



HOMESCHOOLING YOUR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD

Questions and Answers, Recommendations and Resources

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How to Tell Why Your Child is Struggling

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Many children who are not struggling have one or two of the characteristics in the checklists below. It is a matter of degree, and how it is impacting the learning process that we will consider in determining the needs of the learner.

Many educators who follow brain research believe that there are four learning gates that need to be properly functioning for a child to have an easy time learning.

The four learning gates are:

- Visual processing.
- Visual/motor (writing) processing.
- Auditory processing.
- Focus/attention processing.

These checklists show some of the characteristics that a child exhibits when a learning gate is not working properly. Also included is a list of informal evaluations that you can perform at home. In addition, you will find some resources for correction that can be done at home, or with a professional. Learning is all about energy output. Read the following characteristics and see if you can find where your child is experiencing an “energy leak.”

Compensation or Correction?

Before you begin evaluating your child, you should know that once the process is complete you might face a fundamental choice: compensation or correction. Many educational experts debate whether it is more beneficial to help a struggling learner compensate for the learning processes that are difficult, or if time and effort should be spent in the pursuit of a correction of the processing problem.

An example of compensation would be for a child to use a keyboard at a very young age to write papers when he or she struggles with handwriting. A correction would be to do a handwriting exercise that eliminates reversed letters, for instance, and helps the child write more neatly. Another common compensation is to reduce the spelling list required at a grade level for a child who is struggling with spelling. A correction would be to train the child’s photographic memory so that the task of spelling is easier.

Many times this does not need to be a debate. One can easily pursue both compensation and correction simultaneously. Compensation makes the learning task easier while the correction reduces the stress in the child's learning system so that learning can flow. We call this "opening up the child's learning gate."

Visual Processing Dysfunction Characteristics

A child struggling with visual processing issues will display some of these characteristics:

- Reading reversals ("was" for "saw," "on" for "no," "big" for "dig," etc.) after initial introduction of the words.
- Skipping of small words when reading.
- Needing to use finger to track after age 7.
- Oral reading that is smooth at the beginning of the page, but becomes more labored the longer a child reads.
- Experiencing eye fatigue shortly after reading begins (watery eyes, rubbing eyes).
- Yawning shortly after reading begins.
- Continuing to struggle even after being prescribed eye glasses.

Informal Evaluations

These informal evaluations can be done at home to help a parent determine if a child is experiencing a blocked learning gate. Be sure as well to have your child's vision acuity checked by an optometrist or ophthalmologist to make sure that this is not the cause of the child's reading problem.

Eye tracking: With the child standing three feet in front of you, take an interesting object and slowly move it in a left-to-right manner in front of the child's eyes. Ask the child to keep his eyes on the target. Do this for about four swings of the target. Watch to see if the child's eyes skip in any spot, or if they begin to water. Then slowly move the target in a horizontal figure eight manner within the child's shoulder width, making sure that the target is not too close to the child's face. See if the child can look in those various directions without skipping or his eyes looking stressed in any way. Make a note of your findings. There are specific exercises that can be done to strengthen a child's eye teaming abilities to reduce the stress in the visual learning system.

Cross crawl: Many times younger children have difficulty reading because they are not efficiently crossing the midline of their body. This is the process that normally occurs when a baby is crawling. However, some children develop a learning gate problem in this area because they did not crawl, or they crawled but had a traumatic event (such as a fall, or back-to-back ear infections) that inhibited this natural process and made it much less effective.

Stand in front of the child and demonstrate the cross crawl movement by lifting the right knee and tapping it with the left hand, then doing the same with the left knee and right hand. Do this for a minute so the child can observe you. Then ask the child to do it also. Don't correct the child at first, but let him or her figure it out while you continue to do your cross crawl movements in front of him. If the child can't do it, and becomes frustrated, then you can start him out by having him march with his legs while you touch the opposite knee with his hands. After doing this for a bit, remove your hands from the child's hands, and let him do this himself.

Make a note of your findings. If you confirm your child has midline issues, there are specific things that you can do to address this problem.

Reading: There are four components to reading successfully:

- Eye Tracking ability.
- Sight Word Memorization.
- Phonics (letter sounds and word decoding ability).
- Reading comprehension

We can observe a child's oral reading to help use determine if eye tracking ability is contributing to the child's reading difficulties. If the child can read, have him read a passage, and carefully watch his eyes to see if he reads to the end of the line, and then starts the new line, but quickly darts back with his eyes to the last line to make sure that he is in the right spot. We all do this once in a while. Watch to see if the child does this frequently. This takes much more effort to read when this saccadic eye movement is occurring.

Also observe if the child begins reading the word "dig" by forming a "b" with his mouth first. Any time a child reverses a letter or word, six months after being taught to read, that is a sign of stress in the child's visual processing system. Make a note of your findings. There are specific things that can be done to make this process easier for your child.

Colored overlays: At times, a child will experience a mild scotopic sensitivity syndrome, which means that the reflection of the white background of the paper makes it more difficult for the child to see the black letters that compose the text.

One of the ways that you can informally determine if this is any issue, is by obtaining some plastic colored reading overlays (available at www.diannecraft.org or www.nationalreadingservice.com).

Have the child read a paragraph or a few lines. Then place a blue colored transparency over the next paragraph and have him read. Then place a green overlay over the next paragraph when the child is reading orally. Listen for subtle changes in fluency. Ask the child what he experienced in fluency while reading with the various colors. Many times the child will say that a particular transparency acted as a magnifying glass, making the letters bigger, and easier to see. There are other colors that you could try, but blue and green are the main ones that help children right away, in my 35 years of working with bright, hard-working learners.

