

Transitioning to CTY Summer Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities

Email: cty-disabilities@jhu.edu

Call: 410-735-6215

The combination of a rigorous academic course and new social environment, in addition to a residential experience for some students, requires preparation for most CTY students and their families. This preparation may be even more helpful for students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia or dysgraphia. This document seeks to provide some tips for facilitating your child's transition into the program and having a successful experience once there.

The environment of CTY Summer Programs is very different than that in a typical school or home. Three key aspects make the CTY environment unique:

- **CTY courses include the presentation of a lot of skills and information over a short period of time.** Unlike a typical school course, a CTY course covers a lot of ground in three short weeks. Students who are used to working a slower pace over a longer period of time may need to adapt a strategy of focusing on key parts of a task to gain as much as possible from each assignment.
- **Extensive time is spent in the classroom studying one subject.** Unlike a typical school setting, students at CTY study one subject for 5-7 hours a day. They are in the same classroom with the same teacher and students. Adjusting to these academic demands can take some time. Because students study just one subject, choosing a course that suits a student's strengths is of particular importance.
- **Students have an increased responsibility for attending to their own needs.** At home, and even in their home schools, students are often surrounded by people that have known them for an extended period of time and know what supports they need to be successful. At CTY, staff members take great efforts to get to know each student quickly; however, students also need to take responsibility for knowing who to go to with questions or concerns and asking for this assistance when needed. Staff members are always available to assist students, but students will need to take initiative to seek out that assistance.

Before the program begins:

After your child has registered and been assigned to a course for the summer, contact CTY Disability Services at 410-735-6215 or cty-disabilities@jhu.edu to discuss your child's needs.

By providing CTY Disability Services with as much information as you can, you will help the summer staff best serve your child and allow for a positive experience. The more information you can provide, the more likely it is your child will have a more successful experience. Documentation will need to be sent to CTY Disability Services following the documentation guidelines explained during your conversation with a CTY Disability Services staff member.

To aid in deciding which accommodations may be helpful in the CTY setting, here is a list of commonly requested accommodations and supports for students with various learning disabilities that have helped students transition into the program smoothly and find success.

- Use of a laptop/word processor and assistance with printing as needed (students typically provide their own laptop, some include dictation software)
- Use of "smart" pen in class (student provides)
- Book and reading list provided in advance (when possible)
- Modified assignments or extended time (when possible)
- Written directions to accompany verbal directions
- Increase in task structure (breaking larger assignments into smaller parts, modifying open-ended tasks to include more checkpoints, etc.)
- Copies of notes from class and/or a guide for taking notes
- Posted agendas in the classroom and the residence hall
- Overlooking spelling/neatness in assessments (as appropriate)
- Providing oral responses on assessments instead of written responses (as appropriate).

CTY does have students with learning disabilities that attend our programs and do not request formal accommodations. These students have found ways to compensate for weaknesses without needing formal accommodations or support. If this is the case for your child, we still appreciate getting as much information as possible. We will use it to best inform our staff on site about working with your child and to be aware of any issues that may not usually surface in school, but could in the unique environment at

CTY. If you are not sure about requesting formal accommodations, please think through CTY's environment as well as the examples of common accommodations or supports implemented at CTY for students with learning disabilities. We also encourage you to contact CTY Disability Services with any questions. It may be better to set up a plan for your child in order to be proactive about providing him or her with optimal access to the program.

Tips For Helping To Ensure A Successful CTY Summer Experience:

Contact CTY Disability Services as soon as possible. If you complete a Request for Accommodations form through CTY Disability Services, think about the program holistically (not just in the classroom). Talk with your child about how he or she can best be supported. Have your child talk with CTY Disability Services staff about his or her needs.

Ensure that adults working with your child are aware of specific difficulties your child faces and the strategies implemented to help with these to date as well as your child's strengths. This needs to be communicated to CTY Disability Services ahead of the session. The more information you can provide to help us be helpful to your child, the better. By informing CTY of known strengths and weaknesses, staff can better to play to strengths while working to ameliorate weaknesses.

Consult with appropriate school personnel and professionals knowledgeable about your child. Talk with them about your child's upcoming CTY experience and ask for recommendations they might have. These individuals have often seen your child in academic and situations when you are not around and may have valuable insights to offer about your child's attendance at CTY.

Read through the Site Information Packet and any other CTY-related materials with your child. Discuss the Honor Code and student expectations for behavior. Talk about how these rules and expectations may be different from those in school or at home and how this may relate to his or her daily routine and behaviors. Have your child start practicing meeting the expectations (that may be different than what he or she is used at home) so he or she can get used to the environment.

Think about the social, academic, and organizational skills that are required in the CTY setting that may not be needed in the home or school environment. For example, if your child typically spends a lot of time organizing materials outside of class time, this may not be possible at CTY due to the full schedule of the program. Discuss how your child might be able to keep up with organization within class time with support from the instructor or teaching assistant, if needed. In addition, if your child is participating at a residential site, discuss how he or she will share living spaces with others, will have to be responsible for getting ready in the morning and at night, will

need to do laundry, etc. You may want to consider providing your child with some basic hygiene and housekeeping pointers, such as how to do laundry, how to make healthy food choices, how to keep possessions clean and organized, and how to share personal space with a roommate. Your child's Resident Assistant will also be on-hand to provide guidance and supervision in these areas.

