

## How Do You Do It?

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I have been homeschooling for 15+years and have had 7 children during that time, with a total of 10 so far (7 boys!), and I would agree with others that we need to be more mother and less teacher.

The practical working of that in relation to learning is that I keep my little ones with me at all times. The baby sits on my lap or at my feet doing whatever I am doing with the older ones. The toddler also stays with me, "doing school" too. I let them play with toys, or nurse, meeting their needs as we are all learning together. I found that God gave us our little ones to enhance our curriculum, rather than to detract from it. As we are learning to read and write and do numbers we are also learning to yield our rights and to be patient and kind to others.

I consider all of our children to not only be siblings to each other, but teachers also. Our newborn teaches us to be selfless, and to love babies. Our toddler teaches us to be persevering and patient and to laugh at ourselves. I would also like to share some other practical things that work for me.

I find keeping a regular schedule is a life saver. I don't mean a feeding schedule, but a simple event oriented schedule so each member of the family will understand that after we eat breakfast we do chores then school, after we eat lunch we read books and nap and after dinner we do chores, baths, devotions and bedtime. Life is so much easier when I don't have to catch everyone and get them going the same way all of the time.

Another tip that has helped me tremendously is to do spend time with the youngest children first. While the older children are finishing chores I take the littlest ones and spend time with them, reading, doing puzzles, just playing and being Mommy. I emphasize that we work before we play and I consider this part of their day as school. I have found that by giving the little ones their time first they will be content to play quietly at my feet for awhile by themselves giving me time to work with the older ones. I will say that I consider my little ones to be those under 8-10 years old!

My schoolday for my current 9 and under goes like this: rise, get dressed, groom and tidy bedrooms. I have been up for awhile and help the little ones follow my directions. It takes time to get everyone ready, but for the little guys it is a lesson in itself, so don't feel bad taking the time to do it.

Breakfast is very simple and wholesome on schooldays: cooked cereal and fruit. After breakfast we do chores. When all of my little ones were your children's ages we all did them together. Chores teach so much character so I am glad we have them. After chores we all convene on the couch for school. I start with Bible reading and Bible stories. Then we cover phonics.

Everyone gets a chance to say them, the youngest copying the older. After phonics the readers read aloud to all of us. Baby nurses whenever he needs. Then we get out the math manipulatives. Everyone does math. The older one does addition and subtraction stuff with the blocks, the preschooler adds them while the toddler counts them. Baby "eats" the bigger ones. We all work before we play and its hard work to count blocks. It's fun too!

After we do our reading and math we all move to the kitchen table for assignments. I put the toddler's high chair up to the table too. Each child old enough to care has a notebook filled with all sorts of papers. First each child works on his writing. Some scribble, some make circles, lines and dots, others copy my printed letters, some work a handwriting book. Of course even little ones get to use a pencil! Then I have those who can write a story or copy a passage from the Bible or book we have been reading. The little ones "write" or "copy" also. After writing they all illustrate their work using either cut and pasting or coloring.

During this table time I am working primarily with the older ones (over 8-10 years old) while supervising the younger. I bring an older one to the table so I can keep my eye on the younger ones. This works well for me as we do it everyday, we always work before we play, I change the activities just before the children get bored and therefore naughty.

After about an hour of table time (remember we first practiced writing, then wrote stories then illustrated them so I kept the little

ones moving at a pace just ahead of their boredom) I let them move to the living room for duplo or blocks time.

The livingroom is adjacent to the kitchen table so they are right there for me to see, but they can have more room to move about and be a bit noisier without disturbing us. The little ones can play nicely without me for about an hour for several reasons: they already feel connected to mom since they had my total attention first thing in the morning and they are very ready to play since they have had a structured morning. I want you to understand that while the little ones did "school" it was still age appropriate things they were doing.

When my children were all young I used duplo time for reading aloud to everyone. They learn to play quietly and contentedly while listening to me read. Now for read aloud time most of the children prefer to sketch or color. After duplo time (I do not call it play—it is still schooltime) I can let the younger ones play outside my kitchen window (where I am still working with the older ones) for about an hour. The 7yr old can supervise while you get lunch if need be. I think it best if you can go out to play also. This is play time! They have worked hard all morning and play feels so wonderfully fulfilling to them now!

They play until just before lunch when we have a pick up time. I should mention that during schooltime I always emphasize tidying up as we go along. It teaches the little ones to pick up after themselves and gives them a little break from their work, stretching the time a bit more.

We all eat lunch then read aloud some more and then our entire household goes quiet for a 2 hour time period. I nap also. This is an essential for all of us. We used to live in a condo and did not have any yard at all. For exercise we went on a 3 mile walk each day (still do!). We also walked to a park several times per week. Children need lots of physical activity.

I am not saying that all of this is easy. It is not! Everything we do that is worthwhile takes time and concentration. Keep at it and you will see wonderful fruit from all of your sowing! By the way, I don't see much mature fruit until after about 10 years old – the "light bulb"age! Gal 6: 7-9 tells us to not be weary in well doing for in due season we will reap, if we faint not!

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