

What test is best for a child with special needs?

By Debbie Thompson

If a child is cognitively 7 years or younger, then the Brigance is often used as a life skills checklist. Braille editions of some tests are available. The Stanford Achievement test is not timed so that test is often a great option for students. Accommodations or modifications are available if you have a Dr's or psychologist's note or an IEP type document from testing within the last 3 years. The accommodations and modifications allowed for a particular test are usually described in the Directions for Administration books of standardized tests. Whenever any accommodation or modification is made we recommend writing that up and attaching it to your score report to keep in your files. Choose the average level of most of the curriculum the student is using but because much of the test is read by the student, it is usually best to choose a test at their reading level. You can choose whatever level of test is best to fit your child as long as that is allowed in your state. Always feel free to call us if you have other questions. Debbie Thompson, Triangle Education Assessments, 919-387-7004

Learning the Art of Home Education from Parents with Special Needs Children

By Beth Mora

My background as a Registered Nurse, Sunday school teacher and homeschool co-op teacher and my friendships, have blessed me with opportunities to share in the life of special needs children and their families. The moments I have spent offering help always become reversed. I am the one who receives help. I learn. I grow. They provide me with a living example that transforms the mechanics of home education into the art of home education.

The Art of Pacing

I marvel at the ability of parents with special needs children to pace with their child. In a race, the pacer has two jobs. They set the speed at which the runner runs, and remove distractions so the athlete can focus solely on the task at hand, crossing the finish line. For the special needs child, the finish line may remain unknown for years. But nevertheless, these parents accept the responsibility of being their child's pacer. They run the educational course together. When their child's learning slows down, the parents also slow down in presenting new material.

When their child becomes stuck in a particular area, a "do what it takes attitude to unlock her child's capacity" kicks into high gear. When their child excels in a particular area, they present more material on the subject of interest. The up and down rhythms of transferring and receiving knowledge are normalized. As their child's pacer, they know it's vital to remove all comparisons with other children because, frankly, their child is unique and faces challenges other children don't face.

They know that comparing their child to others will slow progress. Sadly, rather than accepting the role of pacer in my children's life, I sometimes give the job to the curriculum. Parents of special needs children tend to view the curriculum for what it is supposed to be: a tool. I also discovered how I distract my children's learning when I compare them to others. Embracing my role as my children's pacer is critical to their success.

The Art of Celebrating

Years ago, as a Rehabilitative Specialist RN, circumstances frequently presented themselves where I stood trembling, awaiting the doctor to deliver to a family the reality of their loved one's functional, cognitive, or physical loss or limitations. Silent moments in a sea of disbelief would sweep away its bystanders in paralyzing breathlessness. I can tell you as an eyewitness; there is no greater display of courage than to watch that family take the next step in their journey. Life-stopping moments change perspective. Every small task learned, every small function restored, and every thought that connects, are cause for celebration.

My dear friend unashamedly posts on Facebook every triumph of her autistic son. Her community of friends and family joins in each celebration. It is no wonder her son excels. She

does not focus on what he can't do, only on what he can do. Encouragement leads to inspiration and produces motivation. I learned my children stand up taller and dare to accept more challenges if I celebrate all of their accomplishments, great or small.

The Art of Understanding

Rarely does a special needs diagnosis follow a predictable pattern. Parents of special needs children quickly become their child's expert. They become a student of their student. They learn to read facial expressions or recognize the meaning of a particular look in their child's eye. They know what foods or schedules help or hurt their child's behavior. They can narrate what makes their child smile, cry, or react in fear. They pay close attention to what motivates and what renders their child helpless before obstacles.

One of the most powerful demonstrations of love is to take the time to know and understand a person. I learned that I, too, must become a student of my student, and to put away my assumptions of what I think I know about my children. I am learning to observe and to listen for what matters to them.

