

How to Create an

Efficient
Schedule

Ten Practical Steps to Help You Manage Your Time

by Anne Elliott

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*“She watches over the affairs of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.”
Proverbs 31:27*

About the Author

Anne Elliott has been a mother for fourteen years and a wife for seventeen years. Currently, Anne is homeschooling an 8th-grade son, a 5th-grade daughter, a 4th-grade son, a 2nd-grade daughter, and a kindergarten-aged daughter. She also has two younger children, ages 2 and baby. (Did we mention her black lab, Penny, and her Siamese cat, Mocha?)

When she's not busy with her children, Anne is working with her husband, a pastor of a Baptist church in southern Minnesota. She also owns several websites for women, with advice on women's issues, marriage, parenting, health and more. Anne is the published author of a book for women titled *Juggling Life's Responsibilities: Biblical Help for the Married Woman*, a parenting book titled *The Four Foundations of Lifelong Learning: Preparing Your Little Ones for School*, and several homeschooling curricula.

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Do you want to set up a schedule for your home? Are you looking for a schedule that's ready-made for you and your family? Do you feel like "a mother's work is never done"?

We're here to help! Here are ten practical steps to help you manage your time as a mom:

1. Rise early in the morning.

The first step in setting up and sticking to a schedule is making sure you get up in the morning. It's fine to have occasional days when you sleep in, but as a general rule, you'll all feel much better if you get up.

When to get up...

Just a little before sunrise is a great time for Mom to wake up. It's still a little dark, and it's usually very quiet. You'll have a few moments of quiet before the busyness of the day begins.

What to do...

Take a quick shower, brush your teeth and grab a cup of coffee, then slip away to plan your day on paper.

I like to start my day in a quiet spot with my Bible. I want to get directions from God on how He wants me to use my time. I bring my worries and concerns to Him in prayer. I bring my "to do" list to Him, too! He directs me, and I feel better knowing I'm doing exactly what He wants me to with my time.

~Anne

“This is the beginning of a new day. God has given me this day to use as I will. I can waste it - or use it for good, but what I do today is important, because I am exchanging a day of my life for it! When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever, leaving in its place something that I have traded for it. I want it to be gain, and not loss; good, and not evil; success, and not failure; in order that I shall not regret the price I have paid for it.”

~Author Unknown

2. Eat regular meals.

Mealtime is fairly non-negotiable in our home. For our health and for more even-keeled emotions (we do have five females in this house, after all!), our bodies need to have regular rhythms.

- ❖ Nothing helps set up a steady circadian rhythm better than regular mealtimes and regular bedtimes.
- ❖ Regular mealtimes also help us do our chores (dishes especially) regularly.
- ❖ Finally, regular mealtimes insure that I set my own interests aside for a few minutes each day and enjoy my companions and show interest in them during mealtime.

3. Follow a plan.

Make an “Everything I Do” list. On one sheet of paper, list every single thing you normally do in a week. (It may take several days before you remember all these things, so take your time!)

Get your husband’s input. Ask him if your “Everything I Do” list is missing anything. Ask him if he wishes you’d take something off your list. (Hey, what a great excuse for a date!)

Prioritize your list so that you know what things you **MUST** do each day, what things you would **LIKE** to do, and what things you **DON’T** have to do.

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.”

Ephesians 5:15-17

In the front of my planning notebook, I have a “Daily To Do” list which tells me what I must do each day so I can reach my goals. Each morning, I can glance at this list and work through it, one step at a time.

1. Have I read my Bible?
2. Have I had a shower (and prayer time)?
3. Am I dressed for the day?
4. Are the kids dressed?
5. Are the beds made?
6. Is the house neat?
7. Have we had a nutritious breakfast?
8. Is the kitchen clean?
9. Have I done my daily cleaning chores?
10. Have I planned the day’s meals?
11. Have I done schoolwork with the kids?
12. Am I prepared for church and ministry commitments?
13. Have I written encouraging notes to people who need them?
14. Etc.

~Anne

Make a weekly cycle for cleaning, budgeting jobs, shopping, laundry, music lessons, sports activities, church and community commitments, dates with your husband and children, and rest times.

Great Worksheets, Schedules, and Helps online:

- ❖ <http://melissaringstaff.blogspot.com/2009/04/homeschool-freebie.html>
- ❖ <http://www.cindysdesktop.com/?p=2937>
- ❖ <http://cindyushton.com/category/articles/scheduling/>
- ❖ <http://flylady.com/>
- ❖ <http://www.digital-women.com/how-to/howto03h.htm>
- ❖ <http://www.digital-women.com/daily-planner/>
- ❖ <http://www.listorganizer.com/>
- ❖ <http://www.thefamilyorganizer.com/>

4. Be a manager of your home.

Face it. You're the mom. You're not your children's buddy or playmate. You're their mom. It's your job to love them, but it's also your job to teach them. Not only should you set up a schedule; you also need to enforce the schedule in your home.

“Don't expect what you won't inspect!”

