

## **Homeschooling a Struggling Learner: Where Do I Find the Time?**

### **By Dianne Craft, MA, CNHP**

"What is God thinking?" Doesn't He know that you are already stretched to find the time in the day to teach all the subjects (heaven forbid we should skip one) to all four of your children, while still keeping the toddler and baby happy? How can you find the time needed to work one on one with this child who is struggling so hard to learn? You go through the day often thinking to yourself (but afraid to voice aloud), "Would the public school do a better job with him or her?"

If you are faced with one of these challenging situations, you are not alone. Rest assured that homeschooling a struggling learner in a large family is being successfully done by hundreds of parents. Some important ideas for a homeschool mom to embrace, when embarking on this journey, include these:

1. Enabling a child who is struggling with a learning disability such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, etc., to obtain a one and a half to two-year growth in a year is both necessary and possible. To achieve this, different methods need to be employed.
2. This remedial teaching process requires more intense and individualized teaching sessions than many moms have been doing in the past. This usually involves two individual, tailored teaching sessions, four days a week, with this child. This child cannot be effectively remediated by working in a group setting.
3. Typical reading, writing, and phonics programs, while good, work for "typical learners" but not for children who have significant learning blocks. You will need some specialized reading strategies and materials to accomplish these leaps in learning versus merely "making progress" each year. These special curricula do not need to be expensive, but they do need to be different than the regular curricula you are using with the other children. These materials and teaching ideas are readily available to homeschooling moms.

#### **One Mom's Story**

Recently I spoke with Terry,\* a homeschooling mom of six children who had faced this challenge. She recalled her fear when faced with the need to spend one-on-one time with her daughter, Jane, who was 8 years old and had dyslexia.

Up to the time Terry had begun homeschooling Jane, she had thought she was a pretty amazing teacher and that homeschooling was "so easy," as her first two sons whizzed through the prepared curriculum. Since Jane was as smart as her brothers, Terry was surprised when she began noticing her daughter's struggle to grasp even simple things. Jane could not say the alphabet (even with the song), write her name, or remember any of her letter names or sounds. Jane wanted to read so badly that she would take a book and "pretend" to read, which almost broke Terry's heart when she saw this.

Terry scheduled an appointment with an educational consultant, and Jane was diagnosed with dyslexia and dysgraphia. Jane had one of the more severe forms of dyslexia, affecting all three learning gates (visual, auditory, and writing), which explained why she even had difficulty singing the alphabet, much less remembering the letter names or sounds.

The consultant assured Terry that with daily, consistent, one-on-one teaching sessions, she could get Jane up to grade level at home. The consultant outlined a daily schedule for Jane to follow and taught Terry specific teaching methods designed to open all of her daughter's

blocked learning gates. However, Terry's day was so full that the thought of spending an hour to an hour and a half with just one child seemed overwhelming to her.

As she prayed about this, bringing her fears to God, Terry came to realize that God had provided her with an answer to Jane's learning challenges, and that this one-on-one time was crucial for her daughter's progress. Terry told me that frankly, at this point, educating her daughter had become so frustrating for both of them (using the old teaching methods and regular curriculum), that Terry had drastically reduced the amount of time they spent on it each day. She was determined to help Jane, even though she did not know how she could possibly give her daughter the individual time she needed and also continue her older sons' education and manage her 4-year-old, 2-year-old, and newborn.

### **Time Management Suggestions**

Using the mindset of "whatever it takes," Terry came up with several methods to get this job done. Following are Terry's suggestions for other parents who are working with this challenge/opportunity at home:

#### *1. Set your priorities.*

The biggest realization Terry had was that teaching Jane to read was the most important thing to focus on. Jane's two older brothers, who were working at grade level, could afford to take a break if necessary, while Terry concentrated on her daughter for a while. Terry found that her children who were not struggling with a learning disability could catch up in a short time.

Terry also reduced the amount of curriculum she covered during the school year. If necessary, she would play some "catch up" during the summer.

#### *2. Realistically look at your daily schedule.*

Terry closely looked at what daily family outside activities she could drop or at least put on hold for a while. Music lessons, sports, field trips, and even extra church activities needed to be set aside for a period of time. It is often more difficult for mothers to give up the extra activities than it is for the children to give them up.

#### *3. Create time in the day.*

Terry decided to have Jane get up an hour earlier than the others, so that they could have their first forty-five-minute reading together, with no interruptions. This worked very well.

#### *4. Extend your teaching time.*

Terry also made sure that the other children were up, breakfasted, and ready for school by 8:30 (after her first tutoring session with Jane had been concluded). She found this extra time enabled her to get in the second forty-five-minute teaching session (tailored writing and spelling instruction) in the afternoon, since the others were finished with their work by that time.

#### *5. Delegate outside the family.*

Terry found a teenager in her church who wanted to earn a little money and hired her to come over for an hour a day to do some of the teaching with the other children. Terry found that it was important for her to work with her struggling learner and not delegate that task,

since she knew the special teaching strategies that worked best with Jane to keep the progress going. If funds are tight, a parent might consider checking out history, science, or literature videos from the library to keep the other children productively entertained during the one-on-one session with the struggling child.

### **It's All Worth It**

Terry reported that the individual time invested with Jane was invaluable. Terry realized that she would not have been able to accomplish this progress with Jane by keeping her in the family teaching setting. Jane required some time to receive very specific teaching strategies and curriculum.

After about six months of more concentrated time with Jane, Terry found that her daughter had made incredible progress and was then able to work alongside the other children more of the time. This was not the end of the daily tutoring sessions, but it was a very encouraging beginning!

She said that this was definitely a labor intensive process, but today, no one would ever know that Jane ever had dyslexia. Jane is now a junior at a four-year college. To her parents' amazement, Jane received a scholarship because of the excellent essay she wrote for her entrance requirements! Jane even tested out of the freshman English course. This is the same little girl who, at age 8, could not tell you the letters in her name, much less write even one word!

Be encouraged! It requires hard work, but you definitely can do it. God will help you every step of the way!

\* Fictional names have been used, to protect these individuals' privacy.

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