If the child does markedly better with one of the colored overlays, continue to use it to reduce the visual stress that he is experiencing. However, it will only act as a temporary aid, until you correct the underlying problem, which is lack of eye convergence. The eyes can be encouraged to work together as a team while reading by doing various home exercises, or by working with a vision therapist using both home and office exercises.

Resources for Correcting Vision Acuity Problems

- Prescription eyeglasses
- Vision therapy from a developmental optometrist. (This kind of therapy can be quite expensive.)

- Brain integration therapy. This program can be conducted at home. For more information see www.diannecraft.org for the Instruction Manual.
- Colored transparencies. For information on how to obtain these visit www.nationalreadingservice.com or www.diannecraft.org
- Irlen Lenses (colored lenses placed into glasses for easier use. For more information visit www.irlenlenses.com....Reading With Colors book)
- PACE program done with professionals. For more information visit (www.pacelearning.com)

Visual/Motor Processing (Writing) Dysfunction Characteristics

The processing glitch that affects children the most is an interference in the writing system (spatial, visual/motor system). The process of writing has not been taken over by the child's automatic brain, which is the right brain hemisphere. This causes the child to have to use much more energy to write. This can make a child look lazy, uncooperative and unmotivated because writing is involved in so many learning activities. See if your child has many of the following symptoms of stress in the writing system:

- Reversals in written letters both laterally and vertically, six months after being taught to write them correctly if written daily.
- Reversals in written numbers.
- Poor spacing in writing.
- Difficulty copying from book or board.
- Resistance to learning or writing cursive.
- Displaying awkward writing posture, with eye and hand very close together.
- No "helping hand" used when writing despite being instructed to do so.
- Failure to complete written assignments despite performing well on tests.
- Spaces math papers poorly.
- Tells great stories orally, but writes very little.
- Leaves out letters in a spelling test, but could spell the word orally correctly.
- Wants to do all math "in his head," no matter how long the problem is.

Informal Evaluations

Check your child's eye/hand dominance: Tear a hole in a piece of paper that is the size of a dime. Have the child stand five feet in front of you and hold the paper with arms extended, in front of him. Ask him to look through the hole and find your nose. As he is looking at your nose through the hole in the paper, you will be able to see his dominant eye.

Now to see if he is using that same eye for close-up work, place a small, round object on the floor about five inches in front of the child's feet. A toy construction cone is good. Ask the child to hold the paper at arm's length and look through the hole at the object on the floor. Tell the child to "freeze" his hands when he has seen the object. Then get behind him and cover one of the child's eyes with your hand. Ask the child if he can still see the object, or if it disappeared. Do the same with the other eye, making sure that the child does not move his paper. The object should disappear when you are covering the child's dominant eye.

We always use only one eye when looking through a small hole, and we use our dominant eye. If the child found that the object disappeared when you covered his right eye, then he is right-eye dominant. If he is also right-handed, then we call that “uniform dominance.” The brain finds it more efficient to be uniform dominant.

If the object disappeared when you covered the child’s left eye, then he is left-eye dominant. If the child is also right-handed, then he is considered “mixed dominant.”

Being mixed dominant can be very helpful in sports, such as baseball and golf, but is less efficient for writing. However, if a child has good brain hemispheric integration, then it is not very bothersome for him. If the two hemispheres of his brain are not communicating well for the act of writing, then the writing has not transferred into the automatic hemisphere, and the writing process can be very laborious.

Make a note of whether the child is uniform or mixed dominant. This gives you a clue as to one reason why your child has been struggling with writing. Many times these mixed-dominant children do not develop a hand dominance until they are 4 or 5 years old, as opposed to other children who develop a hand dominance earlier.

Clockwise or counterclockwise circles? Have child write a word with the letter “o” in it, or just write the letter “o.” Watch to see if he writes this clockwise or counterclockwise. If a child is hard-wired to be right-handed, he should be making all letters counterclockwise. If a child is hard-wired to be left-handed, he will tend to make his letters clockwise.

We only are concerned when a child who has chosen his right hand to write with, but is making all letters clockwise like a left-hander. This creates great stress in the child’s writing system. Make a note of this, because there are specific exercises that can be done to take the stress out of this system. We do not have to change a child’s handedness.

Bottom-to-top letter formation: Ask your child to write the alphabet in lower-case print. There is a natural flow of electricity in our body that God put there. When we make our letters according to that flow, writing is effortless. When we write letters against the flow, writing is laborious. Observe, but don’t correct. See if the child makes letter bottom-to-top, which is considered a vertical reversal. See if the child finds it difficult to remember the next letter to write. See if the child writes a mixture of lower-case and upper-case letters. Watch for clockwise letters, and letters that do not go below the line. These are all signs of stress in the child’s visual/motor/spatial system. Make notes. These problems can be corrected, and the stress taken out of the system.

Resources for Correcting Writing Dysfunction

- When teaching, have the child answer as many questions orally, reducing the need to write until you can take the stress out of the writing system.
- Eliminate copying tasks because of the labor involved until the child’s writing improves.
- Do timed math tests orally if possible.
- Do the Writing Eight Exercise designed by Dr. Getman, to encourage the child’s kinesthetic midline to function well, eliminating both lateral and vertical reversals. This daily exercise, when done in a deliberate, monitored manner, will convert the writing process to the automatic hemisphere. The exercise is described in the manual *Brain Integration Therapy for Children* by Dianne Craft.

- After the child has a strong midline, then you can use the writing program *Handwriting Without Tears*.
- Teach your child keyboarding to encourage computer use for longer papers.
- LinguSystems has several books that talk about writing issues, such as the dysgraphia described in the characteristics section.

