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The Four Foundations of Lifelong Learning

Preparing Your Little Ones
for School



by Anne Elliott

Foundations Press

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The Four Foundations of Lifelong Learning: Preparing Your Little Ones for School

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“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matthew 7:12).

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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Table of Contents

1 - Getting Ready for School	7
<i>– an introduction to why we need to prepare our children for their education and a brief overview of some things parents should consider.</i>	
2 - Foundational Issues	15
<i>– a discussion of the four foundations upon which a successful education is built.</i>	
Order in the Home	15
Respect for Others	18
Attention	21
Parental Example	22
3 - Establishing Order	27
<i>– a discussion of the three basic activities of an orderly day.</i>	
Meal Time	28
Play Time	37
Sleep Time	43
4 - Teaching Respect	47
<i>– a discussion of how and why to teach respect to our children.</i>	
Respect for Parents	48
Respect for Authority	51
Respect for Peers	52
Respect for Property	54
Freedom	55
Consistency	59
Teaching Biblical Values	67
The Joys of Parenting	69
5 - Developing Attention	71
<i>– a discussion of how attention-span skills are simply an indication of the level of self-control our children have.</i>	
The Philosophy of Self-Control	74
Teaching Self-Control	78
Teaching Focusing Skill	85
6 - Beginning School	95
<i>– a discussion of common educational theories and how they affect your child.</i>	
Educational Goals	95
Learning Styles	105
Homeschooling Methods	109
Recommended Reading	131



Getting Ready for School

Chapter 1

How long do you have until your children are old enough to go to school? Are they ready? You probably already realize that you have an enormous task ahead of you. Maybe you've visited your local library and have read many "how-to" and "don't-do-this" books for parents. You've been surfing the Internet, signing up for newsletters to arrive by e-mail, and chatting on social media.

My husband and I have been there! We decided to homeschool when our oldest son was just a tiny baby. My husband was studying secondary education in college, and we enjoyed discussing educational philosophy on weekends. We were new



and excited parents, bursting with studies and statistics. We learned about the benefits of homeschooling, and we couldn't wait until our son turned five so we could begin!

That's when we began checking out stacks of library books and researching our options on the Internet. We visited a homeschooling convention and met other homeschooling parents. We began developing a unique family philosophy of education. We began to set goals for teaching our children.

Our choice to homeschool may be different than the educational route your family is taking. However, if you're like us, you've begun to realize that homeschooling is a lifestyle, a way of living in which learning takes place at any time and at all times. We discovered that "school" wasn't something that would start in September after our oldest son turned five. Rather, we needed to be teaching him a million and one things right away! "School" would simply be a continuation of everything we should already be doing with him.

So what should we be teaching him *before* he turned five? What skills did he need to master so that learning would be enjoyable and effective when his formal schooling began? And in our case, how could we ensure that we would be successful teaching our own son? How would we even define "success"?



“These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”
Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Whether accomplished at home or in a traditional school setting, we discovered that learning requires several key abilities.

First, a child must have the ability to pay attention. I first noticed this when I volunteered in my church’s nursery. I watched as an adult spoke to one small girl. She willingly turned her head upward and looked the adult in the eyes. On the other hand, I noticed a toddler boy who had the amazing ability to tune out all adult voices, whenever and however long he chose.

My husband noticed that high-school students in the classroom were often unable to follow directions, simply because they couldn’t remember more than one or two commands at a time. The students chose to only pay attention to the most interesting stimuli at the moment. In other words, if a subject or teacher were “boring,” the students chose to pay attention to a friend or to daydream instead.



Learning to pay attention is a skill that must be planted and cultivated when a child is young. But if a child can focus his attention on whatever he is learning, he will be able to absorb much more about the topic.

Another ability children need to learn is curiosity and a love for learning. Most children seem to be born with this desire. A baby will spend an hour maneuvering across the living room floor so that she can see what the shiny object on the other side is. The trouble comes when the baby's curiosity leads her places that are dangerous or inappropriate for her.

So yet another ability is needed: **the ability to live peaceably within boundaries.** We all want our children to have a healthy desire to learn, a strong urge to discover *why*. Yet, if our children do not also learn to exist within boundaries that others have set, they will begin to rebel against their parent's or teacher's authority, crossing boundaries and getting into trouble.

