

Are You Considering Homeschooling A Child With Autism?

By Mary Fratianni – NYS LEAH Special Needs Coordinator

In the past, I have had several homeschooling inquiries from parents of children with autism. Many of these children have failed to progress in their current public school placements. The parents are desperate to help their children, yet are overwhelmed with the thought of having to try to educate them while having to deal with autistic behaviors and learning challenges. There are many resources available to help guide parents considering homeschooling these children.

The first stop along this road should be to the NATHHAN (National Challenged Homeschoolers) website (www.nathhan.org). On the NATHHAN website, a search of articles by the subject "Autism" brings up many. There were two articles that I found to be most helpful, the first by Kasia Coe, "Have you heard of the Applied Behavior Analysis Method (ABA)," and the second by Robin Batson Editor of Shepherd Boy newsletter (Shepherdboy.org), "Home Education For Children With Autism." Another resource available from NATHHAN is the book "Christian Homes And Special Kids" by Sherry Bushnell and Diane Ryckman. This book contains a section by Robyn Batson on "Raising A Child With Autism."

The second stop should be to the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (www.hsllda.org) Struggling Learning webpage. The Struggling Learner webpage provides a listing of what help is available and for what disabilities.

In New York State, if a child has been identified by the school district as having a learning disability that qualifies to receive related services, and the parent chooses to homeschool the child, the school district MUST offer the services at the written request of the parent. Please follow the link below to view the guidance now available on Chapter 217 of the Laws of 2008 regarding special education services for homeschooled children: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/nonpub/homeinstruction/homeinstructionguidance708.html>

As noted in Kasia Coe's article, an ABA program can be home based. ABA trained therapists can come into your home to work with you and your child. If homeschooling is being considered, in-home ABA is an option that should be discussed between the parent and the school district's CSE. Homeschool Legal Defense Association should be consulted to make sure that the homeschool program complies with all the applicable state education laws. The Lovaas Institute (www.lovaas.com) is listed on the HSLDA website under Autism Resources. The Lovaas Institute provides in home ABA programs.

It is a good idea to secure the services of an educational consultant who has experience working with autistic children. An educational consultant can write up a home educational and therapeutic program for you to do with your child. A consultant can provide a wide range of services. Homeschool Legal Defense Association Special Needs Coordinators can provide a list of educational consultants.

Choosing to homeschool a child with autism is a life changing decision. It not only changes the life of the autistic child, but it also changes the parents. God teaches us through our children. With support and determination, parents can successfully homeschool children with autism. Yes, the road will have twists and turns, potholes, and mud pits, but if you keep your eyes on the Lord, he will make your way clear and He will do great and mighty things along the way. Other valuable homeschooling resources include:

Home Schooling Children With Special Needs: Turning challenges into opportunities! by Sharon C. Hensley, M.A. helps parents understand what to expect

when homeschooling a child with special needs. She starts with a section called "Getting the Facts," which included a chapter on autism. She then moves on to "Tacking the Issues" and finally onto "Planning Your Program." Sharon tells it as it is. Sharon lists many helpful resources in the back of this book.

Shepherd Boy – Strategies for Autism (www.shepherdboy.org) offers strategies for working with individuals with autism and related disabilities through a newsletter, curriculum, writing, consultation, and speaking.

A "Stranger" Among Us: Hiring In-Home Support for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorders or Other Neurological Differences by Lisa Ackerson

Lieberman, MSW, LCSW

Joyce Herzog's Choosing & Using Curriculum: Your Guide to Home Education

The National Association for Child Development Inc. www.nacd.org