Auditory Processing Dysfunction Characteristics

Your child may be struggling with auditory processing dysfunction if he or she exhibits the following difficulties:

Difficulty remembering sight words, including:

- Trouble retrieving names of letters, words, people, and things.
- Laboring over verbal expression.

Difficulty with phonics, including:

- Trouble remembering sounds of letter combinations such as “au,” “oi.”
- Difficulty applying phonics rules in a reading setting.
- Sounding out the same word over and over in the same reading passage.

Spelling difficulties, including:

- Trouble spelling phonetically (the child may spell “team” as “tie” or “went” as “wat.”)
- Spelling the same word differently each time.

Difficulty sequencing sounds, including:

- Trouble learning and retaining days of the week and months.
- The child guesses at words because reading longer words is very hard.
- The child puts extra sounds in a word (ie., contribution becomes contribu'ta'tion), “band” becomes “brand.”

Difficulty saying longer words:

- Transposing letters: “animal” is ”aminal;” “magazine” is “mazagine;” “suddenly” is “sundenly.”
- Avoiding difficult words when speaking.

The child’s silent voice disappears:

- He or she subvocalizes when reading silently, or needs to read aloud to understand a passage.
- He or she needs to repeat the alphabet in his head when writing it out.

Difficulty with speech, including:

- Trouble articulating many sounds.
- Exhibiting language delay.

Difficulty understanding verbal instruction:

- He or she needs to ask for directions to be repeated frequently.
- He or she says “what” a lot.

- An apparent hearing problem can mimic a focusing and attention issue. The key is determining whether the child really is not hearing and storing the information auditorally, or if the child is not focusing on what is being said.
- He or she is easily confused or is never quite sure he understood the speaker.

Informal Evaluations

An auditory processing dysfunction can manifest itself in so many different ways. Many adults and children have mild auditory processing problems, but find ways to compensate for it in their daily lives. It is a bigger struggle for a child to learn with an auditory processing issue, than with just a visual processing issue, or a visual/motor (writing) processing issue. The left auditory brain hemisphere is responsible for retaining sounds, words, and auditory information. When this process is experiencing a block, the child doesn't know why he can't remember what was just taught, nor does the parent.

Storing and retrieving information: Ask the child to write the alphabet. Observe carefully to see whether the child hesitates after writing several letters, then begins again. Watch for this hesitation throughout the writing of the alphabet.

If the child hesitates in writing a letter that follows a letter that has a directional component to it, such as “b,” “d,” “p,” “q,” “j,” “g,” then it could be that he has a spatial problem, and had to think about what direction the letter should be written. However, if the child hesitates after writing “e,” or “h,” then you can suspect that he has lost his silent voice...his “thinking” voice, and is having to go back and say the alphabet over and over in his head.

With older children, you can ask if they had to say the alphabet over several times in their head while doing the alphabet, and they can tell you exactly where they felt they had to stop and repeat. The efficient storage and retrieval of 26 units is one sign of an auditory processing dysfunction.

Sequencing: Ask the child to say the days of the week, and then the months of the year. The months represent sequencing and ordering unrelated sounds. If this is difficult for the child despite being taught it before, or if the child leaves out some months (they often leave out either October or August, because they start with the same sound), assure him that many children do.

However, these difficulties could indicate that the auditory channel of sequencing is not working as well as it should, and causing your child to struggle with learning. If a child is laboring with auditory sequencing then the popular way of teaching multiplication tables through skip counting will be more difficult for that child. That child would greatly benefit from using right brain teaching strategies, using the child's photographic memory to memorize multiplication facts easily.

Word retrieval: The two brain hemispheres have individual responsibilities. When we understand these responsibilities we can see understand where a child's processing is breaking down in the reading process.

The right brain stores pictures. This means that all of the sight words (words that cannot be sounded out, such as “the”, “many”, etc.) are stored in the right brain after the child has been exposed to these words for several days. The name of the word is stored in the child's left auditory hemisphere. Normally, when the two hemispheres are working well together, when the child sees

the word (a right brain function), the name comes up quickly (a left brain function), and the child remembers the sight word.

To check the efficiency of this process, have your child read a list of words at his grade level. If your child consistently hesitates at words such as “would, what, know and neighbor,” or if he attempts to sound out every word, then make a note of that. If the child is not reading yet, you can have him read, or attempt to name the alphabet letters that you have taught him. If this is very difficult, then we can assume that this is a child who is struggling with the word retrieval portion of an auditory processing dysfunction. There are wonderful methods to help this child.

Hearing individual letters: This is the auditory channel that is involved in learning and remembering the sounds that letters and letter combinations get. We teach this in great detail in phonics. Have your child read a list of words that are on the child’s reading level (if you don’t have a list, you can obtain one from HSLDA Learning Specialist Department, if you are a member). If your child cannot sound out a word, for example, cannot remember the “f” sound to begin a word, or laboriously sounds out “f-a-t,” and then says “fan,” you know you have a child suffering in this area. If your child is older, and guesses at longer words, because he cannot remember the phonemes (vowel and letter combinations) to sound it out easily, then that child is suffering also in this area. Many times these are children who played the Phonics Game well, and knew all the “pieces” (left brain function), but cannot put it into a “whole” (right brain function), when reading a passage. Make a note of your results.