But what about the child who has a healthy curiosity, tempered with self-control? This child must have **the ability to remember what he is taught.** His memory must be exercised and expanded so that he can fit yet more information into it. We've all heard about elderly people who could recite large portions of the Bible. How could they do it? By continuously exercising and using their minds.



Exercising... working... reciting... learning is starting to sound like hard work! Yes, it can be, even though each of us parents wants to make learning fun and exciting. No matter how many hands-on projects or field trips we participate in, sometimes the process of education requires the discipline to sit still and *work*. Therefore, **the ability to do hard work without complaining or procrastinating** is an essential skill our children need.

This also means there will be times when the homeschooling teacher-mother, like her classroom counterpart, must give commands to her student-children. She must give assignments, drill them on their multiplication facts, and require them to do extracurricular projects. Therefore, it is essential that **children learn to respect and obey their teacher, even when they don't feel like it.**

Of course, while parents must prepare their children for school by teaching them these essential life skills, parents also have an obligation to keep some basic educational premises in mind. First, **each child is unique and will have his or her own learning style.** Even when the child's learning style is the opposite of how the teacher learns, Mom and Dad must figure out how to bridge those differences and effectively communicate to their little one.

Parents must also take into account the **mental maturity of their child.** Our oldest son didn't catch on to reading until he was seven, yet our daughter began to read when she was five. Our next son began to show an interest in sounding out words



when he was three, yet our next daughter was still not speaking during her third year. If parents become too caught up in measuring and analyzing their children, comparing them to a neighbor's or relative's child or to a curriculum company's "standard," they may begin to pressure their children unnecessarily. God made each child unique, and we have to be willing to be patient with them.

In addition, **each child has special interests.** One of our boys loves to build indoors with Legos®, while his brother is riding his bike outside. One daughter loves to cuddle with our animals, while her sister cries if the dog licks her too much. The wise parent will pay attention to the interests of her children and tailor their lessons accordingly.

With so many facets involved in parenting, not to mention schooling, how can a parent ever begin to prepare her children for school? The task seems overwhelming!

Don't worry! Many parents have walked this road ahead of us, and they offer us advice and reassurance. All of the things you need to teach your children can be grouped into four categories that, once mastered, will guide your child toward successful learning the rest of his life. Basically, you must be sure to provide an orderly home environment where learning can thrive, teach your children the essential qualities of respect for others,



develop their attention-span skills as they grow, and be a good parental example to them.

We'll spend the rest of this book showing you specific ways to foster each of the essential skills your children will need. As you see your child blossom from his or her earliest days, you'll feel much more confident about school.



Foundational Issues

Chapter 2

Order, respect, attention, and parental example – these are the four foundations upon which a successful education is built. In case you're like me, however, and weren't born with these qualities, let's get a bit more specific.

Order in the Home

By order, I mean that your home will be run according to a basic structure and routine. I don't mean that Mom will be a drill sergeant, inspecting her children's bedrooms with a white glove each morning. Nor do I mean that she slaves through each day with a worried eye on the clock. Rather, an



orderly home comes when a home manager has planned out what needs to be accomplished, has delegated work to the children, and has efficiently created a peaceful environment for the entire family.

Order comes from structure, from a predictable routine. Before I had children, I worked in an office. I had a desk and work space assigned to me. It was my responsibility to know where the day's mail was, where important papers were filed, and what needed to be done each day. Because I handled people's finances, if I was disorganized, checks wouldn't be mailed in a timely fashion. And then angry people would call....

When I became a full-time mother, it took me several years to grasp the concept that being a homemaker was no different than any other occupation. There are efficient ways to handle a home, and there are sloppy ways to do it as well.

Order applies to my homemaking skills, but it also applies to my parenting skills. Children thrive in an orderly environment. They love to know what happens next. On the other hand, too much change or upheaval can upset their little tummies and leave them clinging to me with apprehension.

My kids know that we always do chores after breakfast. They know we always do school work after chores. They love that outdoor playtime always comes after phonics. Then comes lunch, then story time, then math, then science... so the routine goes.

