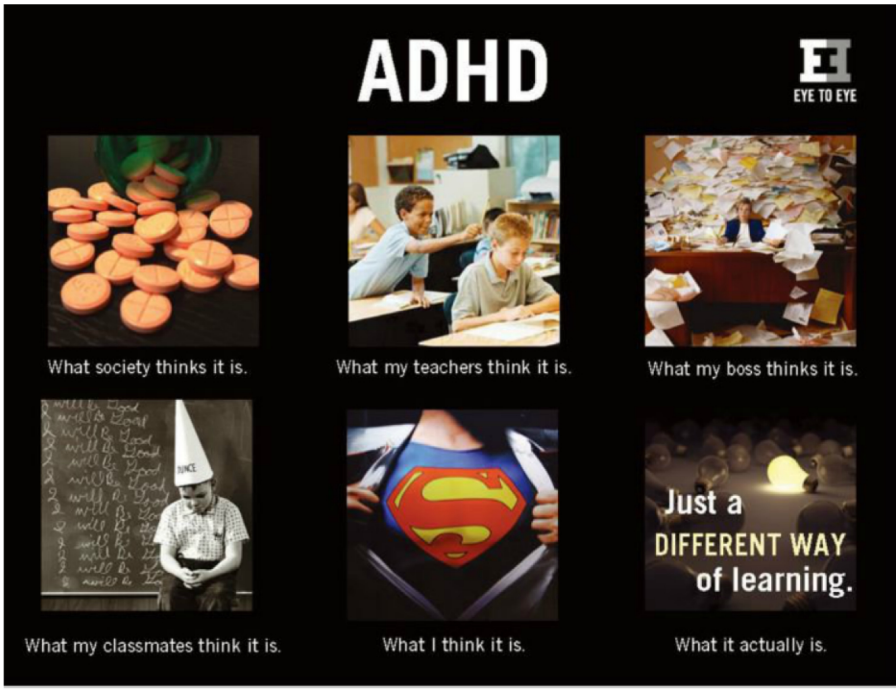
Eye to Eye's Mentoring Model

by Mark Katz, PhD



EYE TO EYE is a national after-school mentoring model that pairs high school or college students who are successfully managing ADHD or other learning differences with younger students who face the same challenges. Mentor and mentee spend time together, share personal experiences, and collaborate on projects.

Struggling younger children have the opportunity to see firsthand that people with the same challenges can have successful academic careers and lead very satisfying lives. They also discover that success doesn't just happen—younger students need to determine how they learn best, find the tools they need to navigate around their challenges, and learn how to ask for what they need. Who better to help them learn these things than their Eye to Eye mentors? It's a simple idea that appears to be yielding significant results.

Research conducted by Harvard University Graduate School of Education and Columbia University Teachers College, as cited by Eye to Eye, shows that participants have seen improvement in the following areas after being mentored in Eye to Eye. Eighty-two percent of participating children view their mentor as the kind of student they want to be, 73 percent feel their mentor helped them learn how to ask for the things they need to succeed in school, and 87 percent reported that "being a part of Eye to Eye got me to think about what I'm good at."

Eye to Eye notes that mentors benefit from the experience as well. Eighty-nine percent felt that being part of Eye to Eye made them better advocates for themselves as students with learning differences, and 81 percent agree or strongly agree that Eye to Eye helped them to think about their own learning styles.

The program has grown considerably since it was first highlighted in this column in 2007. There are currently fifty-six Eye to Eye chapters in twenty states.

How the program works

Eye to Eye programs are structured so that mentors and mentees meet weekly during after-school hours. During these meetings they create art projects drawn from the Eye to Eye art empowerment curriculum. This unique art curriculum was designed by artists who also experience learning differences. Art projects serve as a vehicle for discovering personal strengths, talking about challenges, and learning how to ask for what one needs in school to successfully navigate around these challenges.

Mentors know firsthand how difficult it can be to ask for help, especially when learning differences are seen as shameful and embarrassing. But mentors also know that feelings of shame and embarrassment are the result of misunderstanding. Once students and educators gain knowledge and greater awareness, an embarrassing label can be transformed into a badge of distinction—the distinction of being a different learner.

The best way to overcome a person's prejudice against and misunderstanding of learning differences is to introduce him or her to someone who lives successfully with these differences—particularly someone who can share their experiences openly and effectively. Eye to Eye envisions a future in which those with LD and/or ADHD not only take ownership of their challenges, but change the conversation about these challenges to highlight positive approaches and outcomes.

Key components of chapters

Each Eye to Eye chapter comprises the following four components:

- **Mentor Site.** Most chapters are located on college campuses, with a few high schools around the United States sponsoring chapters as well. Chapter coordinators and mentors are recruited from the mentor site.
- **Mentee Site.** These sites are the elementary or middle schools where weekly mentoring meetings occur. Children wishing to participate in the program are drawn from the mentee site.
- **Student Coordinators.** Each chapter is led by two coordinators, both of whom work closely with Eye to Eye's national leadership team to ensure that program components are replicated with fidelity.
- **Faculty Coordinators.** Two faculty coordinators are involved in each chapter; one from the mentor site, the other from the mentee site. Faculty coordinators provide support throughout the year to student coordinators at their site.

Young Leaders Organizing Institute

Each summer, chapter coordinators from around the country participate in Eye to Eye's

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Young Leaders Organizing Institute, a unique four-day training experience where they learn leadership skills to help them with the coming year's chapter activities.

As part of the training, coordinators also develop their chapter's action plan for the upcoming year. The plan includes mentor recruitment activities, roles and responsibilities of the coordinator, a listing of important events during the year, and a description of how the coordinator plans to implement the art curriculum.

"The four-day experience is as much a celebration of differences as it is a training on differences," says Micah Goldfus, Eye to Eye's National Program Director. "Coordinators leave feeling empowered, with a shared sense of community."

Think Different Diplomats

Although the number of chapters continues to grow, most communities are still awaiting the establishment of an Eye to Eye chapter. These communities can learn about the Eye to Eye experience through the program's Think Different Diplomats. These are Eye to Eye mentors who make presentations to schools, organizations, and conference planning committees seeking more information on how the program is helping to change the conversation about learning differences.

Presentations include an introduction to ADHD and other learning differences and an explanation of the impact stigma and misunderstanding can have on the lives of people struggling with these differences. The Think Different Diplomat discusses his or her own personal journey from struggling childhood to successful adulthood. The presentation also suggests tools to assist struggling school-age children with their journey, and lays out steps to a successful transition to high school or college. Readers interested in bringing a Think Different Diplomat to their community should contact Josh Landay at jlanday@eyetoeyenational.org.

Camp Vision

During the summer months, Eye to Eye also provides a day camp experience for children with ADHD and other learning differences. Children engage in fun outdoor activities supervised by high school and college students who are living successfully with their own learning differences. Activities develop skills in team building and working collaboratively and encourage children to view challenges in a new light.

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As part of their summer camp experience, children also create My Advocacy Plan (MAP), a personalized presentation they can deliver to their IEP team, 504 accommodations team, or to their teachers and parents during school conference meetings. The MAP focuses on their particular learning style and the tools and strategies that allow them to learn best.

Visit eyetoeyenational.org to learn more about this unique mentoring model, including how to start a chapter in your community. To receive their updates, you can sign up on their website.

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