

For her upcoming book, *Homeschooling Your Struggling Learner*, veteran homeschooler Kathy Kuhl interviewed over sixty families across North America who, like Kuhl, homeschooled struggling learners, including seventeen families homeschooling children on the autistic spectrum. Those families are quoted below.

Some Reasons Families Homeschool Children on the Autistic Spectrum:

1. No appropriate placement available.
2. Child could not keep up academically, couldn't succeed at standardized tests.
3. Some families were already decided to homeschool before diagnosis.
4. Bullying, isolation, disrespect, or other social problems.
5. School setting was distracting.

Advantages to Homeschooling

- "Being with your child." "It draws family closer together."
- "Time and the flexibility to teach them when they are ready. If they have a bad day, I can give a break when they need it."
- "It's the best way to boost the child's self esteem, and develop love for learning."
- "You find your child's gifts because you spend so much time together." "We can gear the concepts to his interests."
- Avoid distractions: "In school, he has to deal with noises sounds, and smells."
- "He no longer misses school with digestive problems."
- "I can engineer the social environment: make her do banking transactions, place orders, and so on."
- "I could control flow of work. My daughter is now more self-sufficient."
"It is easier to allow time for learning to take place and teach to mastery of a subject rather than focusing on test taking. I am able to modify his curriculum to his needs."
- "The ability to see how they process and think, provide support they need, know when to give more and when to back off—not let them waste fifteen minutes doing half their worksheet wrong."
- "More time on language development."
- "I know my son better than anyone else. I care more than anyone else that he succeeds. I can provide the structure, nurture, character training, and one-on-one attention he needs to succeed.
He is also on a very strict, and very necessary, diet. Infractions to this diet would be to his detriment in many ways. Homeschooling him enables us to monitor this, and provide him with the best diet possible."

- “Calm! He’s so much more calm. We’re more calm. He’s soared ahead and I’ve no doubt he would have been trailing behind if left in public school.”

Disadvantages to Homeschooling

- “Finding time to plan is hard. I still make curriculum. Loss of personal time. It becomes your lifestyle.”
- “Sometimes I struggle, looking for resources, but much is available.”
- One mother, homeschooling an ASD teen and caring for her parents, misses her job.
- “At first, trying to buy curriculum was expensive,” until she found cheaper options.
- “Can be emotionally hard for the parent, when I see things I think she should do easily and she can’t, it’s hard to maintain composure.” “It’s tempting to feel that putting the kids in school will help all your problems.”
- “Obviously social, but we work hard at having play dates in the neighborhood and church. We also do group science and group PE with other children with autism.”
- “I must be very creative to be very hands-on. It requires a new mindset.”

Books on Homeschooling

Kathy Kuhl, *Homeschooling Your Struggling Learner*, coming in 2008. See www.learndifferently.com

Cathy Duffy, *100 Top Picks For Homeschool Curriculum*. ISBN 0805431381. *Christian Home Educators’ Curriculum Manual: Elementary Grades and Junior/Senior High*. Thorough reviews of hundreds of curricula.

Christine Field, *Homeschooling the Challenging Child*. ISBN 080543078-4.

Sharon Hensley, *Home Schooling Children With Special Needs, Revised*. ISBN 1-56857-010-4.

Joyce Herzog, *Choosing and Using Curriculum*. ISBN 1-887225-22-6.
Learning In Spite of Labels 1-882514-13-0.

Dr. Joe & Connie Sutton, *Strategies for Struggling Learners: A Guide for the Teaching Parent*, 0-9645684-1-1. Available from heav.org

<http://www.criticalthinking.com/parent/index.html> – Critical Thinking makes books and software for parents and teachers, covering language arts, logic, math, puzzles, and more.

www.curriculumassociates.com/ Reading, language arts, math, assessments, and test prep programs for K–8 and at-risk secondary students.

<http://epsbooks.com>– Useful books and workbooks by teachers, including *Explode the Code* reading books.

<http://rainbowresource.com> General education supplies for homeschoolers

[Sonlight.com](http://www.sonlight.com) – Curriculum based on world cultures, literature, and history, but includes all subjects, including several excellent math programs. Browse this catalog for good read-aloud books, prize winning children’s literature, and other useful resources.

Also see Timberdoodle below under “Cool Tools and Toys.”

Respondents Recommend

Dubard Association Method for severe language disorder—tiny, tedious steps to learn syntax. Recommended by mother whose child was still nonverbal at 8, and spoke her first sentence when a teen. http://www.usm.edu/dubard/professional_faq.html
<http://www.usm.edu/dubard/materials.html>

Evan-Moor, Educational publisher Pre-K through 6. <http://www.evan-moor.com/>

ACE curriculum <http://www.schooloftomorrow.com/Default.aspx>

[time4learning.com](http://www.time4learning.com) offers online instruction.

Jumpstart World educational computer games
<http://www.knowledgeadventure.com/jumpstartworld/>

Math-U-See <http://mathusee.com/>

Teaching Organization & Study Skills

Susan Taylor Drumm, *Study Skills: Grades 5-8*. Kelley Wingate Publications. ISBN 0-88724-448-3.

Gloria Frender, *Learning to Learn*. ISBN 0-86530-141-7

Timetimer – a silent timer that lets you see the minutes go. [Timetimer.com](http://www.timetimer.com)

<http://www.learndifferently.com/>

Cool Tools and Toys

Timberdoodle.com sells curriculum, but also offers wonderful games, puzzles, computer programs, educational toys, like Wrap-Ups and Fischertechnik, and many kits, also books for parents.

TobinsLab.com – Lap books and hands-on science materials to study astronomy, plants, geology, magnets, electricity, microscopic organisms, *Crash and Burn Chemistry* kits, dissection kits, as well as resources for social studies, arts, and more.

