

# When Learning is Hard, What Do You Do?



Special guests: Dr. Todd Cunningham, Susan Schenk  
Presented by: The Academic Resource Committee of Northern School Council

# Dr. Todd Cunningham

Dr. Cunningham leads the Bright Lights Psychology Team. He is a school and clinical psychologist registered in Ontario. He also is an assistant professor at the University of Toronto and is chair of the School and Clinical Child Psychology program. Dr. Cunningham received his PhD in School and Clinical Child Psychology at University of Toronto and later completed his postdoctoral studies at the Hospital for Sick Children in neuropsychology.

Over the past five years, Dr. Cunningham has led workshops on assessment throughout Canada. He has given over 650 presentations and workshops internationally to educators and psychologists on learning disabilities and how to support students with learning difficulties. He is also actively involved in the field of school psychology advocacy and is a member of the Ontario Psychological Association working group on Learning Disability and Remote Assessment. In addition, he is a board member of the Learning Disability Association of Ontario.

At Bright Lights, Dr. Cunningham specializes in conducting psychoeducational assessments and treating mental health challenges such as: anxiety and mood-related disorders; attention difficulties; and complex trauma. His area of expertise is in working with children with learning disabilities and using assistive technology.

# Susan Schenk

Susan worked as an Occupational Therapist in the school setting for 20 years. She watched, learned, and looked at skills and how learning was viewed and what seemed to be missing when it came to supporting kids that were learning differently. She had the passion to create change in this part of the learning world. From her own learning and professional experiences, she started a business to help parents support their children in a new way so they could see their learning abilities. She then created various online courses to support other Occupational Therapists to allow them to tap into the power of technology when it came to developing skills. From there, she developed her Invincible Mama program, wrote a book, and finally, the Shift Your Thinking charitable organization with Sperry Bilyea.

Her book, *Beyond Ok from Invisible to Invincible* reviews each part of her learning difference journey — from a child to a parent and an Occupational Therapist working in the school setting.

Shift Your Thinking is a charitable organization with an annual summit - a meeting place for parents and professionals to connect and learn in a setting together without shame or fear, a Professional Resource Hub and a Parent Membership Community. Shift's mission is to change how people view and approach learning differences.

# Presentation Overview

1. Introduction (5 min)
2. A Parent's Story (3 min)
3. Susan Schenk - Behind a Learning Difference (15 min)
4. Dr. Cunningham - What is a Learning Difference? (30 min)
5. Next Steps (5 min)
6. Q and A

# A Parent's Story



Tania Osmond

# Behind a Learning Difference



Susan Schenk

# What is a learning difference?



Dr. Todd Cunningham

# Next Steps

## BE CURIOUS

- Am I missing something?
  - Questions to ask yourself about your child - am I seeing...? I've been wondering...
  - Questions to ask your child - tell me what it's like. what's hard? what are you feeling at school?
  - Questions to ask a teacher/friend/family member - what are you seeing? what is your experience with...?
- Am I part of the problem?
  - Questions to ask yourself- what drives me? am I fixing the real problem? am I in denial about something?

## CREATE YOUR HOME SETTING

- You're safe with me (it's ok not to know)
- Same team - We're going to figure this out together and find what fits
- Growth mindset - you just don't know how to do this yet...but you will
- We're going to break the issue down into steps
- The goal is your healthy development, not grades



# Next Steps - links in blue

## FIND RESOURCES (organizations, books, webinars, videos, tests, tools)

- [Shift Your Thinking](#) (books, webinars, tools) - \*SPECIAL NORTHERN SC LINK [HERE](#)\*
- [Video: Why Do We Assess?](#) Dr. Todd Cunningham
- [Bright Lights Psychology Clinic](#) (webinars, tests, tools)
- [Northern Academic Resource Committee webpage](#)
- [At Select](#) (assistive technology)
- [CADDAC](#) (Center for ADHD Awareness, Canada)
- [ADDitudemag.com](#) (network for ADHD information, tests, treatment overviews, tools, webinars)
- [TDSB Professional Support Services](#) (mental health and well-being)
- [Lumenus](#) (office at Northern, but for all ages and schools)
- [School Mental Health Ontario](#)
- Productivity and Time management Apps: Pomodoro-Tracker.com (free), RescueTime.com, AmazingMarvin.com, GetinFlow.io

# Next Steps - links in blue

## FIND A PROFESSIONAL

- [Shift Your Thinking](#) - Parent Membership Community (resources, monthly experts, parent support)
- [Bright Lights Psychology Clinic](#) - Psych Ed assessment, intervention, therapy
- [CADDAC](#) (Center for ADHD Awareness, Canada)
- Word of mouth/past speakers

## FIND COMMUNITY/SUPPORT

- For Parent
  - Another parent (friend, neighborhood, school)
  - SYT - Parent Membership Community - Welcome Week (link)
  - School Guidance Department, Academic Support Department (NSS - Academic Resource: Amanda Kearney, Gifted: Monique Cipollone, Student Success: April Vibert)
- For Student
  - SYT - [Rise Up Youth Calls](#)
  - SYT - [Freedom from Shame](#)
  - School Guidance Department, [Lumenus](#) (Dale Callender)

# Thank you for joining us!



Visit our website for the recording, more resources and learning opportunities  
[nsscouncil.com](https://nsscouncil.com)