Resources for Correction

- Speech therapy.
- Brain training with music. Various programs include:
 - *The Listening Program* by Dr. Tomatis helps retrain the auditory processing area of the brain, available at www.advancedbrain.com .
 - *AIT* (Auditory Integration Therapy) home program that requires a speech therapist to work with parent, available at www.ait.com .
 - *Somonas Listening Program*, which requires a professional. For more information visit www.somonas.com .
 - *Fast Forward* program, which requires a professional. Visit www.fastforward.com .
 - *Interactive Metronome* (corrects child’s timing, among other things) non-home professional program, available at www.interactivemetronome.com .
- *Lingui Systems* (word games, workbooks, etc.), available at www.linguisystems.com .
- *Brain Integration Therapy for Children*, a home-based therapy program for parents to administer. Visit www.diannecraft.org .
- Specialized reading Instruction. Various programs include:
 - Right brain teaching strategies (bypassing the auditory glitch)
 - *Merrill Linguistic Readers* (very few sight words)
 - *Lindamood Phonemic Awareness Program* (professional program)
 - *Wilson’s Reading Program*
- Nutritional Therapy:
 - Article “Ear Infections: Impact on Learning,” and “Essential Fatty Acids and the Brain,” available at www.diannecraft.org .
 - Contact a nutritionist or chiropractor in your area.

Focus/Attention Processing Dysfunction Characteristics

When a child is having to use too much energy to attend to his work, then that is the area that is a learning block to him. This child often has a body chemistry that is upset, and can be changed with simple methods at home. Other times a parent finds that working with a professional in this area is most helpful.

Often a parent will say of such a child: “He can focus on movies, video games, or Legos for hours, but can’t focus on his schoolwork for more than five minutes.” It is important to realize what is going on, so we don’t become frustrated with this type of child. Movies, video games, or Legos require little energy because children find them interesting and undemanding. On the other hand, a history or math lesson requires much more effort on the child’s part. If the child has an “energy leak” in a certain area, then he will have to work much harder to remain focused. Therefore it is important to distinguish whether a child is struggling with an academic task because of an actual learning block, which causes task avoidance because of its difficulty, or a focusing problem.

Many times these children are struggling with sensory integration issues that make them look unfocused.

We’ll look at the characteristics of a child struggling with a focus issue, and a child struggling with sensory integration issues separately, even though they often overlap.

The official terms that are often used for children who have difficulty remaining focused on a task that they are capable of doing are Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

ADD refers to a child who is not acting out or moving around, and generally can even look attentive during a task, but is generally absorbed in his own thoughts and daydreams to the point that he gets little done in the amount of time allotted.

A child who is thought to be ADHD is generally hyperactive. This child has a motor that is always running that he seems incapable of controlling. He does everything in a hurry, and some part of his body always appears to be moving, which keeps him quite distracted.

The hyperactive child (not just hyper-fidgety), is usually easy to spot in a group. The inattentive child, on the other hand, is not easy to spot. This child just appears to be slow in finishing work, or in following directions. He or she may seem lazy or uncooperative.

In a homeschool setting we do not have to focus on labels, or official diagnoses most of the time. We just need to see if the child we are working with exhibits enough symptoms to warrant further exploration on this topic. In homeschooling we can focus on the solution, rather than a label. Since learning is all about energy output, we ask ourselves why a child has to expend more energy to remain focused on a task than his or her siblings. Once this question is answered, then the action becomes clear.

ADD Checklist

- Distractibility.
- No persistence with a task.
- Inconsistency in performance from one day to another.

- Excessive daydreaming during a school related task.
- Needs to have mom next to him or her in order to finish work.
- Forgetfulness (of previously learned material, daily plans, etc.).

ADHD Checklist

A child struggling with the more active form of a focusing issue will display some of these characteristics:

- Excess motor activity (something is always moving).
- Impulsiveness (acts without thinking much of the time).
- Insatiability (never satisfied with an activity).
- Poor response to discipline.
- Moodiness.
- Sleep disturbances (very restless sleeper).

Informal Evaluation

The difficulty with determining if your child has a focusing issue is that parents often do not have a strong basis of comparison if they only have one other child at home who is homeschooling. Thus, it is important to solicit information and observations from the other adults in the child's life who works with him in both an academic and non-academic setting.

Remember, that to be a real focusing issue, the symptoms must present themselves in more than one setting. It is important to differentiate between a child whose main problem is focusing, from a child who is exhibiting task avoidance because of academic struggles. For example, if your child's Sunday School teacher says that he or she listens attentively to lessons, and participates lively in the discussions that follow, but "gets silly" or doesn't complete assigned worksheets, you can consider that this child has a learning glitch instead of a focusing problem. The child with difficulty focusing frequently does not attend to orally presented information enough to participate well in the ensuing discussion.

On the other hand, if your child's karate teacher says that he needs to continually redirect your child's attention during lessons (ones that are very active and hands-on), you may consider that this child is struggling to maintain focus when his peers do not need to expend any energy for this task.

How You Can Determine if Your Child Has a Focusing Issue

- Checklists, such as the one above help identify a child with an issue.
- Pediatricians can help decipher the observations you have of your child.
- Conners Behavior Scale, or BASC can be obtained by your physician. These are informal questionnaires to be completed by parents and other adults who work with your child in an academic setting. The results are calibrated to determine if the child is merely at risk of an attention problem, or actually is showing attention problem symptoms in more than one setting.
- Sunday School teachers, co-op teachers leaders and other adults who work with your children can help determine if he or she is experiencing a problem

Resources for Correction

There are two ways that children who have to expend more energy than their peers to focus can be helped. One way is to use compensation, and the other is to employ correction of the problem.

Since it takes time for any correctional program to work, we really need to do both procedures. We compensate for the problem, while designing and implementing an effective correctional program.

