

## Homeschooling Special Kids

**By Kelly Lindsay**

My husband and I made the decision to homeschool when our children were 1, 2, and 3 years old. We wanted their education to have a Biblical foundation, and if the schools would not allow Jesus into the classroom, then we did not want our children to be in the classroom.

We did not doubt our decision, and for the next six years we were a typical homeschool family: I joined a support group so the children would have field trip and fellowship opportunities, and it provided support and fellowship for me as well.

Five years ago we adopted a little girl who has Down syndrome, our Amelia. Her adoption was followed by the adoptions of Micah and Dante. They both also have Down syndrome. Suddenly we were homeschooling special needs children, and for the first time we wondered if it was the best decision for them.

I have come to realize that homeschool moms are often experts at second-guessing themselves and comparing their perceived failures to the success they see in others, whether it be others they know in their support group or the “perfect” families they read about in homeschool magazines—all lined up in matching outfits for the family photo. This was true of me too. I questioned if I could meet the special educational needs that my younger children have. When Micah was 3 we did decided to put him in the special needs preschool class twice a week. The lack of communication bothered me; all I knew was that he received speech and physical therapy two times a week, but I could not reinforce what he was doing. When he began to exhibit some of the behaviors of other children in the class, we knew he could not go back.

Amelia and Micah are still homeschooled, and I no longer feel the need to label them with a certain grade level. They are slowly learning to read and write, and I am learning to go at their pace and not to compare. Amelia loves to draw pictures; Micah’s favorite pastime is animal charades. At age 3 Dante is still just learning to walk and feed himself. However, he does know how to sign “ice cream” and “cookie”!

Finding curricula that fit their skill levels has been our main challenge. I have learned to pick and choose what works for them. **Woodbine House** has some wonderful resources, and my favorite is the book titled **Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome**. Amelia definitely has a confidence boost from being able to read her homemade book using words she knows. She likes to read to Pip, our favorite chicken. Micah does not like to sit and complete worksheets, but he loves to use the easel for drawing lines and shapes. Amelia likes **The M&M’s® Brand Counting Book**, if we actually have a bowl of the candies when going through it. We use **Hooked on Phonics®** because Amelia likes listening to the CD and following directions. She has been on the “at family” for a month now, but she certainly follows the directions well! **Signing Time®** DVDs teach them signs so that they can communicate better.

I have learned to use community resources and to see weekly activities in an educational light. Amelia and Micah learn listening and socialization skills when they participate in the children’s choir at church. Twice a week, they also go to a local college to receive speech therapy from the master’s degree students, which we have

found to be much more affordable than hiring a private therapist and infinitely easier than going through the local school district. The best part is that I watch each therapy session and am able to talk to the therapists, and each time, they give me ideas about what to do on a daily basis.

It takes so long for my special kids to learn a new skill that any curriculum with a set number of lessons per week is not going to work. It was frustrating to make a lesson plan book that ended up being filled with crossed-out lesson plans simply because an appointment had interrupted our schedule or a concept had taken much longer than one or two lessons to grasp. Now I still keep a lesson book, but each day I record what we accomplished that day. This works very well for my teens too. They are responsible for writing in the lesson plan book each day, knowing what they must accomplish on a daily basis.

Our long-term goals for the little ones are different than the hopes we have for our teens. Our special kids will probably not go to college, but they will someday have jobs that fit their skills, and it is my job to prepare them for the future. More importantly, it is my job to teach them about the love of Jesus. I know I am doing well at that when the first thing Amelia does every morning is to go to the computer and click on her Bible songs or when she insists on "reading" her Bible during morning devotions. Amelia taught Dante to sing "Jesus Loves Me," although he did not entirely appreciate her hand-over-hand technique of teaching him the signs!

Homeschooling special needs children has taught me, and our teens, patience and flexibility. Our entire family is growing through this experience. I no longer doubt our decision to homeschool *all* of our children, because Jesus is always in our classroom.

*Kelly Lindsay and her husband James live in Massachusetts with their six children. The whole family is actively involved in their church. Kelly enjoys reading, baking, and simple knitting. You can read more about their daily life at Kelly's blog, [www.lindsaykids7.blogspot.com](http://www.lindsaykids7.blogspot.com).*

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