Classroom teachers have structure down to a science. They place posters next to the chalkboard



and list the order of the day's subjects. How many of us would eye the big clock, knowing that in only six more minutes we could go to the restroom and have lunch? There is a certain security that only a schedule can provide.

God's world works on a schedule as well. He created the world on a schedule. We can see the patterns of nature repeating cyclically, over and over... spring, summer, autumn and winter... night and day... rainy season and dry season.

Homeschooling mother Teri Maxwell, author of the helpful scheduling workbook *Managers of Their Homes*, points out:

God has planned for interruptions to this seasonal pattern of creation. They come in the form of storms – winter snow storms, spring showers, tornados, summer thunderstorms – that blow in unplanned and unscheduled. They are often fierce, demanding attention, but sometimes they are gentle and refreshing. So, too, into our schedules, God pushes storms of interruptions. They can be as fierce and demanding as a medical emergency, or they can be as gentle and refreshing as an unexpected lunch date with your husband. If God felt it was important to place His creation on a schedule, perhaps we should seriously consider the need to



schedule our own lives. Observing God’s dealing with his universe can give us the pattern and motivation for our choice to plan and put a schedule into use in our homes.¹

Routines, schedules, plans, goals – all these words might be very intimidating to you, especially if you’re contemplating the enormous task of homeschooling your children. So in chapter three, I’ll show you some proven methods for organizing your home, your time, and your children’s days so that order will reign in your home and your family will thrive.

Respect for Others

Character Counts! is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonsectarian character education coalition that teaches “Six Pillars of Character:” *trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship*. They provide curriculum to public schools because they realize how essential character education is if any other form of education is to succeed. Their guide for parents makes it clear that only with consistent, concrete and creative teaching will parents or

¹ Steven and Teri Maxwell, *Managers of Their Homes* (Leavenworth, KS: Communication Concepts, Inc., 2001), p. 1.



teachers succeed in imparting values in their children.²

Homeschools are no different. How will our children learn to read and write if they won't even listen to us? How will our children have an attitude of discovery and curiosity towards God's world if they are infinitely wise in their own eyes and unwilling to learn from us?

*"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes:
but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise."
Proverbs 12:15*

*"Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes,
and prudent in their own sight!"
Isaiah 5:21*

*"Be not wise in thine own eyes:
fear the LORD, and depart from evil."
Proverbs 3:7*

Character training begins when we teach respect. We must teach our children to respect us as parents, as well as elders in our families, churches and communities and other authority figures. We must teach them to respect their siblings and peers.

² <http://charactercounts.org/>



We must teach them to even respect strangers, including respect for others' property and the environment around us.

Character training involves teaching children to respect boundaries. We must give our children only appropriate levels of freedom, levels that they have earned.

We must teach our children with consistency. They must know that whining and complaining have no place in our home. On the other hand, we parents must uphold standards of character by staying true to our word. We don't parent by threatening or bribing our children. We are also honest enough to admit our mistakes and ask for forgiveness.

Finally, we cement principles of character in our children's hearts by going beyond a list of "do's" and "don'ts," by teaching our children how to know right and wrong for themselves. This is best accomplished by teaching them what God, the ultimate authority, says.

Character training is best begun when our children are very young, and we'll show you how in chapter four. The goal should be to have a child that respects you enough to listen to you on the important things – trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship – so that you're then free to teach him academic skills like spelling and science.



Attention

If you going to send your children to public school, where they will have to sit still at their desks for a majority of the day, you surely understand why attention-span skills are so important. But why do homeschooled children need to be able to pay attention?

Attention is needed for more than just sitting at a desk. Learning to pay attention is essentially learning self-control. Self-control is an essential skill in life, no matter what kind of school a child attends. Self-control is the basis for potty training, for controlling one's temper, for learning to read or hold a pencil, and for getting a job someday. Most importantly, your child needs to learn to pay attention when God speaks.

“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ...”
2 Corinthians 10:5

Learning to focus will help your child in academic ways as well. Even in play, a child must learn to focus in order to sort colors, to put shapes into a shape sorter, assemble a puzzle, or build a



tower with blocks. In chapter five, we'll give you some concrete ideas for building your child's attention span.

Parental Example

The most important foundational piece on which you build your child's education is the example you set for your children. Little eyes are always watching you, and children are sure to copy what you *do*, not what you *say*.

