

As we begin a new school year, many children and parents experience fear and anxiety as the first few days and weeks of school evolve. A majority of this fear is normal. It is natural for us to have some fear as we explore the unknown. For children who struggle in the classroom, a new school year can pose increased fear for both the child and the parent.

The child may have fear of inadequacy. The demands of a work load that may be increasing adds to this anxiety. They are surrounded by new faces, routines and rules. Completing work within specific time limits, under specific guidelines, with a new teacher who doesn't know their learning style are all well founded fears. A fear of failure is easily bolstered when the student feels overwhelmed. The self confidence they developed from last years successes and extracurricular studies may be derailed.

Parents are placed into fear by teachers who question why the child doesn't appear to be listening and following along at the same rate and speed as the rest of the class. Presumptions and judgments are formed within the first hour of class time. The parent feels the anxiety of failure too. Does my child have what it takes to stay in school at this level? Did the time and money for special programs and therapy not work. This is when parents need to show their confidence. They need to trust in their own God given ability to sense what is best for the child. Fear inhibits self confidence and we need self-esteem and confidence to build on. Too often we get pulled back into fear. Why?? Because in most educational settings, we focus on weaknesses instead of strengths. We look at what's wrong instead of how to fix it.

I am going to use an example of my friend Christopher and what happened just this past week, as he went back to school. Christopher has Cerebral Palsy. He is in third grade in a private school in Los Angeles. Both his mom and his third grade teacher are very good friends of mine. They have heard me talking and preaching about recognizing the child's strengths for three years now. Christopher's mom works at the school as a teacher, so all of the teacher's are familiar with Christopher's needs and challenges with learning. His teacher had received lots information on strategies that work best for him in the classroom.

Just to give you a little background on Christopher. He was adopted from Jamaica three years ago. Prior to that time, Christopher had spent the first five years of his life in an orphanage, where sixteen hours a day he was in a crib. When he was allowed to go outside, he was placed on rough cement. Christopher was unable to walk due to the tendons and muscles in his legs being tight because of the cerebral palsy. So he was placed on his hands and knees on this rough cement for his play time outside. Needless to say, out of protection to his knees and hands, Chris didn't move very much when allowed to be outside.

Within the first few months of being in the United States, he had surgery to release the hamstrings and heel cord tightness in his legs, so he could stand and eventually walk. He also began formal education for the first time, in Kindergarten.

Because he had difficulty holding a pencil, and even staying upright in his seat, Kindergarten was a great challenge. By the end of school that year, his teacher felt that the private school, regular education classroom, was most likely not the right environment for Christopher. I began working with Christopher the summer in between Kindergarten and first grade. I quickly found that Christopher's learning difficulties were greatly linked not to decreased cognitive abilities, but simply to lack of exposure, movement, and experience.

The decision was made that Christopher could stay at the school and give first grade a try. I worked closely with Christopher, his mom and his first grade teacher that year. At the end of the year, standardized testing showed as much as three years growth in processing skills, and this was also seen in the classroom, with mastery of most of the first grade curriculum. The same program was continued in second grade. That brings us to third grade.

Now this is not to say that Christopher didn't greatly struggle, and that everything moved along smoothly, between first and third grade. Christopher, his mom, and his teacher invested lots of time and energy into his learning. However, Christopher's personality of thankfulness and gratefulness and his attitude of never give up, he was entering third grade.

Even though there had been a history and background of academic success for Christopher over the past two years and his third grade teacher had received information and training on what to expect with Christopher, the anxiety of a new classroom, new routines and “the unknown” created fear in Christopher, and his teacher. The teacher began realizing his differences from the other children in terms of speed and organization, as well as actual skill level. She became overwhelmed at the thought of how to teach him effectively. She began confiding in her good friend, Christopher’s mom, for advice on how to work through the areas of difficulties. The list of difficulties, immediately overwhelmed his mother and she was pushed to a place of fear of how is he going to make it through third grade? Is this school the right school for him and how could she ask her dear friend to take on the task of teaching her child? School started on Tuesday and by Thursday, Christopher’s mom was calling the public school to see how she could get him enrolled in Special Education. Optimism gone...fear had taken hold. A shift had occurred in only two days from focusing on Christopher’s strengths, to only focusing on his weaknesses.

Christopher’s mom did not follow through that day with moving him to the local public school special education program. Instead she began to list all his strengths and growth in learning that had occurred over the past three years. The areas of concern that had been identified in the classroom were recognized and a plan on how to fix each one was immediately designed and implemented. By Monday, the teacher came running up to Christopher’s mom beaming from ear to ear and reporting successful event after successful event. Christopher was smiling and loving third grade.

Based on nothing else other than celebrating strengths, and finding solution for problems, Christopher will have a successful third grade year. When we focus on children’s strengths, **the impossible becomes possible**. This is the one of the most important keys to education.

Parents and teachers let me give you the tools to assist you in recognizing your children strengths within learning. One of the biggest tools I can give you right now is the **AWARENESS** of the power behind focusing on your child’s strengths. The focus should be on what is beautiful and unique to your child. As you start your day with your child, name at least one new thing that is amazing about him/her today. Before you know it your list will



## What Puts Parents Into Fear?

be so long about all the amazing things your child does, that this will soon become your natural and primary focus. When you have a positive focus, it cycles through all the other areas of your child's life. Success will occur automatically.

Make it a great day in the life of your child today. If you have a specific challenge, in regards to your child, please write to me at [www.speechandmotion.com](http://www.speechandmotion.com), and we can problem solve it together.

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