Abilitations.com and IntegrationsCatalog.com – special needs resources

Headsupnow.com help for the child who is distractible, inattentive, who has sensory integration problems, and more. Good books, tools, “fidgets,” weighted toys, and more.

<http://www.superduperinc.com/> a small publisher of special education materials

Inspiration.com – visual thinking and learning software, curriculum integration and teacher lesson planning tools.

Methodology

1. Teaching styles & philosophies vary by family:
 - a. No textbooks: Charlotte Mason Method, or unschooling, or relaxed schooling,
 - b. Others use workbook or computer-based, (such as ACE PACES or Alpha Omega LIFEPAK— “ten small workbooks instead of one big textbook.”)
 - c. eclectic.
2. Schedules vary.
 - a. Some teach in 15-20 minute increments, with breaks for movement or rest.
 - b. Some give the child the material for the week, and let the child write the schedule.
 - c. Parents recognize “there are ‘off days’ when the information is not getting in. No matter what happens in the front of the classroom, his brain was not engaged. Now that we homeschool, on truly "off" days, we can do art, or go to the park, or study photography and save the "book work" for days when his brain is ready.
3. Many other strategies, including
Exercise: therapy ball, basketball, push-ups,
Hands-on: lap books, crafts, sewing.
Read aloud to child daily (read above her reading level), frequent questions.
4. Therapies and treatments are used vary by family, and include RTI, Floortime, ABA, biomedical approaches, gluten-free, casein-free diets, among others.

How to develop and strengthen social skills? Respondents said:

1. "Her sister is a great bridge for her. They enjoy imaginative games."
2. "A social skills group through a local mental health clinic."
3. "Now he's fifteen, that is a problem. No matter how much he prepares, the world is not prepared to accept him; they don't give him a chance. I have his cousins come once a week; they are younger."
4. "No one mirrored with him [before he was adopted], so he made up his own world. He now asks and answers his own questions. I make him include me in his world."
5. "Role playing, striving to be good examples in front of our son, exposing him to outside influences which reflect a positive example. Character training was paramount (patience, kindness, gentleness, respect, etc.) We felt if we could instill a measure of self-control in our son, this would be the pivotal instrument which would affect his entire life, not only affecting social skills with his peers, but with any age."
6. "We focus on the relationships within our family, communication, manners, being polite, not taking other people's things, asking before you go outside, etc., all of which we believe are critical. Social skills, like all other things, he is explicitly taught over and over. He's still easily overwhelmed with sensory issues, so we find it critical to talk-coach him through every step. 'Slow down.....wait and think....take a breath.....hold your hand out to say "Hello. ""'"
7. "Our city has a therapeutic recreation center, where my son takes cooking classes, taekwondo, and plays Wii games. He also plays in a bowling league, goes to homeschool events (field trips, science and PE classes), and to church events. He plays with neighborhood friends (much younger). We make him pay for things, ask questions, and order his own drinks in restaurants, etc."

How to encourage flexibility and avoid rigid attachment to schedule?

1. "When schedule must change, I give advance notice, and lots of explanations. I give warnings before we transition to another task."
2. "We vary things all the time; we have a routine, but it is loose. It's less of a problem now—tears and tantrums before."
3. "In our situation, I would say that natural maturity was really what it took. We did lots of social stories and scripting, which I think was helpful."
4. "I introduce new situations by carefully explaining what is going to take place, and telling him we will make the change in a few minutes. Since he doesn't know what a few minutes is....I keep reminding him every fifteen to twenty seconds."
5. "He is doing much better at age fifteen, but still if he is into something, I can say it five or six times, but he will perseverate. How to distinguish between disability and disobedience? He's normal fifteen-year old, hormone-wise."
6. "That one is tough for us. We try to talk through the day each morning and try to stick to the plan for both our sakes. When things do change, we just talk through it over and over for some security."
7. "When he was in school, it was a lot harder for him. It has not been a problem since we started homeschooling. Sometimes if we are going to the store, and he doesn't want to go, he wants to finish a game, he throws a fit. We never give in."

Getting Started Homeschooling

1. Contact homeschool organizations in your state or go to hslida.org to find out how to homeschool legally in your state.
2. Check your state homeschool organization to:
 - locate local support groups and coops,
 - attend “getting started” seminars from state homeschool organizations,
 - find resources for homeschooling special needs children in your area.
3. Learn about homeschooling struggling learners, see books and websites below.
4. Consider your teaching style and your child’s learning style.
5. Make goals, which may include some from your child’s IEP.
6. Start researching curriculum. Visit websites, curriculum fairs, and used curriculum sales.
7. Visit local support groups and coops, get coffee with folks already homeschooling.
8. Consider joining Home School Legal Defense Association.
9. Join online groups for homeschoolers with special needs, such as Aut-2B-Home <http://home.earthlink.net/~tammyglaser798/authome.html>
GIFTSNC, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GIFTSNC/?yguid=328588262>.

Websites of National Homeschooling Organizations

National homeschool groups with good sections on special needs students:

- Home School Legal Defense Association (hslida.org).
- National Home Education Network (nhen.org)

Organizations for Parents Homeschooling Special Needs Children

NATHHAN nathhan.com

GIFTSNC giftsnc.com

Other Helpful Websites

Websites on homeschooling with autism by Tammy Glaser

<http://home.earthlink.net/~tammyglaser798/authome.html>

[Helpinschool.net](http://helpinschool.net), by special education consultant Judith Munday, , help with goal-setting.

Kathy Kuhl’s website, <http://www.learndifferently.com/>, www.learndifferently.com has book reviews and articles on homeschooling struggling learners.