

Home schooling – Home educating, the special –needs child by Martie du Plessis
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If you are a parent of a child with a special need and are considering home schooling, you are undoubtedly have many questions and concerns. You probably know more about home schooling than you realise.

For example: you've spent the first five years of your child's life as his most important "teacher." In addition, if your child has been in public school, you've probably spent many evenings and weekends helping your child do homework or other therapies.

Guess what? You've been home schooling.

Current statistics show South-Africa has about 400 000 disabled or impaired learners. Only about 64 200 of these learners are accommodated in about 380 schools. This indicate that, potentially, 280 000 learners with disabilities or impairments are unaccounted for.

The vast majority of learners have to attend residential special schools in a province other than their own, since no facilities are available in their province of residence.

Home schooling has rapidly become a respected alternative, especially for those children with special needs who are being pushed out of public schools or pushed into centres very far from home. With the one-on-one learning that parents provide in a home school

environment, children with special needs can soar.

The reason? You have a love for your child and the commitment as a family. Your home can be your child's safe place.

It is time for parents with special-need children to know that the day of being without hope is over. These children can be brought home and trained up to be successful in life. If you stop and think about it, children need only a few basic skills, adaptations, correct positioning, equipment and aids to become successful in life. It is by sharing life with the family that this can happen.

Many children with special needs are being pushed out of public schools because the system is unable to accommodate their particular needs or learning styles. Home schooling can be a life-saving choice.

There is no way for you to duplicate what a public school has to offer. Parents should also give themselves permission to take a break and just be with their children.

Let's just look at the role model of Jesus again. The 12 chosen disciples formed the family of Jesus. They were with Him in the house, at the table, in the field. They accompanied Him on His journeys, shared His trials and hardships and entered into His work. Sometimes He taught them as they sat together on the mountainside, sometimes beside the sea, or from the fisherman's boat, sometimes as they walked by the way. Whenever He spoke to the multitude, the disciples formed the inner circle. They pressed close beside Him, that they might lose nothing of His instruction.

Children with special needs beg for something different. You should not enslave yourself to the status quo. A specially fixed curriculum cannot work, so don't use it. It is best to utilise multiple resources. Read books and magazines, watch educational videos and the Discovery channel, attend community classes and events, go on field trips, hike, camp, do science experiments, use the Internet, and have a few textbooks if needed. It is important that your child has time to play. Often, therapeutic and educational demands prevent them from having extra time to engage in free play. Try incorporating activities that require making small projects such as simple crafts or cooking. These activities can give children a sense of mastering and accomplishment that they later will use in their daily routines. You can use workbooks and programmes specifically for children with learning problem, such as dyslexia. If your child is ready and it fits his or her learning style, use a fixed curriculum. Otherwise, move on to something else. The essence is to equip them for real life, and therefore helping them to manage themselves and govern themselves is of much more importance than a set plan of other people's ideas. Special needs children need a special programme. Home schooling the special needs child should be as natural as breathing. Parents who home school children with special needs are courageous. You put your child in an environment where they are surrounded by loving parents and an

adult mentor, but most of all you give them a safe place where they can be free to be themselves, growing into maturity in Christ. They have a perfect spirit if they receive Christ, and it needs to be nurtured in a very sensitive way.

Dynamis is working with a panel of specialised people to tailor-make programmes for special-needs children. One-size-fits-all programmes do not work for the disabled, or for children with Down's syndrome, autism or cerebral palsy. Therefore, we have a way of looking at the approach for special needs in a professional way and sometimes just a different approach and different mindset can just be the key.

Parents with children with special needs can contact Dynamis for a seminar on home education, learning style assessment to determine learning preferences and the steps to find the best approach for your child. In some instances, parents would be requested to make a video of the child and give some in-depth information of the child's development before the panel will design a individualised program for the specific needs. Parents can also get legal help and guidance on how to advocate for their own children.

Parents will also need assistance with the intricacies of law and policy relating to the education of their children.