

## HOMESCHOOLING THOUGHTS

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Homeschooling is on a lot of parents' minds right now as they try to "do school" at home or worry about how to progress their children's education. Homeschooling feels safe and comfortable for our family. As many of you begin dipping your toes into some sort of homeschooling, at the end of the day you may feel as though you are not doing enough for your child's education. Yet, how could you possibly do any more? There are still meals to be made, laundry to do and in many cases, employment that somehow needs to be completed remotely. There is no normal right now. One of my virtual mentors says, when you are stuck, sit down and open a book and read aloud for 15 minutes.

I want with all my heart for my kids to have a rich education and I know you do as well. Be gentle with yourself and your family right now. As Joshua 1:9 says, "Do not be discouraged, do not be afraid! The Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

When we first started homeschooling in 2012, I had a picture in my mind of schoolwork happening quickly at home so we would have a lot of free time. Homeschooling didn't happen like I pictured in my mind. Thankfully (I think, since we aren't at the end of our journey yet) I have learned so much, and continue to learn. As of right now, our kids are 14 (8th grade), 11 (6th grade), 9 (3rd grade), and 6 (1st grade).

Often, people (myself included) want formulas that they can follow to do it "right." But since everyone's background and situation is unique, there could never be a formula. What I wish someone told me back when I pulled my oldest child out of school is to worry less and have fun with your kids. Spend time with them and fill them up with love—make love and time a priority.

**Look for the things that they are passionate about and help them pursue them** through books, crafts, and games. Study your kids right now. Give them options and then pour fuel on their interest fires for topics or activities to which they are drawn. Create space for them to do this and do it with them, even if just for 15 minutes. Children love when you enter their world and interests.

During this time when the world feels weird and uncertain, I am trying to make our home a place of consistency (as much as possible) and peace. As homeschoolers, our home is our learning environment and putting a puzzle on the table or sheets out to make a reading fort creates inspiration for play (which is how kids process). For example, the other evening, my youngest child told me that his stuffed dog has the Coronavirus... And that led to a discussion about the virus and medical treatments.

Do the school work your school gives you and then, if you are able, pick one thing to start as a family during this time.

The one thing I would recommend is to **begin a reading habit with your kids**. If you have to work, then listen to an Audible audiobook series (and I have heard that they are offering some free children's audiobooks on Audible right now). Some of our favorite book series have been The Green Ember series, The Chronicles of Narnia, Gregor the Overlander, The Hobbit, The Rangers Apprentice series, Fablehaven, The Mysterious Benedict Society, and The Little House on the Prairie (read by Cherry Jones—so good). **Reading together has given us a similar narrative for life and provided so many points for connection.**

Right now, if your kids are coming from a school environment, I would focus on reading and a little math. A little each day will go a long way. I really encourage parents to set aside a reading time and give their kids something to do while they read or listen. While I read out loud, my kids enjoy tea, hot chocolate, apple cider, legos, coloring, tracing, magnatiles, perler beads, drawing, play dough, etc. There is no need to recreate school in your home—your kids will be fine! If reading is a struggle, consider a challenge where they earn a movie night or their favorite dessert if you read for 30 minutes for five days straight.

**If you truly are curious about homeschooling for a longer period of time, a few books I would recommend are:**

- [The Call of the Wild and Free](#) by Ainsley Arment (This book is a great resource that details all types of homeschooling in an easy to read way).
- [Teaching from Rest](#)
- [Educating the Wholehearted Child](#)
- [The Homeschool Experiment](#) (a novel—just for fun)
- [Honey for a Child's/Teens Heart](#) (great book lists)
- [The Brave Learner](#)
- [Mere Motherhood](#) (by Cindy Rollins)
- [Beautiful Feet Books](#) (history curriculum)

**Our favorite online resources (there are so many, but here are our favorites):**

- [Around the World Stories](#)
- [Khan Academy](#)
- [Art of Problem Solving](#) (Alcumus is a free online math curriculum with problems, challenges, and videos)
- [Beast Academy Math](#) (for a subscription)
- [Dance Mat Typing BBC](#)
- [You are an Artist](#) (chalk pastel drawing classes)
- [Read Aloud Revival](#) (great booklists, podcasts, author interviews)
- [Bravewriter](#) (Julie Bogart and Susan Wise Bauer are **offering an online conference for free Mar 23-27**—you do need to sign up).

Also, as parents, it is important to take care of yourself to keep from falling into anxiety, especially during this time of isolation. **Please ask yourself what do you need to be healthy and mentally prepared for your kids each day.** For me, it's always exercise (even when I don't feel like it), the Dwell Bible app, and spending time reading my Bible and a devotional. Welcome your kids into your quiet time if they are curious. Often one of them will be curious and want to read with me. If I can invest time in one of those to start my day, I feel centered and able to do the next thing for my kids.

Remember, relationships are so much more important than being a “teacher” to your kids. Set your expectations up front and if your child is old enough, ask for their input on what they think is reasonable. Your kids are watching your example. I remember very clearly waking up most mornings as a child to my mother studying her bible at the kitchen table. It is a privilege to learn with your kids—hold onto gratitude for this time with them.

I hope that some of this will encourage someone. **Ask God for help and listen. I believe that He will help you. We are in this together. Oh, and one more thing... Look to wise people.** Is there someone that you really respect who has raised their children or is raising children? Don't be afraid to ask. Try to be flexible, there will be interruptions, and always choose kind words.

Our days typically start with breakfast, personal chores, math, and then we all sit down to read aloud. We take a break for lunch, finish up independent activities, and the kids can have free time or screen time starting at 3pm or 4pm depending on the day. I like to take Fridays to hike or get outside in some way. They also help with chores throughout the day such as taking out the garbage, dishes, and laundry. I am hoping with this extra time to work on cooking skills with them more.

This virus has been a disruption to everyone's schedule, but most of all to the people who have it. I want us to look for ways we can be helpers even if it means just being home.

**Give yourself permission to pause and enjoy your kids. Even if it means spending a whole day building Legos.** Just a few thoughts. Feel free to do what you wish with them. I hope they are slightly helpful to someone.

My heart goes out to parents trying to work from home and take care of the needs of their families. I wish that I could give everyone a big hug!

— *Jessica McFarland*