In determining the best way to correct a child's processing problem that is affecting his ability to focus on a task, we need to consider that this child likely has an upset chemistry. The basis for this assumption is the long history of the use of medication used with children with a focusing issue. These medications are designed to help the child focus with more ease, by making the neurotransmitters responsible for the process of focusing, more available to the brain and nervous system.

If a parent decides to try some medication for this purpose, then the child's pediatrician is the place to start. Sometimes parents try various medications, only to find the side effects to be unacceptable. So it's a good idea to also consider alternative ways to help balance the child's upset body chemistry.

Other times the parents are not interested in pursuing medication at all, but realize that their child is struggling too hard to focus, so still needs some help in producing and releasing the necessary neurotransmitters. This is when parents often turn to a nutritionist, naturopath, chiropractor, or nutritionally oriented physician to explore alternatives that seem to help so many children.

On this website we will explore both compensations and corrections for these struggling children. In homeschooling we have a unique opportunity to help the child learn how to control his own behavior, through gentle behavior modification. We also have the opportunity to give this child more time and attention, taking the burden off of his focusing system. We can plan schooling days that help this child gain as much information as possible from the material, without the frustration of always being behind, or not knowing what to do. It is very rewarding to work with these learners in the home setting.

Compensations

Employ one-on-one tutoring. Children with attention problems thrive when an adult works one-on-one with them. These children struggle to complete work on their own, and find the frequent reminders to hurry up and complete their work debilitating. (See "Managing the Homeschool Teaching Day with a Struggling Learner" in the section following, to learn how to get this important time with your child, while still working with your other children).

Choose a curriculum that does not require mainly independent work (such as a computer curriculum program, or a self-paced program).

Reduce workbook exercises and busy work, such as copying and repeating math problems, as much as possible.

Buy good quality earphones for this child. He could use them to block out distracting noise, or you could have him listen to classical music softly while working on assignments.

Keep this child close to you throughout the day. Your proximity makes a big difference in his ability to focus. You do not always have to be interacting with him. Just be near him. Even when you are teaching another child, this child can be next to you with his earphones on, completing his work.

Group assignments. When approaching a math page with many problems on it, put a star by the ones you want him to do in that sitting period. If you are only having him do some of the problems on the page, not all, then he can put a large “X” over the ones he doesn’t have to do. This is very satisfying for the child. If you can’t do that, then use construction paper to cover the problems on the bottom half of the page so he doesn’t have to see them when he is working on the top half.

Focus on study skills. If your child is prone to make mistakes when doing math problems, have him mark all the similar problems with red, and do them first. These children don’t transition well, because transitions require more focusing power. Doing all like problems together greatly decreases their need to focus, ensuring few errors on a page

Take breaks. Many little breaks, versus one big break, helps these children stay on task.

Involve dad. Assign one subject for dad to do with the child in the evening when he is home. Dads often have a different approach to teaching, and the child gets the important one-on-one time that helps him be successful. Make sure that dad knows the chunking approach, and how to reduce mundane, repetitive tasks.

Use more right brain strategies, since these employ color, humor, weirdness, etc., to put “Velcro” on the information presented. These children may not necessarily be right brain learners, but the engaging aspects of right brain strategies keeps them interested, and uses less focusing energy. For example, when explaining a new concept or showing how to memorize material, make it fun by having your child help you draw sketches with colored markers.

Adjust your expectations. Your other children may complete tasks without constant reminders, or may actually be able to perform chores without your intervention. If your special needs child could do that, he gladly would. He wants to please also, but does not have the physical ability to bring this about. He is as disappointed in himself as you are. If you have asked him to do three things, and he completed just one, and comes to you, think about saying, “Let’s do the other two tasks together.” This takes such pressure off the child, and models how to get several tasks done in a row, without the feeling of failure.

If your child had a disabled arm or leg, it would be so much easier to adjust your expectations without feeling that you weren’t teaching him how to be responsible. This child has as real a disability, but because it is not visible it can so easily be seen as sloppiness, irresponsibility, or laziness. God will help you find the right way to work with your child.

Corrections

Medications: Even though most homeschooling parents are not interested in the use of medications to help their child focus, the discussion is warranted here, since there may be times when it is necessary, even if it is only for a short period of time.

- Serotonin boosting medications:
 - Ritalin (short release time)
 - Concerta (sustained release time)
 - Antidepressants (Zoloft, Prozac, Effexor, Wellbutrin, etc.)
- Stimulants:
 - Adderall (amphetamines)

■ Dopamine boosting medication:

- Strattera

All medications come with the risk of side effects, of course. Parents must weigh the potential benefits against the potential risks before deciding whether or not to use medications.

Diet: It has been known for over 20 years, first starting with Dr. Feingold and his famous Feingold Diet, that by reducing sugars, colorings and preservatives, children with attention disorders have a much easier time focusing.

Many parents report that when they change the diet of all children at home, that they see a tremendous difference in learning ability and behavior. Some of the diet recommendations that seem to be the most effective include:

Reduce sugar intake. It's the hidden sugars that get us in trouble, such as the sweeteners in fruit juice, boxed cereals, granola bars, fruit rollups, soft drinks, chocolate milk, pancakes, waffles, etc. Remember that a Snickers candy bar has about 30 grams of carbohydrates, and 35 grams of sugar. When you add the two together, you get 65 grams. Without realizing it, we often feed our children this same amount of sugar by just giving them juice and a bowl of cereal. For many children, consuming this much sugar contributes to their difficulty focusing and controlling their moods.

Increase raw fruit and vegetable intake. As we know from the research in books such as *Children with Starving Brains* by Dr. Chandless, many children are low in essential vitamins, minerals and fatty acids. These children either are not getting the daily nutrients they need for their brain to function well, or they are eating the correct foods, but are not absorbing the nutrients found in the food.

