

Dr. Susan Leslie: Advocate, Partner and Friend



For children who have undergone treatment for a brain tumor, school can be an overwhelming experience. They may struggle with attention span,

processing speed and memory. Depending on the tumor's location and treatment, other aspects of functioning, such as language, executive and motor skills may also be affected. In addition, children may experience behavioral changes—irritability, unpredictable bouts of fatigue, difficulty regulating emotions, and more. Not surprisingly, issues like these can lead to both academic and social challenges. That's where the educational specialists on the Making Headway Ongoing Care Team come in.

One such specialist is Susan Leslie, PhD, a neuropsychology and educational consultant who supports families in the Connecticut area.

Dr. Leslie serves as an advocate for families, working to ensure each child's academic, social and emotional needs are met. One way she does this is by partnering with staff at the child's school. She reviews cognitive testing and other medical records to establish what type of curriculum, classroom situation, modifications, and accommodations would be most helpful for a given child, and then shares her findings with the family and the school. She is supported in this by her

colleagues: when appropriate, members of the Ongoing Care Team consult with each other, so families benefit from a range of specialties and expertise. It is a long-term commitment.


"The process of returning to school is a journey that unfolds over time, as the child's brain heals and new connections are developed," says Dr. Leslie. "Our team is typically available to families right through college."

Grace came to Making Headway as a 10-year-old. She was being treated for a brain tumor that had first been discovered two years before, and was experiencing significant behavioral and learning issues at school. School personnel welcomed ideas for how best to educate her.

"After meeting her and reading all relevant medical and educational records, I partnered with the public school team to help them create an appropriate educational program," says Dr. Leslie.

She met with school staff to explain the neurology behind Grace's particular challenges. Then she suggested both behavioral and teaching strategies that would help. For example, she recommended that worksheets be made visually less cluttered, that a break room be provided, and that certain activities be instituted to help with social skills.

Today, Grace is in ninth grade and enjoying school. She is motivated to learn, enjoys her relationships with staff and friends, and is progressing academically, behaviorally and socially. Dr. Leslie continues to meet with school staff throughout each academic year to help tweak the program based on her progress, and to address any issues that arise. Grace's mom has come to count on her:

"I can confidently handle the medical aspect of my daughter's care but am not always sure when it comes to Grace's education. Susan always has my daughter's back. I never fear walking into a [school team] meeting with her by my side because I know that she knows Grace and will do everything she can to help her reach her goals. I don't know what we would do without Susan." 

Left: Dr. Susan Leslie.

*Below: Naomi Borbon.
Todd Shapera Photography.*

