

# From Surviving to Thriving



A parent's guide to help you  
find confidence and  
contentment in  
homeschooling your child  
with additional needs.

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DIFFERENT BY DESIGN LEARNING

# Different By Design Learning

with Shawna Wingert

*“I am not sure I can do this.”*

I spoke with a mom last week about her son with learning differences.

After getting into a few details about his reading delay and processing speed, she said, *“I know that homeschooling is the best choice for him. I just have no idea how to actually do it. I am not sure I can do this.”*

I actually nodded my head in agreement, even though we were on the phone.

“None of us really do,” I replied.

I wrote a book all about [Homeschooling Your Child With Special Needs](#), and yet this is still my firm belief.

**None of us really know how to do this. We just do it, because we know it is what is right for our child.**

Along the way, we learn a bit, we fail a lot and eventually, we begin to understand what works.

With this in mind, I want to share the things that I have found to be universally true for all of us, no matter what the diagnosis or educational circumstances leading up to our decisions to homeschool.

My hope is to encourage you and hopefully, help you feel a little more confident, a little more equipped, and a little more content in your life as a mom homeschooling a child with additional needs.

## *I Have No Idea How To Homeschool My Child With Special Needs (but here's what I do know)*

**DIFFERENT IS NOT LESS. DIFFICULT IS NOT WRONG.**

One of the most challenging parts of homeschooling a child with special needs is how completely different it looks, compared to other homeschools and traditional classrooms.

**My son learned to read** with a combination of YouTube, sidewalk chalk and Harry Potter audiobooks, y'all. It looked nothing like everyone said it should.

**We need the reminder that different is not less than other, more traditional approaches.**

More importantly, we need the reminder that just because it's difficult (and it is!) doesn't mean we are doing it wrong.

It's just really difficult sometimes – that's not your fault and it doesn't mean you are doing it wrong!

## CONFIDENCE MATTERS MORE THAN CURRICULUM.

It is really easy to worry that we are using the wrong curriculum or need to explore all the other options available in an attempt to “fix” what is not working.

While it is appropriate to change up your curriculum from time to time, the truth is, the best thing we can do is focus on what *is working* and do more of it for a while.

If you are worried about your math curriculum, instead of obsessing about other math options, spend more time on the things that are **natural strengths and interests** for your child.

**This approach develops much more confidence in learning, both for you and for your child.**

You can and will always come back and work out the curriculum challenges later.

## WE KEEP GOING, EVEN WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE NOTHING IS WORKING.

This one is really, really difficult. And, it's really, really accurate.

Many times, when you are helping a struggling learner, it will seem like they are making no progress at all. Even worse, sometimes, it seems like they might be losing ground.

For example, it took almost three years for my son to master reading the word 'the.' It was my nemesis and his.

Three years, but it eventually "stuck" and now he can read it beautifully, every single time.

We keep going, even when it seems like nothing's working. This is simply part of homeschooling a child with special needs.

## IT ALL ADDS UP.

This is one of the most surprising parts of this homeschooling journey to me.

My children are 17 and 14. Looking back over the past almost decade of homeschooling, I can tell you that more than the curriculum or the tutors, the co-op or the online program – what has made the most significant impact in my boys' overall education is just simply showing up and doing what I can.

**What I can see now, looking back, is that it all adds up.**

Every random audio book and conversation about reptiles. All the times spent driving from one aquarium store to the next, looking for just the right fish. The pencils broke in frustration and the sidewalk chalk phonics.

*All of it is adding up to an education that is working for my boys.* I am confident it can and will for your child as well.

I am including a few, completely free, hopefully helpful tools in the subsequent pages to help you figure out some of the details associated with homeschooling your child.

They are here as a resource and support, but please know, nothing is as important in your homeschooling journey as this -

You are your child's mom.

You know him/her better than anyone else on the planet.

You have been teaching all along the way.

*Most importantly, you can do this!*

Wishing you so much love and learning,

*Shawna*

[Different By Design Learning](#)

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# *Parent Worksheets*

*The following are worksheet templates to help you, help your child.*

1. Questions to Ask When Considering A New Curriculum
2. Strength Based Homeschool Planning Guide
3. Guide To Helping Your Struggling Writer



## Questions To Consider When Selecting Homeschool Curriculum

1. How does my child learn best?
2. How am I most comfortable teaching?
3. What is my budget?
4. Are there ways to find the same sources for free? Is the time and effort worth the savings?
5. How much time do I plan to spend daily/weekly in each subject? Does the curriculum support this?
6. Are there any world views I do not want included in my teaching? Does the curriculum support this?
7. No matter what the suggested grade level, do the samples suggest that this would be a good fit for my child's current ability?
8. Am I excited about using it? Is my child?

*Different by Design Learning*





# Different By Design Learning

PARENTING AND HOMESCHOOLING CHILDREN  
WITH BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES, LEARNING DIFFERENCES, AND SPECIAL NEEDS

## Getting Started With Strength Based Homeschooling

Preferred Subjects: What subjects are easy and/or most interesting for my child?

Interests: What are my child's current interests? (include anything your child enjoys - don't worry about educational value at this point)

Learning Style: What are my child's preferred methods of learning? (i.e visual, auditory, tactile, verbal)

**Preferred Subjects + Interests + Learning Style =  
Strength Based Education**

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Different By Design  
Learning

*Shavna Wingert*

## A Quick Guide To Helping Your Struggling Writer

1

### UNDERSTAND WHY

Writing struggles can be caused by a variety of functions.

- Motor coordination and fine motor skills
- Language based processing differences
- Sensory issues related to touch
- Perfectionism
- Attention issues
- Executive Function Ability

2

### ASK YOUR CHILD

Do you prefer creative writing and story telling? Or making lists?  
Would you rather type or hand write?  
Would you like for me to type it for you as you dictate?  
Do you need to move while you think of what to write?

3

### FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

- Speech to text options are available for free in Google Chrome.
- Ask the teacher for other options (i.e. a video of the child explaining his thoughts.)
- Scribe for your child as needed (and without guilt!)

Teachers are open to ideas, especially now!

### HANDS-ON HOMESCHOOL

Research has shown, over and over again, that multi-sensory activities and sensory input help with attention, comprehension and retention.  
Schedule hands-on sensory activities or get your child moving before sitting down to write. It will help ease the stress.

4

### TIME, STRENGTHS, AND GRACE

Writing takes time for many children to master. Complicated processes require brain development and maturity that can take more time for some kids. It really is OK!

When at all possible, try to focus on what your child is doing well. If writing is a struggle, you don't want your child to lose confidence as a learner because of the special circumstances right now. Focus on the good, give it time and a ton of grace!

5