

Thirteen Tips for the Unexpected Homeschooler

You never thought you would school your kids at home. But along comes coronavirus and WHAM! You're a homeschooler.

You may think homeschoolers have the life of Riley, with no schedule, no need for clothes other than PJs, and really no obligations whatsoever! But successful homeschooling takes grit, and surprisingly, good manners to pull off. Here are a few ways families can maintain balance and structure while running school from home:

1. Create a Command Center

Setting up a command center for all things school-related will help you and your children maintain sanity. Use your kids' backpacks as makeshift school lockers for short-term homeschooling situations. Clear off a bookshelf or order a few plastic milk crates from Walmart to hold supplies. Post everything in this area: a daily schedule, a meal plan (even if it is nothing out of the ordinary), and rules and expectations. Posting these saves you the time and trouble of multiple questions.

2. Assess Responsibilities

Make a list of what each person needs to get done in the day. Your pupils will need your help with some subjects, but not others. Make your time as productive as possible by planning strategically to help each student as needed. This will give you time for other responsibilities and free your children from feeling you are hovering too much.

3. Set a Family Schedule

Good news: You already have one! Fill your schedule with the basics of rising, dressing, meal times, reading time, device time. Then set times for group activities. All kids should do

math at the same time, science at the same time, and so on. This sets your brain to one subject instead of trying to help with four at once. Use the remaining time for “odd subjects.”

Remember: The schedule is your servant, not your taskmaster. If something isn't working, change it.

4. Establish Respect

Have everyone get dressed first thing. Anyone who has ever worked from home knows this trick. It is imperative that you establish respect and are ready for the day. Teach your children that education from home is just as important as education in a school building.

5. Take the Reins

Parents, you are in charge. What you say must go, or consequences will be faced, whether those be no Paw Patrol for a little guy, or no car privileges for a big one.

6. Put Kids to Work

Your house will be messier with more people at home. Manage the mess through structured pick-up times and by having kids do chores. This is a perfect time for children to learn to wash dishes or do laundry!

7. Use Manners

When we are at home, we often let manners slide. We allow kids to command rather than politely request, or we accept whining and snark as alternative forms of communication. Setting a high standard ourselves gives a good example for our children. As homeschoolers, we are their sole representatives of fully-formed adults.

8. Make Work Fun

You're in charge, but you're not the bad guy. Be magnanimous. Dance in the kitchen while the family cleans up after meals. Use sidewalk chalk to practice math outside. Act out a play as part of your reading work. Even when they groan, roll their eyes, and say, “Ugh! That's the worst, Mom,” they don't mean

it. They really love it when you show them how to have fun while they get things done.

9. Take Breaks

One of the biggest challenges of homeschooling is getting consumed with the volume of work and hibernating like a bear. Instead, remember the tortoise and the hare. If you have the kids work fast and furious, you'll both burn out before the work is done. Take it slow. Take plenty of vitamin D breaks to soak up the sunshine, then get back to work for a while. The out-of-doors is so good for the kids and may be the only safe place other than home.

10. KIST: Keep It Simple, Teacher

Children nine years old or under need help with reading, handwriting, and very basic math. That's easy! Don't make it harder than it is. Rather, use the time you might be tempted to prepare a cool lesson to play, cook, or clean with your child. Even older kids will enjoy the same activities with you, and should be able to manage their heavier workloads with Mom's help as encourager, trouble shooter, and facilitator.

11. Incentivize

For some kids, just the act of completing work and going to play is gratifying enough. For others, a little incentive goes a long way. To help complete tasks, you may offer an extra outing, a special treat, or an extra 15 minutes on the Xbox. Incentives make work more fun!

12. You are the Best Teacher for Your Child

As your child's parent, you are the one most interested in him becoming a well-formed adult. You want him to succeed in life. It is up to you to make sure he has the tools and motivation to succeed. Facilitating his education is what most teachers do. You don't need an education degree; instead, let good resources do the actual teaching, be involved as much as you can, and ask lots of questions. Trust that you can do it and work at it with the focus and intensity you give your nine-to-

five.

13. Enjoy!

Even when times are tough, set the tone by keeping a cheerful disposition. With a good attitude you may be surprised by how much you cherish this time at home with your children. This is what parents are made for, so embrace it!

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