Students with average to superior intelligence who have specific deficits in perception and/or cognitive skills are said to be learning disabled. An educational battery of formal and informal tests is required to determine areas of strength and weaknesses and to identify specific learning disabilities. The psychological testing must be done before admission to the program and every three years thereafter.

How did the Discovery Program of Educational Therapy begin?

The NILD Educational Therapy model was developed by a Christian nurse/educator in conjunction with Drs. A.A. Silver, MD and R.A. Hagin, Ph.D. at New York University in the 1960's. In 1973, Norfolk Christian schools, in Norfolk, Virginia, pioneered the first school program utilizing the model. Due to increasing requests from other schools the National Institute for Learning Disabilities was established in 1982 as a training organization to make the program available to the Christian community around the world. Currently, NILD is developing various means (private, clinic, private and public schools as possible) to make this form of intervention available to a wider population of students with learning needs. The program is referred to as the Discovery Program.

When would my child attend the program?

Students in Educational Therapy receive two 80-minute sessions of intensive one-on-one therapy per week, which includes a variety of techniques designed to stimulate and strengthen students' specific areas of perceptual and cognitive difficulties and their overall ability to think.

Who will be the Educational Therapist?

NILD educational therapists, Elizabeth Hicks, Karen Hoogenboom, Kate Helms and Lisa Nolan work with our therapy students. Mrs. Hicks is the Director of our Discovery Program. All have received specialized training from NILD beyond their degrees in education, and will be involved in continuing education in the field.

How does The Discovery Program relate to the regular classroom?

Accommodations are made in the regular class based on the specific needs of the individual student. While the student is in therapy the goal is to create a situation in which the student can work to his/her maximum potential by adjusting class requirements in order to relieve excessive stress until educational therapy has helped the student become independent and responsible in the classroom.

How are parents involved?

Regular collaboration between the therapist, parents and teachers is recommended in order to develop an improved educational program for each student. Parents are encouraged to be involved with their child at home and to work closely with the therapist. Parents are asked to come to orientation meetings and attend the first six therapy sessions in order to work with their child. Informational and training meetings are held for parents periodically.

What is the main focus of the program?

The focus of the therapy is on strengthening the areas of weakness in perception and cognition that cause difficulty rather than on finding ways to compensate and work around them.

The Discovery Program of Educational Therapy is skill-oriented. The purpose of working in a specific area is to improve basic learning skills so the student can learn and work independently on his/her own. Most tasks in life require integration of skills. For example, one skill a student needs is to be able to take notes in class. To do this a student must:

- stay focused on the teacher's voice – attention skill
- accurately hear and remember what the teacher is saying – auditory skill
- read any visual information given on the board or transparencies – decoding, comprehension/memory skills
- identify the main point of what the teacher is saying – analysis skill
- decide what information to write down – evaluation skill
- remember how to spell the words being recorded – encoding/visual memory skills
- write down information legibly – visual-motor coordination/spatial organization skills

Under normal circumstances these tasks are integrated, which means the brain performs the tasks simultaneously and automatically without our being aware of each individual skill. For students with learning disabilities certain key skills are not automatic, causing them to struggle with common tasks. Discovery therapy techniques have been developed which require students to use various combinations of perceptual and cognitive skills, thus encouraging the development of neurological integration.

How long will my child be in the program?

The number of years a student is enrolled varies according to the severity of the deficit. A minimum of three years seems to be the norm. The ultimate objective is the development of self-reliance and logical thinking in both academic and living situations.

How is the program financed?

The cost of the Discovery program includes the therapists' salary, instructional materials, testing material, and administrative expenses. The fee is in addition to the classroom tuition.