



“If I Could Do It Over Again, Here's What I Would Do Differently...”

Thoughts and Advice from Homeschool Families

Collected and Edited by Jim Erskine

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INTRODUCTION

We recently surveyed over 800 homeschooling families about what has worked well and not-so-well for them in their homeschooling activities. We got some remarkable answers from this survey which we have shared in other reports in this series. One of the most intriguing questions we asked was this:

“If you could do it over again, what would you change about how you have homeschooled in the past?”

We got some great responses to this question, with some tips and suggestions that are well worth considering by both newbie and veteran homeschoolers alike. This ebook is an edited collection of the best of these.

Now, as you go through this, here is a caveat for you: There obviously isn't an ultimate “right way” to homeschool that fits everyone, and we are not endorsing any single method by offering this report. This is reflected in the responses you will find in this collection. In fact, some of the thoughts expressed here turn out to be the direct opposite of the advice given by other moms. However, you will notice that a few very definite patterns will quickly emerge as you read through these. So our suggestion to you is this: Do any of these speak to you in your situation? Are there lessons you can learn from the experiences of these other moms that can be applied to your own homeschooling?

Glean and learn, friends... and read through this with a highlighter or pencil in hand. There are some true golden nuggets **just for you** here, if you are willing to find them!

*- Jim Erskine, HomeschoolFreebieOfTheDay.com
Fall, 2008*

The Question:

“If you could do it over again, what would you change about how you have homeschooled in the past?”

The Answers:

Do something every day no matter how little and not have a big stress attack about all the "time" we think needs to be spent on the book work

I would go back and expend the same creativity I homeschooled with when my kids were in Kindergarten thru 5th grade and carry that into the Junior High and High School years (that tend to be more "serious" and less creative). Independent learning is great, but co-operative learning builds memories and bonds relationships! My! How fast they grow! You can never go back and recover those years.

Be more consistent in our schedules.

I would have start earlier and been more organized.

I wouldn't worry so much about formal schooling and academics in Preschool, Kindergarten and Grade One. There would have been less (or no) worksheets and more time to have fun. I would have spent more time outdoors and given my child the tools with which to explore and create.

Less 'curriculum', more reading and enjoying my children.

I would do more hands on projects to help my children grasp what I'm teaching.

I wouldn't worry so much and enjoy much more than we have to this point. I would allow others to help me a lot more along the way and accept support of others more freely. I would definitely learn to be more organized!

Relax more about my expectations and have more fun with the kids, realizing that life is full of learning.

I wish that I learned a little about all sorts of methods and ways of education instead of just one popular method of the time. I wish that I had started to seek God for the direction of our homeschool years before I actually did.

I would have got myself organized earlier on. These days I feel like I'm in a constant state of trying to catch up, although I'm learning organizational skills. If I'd done it earlier, I might have been able to teach my children more easily...

I would have taken notes while reading all the wonderful homeschool resource books rather than thinking I would remember it all.

I would let my kids know what is planned for the day. I always seem to forget to let them know that.

To not have started so many extracurricular activities outside the home. I let others talk me into so many for fear my son wouldn't have a social life. We are over committed and are having to cut back just to get the basic subjects covered.

I think I would not have taken myself so seriously. That would have taken some of the pressure off this 'perfectionistic' mom and my 'less than perfect' children! We're still learning together as a family and we're still talking to each other so it was really worth every minute!

I would have been more relaxed with my eldest daughter's kindergarten year. We wouldn't have used a prescribed curriculum. I would have taught her through play and games like I have the next 3 children.

Not to over plan my/their schedule. I seem to fall in the trap of trying to make sure they experience everything they would normally experience in traditional school. I just need to learn to relax!

I would play more while they are young. I would also focus on training in good habits and wait for the academics.

I would go back to the beginning and change the way I was as 'the teacher'. I would be a more scheduled and quicker to change the curriculum. I would do more fun things not just bookwork.

When we first started homeschooling our son I set it up like a regular school. He had to read and do everything on his own. (He was in 8th grade!). I would have been a little easier on him and enjoyed just being with him and helping him learn, not just making him do it on his own.

Having a dedicated space that is out of the main traffic flow of the house, DEDICATED to schooling!! Someplace we can shut the door & "get away from school" when we are not "actively" doing our book lessons. You need a dedicated space, and we have it. We just can't shut the door and "leave it".

