

Twenty Six Reasons for Home Schooling A Child Who Has Learning Difficulties

-by Suzanne Day

As a psycho/educational consultant working with home school, public school and private school children, I constantly witness "unexpected" levels of achievement from children with learning difficulties being home schooled, in comparison with the level attained with children presenting similar problems in different settings. God chose to bless my husband and I with a gifted child with learning difficulties which deepened our search for remedial solutions, but more importantly, forced us to constantly re-examine our priorities and heart attitudes toward a person who learns differently. Through this exciting journey guided by God's Spirit, one sleepless night in the fall of 1998, God gave me ten reasons why home schooling is, for us, the best option to educate a child who would qualify for "learning disabilities." As I shared my list with friends and clients, my list grew, and I hope one day to publish a little booklet to encourage more parents. Please feel very welcome to share your own experience with me in order to extend each other's "hope".

I have tried, in vain, to present these twenty six reasons by degree of importance, to discover that they all have an important role according to what each reader needs to hear at a given time.

The expression "LD child", is used in this article to facilitate the flow of speech, and stands for "a child with learning difficulties", including learning disabilities, attention-deficit disorder (ADD), dyslexic, and others which are on a continuum from light to severe. Most children referred to me have symptoms of inattention. The symptom of inattention and of impulsiveness are often labelled ADD, or ADHD, but according to my experience all these children have some types of learning inefficiencies and I have all these children in mind in writing this article. Some reasons described herein can also applied to "special needs" children, including giftedness. However, another article will be written to address specific reasons for home schooling a gifted child.

First: an LD child needs an individualised programme. Although experts do not easily agree on a definition of a learning disability, there are three points on which they do agree: these children are average or above-average in intelligence; the basic cause is neither a psychological nor a physical handicap; and they do not learn satisfactorily from standard methods of instruction. These children learn differently than the average children and should be taught with a specially designed programme to fit their learning strengths and

weaknesses. The classroom with 20 to 30 students cannot easily provide individualised programmes. The home schooling setting can.

Second: in a regular school setting, an LD child will have to leave the classroom several times per week to work with a remedial teacher. This singles her/him out in the eyes of the other students as somebody that "has something wrong". Every child dreads the shame of going to the remedial class and to be seen as "retarded", which is often the unconscious label in the little minds of the other students. Home schooling allows the LD child to be shielded, while developing her/his strengths, from that spirit of mockery. Only the parents and sometimes siblings need to know that he works at different grade levels in different subjects.

Third: when his individualised programme includes developmental and remedial activities, some may be difficult to do in a regular classroom: such as wearing ear plugs, or the patching of an eye for few months. The home school provides a favourable environment without the fear of being mocked.

Fourth: this child will respond better one-on-one. I regularly read recommendations from psycho/educational assessment reports after the child had been identified with learning disabilities. I also have to write such reports, increasing my awareness that, in my estimation, at least seventy five percent of these recommendations require a teacher that must work with the child one-on-one. The remedial teachers in a school can rarely afford the time to work with one child at a time, but home schooling should be able provide this one-on-one attention for at least an hour per day, even when the mother has other children to attend to. Dr. Steven Duval, a behavioural psychologist who conducts research, has measured that home schools had children and teachers sitting side-by-side or face-to-face 43% of the time, while special education classrooms had such an arrangement only 6% of the time.

Fifth: an LD child, most of the time, has sensory integration inefficiencies which are an important part of their inattention problems. This child may be hyper- (*over-*) or hypo- (*under-*) sensitive to sound, sight, smell, and/or touch. He will, for example, benefit from a quiet atmosphere or a more stimulating atmosphere than what the public classroom can offer. It may not be easy to establish this at home with many children, but the home is still an ideal place to control the "reception" of information.

Sixth: the home school situation allows parents the flexibility they need to adapt the curriculum at any time, or to change it completely according to the educational progress of the child and their increasing understanding of his learning style and needs.

