

The Learning Challenged Teaching the Learning Challenged!

by Maxine McLellan

Children with learning challenges and difficulties often come by those difficulties genetically. Now there is a sobering thought not intended to place a guilt trip on anyone by any means! It is a point to consider, though, particularly for the parent who is attempting to teach a learning challenged child at home. Often the child mirrors the disabilities of one or both of the parents.

I believe that this situation is a blessing rather than a curse or a deterrent to home schooling the learning challenged child. As an adult with significant learning disabilities myself, I have found that I have an empathy for children with challenges.

My daughter, although very gifted, has some learning challenges. My son learns very differently than I do. Through fourteen years of home schooling them, my learning challenges allowed us to learn together. I was able to teach them ways to compensate for various learning challenges. They, in turn, have taught me new compensation techniques. This year is our fifteenth year in home schooling. My children are graduated, but we now teach two young girls with learning disabilities. Samantha is nine and has been with us since September 1999. Her sister Stephanie is seven and joined us after Christmas.

Because of my personal limitations, it is easier for me to be patient with the girls when they are frustrated or run into a mental block. When Samantha panics because she feels she is not learning something quickly enough or as quickly as Stephanie, I can identify with her and calm her down. My need for hearing aids allows me to understand some of the auditory processing difficulties of both girls. People have been patient with me over the years when I have not understood what was said, and now I can show that same patience as the girls try to decode my words or instructions. The exercises we do every day to develop their neurological and hearing systems are sure to help me in time. The full belly-laugh we enjoy as we watch each other attempting sometimes seemingly impossible exercises are, in and of themselves, healing. Samantha is slowly learning to laugh at herself and her limitations as she strives to strengthen her weaknesses.

I am learning from them. One day I was working on putting plastic puzzle shapes into a square form. I had been working at it with no success. Samantha saw my frustration, came over, put her hand on mine, directed it to the red piece, and we placed it in the form. She

patiently guided my hand to each successive piece and in little time at all we had accomplished the puzzle together. My young teacher then instructed me to “try it again” under her watchful eye. When I finally got it done, with only a little help from my teacher, she gave me a hug and “thumbs up” and went happily on her way!!

It is important as the parent to not wish to live out your own un-attained goals through your child. Do not expect and push them to excel beyond what you were capable of just so you feel fulfilled or successful. This places a heavy burden on the child. Children need to be able to attain the goals God has for them personally. It may be that your child will in fact grow in many areas well beyond your capabilities, as has happened in our family. I now know how to turn my computer on and off properly; my children are both web-site designers and do trouble-shooting for computer technicians!

I have found it good to keep samples of the work the children do. Look back together from time to time to see how far they have come. It is exciting to see and to celebrate the little steps of progress. Remember, a mountain is moved one shovelful at a time. Do not approach your child as a bulldozer out to get the job accomplished in an unrealistic time-frame not suited to his or her abilities and God’s goals for their life. Tears, rather than progress, are the usual results of such assaults. On the other hand, do not assume the child cannot learn and put them into a small academic box. Always be challenging and encouraging them to stretch just a little farther. Each step of the way, be sure to give a hug and “thumbs up”; it sure encouraged me!

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