

Homeschooling with Little Ones

By Anne Elliott

Are you a busy homeschooling mom with even busier toddlers and preschoolers? Are you wondering how you will ever get through a long list of school subjects when your youngest children also need your attention?

Have hope! We've been there! (Actually, we're *still* there.) Here are our best ideas for homeschooling with little ones.



Why?

Homeschooling when you have little toddlers or preschoolers around is a challenge, to say the least. One of the most challenging parts of being a mom, in fact, is learning how to juggle the multitude of responsibilities that faces you in a day, from parenting various ages of children to handling all the different aspects of a home, sometimes while also maintaining a job or ministry. Sometimes I wonder if one of the reasons God asks me to “be fruitful and multiply” is so that I’ll learn valuable “have dominion over the earth” skills (Genesis 1:28). What kingdom responsibilities will He give me in eternity? How is today a preparation for then? How unprepared would I have been if He had not blessed me with all these little ones? (See also [Titus 2:4-5](#)).

Your children also need to learn eternal lessons. **One of the lessons they need to learn at your knee is obedience to authority.** Just as Jesus submitted to His heavenly Father, we must also teach our children to submit to our God-given authority. The Bible says that we are to teach them in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4) – but teach them we must! The Bible says this is best done when “you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:7, NIV). It also says you are to teach them “diligently,” which means constantly, attentively, persistently, and with persevering attention.¹

Another eternal lesson your children need you to teach them is what their heavenly Father is like. Just this week, someone remarked that one of the reasons she loved

¹ diligent. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/diligent> (accessed: August 14, 2008).

God so much was “because I know He cares and loves me even with the most horrible things.” Yes, He does, but He also disciplines those He loves so that they won’t continue doing those “horrible” things and reaping the deadly consequences ([Proverbs 13:24](#), [Hebrews 12:6](#)). So to be an accurate picture of our Heavenly Father, we must put up with the unlovely things that a preschooler is prone to do, while never neglecting the *diligent* training that will spare him from a lifetime of evil consequences.

Finally, both you and your children all need to learn how **to “love your neighbor as yourself”** ([Leviticus 19:18](#), [Matthew 22:39](#), [Mark 12:31](#)). True love for God is *always* manifested in love for others. What better place is there to learn this than at home? If you’re anything like me, you find it easy to love the world and difficult to love a brood of loud children. Never forget that God is working on your heart, and that you’re in eternal training yourself. However, this does not negate the importance of training your children how to love each other, even when it’s a lesson you’re still learning yourself.

Dominion and management of the home, order in the home, submission to authority, loving the unlovely, sharing, diligent training. These words all describe the goals of the mother of toddlers and preschoolers. Why not write down the ones you especially need to focus on this year?



What?

When you’re working with your older children or catching up on the bread-baking, you need to come up with activities for your little one. You could put him in front of the television or leave him to completely ~~get into things~~ play on his own. However, he’s not going to learn much or develop properly. He has needs, too, and your goal is to meet the needs of *all* your children.

His first need is for order in the home.

Order is shown in the actual running of the house and also in the line of command that is present in your home. For instance,

- He needs to be taught to obey.
- He loves to know what is next in his day. You can make a simple chart with pictures that tells him what is next.

- He needs his meals, snacks, and nap at a consistent time each day.
- He needs to be reminded to use the bathroom.
- He needs to know that his toys belong in a certain spot and should be put away when he's done playing with them.

His second need is to learn to care about the needs of others (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31), rather than just himself.

For instance,

- He needs to learn that he is not the center of the universe.
- He needs to learn patience and how not to complain or scream when he wants something.
- He needs to learn how to interrupt properly.
- He needs to learn how to share his toys.
- He needs to learn how to play quietly sometimes, so that older children can concentrate on their studies.

His third need is to learn how to pay attention and concentrate, so that he is prepared for the day that he also officially starts “school.”

(Of course, we know that there is no official day when learning starts. Attention skills are vitally needed even now!)

For instance,

- If he has a time (30-45 minutes) each day when he plays quietly by himself, he will have time to concentrate on just one play thing. He will learn to pay attention to it. This is often called “room time” (or “playpen time” for the very little ones).
- Table time is also valuable for learning to pay attention. While you’re “doing school” with the older children, your youngest ones can also “do school.” Help him develop his attention skills with coloring (learn to stay in the lines), cutting and pasting, play dough.
- Many, many ideas that can help your child learn to pay attention can be found online. A few good websites are listed below.
- I find it is helpful to set a timer so that I don’t *forget* my child is playing alone. I need to be careful not to frustrate my child or take advantage of him.

Good websites:

- <http://www.activitybags.com>
- <http://www.preschoolersandpeace.com>
- <http://www.jeanniefulbright.com/homeschooling-tips-and-tricks/preschooler-solutions/>
- <http://www.raisinggodlytomatoes.com>

His fourth need is the example of a godly mother.