Relax during the younger elementary years by spending more time reading and observing nature and less time doing "school work."

We wasted valuable time with "unschooling" practices. When left to themselves, most children do not apply themselves as they should. Children need gentle and consistent prodding. Making up ground later can be very painful for all involved. 2. We tried to do too much of the curriculum ourselves. We would have invested in good curriculum early on (You need to read reviews and find what is effective and compatible with your philosophy of education.)

I love homeschooling. If I could change something, I would have more patience. The Lord is using our homeschooling journey to help that department!

We have already changed this.... but I would be less involved in support groups and their activities and just concentrate more on finding good friendships for child and myself. Support groups and activities are fine, per se, but tend to create a lot more running around and frenzy than they are worth. I've also noticed the tendency for gossip and backbiting among these groups, as they are run primarily by women. I'm sure that they have caused some amount of hurt feelings and negative attitudes for some parents.

I wouldn't have burned out my first child on a complete curriculum package at age 6. He was not enjoying school by the end of that year and neither was I!

Our oldest daughter was bored with the 7th grade curriculum, so we let her work faster, finishing Jr. High in 13 months. I wish instead I would have expanded the curriculum - especially the science and history - to include projects which would have interested her. 2) Our girls have told us that the worst thing we did was to have them join the church campus school for electives; we agree with them. Now we have Clubs. The moms teach and are always present.

Trying to make my children into little Me. I have tried to live my youth again through them, it doesn't work so don't try it.

I would delete the whole first year. I used a boxed curriculum and tried to sign up my boys for too many outside activities instead of focusing on being at home and building important relationships. I am thankful that we have a redeeming heavenly Father.

Well, we have learned from everything we have been through, but we probably would not have pushed the older boys to be so academically inclined so early. We would have given them more time to mature at their own rate of growth. We would have concentrated more on character issues during that time period instead of stressing academics so much.

Homeschooling is a progression and most people go through the same steps. School at home... de-schooling... finding your own way (unschooling, eclectic, etc.) -- this all seems necessary... so I would not change anything. (Well, maybe I would try to spend less money - especially in the beginning.)

To "follow my own instincts" about the curriculum that "I" originally chose, and not take the path of "following" others in their curriculum choice, just because it was the curriculum rage of the day. "My choice" for "My Family" is ALWAYS Right, and Best for "Us". :) I hope that others will have the courage to KNOW this for "their Homeschool".

Not to start out so rigid, especially if you are pulling your child out of a public school setting.

I'd worry less about getting book work done every day and make more opportunities to learn through play. I will never regret the enjoyable times, only that there weren't more of them.

Don't set unrealistic goals or have unrealistic expectations. Take time to get to know your child again (if they have been in regular school like my daughter was). Also, I felt God leading me in this direction long before I actually took her out of school. I should have obeyed God right away when I first became aware of His will for us. It is a challenge to unschool!

I would not waste so much money on fancy "educational" toys and counting blocks and just go with simple legos, m&m's, and beans...Remember, kids spell love as T-I-M-E spent with them!

I wouldn't spend so much money on different curriculum. I would find what works, stick with it, and convince myself that my children aren't going to miss out on something else that's out there.

Enjoying them more, not getting caught up in the tyranny of the urgent. Letting go of what other people think. Making sure that I had their heart as opposed to outward obedience.

I would be more patient with my eldest. She was slow to read and I pushed her more than I ought to have. It hurt our homeschooling relationship.

I would have more fun with hands on projects. I have often got too caught up in quantity of work

finished and we have missed out on quality learning time. Luckily I have three more little ones who have not reached Kindergarten and I will do things differently with them.

I'd shun the criticism of my parents instead of feeding into it.

Savored the moments more...I didn't know how fast our 4 children would grow-up. And...I think I could have started sooner. We pulled our two oldest children out of school when our oldest was in third grade. Looking back, I wish I wasn't so afraid to start home schooling.

Enjoy each day for what it brings. I wish I would have put the workbooks away sooner and left them there, unit studies have always been the very best way for our children to learn. Unit studies allowed each child express themselves and excel at their own speed. I also would have let each child help in picking their studies at the beginning of the year, when I do this they seem to want to pick it up more often.