The enzymes contained in raw foods greatly assist the digestive system in absorbing nutrients. This can make a huge difference with some children. To make this difference, parents always had grapes, apples, bananas, watermelon, cantaloupe, and other fruit around to eat, and made sure the children had three servings a day. These parents also kept a plate of raw vegetables such as carrots, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, and green pepper strips along with plenty of ranch dressing around for lunch.

Use less processed food. As the pioneering Dr. Feingold, and many of the researchers following him found, when food is boxed, it is filled with preservatives. Those preservatives can be very toxic to a child's nervous system. Processed food also has no life in it. The rule of thumb for brain-healthy eating is to shop as much as you can in the periphery of the grocery store, where the plugs are in the walls. Buying food that is refrigerated in the store ensures you that the life-giving nutrients are still in there. When it is canned or boxed, the live nutrients, such as the fats that are good for the brain have been removed so that they do not go rancid on the shelf. Of course, there are some good brain fats that are not refrigerated...such as cans of tuna or salmon, and mayonnaise.

Increase water intake. Children are often tired because they are dehydrated. They do not drink enough water during the day. A great book that details all the symptoms of being low in water intake is *Your Body's Many Cries for Water* by Dr. Batmangahidj. He recommends that children drink half their weight in ounces of water. Making adequate water intake during the day a family priority is very helpful for many families. Water helps eliminate histamine and other toxins from the body.

Sensory Integration Issues

Many times a child who appears to have great difficulty with focusing and attending to a task is really struggling with a sensory processing problem. The child's sensory system is not functioning correctly, resulting in errant signals. An example of this would be a malfunctioning sensory system that shouts "pain," when a tag on a shirt touches the skin. Another example is when a child covers his ears at fairly minor unexpected sounds, because the sensory system is giving the errant signal that the sound is too loud. This child is not just distracted by his outside environment, but is distracted by his inside environment as well.

The following are some of the typical symptoms of sensory dysfunction:

Auditory:

- The child displays sensitivity to loud noises.
- The child struggles with language skills.
- The child dislikes being in a group to the point of avoiding most group situations.
- The child struggles with transitions and changes of any kind.

Taste/Textures:

- The child is bothered by certain food textures, such as lumps in yogurt.
- The child won't eat meat.
- The child is a very selective eater, preferring mostly carbohydrates.
- The child dislikes it when food on the same plate touches.

Touch:

- The child finds clothing tags an irritant.
- The child dislikes nonsoft clothing such as jeans.
- The child insists his socks have to have the seam "just right."
- The child grinds his teeth.
- The child walks on his toes for an extended period of time.
- The child dislikes his hair being touched, combed, washed or cut.
- The child finds visits to the doctor to be very hard.

Evaluations

- Pediatricians may have some insight into this, or they may refer parents to an occupational therapist for an evaluation. With a referral, insurance plans are more likely to cover these visits.
- For further checklists, see Carol Kranowitz's book, *The Out of Sync Child*.

Resources for Correction

- *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun: Activities For Kids with Sensory Integration Dysfunction* by Carol Kranowitz
 - Occupational therapy.
 - Nutritional therapy (very helpful).
 - Brain integration therapy.
 - Music therapy (as described under Auditory Processing Dysfunction).
 - Chiropractic services.

A Right Brain Learner Stuck in a Left Brain Curriculum

You may have noticed that your children have totally different learning styles. Your left brain child tends to like workbooks and working on his own. The right-brainer, on the other hand, likes discussion, prefers projects to workbooks and tends to be a little higher maintenance during the school day, requiring more of your interaction time.

Since most curriculum teaches in a more left brain manner, focusing on auditory and sequential aspects, as well as writing, our children who are more right brain learners often feel left out, and even struggle with learning and retaining material using this same curriculum. Once we have identified the right-brainer who is struggling because he is stuck in a left brain curriculum, then we can tweak our teaching process to help these right brain children get in touch with the “smart part of themselves.”

Before we explore these many different teaching strategies, let’s identify the common learning styles of these children.

Common Characteristics of a Left Brain Learner

- Tends to seek structure in the school day.
- Memorizes best by repetition (auditory or writing)
- Likes to know the plan for each day, week, etc.
- Tends to work well independently.
- Likes to make lists, and check them off as tasks are completed.
- Thinks things through with multiple pieces of evidence before coming to a conclusion.
- Tends to find math interesting, and is very good at it.
- Likes the predictability and conciseness of workbooks.
- Can do well with self-paced and computer curriculum.

Common Characteristics of a Right Brain Learner

- Likes spontaneous events, versus planned events each day. Seeks change.
- Memorizes best by using meaning, color, pictures, story, emotion in material.
- Does not plan ahead regularly.
- Prefers much involvement with parent while doing daily lessons.
- Does not do items sequentially, but skips around in his or her work.
- Makes quantum leaps when learning. Figures things out from scanty evidence.
- Finds math quite repetitive and somewhat boring.
- Prefers projects and discussions rather than workbook learning.
- Does not do well with self-paced or computer curriculum, but rather one that requires more parent and teacher involvement, such as unit studies, or any curriculum that is more hands-on and interactive with the adult.

Many right brain dominant children can adapt to left brain curriculum without much effort. If that is the case, then no changes need to be made for this child. However, if a child is struggling to be successful in learning, then some accommodations need to be made. Sometimes just putting the

struggling child in a more right brain friendly curriculum, makes all the difference in the world in how easy his school day goes.

Other times a child needs a totally different strategy to make learning easy. That is when we turn to right brain teaching strategies.

Who Needs Right Brain Teaching Strategies?

