

# Ten Reasons to Homeschool Your Child with Special Needs

By Amanda Fuller

Choosing to homeschool your child is a huge decision. Then add to that a child with special needs. This brings up all kinds of mixed feelings, uncertainties, and emotions. I feel we tend to sell ourselves short when it comes to our children with special needs because this is uncharted territory. However, with research, resources, and much prayer, you can do it. Here are ten reasons to homeschool your special needs child.

1. No one knows and understands your child's needs better than you do.

Who is there when your child is diagnosed with a special need? Who spends a great deal of time at doctor appointments, in therapy sessions, and by their beds when they are sick? You! You have been through thick and thin with your child. You know and sometimes understand a need or behavior your child might be experiencing. Your knowledge of his needs allows you to modify your child's schooling based on his needs instead of his needs having to conform to someone else's teaching method or classroom rules.

2. Homeschooling provides positive socialization opportunities.

One of the most common questions we hear as homeschoolers is "What about socialization?" Something I have learned over the years is that not all socialization is good or positive—especially for a child with special needs. Developing a positive relationship with Mom and Dad is one of the best experiences a child can have in life. By homeschooling, you are able to help special needs children nurture and develop positive relationships with others around them. Some of the most positive socialization comes from family and friends of all different ages, who help them learn to interact with adults as well as children.

3. There are fewer distractions.

When a special needs child is trying to learn, the last thing he needs is distraction. Most have to work harder to focus on their work, so when you have their attention, it is important to keep it. Having them at home gives you the opportunity to keep distractions at a minimum. If you need to take that child into a separate room during instruction time and close the door so that he or she can concentrate better, you can do that. Staggering the teaching time between your special needs child and your other children is helpful.

4. You can provide one-on-one teaching.

Many special needs children require one-on-one guidance throughout their daily lives. This holds true for their education as well. You can sit down face-to-face with them and take as much time as needed to explain and work through the task at hand. Giving your special needs child one-on-one attention not only can help encourage and improve your relationship, but it also can give him a positive school experience. Also, it helps you as his teacher to be able to see where adjustments and improvements need to be made to personalize your child's education.

5. It gives you the ability to focus on your child's strengths—not weaknesses.

Children with special needs face all kinds of challenges. The last thing they need in their education is negativity. You can take the subject or work area that they are strongest in and spend as much time as is needed throughout their day working on this. This can boost their confidence, providing them with an opportunity to say, “Hey, I’m good at this!” instead of feeling frustrated while working on tasks they aren’t ready for. If they have subjects that they are not as strong in or are struggling to comprehend, you can just touch on these subjects briefly throughout the teaching time. Minimize their frustration by focusing more attention on their stronger subjects.

6. Use your child's interest or compulsive tendencies as educational tools.

My daughter with Down syndrome loves to shuffle cards repetitively on a daily basis. She rarely goes anywhere without them. So we use them in her education. She has trivia cards that we use for reading and playing cards that we use for number order, number recognition, sequential counting, addition, and subtraction. She loves it because she is getting to use her favorite things while she is doing school.

7. Siblings or other homeschoolers can encourage and help your child with his or her schoolwork.

Siblings are fantastic teachers for your child with special needs. They are fantastic motivators. When your special needs child sees a sibling learning to write in cursive, you may very well hear these words from her: “I want to learn how to write like that.” You might find yourself teaching her something you never thought possible. If she doesn’t have siblings, then you can recruit a fellow homeschooler to spend time with her.

8. Personalize self-help and life skills to meet your child's specific needs.

Each child with special needs has very different needs. If your special needs child is at home, you can identify his needs and discern what he needs help with to grow up to be as self-sufficient as possible as an adult. If this means that you dedicate an entire school year to teaching him how to feed himself with a spoon or how to choose the appropriate clothing to wear for the weather outside, then that should be a part of his education that is just as important as math and reading. Children with special needs do have to work harder to accomplish tasks, with lots of repetition and positive reinforcement, and this holds true for self-help and life skills.

9. Teaching morals, values, and manners is also important for children with special needs.

Homeschooling your children gives you an opportunity not only to verbally teach them your family's morals, values, and manners but also to show them by your example. Just because your child has special needs doesn't mean that you can't teach her these things too. You want her to have every opportunity that life can offer, just like anyone else. If we hold back on teaching our

special needs children how to be respectable people in life, then we are selling them short. The instruction might have to be broken down into smaller or simpler lessons, but it can be done.

10. You can share all of the different joys, excitement, and struggles that you and your child may encounter during his education.

Teaching a child with special needs can be rewarding and yet heartbreaking. Special needs children have to work harder at school and life. There is nothing more rewarding than to see your child achieve or comprehend something that he has been working on for weeks, months, and possibly even years. To see that joy and excitement after such a struggle is priceless, and with them at home you are right there to share it with them. You get to see the tears of joy and struggle and even shed some yourself.

As a parent of a special needs child, I feel that we have been chosen by God to raise these precious special children. If He has laid it on your heart to home educate them, then He will be there to help guide you through the amazing journey. It may not always be easy, but with much prayer and patience, it can be done.

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### **Biographical Information**

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*Amanda Fuller and her husband, Billy, have been homeschooling their two children, the oldest of which has Down syndrome, for seven years. Amanda enjoys spending time with her family and has a newfound love for gardening. For the last ten years, she also has been a support parent for other parents of children with special needs. The Fuller family lives in western North Carolina.*