

Homeschooling A Houseful

Remember when you had your first baby and daydreamed of all the science experiments and lapbook projects you were going to do together (cheerfully I might add)? And of course, your little guy would learn to read by the time he was five because you would be spending so much one-on-one time with him. Then came baby number two, then three, then four... Now the only science experiments you have time for are those related to what's that growing in the Tupperware in the fridge and what could sister have possibly eaten to turn her diaper contents that color. Reading consists of reading the directions and instructions of all those Lego building kits, board games, and electronic toys.

Whether you're one of those Proverbs 31 women who "rises while it is still night" and lives by the promise of Psalm 173:3 that says children are a reward from the Lord, or you're one of those moms who prays that somehow time will stand still during the night and give you an extra three hours of uninterrupted sleep, learning how to homeschool a houseful of varying ages takes time, trial and error, and the wisdom of others who have been there and done that. Personally, I am in the middle of the battlefield with children heading into the ninth, seventh, fifth, and fourth grades, and though I am not foolish enough to believe that I am full of "wisdom", I do have some ideas for you to sift through while looking for the wheat that may work for your family.

First, consider splitting your homeschool schedule up into shifts, both a.m. and p.m. Younger children who still nap can be taught in the morning while older siblings work on chores, homework, extracurriculars, etc... Then when the younger children go down for naps, the older ones can begin their school day while not having to suffer through those unscheduled diaper changes, temper tantrums, sippy cup refills, and feedings. Also, never underestimate the benefit that results from having older kids help teach their younger siblings. It teaches character, patience, responsibility, and compassion in the older kids and the younger ones love nothing more than their big brother or big sister wanting to spend quality time with them.

If schooling in shifts does not work for your family, do not fret. There are ways to homeschool both older and younger children simultaneously. It takes some creative planning and cunning on your part, but it can be done. Start by making a list of each child's stronger and weaker learning areas. Then schedule their school days strategically. Make each child a daily schedule that outlines for them in what order they are to complete their subjects so that you can be available to the one that requires the most of your attention to complete their work. For example, math is not a strong subject for my oldest son Jonathan. So while Jonathan and I are doing his math, Benjamin is working on his math and Michaela on her handwriting, which are the subjects they need the least amount of help with, if any. Michaela needs me for math as well and so that's when Jonathan works on his spelling and geography and Benjamin works on his handwriting. Benjamin needs me for language arts and so Michaela works on her history then and Jonathan on his language arts. Make sense? This way, I can spend the one-on-one time necessary with each of them when they require my attention the most. It also promotes independent working skills and patience in the other kids who are waiting for their turn with mom.

You can also consider using a curriculum that can be taught to kids of varying ages at the same time if the strategic scheduling seems too overwhelming for you. Student of the Word is one. Unit studies can be adapted for all age groups as well. When I was teaching my kids about creation, I wanted them all to learn together. I devised a unit study that would achieve this goal. All of the kids listened to the story of creation in *Genesis 1 and 2*. Jonathan, who was in the sixth grade at the time, made an outline of the days of creation and then from that outline, he creatively re-wrote *Genesis 1 and 2* (without changing the meaning) in his own words. I asked him to add in strong verbs (birds soaring instead of flying) and good adjectives (brilliant sun, shining stars). These were creative writing skills he learned from his Institute for Excellence in Writing course. Michaela (then fourth grade) experimented with the different types of water (vapor or steam, solid, and liquid) and charted her findings. Benjamin (then second grade) made a chart depicting all of the types of dry ground included in God's creation (soil, rock, clay, sand, etc...). And Jeremiah (then 1st grade) was given pictures of all types of God's creations and asked to place them in the correct columns that depicted which day God created them on (i.e. a picture of a tree would go under the third day column).

Maybe you have multiple children, but they're not all school-aged yet. For those toddling tornadoes, invest in several bins of educational and time-consuming and creative projects, motor skill-developing toys, and anything else that will fascinate and occupy those busy little minds and hands for a while. Only put one object in each bin and label the bins Monday through Friday. For example, put Model Magic (non-toxic and non-messy) in one of the tubs with some plastic cookie cutters or even a small rolling pin. In another tub put Color Wonder books, fingerpaint paper, markers, and paints (again, non-messy to anything but the paper they were intended to be used on). Maybe another bin could have just a bunch of plain, white paper and some stickers, which are great for fine motor developing skills and definitely time-consuming to peel off. To ensure that these bins being given to your toddlers is anticipated and appreciated, only give the Monday bin on Monday and only when you are in need of the most uninterrupted school time with your older children. As soon as you are done with what required your undivided attention, remove the bin from your little one and put it away until the next week on that regularly scheduled day. Never use it as a pacifier while you clean or nap or it will surely lose its appeal when you need it the most.

Again, make good use of those older siblings and the homemaking skills they can be trained, regardless of whether they are boys or girls. Teach them to change diapers, rock babies, patiently play peek-a-boo 87 times in a row, burp after feedings, etc... You are no less a supermom if you allow your children to help you complete the daily tasks, chores, and routines that go along with being a full-time homeschooler. In fact, in training your children in these respects, you are instructing them in the ways of the Lord as they learn to be humble servants and they themselves godly husbands, wives, mothers, and fathers someday.

Last, but certainly not least, make sure that you maintain a well-balanced diet of sleep, Bible study time, quiet time, and intimate time in prayer with your Savior. I cannot tell you how many nights I have fallen asleep thinking about my next day's schedule and how I was going to accomplish all that I needed to do. I awoke the next morning, my knees hitting the floor

in prayer to my Father, the keeper of my Day-Timer. I gave Him my day, my to-do's, my plan A, my children's attitudes (and mine as well), and then asked Him to be ruler of it all. At the end of the day, whether or not He enabled me to accomplish all I had set out to do, and even if my day included an unforeseen (by me) Plan B (or even C, D, E, etc...), Christ gave me peace and a clear sense that I did exactly what He planned for me to do that day as a mom, homemaker, helpmate to my husband, friend, and homeschooler. And walking in His will and fulfilling His purposes for our lives daily is what it's all about!