- Children who have underdeveloped memory skills.
- Children who have an auditory processing glitch.
- Children who have a focusing or attention issue.
- Children who have a visual/motor (writing) glitch.
- Children who dislike school work.
- Children for whom the more common methods of teaching are not working.

What Are Right Brain Teaching Strategies?

In 1981 Dr. Roger Sperry received the Nobel Prize for his split brain research. Prior to that, little was known about the separate responsibilities of the two brain hemispheres. President George Bush declared the 1990s as the Decade of the Brain. Much brain research came to the forefront during that time. It has been a very exciting time in beginning to understand the processes of learning.

The right brain is responsible for long-term memory storage. Ultimately, we all store learned material in our right brain, for easy retrieval. Generally this process of storing material in the short term memory (the left brain's responsibility), and then transferring it to our long-term memory (the right brain's responsibility) is automatic, and we don't even think about the intricate process that is taking place. However, when the left brain methods of repetition (either orally or in writing) is not transferring to the right brain long-term memory storage unit, then we need to look at ways to make this transfer more efficient. This is where right brain teaching strategies comes in. When we use right brain teaching strategies with our children, they are required to use much less energy to store learned material. Both right and left brain learners love these techniques!

Right brain teaching strategies involve using "visual Velcro" to easily memorize material. For example, if learning math facts through oral repetition, games, or writing them isn't working, then by making little stories (not rhymes because these are auditory) with emotion, and adding picture and color to the math fact, the child finds that it is easy to recall. This is using an easy, inexpensive learning strategy that totally transforms how a child remembers something as important as math facts. This type of teaching applies to all areas of curriculum. When a child says, "I can't remember," then it is time to use right brain teaching strategies to make the memory process so much easier. Let's explore some of these troublesome learning areas:

Spelling

- Train a child's photographic memory capability while teaching spelling words at the same time!
- Teach the word retrieval technique that spelling bee winners use!
- Avoid using the "writing gate" for learning spelling words, since this technique is inefficient for a right-brained child.
- Place color and picture with humor on the letter or letters in a word that are silent, or hard to remember. Have the child take a picture of the word using his internal camera.

Resources

- *Teaching Your Right Brain Child* video by Dianne Craft
- *Right Brain Child in a Left Brain World* by Jeffrey Freed

Vocabulary

- Have students draw cartoons to aid in memorizing vocabulary words.
- Make a drawing of the meaning of the word. Then superimpose the vocabulary word, or science term directly on the picture. The brain receives it in a “chunk,” and then retrieves it in a “chunk.”
- Use pre-made vocabulary cartoons by homeschool dad Sam Burchers for regular weekly vocabulary enrichment lessons that are easy to remember.

Resources

- Elementary and high school editions of *Vocabulary Cartoons* by Sam Burchers, available at www.vocabularycartoons.com.
- *Teaching Your Right Brain Child* video by Dianne Craft

Math

- Teach the problem and answer as a whole rather than in parts. Make a story and picture for each hard math fact. Keep these on the wall for child to take a mental picture of it for a week. Teach only five hard math facts a week using this picture method.
- Use Hollywood techniques employing stories, emotion and pictures to help struggling math students.
- Put math processes such as fraction rules, division steps, decimal rules and algebra steps into long-term memory storage. Keep these pictures of the processes, called templates, on the wall for easy retrieval. They won't be needed for long.

Resources

- Right brain multiplication cards, available at www.diannecraft.org.
- *Right Brain Child in a Left Brain World* by Jeffrey Freed.

Phonics

- Use color and pictures to make phonics easy. Every day read lists of long words with the decoding unit in color. If you have a child who is a word-guesser, you will see great results with this technique.
- Train the brain to store the sound and picture as a unit for easier retrieval of letter sound by placing the letter directly on the picture that gives that sound

Resources

- *Right Brain Phonics Reading Practice Book* by Dianne Craft
- Right brain phonics cards by Dianne Craft
- *Lindamood Phonemic* awareness program, available at www.lindamood.com.

Sight Words

- Beginning readers who have an auditory processing problem that causes them to struggle to learn the names of sight words learn them easily when a picture of the word's meaning is superimposed on the letters of the word.
- Teach both the reading and spelling of sight words using picture directly on the word.

Resources

- Sight word cards (36 words) by Dianne Craft.
- Your own homemade cards made by you or your child.

Reading Comprehension

- Train your children to change words into pictures when listening and reading.
- Teach them how to make a movie in their head as they read to dramatically increase their reading comprehension and memory.

Resources

- *Teaching Your Right Brain Child* video by Dianne Craft.
- *Teach Both Sides of the Brain* by Tony Buzan.
- Lindamood Bell's *Verbalization/Visualization* program.

Writing

- Model for your children how to see their whole paper, or paragraph, before they write it.
- Model pre-writing by using webbing (right brain) versus outlining (left brain).
- Show them how to write only one or two words to remind them of the whole thought.
- When grading the papers, give points for every positive thing on the paper. Ignore the errors initially, addressing them later when students prepare to write their next paper.
- Don't correct spelling errors on the paper. Instead, put the misspelled words into the next spelling list for the student to learn.
- Don't require that a paper be rewritten until a child has achieved success at the writing process.
- Give the child a list of transition terms, topic sentence starters, and concluding terms to use in his writing at first.

Resources

- *Tapestry of Grace Writing* program by Marcie Somerville, available at www.tapestryofgrace.org.
- *Step Up To Writing* by Maureen Auman, available at www.sopriswest.com.

Following Directions

- When giving oral directions, use quick doodles to help a child remember what is said.
- Later, have the child make a picture in his head of what you tell them to do.
- Using color and circling to help show a child how to break down the steps of written directions for easy understanding.