When I first began homeschooling I scheduled my children with MANY activities out side of the home. We always finished the school day, but simple at home time was lacking. I was stressed, as were my children, trying to get them from one thing to the next. I have recently cut out everything but one activity for each child, and am loving the free time!

If I could change something about the past, we would simply have had more fun and hit the books less when the kids were younger. Sure, you need to get them reading and other fundamentals started, but when it starts to create stress for everyone, you have done too much! Now we are having more fun and less stress and they are more happy and learning just the same.

I wouldn't procrastinate so much. The time has just flown away. "I'll do that with the children in one minute, (one hour, one day, one week)", and the time is gone.

I would take more time to just work on my relationship with my daughters, and do fun things with them in the early grades, instead of so many workbook pages. I would smile more and be less stressed and just be thankful for the time I was having with them. I would be more assertive with my husband about needing help in the evenings so I could get a break and be refreshed and able to concentrate on the 'full-time job' of homeschooling during the day - instead of squeezing it into my to-do list of chores, and everything else.

I was so hard on my first two children, I killed their love of learning and made them too nervous to be wrong. I was young and saw my kids achievement level as a reflection on me. I would have relaxed more, had more fun getting to know them and their interests and teach on that.

I would make a plan. Without a plan you end up meandering all over. A basic outline and timeline for when you want to do things will keep you on track and help you finish things by the end of the year. I also wish I wouldn't have purchased so many materials. My bookshelves are full of unused books. I would have used the library more and borrowed more until I knew what I liked.

Not planning as much of a work load as I did the first year. I tried to fit every area of the key-learning areas in as a separate subject. It would have either taken a ten hour day or covering each area about once a month. I soon realized that by only doing one activity we are naturally covering several areas of learning at once. Three years in and life is much simpler now, we have gained back a lot of extra time too.

Thanking my sister-in-law for her well-intentioned "teacher's advice" but telling her that I have researched the area of learning to the nth degree and feel confident to come up with my own ideas. That I know how my children learn best and it's different for each one.

I wouldn't worry about the small stuff and spend more time just enjoying the journey of watching my children grow up and mature into their relationship with the Lord. We didn't do as much paper work as I would have liked, but if I had it to do over again I would trust God more. Looking at the way my boys have turned out has given me more reason to trust my instincts as a home schooling mom and I am contemplating home schooling my four grandchildren as well.

First of all, I wouldn't stress so much over my kids' lack of performance in some areas. Especially when my oldest didn't read until he was nine. At 13, he's an excellent and avid reader. Secondly, when our family went through times of change, like moving or new babies, I wish I'd just kept up on the basics and left all the fluff. It would have been less stressful and they might have learned their math facts by now. Lastly, whenever I got over-committed to outside work, our homeschooling suffered and no one had much fun.

I would have started homeschooling sooner. My daughter went to public schools for kindergarten and 1/2 of first grade. Her kindergarten experience was great, and I worked closely with her teacher by volunteering at the school. But her first grade teacher labeled her from the first week as a problem child, insisting that I get her on medication for ADHD, something she doesn't have. She put my daughter down and it took almost two years before my daughter started to enjoy learning again. She has no desire to return to public school.

Stop stressing about how much we get done in a year. There is no hard & fast rule that "Math Textbook A" needs to be finished in "X" amount of time. The beauty of homeschooling is that you can relax and let the kids move at their own pace.

I would have taken my own advice and spent time with my oldest who is now 19 yrs. old instead of

leaving him to learn on his own. I should have monitored his work closer rather than trying to give him the responsibility for his own education. Big mistake!

I would have been slower to spend big money on curriculum until I knew it was going to be appealing and effective with my particular children's learning style as well as my own teaching style.

I would be consistent. I don't think the curriculum matters as much as being consistent with what you have chosen to do. A completed regular time of 15 minutes is better than a hoped for 1 hour session.

I would not force-teach a skill when it was clearly straining. I have learned that if I wait for more signs of readiness, or present it in very small and unimposing ways, there is an "I can" attitude and ambitious spirit that comes along and takes a child much much farther.