Seventh: he needs a lot of repetition. An LD child is often referred to as a "leaking bucket." His memory, short-term and long-term, is not as

efficient as it should be because of the anxiety created by certain information or the way the information is presented. God will give the parents the patience to repeat the information in different forms. Repetition does not mean rote repetition but application to that information to different areas of daily life: as you sit, as you walk, as you lie down. In fact, the Bible reinforces this idea in Deuteronomy 6:7 *"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."* We need to remember that learning is "better caught than taught". As home schooling parents grow in that broader awareness, they become more efficient.

Eighth: his need to increase his memory skills is usually not met in a regular classroom. His weakness will be identified they usually will not provide the means to increase it except in the repetition of facts. The home schooled child will have more occasions not only to work at enhancing his memory skills but will be provided the choice on the quality of the content of the memory work. Memorising large portions of Scripture will broaden his memory skills and deepen his thinking skills. Colossians 1:9-11 has been a powerful vehicle in our family to keep our minds focused. We quote it to each other and to ourselves in the first person: "that I may be filled with the knowledge of Your will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,... strengthen with all might according to Your glorious power...for all patience, and longsuffering with joy..."

Ninth: he needs trained teachers to address his needs. One of the questions often asked by parents who are considering the home schooling option for their learning disabled child, or, by parents who are home schooling and discover that their child has a learning disability is, "Wouldn't it be better for my child to be at the public school with the specialised teachers to work with these children?" Yes, and no. Being "trained" does not mean only at the university level. University training is needed to prepare a person to teach different types of learning difficulties, but parents have only to be trained to address the needs of their own child. Using the data from professional testing, the parents can be educated to recognise the learning strengths and the weaknesses of their child. Specific educational and developmental techniques can be taught to the parents, making them the specialised teacher that this child needs. God will use your prayers and other means.

Tenth: the LD child needs consistency and structure which is provided by parents who are the same teachers year after year. Oftentimes, LD children change remedial teachers several times per year, not counting the change in their homeroom.

Eleventh: the LD child often feels frustrated and discouraged, which may lead to a pattern of "depression". He desperately needs to be constantly encouraged. Looking at the meaning of the two suffixes we find that "dis" means "apart, away, negative" and "en" means "to make, quality". The root word "cour" means "heart, desire" and the suffix "age" means "that which, state". The definition of courage from Webster's dictionary is "that quality of mind which meets danger or opposition with intrepidity, calmness, and firmness; the quality of being fearless." The home provides an excellent ground to impart "courage", which is a heartfelt strength coming from caring people. Our educational attitude is disproportionately filled with finger-pointing at mistakes, in comparison to "positive" comments that lift up our spirit. The LD child, (and really, everybody), needs a ratio of four positive comments for each negative comment. The positive comments do not only need to include compliments on what he does right (which is often difficult to find!) but clear directions on "how to" and "why to" in order to direct his thinking and actions. The home schooling situation with parents who are committed to support him and find solutions will be able to better control the quality of the interaction.

Twelfth: an LD child, being vulnerable to low self-worth, needs thoughtful educators who address their demands to him considering his strengths and weaknesses. When dealing with multiple educators, the LD child is confronted with different points of view in the way that he is seen. He has to adapt to these different angles as he tries to please. Because the LD child can do well on some days, but on other days he cannot, he is often singled out as "lazy" by people who do not understand. We are led to believe that if ever he would "try harder" he would succeed! He is often surrounded by lack of understanding. The difficulties are real and rooted in the central nervous system functions. The home schooling parents should make every effort to ensure that their child understands that his reading, spelling, and language difficulties are not related to his value as God's child nor as a person, family, or church member. The LD child needs his parents', brothers' and sisters' help to discover his self-worth in God's eyes. Thomas Edison, who had great difficulty with learning at school, was finally home schooled. He was led to later say: "All that I am, all that I ever hope to be, I owe to my mother."

