

Sticking With Homeschool

Advice for families who plan to continue learning at home

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For some parents the pandemic lockdown has come with an unexpected side effect: an awakened look at their children's education.

Some parents have come to realize that their kids are mostly bogged down with busywork instead of meaningful learning. Others have experienced the unfortunate surprise of seeing what their children are being taught (and what they're not). Some have felt relief from witnessing their children as they experience a taste of freedom from the confines of school or seeing how they are thriving in their newly found free time. Maybe beauty and peace have returned to their homes. Maybe their children's true nature has gradually reemerged as the space between them and the social environment of school widens.

For others, the awakening has come in the form of questions such as: Is school benefiting my child? Is the environment at school a good one? Are the values being extolled at school in line with those of our family? Is the school's education model the best option available to my child?

As they mull over these ideas, many parents begin to wonder if they could make homeschool a permanent part of their family's life. Some might even be wondering how they were ever convinced otherwise.

If you've come to find yourself pondering these kinds of ideas and are thinking of giving the "crazy" idea of homeschooling a go, I have a few tips to help you get started.

De-Schooling Is Key

Few of us realize how deeply ingrained our notions about school are. We've all been operating on assumptions such as the following. Home is where you live and school is where you learn. Five days a week for six hours a day is the ideal school schedule. You need a degree in education to be able to teach. Teachers are experts in the subjects they teach. Kids need to be pushed, even forced, to learn. The social environment at school is a good one. The teaching strategies and methodologies used in school are tried and true. Kids learn what they need to learn in school.

I imagine comedian Jeff Foxworthy saying, "If you are questioning the assumptions above, you may be a homeschooler."

It takes some time to first, recognize and second, put down the notions that have been deeply ingrained in us and our children for so long. "De-schooling" is a term homeschoolers use to describe the time you allow yourself to do just that. As summer approaches, give yourself and your children time to play, explore, read, make, do, and separate yourselves from the constructs and trappings of school.

Ground Your Homeschool

Before you dive into the nitty-gritty of teach-



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ing your kids math, literature, science, and history, recognize that you can ground your homeschool in the values that are most significant to your family. The moral character and spiritual values that you deem fundamental should serve as the foundation of your homeschool.

When you make a priority of grounding your children's education in what's truly most important you'll find that learning in every subject takes on a much greater significance in their lives.

Get Inspired

Homeschool is not about bringing what is done at school home. It's something else entirely and it usually develops into something unique to each family that makes it a part of their life. To see the different approaches others take can be quite inspiring.

The homeschooling resources and inspiration to be found online and in books and, likely, in your own community are abundant. Immerse yourself in different ideas and possibilities.

Look for homeschooling mamas (and some dads, too) on YouTube and Instagram, and specific teaching ideas on Pinterest. Look for local groups and activities on Facebook. Read one of the best books written for homeschoolers in recent years, "The Brave Learner" by Julie Bogart.

In addition, it's worth the time to familiarize yourself with some of the philosophies of education that homeschoolers have come to appreciate. Of course, homeschool can be anything you want it to be, so you certainly don't need to follow any of these methods or ideologies, but considering these can open your mind to possibilities you may not have yet considered.

Classical education. Based on the trivium, this systematic method of learning incorporates the stages of grammar, logic, and rhetoric and educational ideals of the Renaissance. This philosophy is best summed up in Susan Wise Bauer's seminal book, "The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home."

Charlotte Mason education. Evoking the teaching philosophy of the 19th-century British educator, this method centers on "living books" as opposed to textbooks that have been "written down" for children, along with a focus on good habits, an appreciation for the finest art, and a study of nature. "A Charlotte Mason Education: A Home Schooling How-To Manual" by Catherine Levison is a well-regarded guide.

Waldorf education. Founded by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, the approach aims to develop a child's "body, soul, and spirit" through practical and creative experience, with an emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy. "Foundations of a Waldorf Education" is a copious collection of lectures Steiner gave on his philosophy.

Unschooling. A term coined by John Holt in the 1970s, unschooling focuses on student-driven education where children learn through play, household work, and their own natural curiosity. For more information, see "Teach Your Own: The John Holt Book of Homeschooling."

Eclectic. This approach is a very common strategy in which homeschoolers take what they like from the methods above

or elsewhere and design their own system of teaching their children.

Focus on Your Children

Get reacquainted with your kids. Watch the way they choose to spend their time and notice the things that light them up. Understand their current interests, their aptitudes, their talents, and their character—and begin to imagine how you can facilitate an education in which they learn how to learn, maximize their inner strengths, and become the truest version of themselves.

Enlist the Kids

Ask your children what they want out of homeschool. Involve them in brainstorming and planning for the coming year. Allow them to choose subjects and topics to explore. Respect them as individuals who have something to contribute to their own education.

Start Small

Finally, when you begin to actually homeschool, start slow and small. Don't try to dive in and cover all of the subjects right off the bat. I recommend starting with either math or language arts first. Focus on one subject for, say, one week. If it's language arts, you can read aloud together, use a curriculum you've chosen, or execute a simple plan you've created. See how it goes.

You'll learn a ton by simply diving into that for a week. It won't all go smoothly. You'll see areas you need to tweak and moments that were so magical you could cry. Adjust. After a week, try something else. You can build upon each week of success until you've established what you consider to be a solid curriculum that's working for you.