Relax. Don't feel the pressure to be schooly. Often I did this because that is the system I came out of. It took a few months of constantly reminding myself - this is not a school at home. This is life skills training and the reading, writing, and maths will happen but not according to a rigid external institution's timetable.

I would be obedient to God's call to homeschool earlier and not have put it off until after we "tried" public school. Even though our public school experience was only at the Kindergarten level, it still left us with a lot to "undo" in the way of social and attitude training. We are still working on some of the bad attitudes (for example, "everyone hates math, and so do I!") that has even carried over in to the third grade.

I pushed my ds to learn the alphabet when he was only 4, he would cry when I pulled out the flash cards. He would never sit with me when we read stories or try to read along in the book. I had his eyes tested but there seemed to be no problems there, 3 years later he still couldn't/wouldn't read. I almost gave up, but formal testing from a CHILDREN'S SPECIALIST found the problem. With the correct glasses and a change in our teaching methods, he has made up almost all of his lost ground. If I had it all to do again, I would trust my own instincts and not let other second guess me :o(

I would be less pressuring of my oldest child. I would have taken it slower and let us both appreciate him being a little kid longer. I wouldn't have rushed him into elementary work in Kindergarten. I would have enjoyed him more and accepted and met him where he was. Not that I didn't do these things at all, I just would have done them more, and worried less about gaps in the education. They have a way of filling in over time.

Deal with discipline at a early age because little problems just become bigger.

Start out finding a curriculum in Language Art and Math that your child enjoys and stick with it throughout...this will avoid gaps in scope and sequence and help them avoid frustration in other texts due to not having covered certain areas yet. Also as the teacher, take breaks from your children once or twice a month. Although you love your children dearly, spending 24 hours per day with them for months on end will cause parent AND child to take the other for granted and never give the opportunity for appreciating our journey together.

I now have a sitter come in once a week to stay with my children. I did not do that before this year. I would have done that from the beginning if I had known how helpful it would be! A few hours away to run errands alone or meet with a friend makes a BIG difference.

I would concentrate more on a home "education" and less on a home "school." At first I tried to reproduce a classroom at home. That was a mistake. Education has nothing to do with a classroom and everything to do with the heart and mind.

I would take the time off when I took them out of public school. I didn't do it even though it was suggested to me. I ended up doing it later, but it worked out okay in the end.

The first year that I homeschooled, I recreated school at home with bulletin boards, desks, timers (for bells), and all sorts of things that I thought that they would see in "real school." I took the fun and comfort out of homeschool and it has been difficult to get us all comfortable again. Thankfully, every year it gets better.

I would have found benchmarks for both of my children so I could measure our successes more easily. This year I've done that, and I realized the progress we'd made in the first 12 weeks of school - much more than I'd "felt" like we'd made.

At the beginning I tried to fit our homeschooling day into chunks of time, so that each subject had to be done during a certain time period. This left me frustrated and disappointed. Now I have a more relaxed schedule, which works much better for all of us.

I would have encouraged my older children to be more involved in teaching/helping their siblings. They all work very well independently, but I would LOVE to see them even reading together more. The little ones learn so much from the big ones, but it does not happen enough in my opinion.

Get more audio books since I think it's good for the kids to learn to listen and I don't have time or the voice to read 2-3 hrs a day.

Be flexible to the ever changing needs of your kids and how that blends with your needs and abilities,

and not follow the "I'll never do that". When it comes to homeschooling, one never knows what the next day will bring if you are watching and listening.

I would definitely loosen up more and have more fun...spend more days outside playing, observing nature, doing arts and craft projects, drawing, pursuing my daughter's interests.

Not spend so much money on a bunch of different STUFF! Over the years I've learned that less is best and I've started getting rid of so much junk. You can have SO MUCH stuff (workbooks, maps, manipulatives, etc.) that you can't even find what you really need! And then it stresses you out because you're buying it and not using it. KEEP IT SIMPLE SWEETIE!

Systematically teach the multiplication tables, teach a proper way to hold a pencil when handwriting, find a way to have regular family devotions or Bible study.

I would have read more to my children. Read, read, read! My husband is extremely supportive of home education, but he wishes he had been more involved in a hands-on way from the beginning.

When we started, my daughter was 4 1/2 - I was busting, prepared and ready to begin formal schooling - she was not. The poor little girl completed stacks of workbooks and worksheets and being 'forced' into the learn-to-read lessons, but she would have been so much better off if we spent the time reading stories, doing nature walks and doing science experiments.