Thirteenth: most LD children need more interaction with the teacher because of their difficulty with expressive language. A large body of research proves that education is a function of the amount of time a child spends in educational interactions, as opposed to the time the child spends merely sitting in class or in front of a computer. In this respect, home schools have an enormous advantage over public "special education" classrooms. Dr. Duvall's research points out that

children in public school "special education" classrooms spent 74.9% of their time with no academic responses. Home schooled children only spent 40.7% in this mode.

Fourteenth: often the LD child thinks more in pictures of concepts and ideas than in words. The non-verbal conceptualisation is many times faster than verbal conceptualisation, which is thinking with the sound of the language. The strong visualizer will need more time to transcribe his pictures into words and will often be frustrated and confused in a regular classroom which is primarily organised around verbal conceptualisation. The home school can be adapted to accommodate him providing that the parents understand these differences and discover tools to teach him. Teaching a visual learner does not only include the use of visual material but should allow him the time and the means to translate his pictures into words.

Fifteenth: the home school setting allows the control of three important components in the learning process: frequency, duration, and intensity. These children need short duration (short periods), more frequency (more often), and a lot of intensity (energy level).

Sixteenth: as parents, we need to develop character qualities and God wants to use our children to force us to learn. While home schooling magnifies our weaknesses, it also allows us to humble ourselves in searching deeper grace (energy) from God to improve our attitude. Home schooling parents can no longer put the blame on the "teachers" or the "school"! Because of the proximity in the relationship, they have many occasions to identify their "blind spots" which are in the way of their spiritual growth. Children usually will not advance any farther along the pathway to maturity than where their parents are at any given time. Learning difficulties are inherited. The solutions that parents find for their child can also bring a healing process for themselves and vice-versa, the solutions that they find for themselves will benefit their children. John Powell said, "The most magnificent opportunities come into our lives disguised as problems."

Seventeenth: research shows that an LD child performs better academically in an individualised instruction setting, which the home school provides. This is especially so when the strengths and weaknesses of the child are identified so that the parents can deal with the learning inefficiencies accordingly. Our data over the years clearly confirms this fact with children increasing to at least one year on one subject in just few months. A report of these findings is available to interested readers.

Eighteenth: the LD child desperately needs more time in most activities: reading, writing, getting up in the morning, eating, etc. He needs more time to process information not because he lacks in intelligence but because of certain inefficiencies in the organisation of

his central nervous system and simply because of a different thinking process. He will need more time to mature in general. He will need more time to learn to organise his time, which is a frustrating task as much for the teacher as it is for the student. The structured and yet flexible home school environment will allow him to take the time he needs while remediating weaknesses and learning strategies to organise himself.

Nineteenth: home is the most affordable "tutoring" service. Individualised teaching at \$30.00 per hour (which is a low cost), for at least three hours per day, would cost you \$450.00 per week, \$1,800.00 per month, and \$18,000.00 per year! However, parents should wisely consider investing in professional consultation to guide their teaching and character building efforts. Too often, we meet home schooling mothers who feel guilty for not succeeding in bringing their child up to grade level. The mother who is teaching the child usually suspects that there are learning inefficiencies. By the time she seeks help, she has paid the high cost of frustration, defeat, and a battered self-esteem. A surgeon needs tests to be done, a home builder will look at his plans, and a marketing agent needs the data. It makes sense that the teacher of a child with learning difficulties assumes that responsibility with a thorough assessment of the problems and specific techniques to guide her efforts. Home school parents have freedom to hire the professionals and teachers of their choice.

Twentieth: raising an LD child can be a potential drain of huge amounts of emotional energy on the part of the rest of the family. Because of the need for deep commitment within the home schooling family, the father is often more involved, creating a more balanced educational situation to benefit his maturity. The LD child will benefit more from being "pressured by wisdom" than by "peers".

