

# A Parent's Perspective: How I Am **Successfully** Homeschooling My Child



## By Traci Gulledge Street

Traci grew up in the Flathead Valley. She graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in communication studies, and has worked with kids off and on for many years. In the rare moments when she's not actively being mom, she enjoys collecting and researching items from the 1950s and 1960s.

## Montana Agitate, Advocate, Help Each Other Navigate **Voices AMPLIFIED**

The Montana Voices Amplified project offers people of all ages and abilities a stage to speak for themselves. The series is hosted by the Montana Family to Family Health Information Center (MT F2F), a program of the Rural Institute for Inclusive Communities (RIIC) at the University of Montana.



An accessible digital version of this essay is available. Open by scanning the QR code with your smart phone, or visit the web site at:

[scholarworks.umt.edu/ruralinst\\_independent\\_living\\_community\\_participation](http://scholarworks.umt.edu/ruralinst_independent_living_community_participation)

The COVID-19 pandemic has people considering homeschooling, which can be overwhelming and daunting. Many parents are not, by trade, teachers. Lots of us have tried (and failed!) to emulate traditional school. Others do well, setting up classrooms in their homes and planning and following a set curriculum.

Whatever your reasons for choosing homeschooling, thanks to COVID-19, there are now more resources available to the homeschool parent than ever before.

When my son was almost 4, he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. At the time, I was working for the local school district as an aide to an autistic child. I had learned about PECS (a six-phase communication system using pictures) and Proloquo2go (a popular and robust communication app for iPads), and I knew what stimming\* looked like. I was more fortunate than most parents – I already had a minor introduction to autism.

As the parent of a newly diagnosed child, you often don't know where to turn or who to trust. You most CERTAINLY don't trust yourself! You begin by researching and listening to the experts...you search out the supports available in your area...you try to relate what you read and learn to your own child.

*And after a while, you learn to listen to yourself, and to your child.*

**01. Following My Instincts** It was this instinct that finally led us to pull our child out of public school. By the end of first grade, my child began refusing to go to school. He cried for hours in the morning. I had to drag him out of bed. I finally looked at my son and wondered if the benefits of going to school outweighed potential damage to his mental health. I can't say what exactly caused his extreme reaction to school that year. The school tried, but in the end, it just wasn't working for him.

**02. Incidental Learning** Children are natural learners. Their curiosity lends itself to learning. You can turn almost anything into a learning experience! Baking cookies? Learn about fractions or chemistry! Going on a walk? Talk about why the leaves turn colors. At the grocery store, discuss where your food comes from and how it gets there.

\*"Stimming," or self-stimulating behaviors, are repetitive movements or sounds. Many people on the autism spectrum stim, although stimming is not strictly an autistic behavior. Stimming can be self-calming, focusing, or simply help a person feel where his body is in space.



**03. Utilizing Interests** For my child, we take his extreme interests and use them. We have spelled words and done math with Legos. We have written letters to family about his favorite mythical beast, the Kraken. I ordered workbooks specific to Minecraft, his current favorite video game.

**04. Socialization** People often worry about a lack of socialization for homeschoolers, but I have met many parents who find homeschool works better for their child with a disability. My son has made friends who have similar interests, and at times, friends who may have similar communication styles or social awareness. Because of this, I have also made friendships with parents who understand my situation — moms who recognize when we have reached our limit and understand if we have to bail on plans.

**05. Setting Our Own Pace** I believe children learn at their own pace. For my child, being in his own environment has often been a better choice. When he was younger, he often had insomnia, which made it hard for him to have a successful day at school. Now we are able to flex his schedule to meet his needs. We can often rework the “classroom” to meet him where he’s at, such as doing something outside, taking breaks, or having a later start time.



At some point, he may want to go back to public school. If he chooses that, I will do my best to support him. As he gets older, homeschool becomes more challenging for both of us. The main thing I’ve learned, however, is to keep moving forward, and to open my eyes to experiences that promote learning.

## RESOURCES

The **Montana Office of Public Instruction** Just for Families page lists content standards for each grade and homeschooling resources. The page advises parents to contact their County Superintendent to register their homeschool.

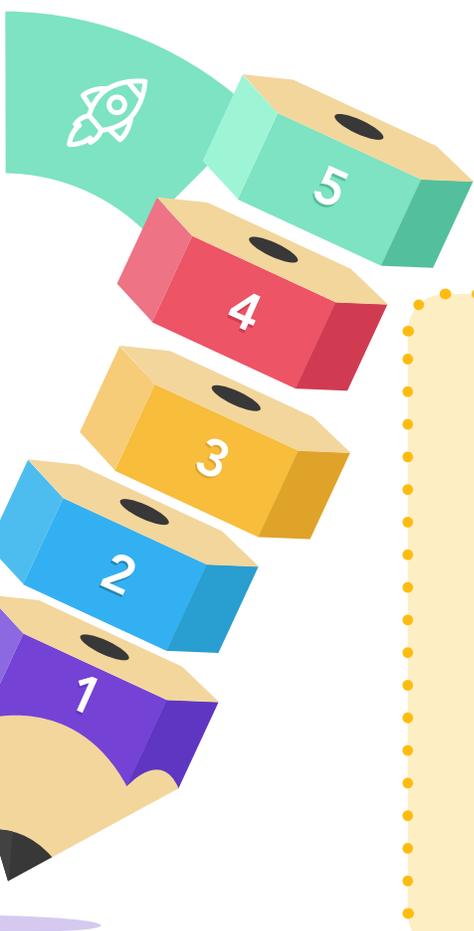
<http://opi.mt.gov/Families-Students/School-Topics/Just-for-Families>

Distance Learning with MontanaPBS

<https://www.montanapbs.org/education/distance-learning/>

The Best Homeschooling Resources Online

<https://www.parents.com/kids/education/home-schooling/the-best-homeschooling-resources-online/>



# Montana Agitate, Advocate, Help Each Other Navigate **Voices AMPLIFIED**

Montana Voices Amplified provides a microphone and broad audience so the stories, lessons, causes, and advice of individuals with disabilities and their families are heard. No one tells your story better than you can. But life is busy, and time is precious. If you take the time to articulate your experience, we will share your message with people who will benefit from your wisdom, or influence change.



Montana Voices Amplified welcomes submissions of five-minute videos or 600-700-word essays on any topic related to your lived experience as a person with a disability or caring for someone with a disability. Authors of chosen submissions receive \$100. Videos will be posted on the MT F2F web site and shared on social media. Essays will be posted on the web site and ScholarWorks, shared on social media, and printed in a professionally designed publication to distribute to families, schools, agencies, and legislators as appropriate.



## Let us amplify YOUR voice!

Do you have a story, a lesson, advice or a message to share about life with a disability or diagnosis? Your experience can positively impact other Montanans.

Send your idea for an article or brief video to [stacey.bliss@mso.umt.edu](mailto:stacey.bliss@mso.umt.edu) or [shawna.hanson@mso.umt.edu](mailto:shawna.hanson@mso.umt.edu).

If you prefer to talk through your idea, you can call Stacey at (406) 243-5760 or Shawna at (406) 243-4531.



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