

Am I Crazy??

(How do I get started?)

Yes, of course you are. At least mildly so. But, don't worry. You are in good company. Think of how many wonderful things have been accomplished by individuals whom the general public thought were crazy. Christopher Columbus and Albert Einstein come quickly to my mind. You may not ever be recognized the world over, but you have chosen a bit of a different path to try to get the results you want. So, let's talk about a few things that can help make schooling at home work for you, namely patience, organization, and fun. Here we go! This should be great! I am excited to get this down on paper. I can always use a good reminder. I hope I will take my advice!

Patience. What does patience have to do with anything? Actually, a lot! I am not talking about the need to be patient with your children. Naturally, you will need to do that. But, before you can be patient with them, you must be patient with yourself. You are getting started on a new venture. Or, perhaps like me, you are getting restarted. It is good to regroup often.

Keep in mind that you need to take things a step at a time. When you are trying something completely new, you aren't going to be able to know everything there is to know about how it works within a day or two. It takes a few months to be really up and running and even then, you continually learn more things about how things work. As long as you are seeing improvements over where you started, you are doing well.

Don't be afraid to ask questions! Other homeschooling families are generally willing to help. If they don't have the answers, they might refer you to someone else who might know where to find them. There are also many homeschool groups that can be found by using a Yahoo or Google search.

Now on to organization. Organization is vital to success in schooling at home. There is no secret formula for the best way to organize. There are two main things that need to be organized—your schooling stuff and your day.

First, where will you put all your schooling stuff? There's a lot! We do a lot of our schooling at the kitchen table, but it is not uncommon to find a child sprawled out on the floor with their math book or lying on the couch reading Shakespeare. We have more kids than available space to put things in, so I don't have everything in one location. Each child has a shelf or shelves, as needed. I put all the art supplies together in another spot and science experiment materials generally remain in their boxes and are put under a bed. But, I am going to have to figure out something new to do with those since we no longer have any kids beds with room to store things underneath.

I have found that the best place to look for great storage and organizational options is at IKEA. (<http://www.ikea.com/us/en>) I am not just saying this because I am a lover of Swedish things. You can probably find some useful things other places too. IKEA is affordable and creative. You have to find a good way for things to work at your house. There are many different options for setting up your classroom and school supplies. Ask other parents what they do with theirs.

Second, how do you schedule your day? I think that the most important thing that I have learned is that I should not be completely rigid in my scheduling. Remember that your school is not a typical brick and mortar (B&M) school. You don't need to start at 9:00 and finish at 3:00. In fact, that can get boring awfully quickly!

One of the reasons schooling at home is wonderful is because it is flexible! You can choose when to school. Don't try to copy another family's schedule. Create your own. I am going to share with you how we organize our time, however, don't you dare imitate me! Well, I guess you can try, but only if it seems like a good fit for your family. And, if you try it and it doesn't work, don't keep doing it! Keep trying things until you find what will work best for you.

On Sunday evening, we gather all the kids to the family room. Wait! Backtrack! Before we gather kids, Kevin and I do some planning. This sometimes becomes very important so that we are in agreement on what activities should take priority for the week. Okay, back to the family room. Each child has a calendar. Even the little ones if they want one. Dad leads the session as we cover each day, one day at a time. Anyone that has plans for the week better let us know what they are. If events are not on the calendar, they are probably not going to come to pass. As needed, we look a month or two ahead and from time to time we check out our year.

Once our family planning session is done, I try to figure out where school fits in best. Any child in high school doesn't need this done for them. They know what they will need to do that week by looking at their own schedule. If they want to go play at an Ultimate Frisbee tournament Friday morning, swimming in the afternoon, and hang out with friends at the movies that night, they better be prepared to work a few extra hours Monday through Thursday, or put in some Saturday time.

What I generally do with my junior high school students is to print out their weekly schedule and tape it to the wall. I try to encourage them to do subjects that they might need my assistance with during times that I am available to them; otherwise they can get back logged. Junior high students can do most of their work with little help. I check over work, have discussions and assist as needed. If I know the child has been working hard and isn't able to get through everything because the one hour science experiment took three hours, or they wrote an especially nice book review, I can certainly cut them a break and have them do one less literature assignment that week, or do a vocabulary lesson in place of something else that takes a long time.

Elementary school students are a little trickier to plan for. I like to figure out what I want them to accomplish for the week and print out their weekly plan as well, but I am a little more flexible with them, because I need to be available a lot more for them. Sometimes things come up (sick baby, extra trip to the grocery store needed, etc.) When this is the case and I am just not able to do what I thought I could, I have them do an easier subject that they can work on without too much assistance from me. Sometimes I find myself just simply cutting out a few things because it just didn't work. (Hate it when that happens, but happen it does.)

So, that is basically how we organize. Next, it is on to fun! I suppose I shouldn't say next. We should be trying to have joy all along the way. Not always that easy, I know. I have just a few comments on fun.

A boring, dull, same old-same old rut is no fun for anyone. If school is a drag, burn-out is likely. Being somewhat flexible with your schedule allows time for adding in fun things like field trips, a day off to go to the pool, going to visit somewhere you learned about in history or go out to lunch with Grandma.

The other thing I want to mention to make school more fun is to get involved with other homeschooling families. As the kids join each other in sports activities, clubs, outings and other things they form friendships and are able to realize that there are other kids who are doing the same thing as they are.

That was schooling in a nutshell. Just take things a step at a time and be okay with figuring things out as you go. It will come. Now go out there and start! Be patient, organized and have fun, go do it. Go on. Stop reading this and get busy! You will do wonderfully well!

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