Twenty-first: the LD child is more susceptible to physical and emotional exhaustion after a whole day in a regular classroom setting because a large portion of his day is spent being frustrated and confused. These children develop headaches, stomach-aches, nightmares, and more. Many scientific studies have shown that long and continued emotional stress physically exhausts a person. Many parents who discover their child's learning difficulties will choose to work with their child after school hours, which only adds to the emotional and physical pressure. In the home school, the parents will be able to use the morning as the optimal time for alertness. Also beneficial are the regular backrub and other physical contact that reassures and loosens tension such as gentle massage. With the application of reassuring, physical touch, these symptoms of exhaustion often disappear after few weeks.

Twenty-second: an LD child often has a weaker immune system with different manifestations like allergies and asthma. The home school allows control of the exposure to germs and allergens.

Twenty-third: the LD child needs to specifically learn social skills which are best learned in context with individualised attention provided by the home schooling context. This child is not only "learning disabled" in the academic domain, but socially he needs more guidance to learn how to reason and how to understand social rules. Some of these rules are explicit and some more subtle. For example, an explicit rule would be a person's manners at the table. A subtle rule would be how to choose when it would or would not be appropriate to greet a person who is not a relative with a kiss.

Twenty-fourth: the LD child needs to develop other gifts. The diagnosis of a learning disability refers to discrepancies between intellectual potential and academic requirements. But these requirements are often limited to mainly linear thinking. It is important to realize that the "disability" often

hides a giftedness in another area: for example, the ability to see in three dimensions with their "mind's eye". The parent-teacher who spends longer periods with their child will discover these specific abilities and will find the means to encourage their expression. It is wise to aim for at least one hour a day for the child to do something at which he excels in, order to discover his different talents and to strengthen his self-worth. The LD child will then have more opportunities at a young age to realise his career inclinations and work early toward developing skills that he will need. Again, the flexibility of the home schooling allows this inclusion in the curriculum.

Twenty-fifth: parents of an LD child need to discover a deeper meaning of humility. God promises to "give grace to the humble". Learning disability is referred to as the "hidden handicap" because there is no outward appearance of the disability. Children with learning disabilities often appear to be no different than their "normal" peers and are frequently confronted with demands than they cannot meet. They are often humiliated. As parents discover a deeper meaning of "humility" for themselves (which is a sense of dependence on God), they will be in better position to not be caught in the "act of humiliation" toward their child. They will be specially equipped to teach their child to react with humility. It requires humility to labour industriously at home educating a child who progresses slowly. It requires humility to face other people who do not necessarily understand why your child acts immaturely, and the reality is that you cannot explain "why" to everybody.

Twenty-sixth: because God is asking us to home school His child. When I picture myself in the grave, at the end of my life, looking back ... I know that I will be glad to have home schooled my LD child. Home schooling is a high calling... home schooling an LD child requires a larger dose of courage, determination, wisdom, initiative, flexibility, creativity, perseverance, honesty, resourcefulness, generosity, tolerance, orderliness, gratefulness, self-control... God has all these qualities in store for us as we give Him our hearts.

Home schooling is a process in which we do better today than yesterday, and less than tomorrow. The condition for success is to commit it **daily** to the Lord. "Lord, give us Your daily grace!"

I pray that these words have been an encouragement to your hearts. I am grateful to God for the exciting inspiration that came to me in writing this article. I thank all those who prayed for this issue on "Learning Disabilities" and for the encouragement of concerned home school leaders like Jean Geyer, Maxine McLellan and Brenda Rishea. I thank God for my husband and our two children with whom I grow spiritually. I would be glad to hear from you and further encourage you individually. "Our soul waits for the Lord: He is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in Him because we have trusted in His holy name. Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us, just as we hope in You." *Psalm 33:13-22*

Copyright: Suzanne Day

Suzanne Day is a psycho/educational consultant, and home schooling mother.

*She can be reached at: Wise Choice Educational Services
Psychoeducational Assessment, Consultation, and Tailored Programs
29 Albert Street, Barrie, Ontario L4M 3S7 Phone (705) 726-5971 * Fax
(705) 726-5958 * [e-mail: wces@bconnex.net](mailto:wces@bconnex.net)*

This article originally appeared in the OCHEC Winter 2000 newsletter.

Permission to reprint must be obtained from the author.