Study Skills

- Teach your child how to take picture notes for history, science, grammar and other subjects. Their test scores and understanding will improve dramatically.
- When teaching any amount of sequential material, use doodles and pictures, in a story, or in a row, touching each other, for easy storage and retrieval.

Resources

- *Teaching Both Sides of the Brain* by Tony Buzan
- *Teaching Your Right Brain Child* video by Dianne Craft

Possible Remedial Solutions for Daily Teaching

As a special education resource teacher for remedial reading and language arts I developed this method of teaching these bright, hard-working, but struggling students. The key for you is to have your struggling child work with you in a one-on-one situation for defined periods of time during each day. Struggling children do not learn independently, but need much teacher involvement to be successful. Using this method, I regularly saw a two-year growth in one year in both reading and spelling in the children I worked with, even if they had dyslexia and were non-readers at the beginning. Feel free to modify the plan in any way that works for your family. There are many other methods that work. This is just one of them.

Managing the Homeschool Teaching Day with a Struggling Learner

by Pam Gates

As a homeschooling mom of six, one of the most challenging situations that has arisen is having a struggling learner who needs one-on-one time with me. I do as much of my homeschooling as possible with all of us working together. Even with math, which is so individualized, I prefer to have everyone working at the same time so I can move easily from one child to the next, helping where necessary. Our day is full, so the thought of spending an hour to an hour-and-a-half with just one child seemed difficult at best. The reality is, though, that that one-on-one time is crucial for the struggling learner.

Up to the time I began my third child's more formal education, I thought I must be a pretty amazing teacher. My two sons had no struggles academically. My daughter is very bright, so it was a surprise to me when I began noticing her having difficulty grasping even simple things.

She wanted so badly to learn. But by the age of 7 she was already considerably behind. She could not count to 10 comfortably. She could not say the alphabet (even with the song). She could write her name, but was unable to name each of the letters in it consistently. She could not remember phonics, so reading was nonexistent.

I scheduled a consultation with an educational diagnostician in Denver who was able to diagnose my daughter as having dyslexia. The diagnostician outlined a daily schedule for us to follow and taught me specific teaching methods (most of them right brain strategies). She also taught me therapy designed specifically to open my daughter's blocked learning gates and guided me through a nutritional plan found to work particularly well with children with dyslexia.

I left the appointment relieved and excited, but somewhat overwhelmed. Frankly, at this point, educating my daughter had become so frustrating for both of us that we had drastically reduced the amount of time we spent on it. But I went home determined to prayerfully carve out the time she needed.

Please take this in the spirit it is intended. I know how difficult the task is and how the enemy tries to cripple us with guilt, so I was asked to share practical advice to help those of you who find

yourselves in a similar situation. With our schedule as it was, how could I possibly give Breanna the individual time she needed, continue my sons' education, and manage my 4-year-old, 2-year-old and newborn's schedules?

Time Management Suggestions

Set your priorities. The first milestone was the realization that teaching my daughter to read was the most important thing to focus on at that time. Her two big brothers could afford to take a break, if necessary, while I concentrated on her for awhile. I found that my children who are not struggling can catch up in a short time. You may decide that it is necessary to ease up on the amount of curriculum you cover with them during the school year and spend some of the summer break working to pick up the slack.

Realistically look at your daily schedule. What activities could we drop, or at least put on hold for a while? Music lessons, sports, field trips, even extra church activities may need to be set aside. Remember, this is not a permanent situation. It is often more difficult for us as mothers to give the extra activities up than for our children.

Extend your teaching time. For me this meant getting up earlier in the morning. It is much more productive for me to get myself to bed earlier and have more hours in the morning than to plan to get things done after the children have been put to bed. The energy I hope to have in the evening hours is somehow nonexistent. As for my children, I began making sure they were up, breakfasted and ready for the school day by 8. Look at your schedule to see what works best for your family.

Delegate within the family. My husband encouraged me look at my daily tasks and determine which of my responsibilities I could turn over to the children. For example, we set up a simple breakfast and lunch menu and my three older children (10- and 8- and 7-year-olds) were each responsible for one day a week. As a mother, your time is more stretched. It is important to free yourself from some of the more repetitive tasks. Generally, our children can take on a lot more responsibility than we give them credit for. Once the initial (rather messy) training period is completed, this turns out to be a real blessing.

Delegate outside of the family. Recently, someone suggested hiring a homeschooled teen in the area to come over for an hour a day to do some of the teaching with the other children. It is important to note that I, as parent, am the one who needs to be focusing on my struggling learner. If funds are tight, consider instead checking history, science, and literature videos out at the library to keep your other children productively entertained during the tutoring session.

Incredible Progress

The individual time invested with my daughter was invaluable. We would not have been able to accomplish all we set out to do by keeping her constantly in the family teaching setting. She had to have some time free of distractions with me. After about six months of more concentrated time with her, she had made incredible progress and was able to work alongside the other children most of the time. We have been using the teaching strategies found to work best for her and have continued with the at-home therapy, along with nutritional interventions.

It has been a long, sometimes laborious, process, but now, six years later, you would never know she ever had dyslexia. She is reading, writing, and doing math at grade level. Last year

her language arts teacher in our once-a-week home school co-op said she was amazed at her talent for poetry. Her teacher this year commented that she sometimes uses my daughter as a “second teacher” to help some of the other students. Best of all, my daughter no longer considers herself dyslexic.

Just as with homeschooling in general, this is obviously a very personal situation. I encourage you to pray for wisdom and patience to accomplish the task God has placed before you.