

Why Homeschool a Student with Dyslexia?

Homeschooling has emerged as a viable choice for many families. *Homeschooling may also be an option for a child with dyslexia.* A student with dyslexia requires direct, systematic, and individual instruction in reading and spelling, and traditional schools do not always provide adequate levels of service. Moreover, services may be offered at the expense of subjects in which a child with learning disabilities may excel such as art, sports, or music.

As schools are increasingly required to follow mandates, less time is devoted to individual needs. For many parents, an independent specialized boarding or day school is not an option. Some people live in rural areas away from learning centers; long drives interfere with other family activities. In addition, many children need daily remedial lessons that learning centers and private tutors cannot provide.

Homeschooling can provide solid remediation without the burden of travel and can allow parents to see directly the progress of their child. Another option is home tutoring; the student attends his or her regular school but receives tutoring at home.

What are some of the challenges of homeschooling a child with dyslexia?

One challenge a parent may face is the relationship between the teacher-parent and the student-child. The student is required to reveal the disability at home, and the parent is required to maintain a supportive, yet disciplined approach.

Knowing what to teach, the sequence of instruction, and the use of valid instructional methods may require much research and specialized training. Even many reading courses at the college level tend to be too general and imprecise to offer adequate guidance to teach students with dyslexia. The parent needs to

become highly trained in the areas of language and reading or find expert resources that can provide a framework for a systematic approach appropriate for the needs of the child.

Providing social activities for the student and parent may also create challenges. However, none of these challenges is without solution.

What are some of the benefits of homeschooling?

The most obvious benefit is that homeschooling allows for the necessary individualization in all subject areas, including reading, spelling, composition, and comprehension. It allows a student to focus on areas of interest and allows parents to develop lessons based on those interests.

The homeschooled child is free from measuring progress and skills against peers without learning differences. A child can work at an individualized pace in a program that directly addresses unique needs. Homeschooling may provide an alternative to the premium on speed, conformity, and rigid scheduling and standardized testing that is required in many traditional educational settings.

Homeschooling for children with and without dyslexia allows for enriching experiences on a daily basis: cooking, music, field trips, and hands-on learning. In many locations, homeschooling parents have formed support groups so the homeschooling experience becomes socially rewarding for students and parents. A skilled carpenter may, for example, offer carpentry lessons to children in exchange for Spanish lessons by a native speaker.

Many homeschoolers argue that traditional schooling in a room of twenty to thirty students and one or two adults can be more socially

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isolating for a child than a home education program that makes good use of local resources.

How do I get started?

First, do the necessary research to learn how your state and district deal with homeschooling. Make solid connections with other homeschoolers before withdrawing the child from regular school.

When planning instruction, start the same way any good teacher, tutor, or therapist would begin: with a thorough understanding of your child's reading, spelling, writing, and comprehension abilities.

You may wish to consult an educational psychologist to get a complete evaluation that can diagnose dyslexia. It is important to ask the evaluator to provide very specific recommendations. The report should include descriptions of the child's reading and spelling abilities and offer specific instructional recommendations.

Be aware that there is no magic bullet for dyslexia and that remediation is best achieved through direct, structured language instruction. Modern technology has enhanced the ability to find a variety of resources. State curricula are readily available and may provide accessible and useful information.

What are some examples of the kind of instruction I should provide?

Language remediation often requires daily spelling and oral reading practice. Spelling, even in the age of word processing, remains important because it provides important reinforcement of reading. During a single lesson, spelling should

move systematically from phoneme (sound) to grapheme (letter or letters spelling a single phoneme) to syllable to word to phrase and sentence dictation. The lesson should include new words displaying a similar spelling pattern, as well as review words and recently taught unpredictable high frequency words. Techniques such as writing on a rough surface or in the air, clapping syllables, and concentration on mouth positions unique to specific speech sounds all provide a multisensory basis for learning. The tablet computer, in particular, allows for a multisensory approach.

A student should read aloud on a daily basis from a book he or she can read with at least 95% accuracy (independent reading level). Before the student reads aloud, he or she should review the passage and ask for help with words that may cause difficulty. A parent should select challenging words from the passage and teach their pronunciation and meaning before the student reads aloud. A warm-up reading of words and phrases on flashcards or even a screen is often useful. Record reading errors to serve as a basis for planning future instruction.

There will be days...

There will be days when nothing seems to work right. The lesson goes slowly; the student is restless and perhaps bored. Education was not intended to take place in a single day. Give yourself and the student a break, and with the student, set meaningful goals for the next lesson. While no single form of education can meet the needs of every child, homeschooling is a viable and rewarding option for parents committed to securing an excellent education for their children.

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