I would have fine-tuned our high school curriculum from the outset to the individual needs of each student instead of sticking so much with the traditional workbook/textbook method. There would have been more emphasis earlier on creative writing skills.

If I could do it all over, I never would have sent my children to public school. I am having to review and revisit so many topics that I feel that I am spinning my wheels while I am reteaching concepts that they should have already had a grasp of. Additionally, I would take some time off to let my kids decompress from the school experience. The first couple of weeks were a real struggle because they were still stressed about the transition from school to home.

Discover my child's learning style. Not run my "school" like a government school. I would have listened to God's voice and stayed home (not worked) when my children were little and homeschooled right from the start. Bless God I listened before it was too late.

I would have taken the time to teach my first couple children proper pencil techniques and letter

formation...I didn't want to stunt their creativity by showing them how, so they developed BAD habits that they never were able to break.

Now that our oldest has just entered college, I would go back and enjoy her littleness more, and make sure we discussed her readings more completely, and get to the discussions we never got around to doing.

Spent more time reading aloud, less giving lessons. Let them learn things such as spelling and writing by just copywork writing in journals or whatever they want, esp. at a young age. Save anything that requires a teacher (such as foreign language) for ages 11+ when they can teach themselves.

Probably worry less about trying to match what we *thought* the schools were teaching and concentrate on a real education. When we met others with children in schools (poor things!) we found they learned far less than we had supposed.

When we decided to homeschool, when we knew it was God's will for our family...we should have begun right then...the best time to begin homeschooling is the moment you come under conviction! Don't wait for the "right time" to pull them out of school. Now is the "right time"! Also, to keep homeschooling as simple and cost effective as possible. Keeping it simple.

I'd have politely listened to the nay-sayers and then forgotten them completely....instead of letting them plant seeds of self-doubt in my mind! I'd also have bought a LOT less curriculum, lol. You don't need EVERY curriculum on spelling, or phonics, or whatever. Go to a large homeschool convention and forget the speakers, head for the vendor hall and spend all day handling the actual curriculums and sitting on the floor reading through them. Then make a list of those that you liked and get online at homeschool forums and chat with others who are already using those and through lots of questions and discussion decide which might be best for YOUR child's way of learning (there are plenty of books on this too).

I would lighten up during the Kindergarten and first grade years if I could do it over again. I would make school more fun and do fieldtrips and art projects MUCH more often. I was such a new HSer and SOOO worried about "doing it right - doing REAL school" that I was far to uptight! School gets serious enough in later years.

I would read aloud to my sons more, and enjoy them exactly where they're at, they truly do grow up so quickly. Also, I would start each day with a quiet time with the Lord, asking Him to direct our day--this one thing can make all the difference in the world!

Not to try to teach a preschooler every subject known to man. I was just so excited about

homeschooling and there were so many wonderful things I wanted to share with my son, that I tried to fit in every subject, every week. Big mistake.

I would relax more and enjoy the process. Teaching a child isn't like aiming a fire hose of knowledge at them and expecting them to drink from it. It is more about forming relationships and connections even if they aren't reading or performing at grade level. It is more important to just handle the subject matter at the child's pace.

I'd be more consistent in requiring obedience the first time, and not let what others think affect me more than what the Lord thinks of me. I'd also have wasted less time with the seemingly "harmless" activities and spent more time on the things that will matter in eternity.

If I could change one thing, I would not make academic demands as early as I did. I would recommend the book "Better Late Than Early" by Dorothy and Raymond Moore, which suggests that children younger than 9 or 10 (especially boys, and I have only boys!) not be required to do sit-down academic work. I insisted that my two older boys meet certain academic goals when they were young, and definitely not ready. Now my youngest son, who I have not made sit down and do academic work, accomplishes as much and more in his own way at his own time.

I am a very laid back mom when it comes to homeschooling, We dont have a set schedule and its really easy for me to let schooling slide by. It has caused us to get behind in homeschooling and I am not happy about that. I think having a schedule and being able to stick to it really helps

I focused the first 2 years on a rigid school time and I missed out on getting to know my sons better after pulling them out of the public school system.

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