The Art of Acceptance

Parents of special needs children are dance partners with hope and acceptance. They sway to the music of therapy and doctor's appointments in hope of change, but rest in the slow dance of acceptance. Watch Special Olympics athletes enter the arena to an eruption of thunderous applause and standing ovations. These athletes compete under a different set of rules than most athletic competitions. Scenes of compassion, hugs, and high fives are the rules of this competition. The families also live under a different set of rules. They cheer and applaud not for the superior, but for the potential reached. They are the rules of unconditional love and acceptance. And acceptance is a beautiful place. It's where children thrive. It's where we as parents learn to see life through the eyes of a child.

The Art of Grieving

Hot tears sliding down her cheek, the mother of a special needs child mourned; her child will never be like other children. I can only imagine, but never fully understand. She carried the hurts of her dear child. She had already come to grips with her child who could not walk, comprehend, or relate to a person socially. But it was a birthday party that he was not invited to and the sports team he wasn't allowed to join that magnified her grief. It was the driver's license he will never receive that caused her further sorrow. His pain was her pain. These are the burdens parents of special needs children carry. Each stage of life carries its own set of losses. However, grief is a powerful teacher; it places a spotlight on what matters most.

Quietly sitting next to this grieving mother helped me to realize that grief and letting go of our expectations are normal parts of parenting and home education. The moment our children are born, we hold dreams about the abilities and the talents we hope will emerge. And when they don't come into view, we despair. We make excuses. We blame. She showed me that it's okay to mourn the loss. She uncovered my pride that held my unshared grief in a personal prison and how that prison held me captive in reaching out to other moms. She drew back the curtain of my own heart to reveal how my expectations for my children blinded me from the joy of God's plan for my children's lives.

I am grateful for the lessons and wisdom these parents have brought into my life. The artist will create a masterpiece with color, shape, and texture, but a parent of a special needs child uses their own life to create another kind of masterpiece, a place for all parents to learn that every child is a gift from God. They teach us we can unwrap this gift through the art of pacing with our children on their journey. We can engage in the art of celebrating every achievement, no matter how large or small. We can uncover a child's heart through the art of understanding. We can unconditionally love our children through the art of acceptance. And by engaging in the art of grieving, we can exchange the loss of our own expectations for God's beautiful plan for our children.

Ways to Bless a Parent of a Special Needs Child

Grow a friendship of love and understanding with a mom or dad of a special needs child, and learn the art of true home education. By offering a hand of hope to these parents; you will be the one blessed.

- Offer to pick up grocery items.
- Invite their child to special occasions.
- Give the gift of a meal "just because."
- Learn about the disability and the unique challenges it brings.
- Share the information with your children.
- Do not offer advice unless asked, and even then, be aware of your limitations.
- Ask for a list of prayer requests.
- Send a card, a flower, or a cupcake.
- Simply ask, "How can I help?"
- Offer to take their other children on outings and field trips.
- Make a "date basket" for the parents to enjoy in their home.
- Validate by saying, "You are doing a great job," but don't ascribe a hero status.
- Listen to understand, not to fix.
- Don't stop the conversation by offering pity.
- Don't assume what works for you will work for them.
- Money is always tight; bless them with a gift card.
- Offer help in the home especially when the child must have surgery.
- Share other interests.
- Include, but don't be offended when they can't participate.
- When possible, think of ways to modify activities so the special needs child can participate.
- Don't wait for a need to arise; the need is always there.

Beth Mora is a veteran homeschool mom, author, and speaker who lives in northern California with her wonderful husband. She is the creator of [Here to Help Learning](#) that offers filmed writing instruction for grades 1-6 and includes a special needs forum for moms to share ideas about home education. You can find her at Here to Help Learning's [Home to Home blog](#), dating her husband, kayaking, deck farming, or spending time with her eight grown children and her granddaughter. Here to Help Learning includes the Write a Book Project for \$6.99/month/family. Worksheets and scripted lessons are included. Perfect for co-ops and multi-level teaching.

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