Ideas:

- ❖ If you have a difficult time getting your children to do a GOOD job on their kitchen chores (rather than rushing through them so they can get back to their fun), try this...

Post a list of what you expect during kitchen clean-up. You could tape the list to the inside of a cabinet door. Detail every job that needs to be done before the kids may leave the kitchen. For instance,

- Clear your own spot.
- Help clear the rest of table.
- Wipe the table.
- Put on the tablecloth and centerpiece.
- Vacuum under the table.
- Push the chairs in.
- Sweep the kitchen floor.
- Wipe off counters.
- Wash dishes.
- Dry dishes.
- Put away dishes.
- Wipe off stove.
- Shine sink.

Maybe your kids aren't lazy after all. Maybe they just don't know what's expected of them! (By the way, this idea works for any cleaning job.)

- ❖ Laminate your schedule and hang it on the refrigerator. Each day, use a dry erase marker and check off each activity as you complete it. At the end of the day, you can easily see what has or hasn't been completed. Wipe it off with a paper towel to use the next day. You'll enjoy not having to remember everything in your head anymore, and your children will enjoy knowing "what's next."
- ❖ I keep a calendar white board on my refrigerator also. All our appointments and responsibilities get written on this family calendar. We all know where to look when we want to know what's happening.
- ❖ Place an alarm clock in the kitchen, and set it for a specific time each day. When the alarm goes off, Mom does a "house inspection." Be sure your children know exactly what your standards are, then force yourself to actually check their work at this daily time. Be consistent with rewards or consequences. I like to have "house inspection" time in the late afternoon, before Dad gets home, so that the house looks nice for his return.

5. Change activities before you get tired.

Mom, admit it! It can be exhausting to be a mom!

Studies have shown that your brain will recover quicker from the intensity of your days if you'll take frequent breaks. Have you been reading aloud to toddlers for a while? Stop and take a quick walk outside. Have you been online too long? Get up and do the dishes. Have you been on your feet awhile? Take ten minutes to lie down and listen to music.

Often, we moms will forget about taking care of ourselves. If you must, set a timer to remind yourself to take a break at least once each hour. You'll be amazed how much more energetic you feel!

6. Set up your space.

My house isn't big enough to actually have one room that's exclusively devoted each activity (although that would be *wonderful* someday). However, we still have spaces for each thing we do.

- Is your kitchen set up for efficiency? You might want a food-prep station, a cooking station, a cleaning station, and a storage station.
- Is your bathroom set up for efficient grooming each day?
- Is your home office set up to pay bills quickly and easily?
- Is your entryway set up so that you can find your keys, your purse, all the school bags, the cell phones, the boots and mittens, and the soccer equipment?

When there's a "place for everything and everything in its place," you'll be relieved of a lot of the pressure of a busy home.

7. Be consistent with the children.

Kids crave order. One of the best ways you can do that is to remind yourself to be consistent.

- Did you make a rule? Are you enforcing it consistently?
- Did you set a certain bedtime? Is it the same almost every night?
- Did you make a promise? Did you keep it?

Consistency brings stability. Consistent mealtimes, bedtime routines, and after-school schedules help your children stop thinking about their day and start relaxing enough to learn and think.

Consistency helps mom, too. Have you ever had jet lag? Didn't you feel exhausted? Jet lag at home is no fun, either. Try to establish consistent habits that will allow your brain to go on "auto-pilot" as much as possible.

8. Plan things for the little ones.

The younger the child, the more she needs a consistent schedule in order to feel relaxed and secure.

Some things you might want to include are:

- ❑ Chores and life skills
- ❑ Play time with Mom
- ❑ Play time alone with fun toys like blocks, Legos, lacing, puzzles, or sand.
- ❑ Play time or nature walks outside.
- ❑ Play time with siblings or friends.

I have even more ideas online at

http://annesschoolplace.com/downloads/homeschooling_with_preschoolers.pdf

9. Take domestic shortcuts.

You know, if you really think about it, being a mom is just a short season of your whole life. Before you can blink, your kids will be grown and gone.

Why not relax some of your housekeeping standards during this season of your life? I'm not saying that you should never do laundry or clean the dog hair off the floor.

However, do you really need to dust seven days a week? Do you need to iron your pajamas?

Experiment with your cleaning routines until you find a happy "middle ground" that is acceptable to you and your husband. Then delegate at least half of those jobs to your children!

Don't try to be a superwoman.

10. Rest

Finally, remember that we're only human, and we need to rest.

What time do you go to bed each night? Doctors tell us that our bodies recharge between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m., so aim to be in bed by 10:00 p.m. (If you don't believe me, keep a diary of how you feel on the "day after" going to bed late. Compare this to how you feel when you get plenty of rest.)

Also, be sure to take one day each week to completely rest. For 24 hours, remind yourself that it's your day off. How can you plan ahead so that for this day, you don't need to cook, clean, weed, or run the family around to a million events?

Resources for You

My blog is updated weekly with ideas for your home, for educating your children, and for taking care of your health. I'd love to see you online!

<http://anneelliott.com/blog>



~Anne