Little children need time to play, since play is their most important work. But do you remember hearing stories of one-room schools in America? Much of what the students learned was absorbed by “osmosis,” from listening to the older children recite or from watching the behavior of the teacher. It’s the same at home. For example,

- Your child needs time by your side, to observe you. (You can also be observing him, and quickly correcting an improper attitude or an unkind word. “A child left to himself brings his mother to shame,” [Proverbs 29:15](#).)
- Your child needs time one-on-one with mom (story time, walk, coloring, play with paper dolls). Your older children should not take all your time, nor should your housework. All the children need to learn to wait for others, even the little ones.
- Your child needs time side-by-side with mom, in kitchen, folding laundry, cleaning bathroom, making beds, dusting, grocery shopping. Remember that the Bible says this is when you’ll have your best teaching opportunities ([Deuteronomy 6:7](#)), to say nothing of wonderful memories.



How?

Unless you’re a supermom (and I know that none of us are, even though we wish we were), you’ll need a schedule. There, I said the terrible S word! Schedule, schedule, schedule! Okay, you’ve recovered now, so let’s talk about why you need one.

Back when I only had a couple children, I could manage my life with just a routine. (The R word was bad enough! I was wishing life could just be “all natural” and “simple,” and that I wouldn’t even need a routine.) But I’m either too old or too busy to remember everything that is supposed to be done in a week now, and I can’t get it all done in just one day, so a schedule is my only alternative.

Did you notice that I said “week”? “Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work,” says God (Exodus 20:9). On Saturday, I rest and have my “free” day where no schedule reigns (and oh, I love it!). For the other days of a week, I had to make a list of everything that needed to be done and slowly make a plan of attack for accomplishing it.

Your preschooler also needs a schedule. You’ll want to begin by planning his schedule around meals and naptimes first. These are rather fixed times in your day (or at least, they *should* be), so it’s easy to plot them on paper. You can plan to do the most intense school time with your older children during naps. Don’t forget that mealtime chores should be delegated, for training and sanity’s sake, to your older children as well. Finally, if your child is learning to use the bathroom, schedule plenty of reminders for Mommy on your schedule as well.

God's Word should have a top priority in your day, so schedule a half hour or so each morning for teaching the Bible to your children, either alone or with your husband, as he gives you permission. Your toddler can learn to sit quietly on your lap, or in his highchair with Cheerios or a blanket. Your preschooler can learn to color quietly or draw on some blank paper. All children can memorize Scripture together to their own abilities. All can learn to pray.

To teach attention skills, schedule half an hour for quiet playtime alone. To teach skills of love and sharing, older children (ages 4 and up) should have a scheduled time for playing with their siblings one-on-one, crawling babies and older. Depending on how many children you have, this can take a good part of your morning and free you to do quite a bit of teaching with your other children. Assign them to a safe place, with earshot, and teach them safety and kindness rules. Set a timer so that you remember to rotate playing partners.

If you have leftover time in your morning, seat your young child next to you, either on the floor on a blanket or at the table with you. Have a list of activities ready for your reference. You can plan time with art supplies, preschool workbooks, games, puzzles, cutting and gluing, magnets, rubber stamping, play dough, sponge painting, looking at photo albums, water color painting, and more.

You can also have a formal "school time" with your preschooler. Half an hour is plenty. If you can get your hands on some used Sunday school preschool curriculum, you'll have plenty of ideas for activities. Don't forget to teach the days of the week, the months, how to use calendars, weather, and more.

Some other "half hours" you could put in your schedule include:

- listening to books on tape in a corner of the living room
- watching a good video (limit this!)
- doing chores with Mom
- read-aloud time (my children enjoy Legos or coloring while I read)

More good websites and books:

- [*Language and Thinking for Young Children*](#), by Ruth Beechick
- Rod and Staff's [*Preschool ABC's Series*](#)
- [Good Toys for Young Children](#)
- [Tracing and Cutting Templates](#)
- [Letter of the Week Preschool Curriculum \(free\)](#)
- [Homeschooling with Little Ones in the House](#)



To Sum It All Up...

Now that you have lots of ideas, I recommend that you take a piece of paper and divide it into half hours. You'll include things such as a morning shower or your quiet time with God for those times of the day when your little ones are probably sleeping. But for now, just schedule out the part of the day that affects them.

Remember, start with meals and naps. Next, plan for Bible time. You'll include alone playtimes and sibling playtimes. Pencil in when you'll teach the most intense school subjects with your older children. Use the ideas below or search the Internet for activities you can use to fill in all the other slots. Don't forget chores and snuggle times with Mom.

Finish out your planning by making sure that toys are neat and organized. Check that all the supplies you'll need each day are in an easy-to-reach place (easy to reach and easy to put away). Purchase a timer to help keep in on track each day.

All set? I think you're going to have a great school year!

You'd probably love Anne's book,
The Four Foundations of Lifelong Learning: Preparing Your Little Ones for School