Think about the situations that will be new that may cause your child anxiety.

Discuss these with CTY Disability Services and your child in advance to prepare as much as possible. For example, a lot of material is covered in a short period of time in classes. Be sure to talk with your child about not being afraid to speak with his or her instructor, teaching assistant/program assistant, resident assistant, or academic counselor if he or she is feeling overwhelmed.

Discuss strategies for dealing with anxiety in the CTY setting with your child and share this with CTY Disability Services and the academic counselor on site. What does your child normally do to cope in stressful situations? Will this be possible at CTY? (If you're not sure, discuss this with CTY Disability Services). Talk with your child and CTY Disability Services about what else your child can do to handle stress and anxiety on site.

Talk to the academic counselor the week prior to the start of the program. (**Please note that the counselor will call you. If you do not hear from counselor within a day or two of the start of your child's program, please feel free to contact the site office and ask to speak with the counselor). The academic counselor is the point person for you on-site to discuss any accommodations or information that will help your child have a successful experience on site. Take this opportunity to share further information and ensure you both understand the Accommodations and/or Support Plan developed through CTY Disability Services. Have questions prepared that came up in any discussions with your child in preparing him or her for the program.

Talk to your child about where he or she can go for assistance while on site. Make sure that before your child is without you on-site that he or she knows who to talk to if he or she is feeling stressed or anxious.

During the program:

On Opening Day, be sure to meet with the academic counselor on site. The academic counselor will most likely be stationed at the medical table at registration. If not, ask the health or other CTY staff where to locate the counselor.

Check-in with your child and the academic counselor regularly. You may want to let the academic counselor know on Opening Day/Registration Day that you would like to speak with him or her at some point during the first week so that you know how your

child is progressing in the program. It is easier to address any issue that may arise as it is developing rather than after it has surfaced. You know your child best, so site staff members appreciate any information you can update them with during the summer.

After the program:

On Closing Day, you'll have the opportunity to discuss your child's academic progress in a conference with his or her instructor. You may also want to check in with the academic counselor. Use any challenges faced as a learning experience and celebrate your child's successes in the program.

After the summer, you may be asked to participate in a survey about you and your child's experiences. Any feedback is appreciated to help improve future CTY summer experiences for students (and parents).

Further Resources:

Your child's CTY experience can help to prepare him or her for the college experience. The resources below may be helpful for you to help in preparing your child for the CTY Summer Programs, transitioning into middle or high school, and making the transition to college.

LEARNING DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND BEYOND - AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE:

This book provides a good approach to helping students succeed in the collegiate setting. Of particular note is chapter nine, written by Lynda Katz. She discusses the challenges of transitioning between high-school and university, as well as avenues for addressing and overcoming these difficulties using school resources and technology. The rigors of CTY's classes match those of most university classes, thus this article is particularly apt and helpful to parents.

DIFFERENT MINDS: GIFTED CHILDREN WITH AD/HD, ASPERGER SYNDROME, AND OTHER LEARNING DEFICITS:

This book works through the interweaving difficulties between giftedness and learning disabilities. Additionally, the book does a wonderful job explaining what it means to be gifted and how having a learning difficulty can affect, and occasionally benefit a student's giftedness.

TO BE GIFTED AND LEARNING DISABLED:

One of the formative texts on understanding students who are gifted and learning disabled. The text is written by Susan Baum, a leader and expert in the field.

2E NEWSLETTER AND BLOG (<http://2enewsletter.blogspot.com/>) and (<http://www.2enewsletter.com>):

Both the blog and the newsletter provide current articles and information related to all things “twice exceptional.” The bi-monthly newsletter has a subscription fee, but the blog and news briefings (a collection of links to twice exceptional articles sent monthly) are free. Past newsletter themes have included ADHD, dysgraphia, transitioning to college and more. You can see a complete listing of past newsletter topics on the 2eNewsletter website.

COLLEGES STEP UP TO MEET DYSLEXIA CHALLENGE

(<http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2011/09/27/colleges-step-up-to-meet-dyslexia-challenge?PageNr=1>):

This U.S. News article describes the current “scene” for students with learning disabilities entering colleges. It offers several tips for students as they explore college options.

SMART BUT SCATTERED:

Written by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare, this book addresses executive function struggles and offers tips for parents (and educators) to help identify a child’s strengths and challenges and then tips for helping address weaknesses in areas such as getting organized, resisting impulses, staying focused, using time wisely, planning, following through, being resourceful, etc.

HELPING THE CHILD WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES FIND SOCIAL SUCCESS- IT’S SO MUCH WORK TO BE YOUR FRIEND:

Written by Richard LaVoie, this book addresses how to assist students that might struggle socially due to their learning disability. It addresses anxiety and its impact on social situations, language difficulties, ADHD, social skills at home, social skills at school (including handling bullying), and social skills in the community.