Being a good example begins with having a right relationship with God. A right relationship begins when I come to God by faith, acknowledging my sin and accepting Christ's punishment in my place on the cross. Repentance is needed, so that I turn from my sin and commit to walking in obedience to His Word from this day on.

God wants a relationship with me. He is my Father, and I am His child. Because I love Him, I want to spend time with Him each day, reading His Word and talking with Him in prayer.

As my children see my vibrant relationship with God – a relationship that is just as real on a rainy morning at home as it is when I'm in front of others in our local congregation – God will become real to them as well. Our children want us to put shoes on our beliefs. They want to know that we are credible and authentic. Of course, we won't be



perfect, yet they want to see that the Holy Spirit has the power to change our imperfections.

“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.”
Ephesians 5:1

“...Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”
Hebrews 6:12

Our imperfections will be most obvious in our marriages. My husband knows me better than anyone else. He (intentionally or not) knows how to get me upset or irritate me. Yet our children badly need to see what unconditional love looks like. They need to see how forgiveness works in everyday life. They need to know that my promise to stay with my husband for life is good – and therefore, that all my other promises mean something, too.

If your marriage is rocky or nonexistent, you can reasonably expect your children to encounter problems as they try to learn. Yes, your children can still learn if you’ve been divorced or are a single parent. However, their learning potential is virtually unlimited in a stable home environment.

Therefore, make your marriage a priority! Spend more time studying your spouse than you do



studying homeschooling curriculum catalogs. Be sure that your husband's needs are met before you check homework. Show your children a concrete example of your love by spending a priority hunk of time talking and loving your husband when he comes home from work.

You can also set a good parental example by showing restraint in your spending. Many families exist on one income, and that takes self-discipline. You'll notice that when your budget is out of control, other areas of your life are probably suffering as well.

You also need to set an example by carefully choosing the community of people with whom you surround yourself. Are you actively involved in ministry in your local church? Your children will learn more about serving God by watching and participating with you than they will by waiting until their teenage or college years to experience it on their own. They need to see you showing hospitality. They need to experience worship in a congregation of believers each Sabbath. They need to learn how to resolve differences in the local church and how to know what they believe.

Finally, you must be careful to set an example by continuing to learn and grow yourself. When was the last time you read a book? Studies have proven that when children grow up surrounded by books, they are much more apt to love books themselves. They should see that you place a high importance on learning, on discussing, and on changing.



A friend of mine said, “When the parents show excitement about something, it helps the kids to be excited! If Mom is excited about nature, it catches and spreads like the flu through her children. If Dad is excited about the science of rocketry, suddenly all his sons just can’t wait to learn all about rocketry. Older siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins can have the same effect.”

Author Jean Fleming writes,

Ezra illustrates the approach of being a doer first and then a teacher: “For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezra 7:10). He studied God’s word, applied it to his own life, then taught others. The suggested order is: Study, Do, Teach.³

This principle applies to us parents, too. First, we need to love to learn. We need to learn how to have a closer relationship with God, how to have a satisfying marriage, how to exhibit self-control and order in our homes, how to have good relationships in our communities and churches, and how to continue to grow intellectually. Then we need to put into practice all that we learn. (Easier said than done, isn’t it?) Only when we’ve shown that we’re good at learning and even better at doing will we earn the right to be our children’s teachers.

³ Jean Fleming, *A Mother’s Heart* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1982), p. 66.



Establishing Order

Chapter 3

We've already discussed how much children love order. They like knowing what to expect next, and they appreciate some regularity to their days. So how can a mother go about setting up order in the home?

The easiest place to start is with a schedule. On paper, you can make a list of everything you want to accomplish in a day, and then figure out how long each thing will take. (Of course, you can't plan more things than you can fit into twenty-four hours!) Next, you fit each planned activity into a rough time slot.

As we mentioned earlier, we shouldn't expect our days to go by without interruptions to our plans. It's rather obvious that unexpected things happen,



and we shouldn't be so bound to the clock that we get all unbalanced when something comes along to upset our schedule.

On the other hand, many days will be ordinary and uneventful. Whenever you can, seize the opportunity to follow some sort of routine.

Meal Time

When setting up a routine, it's often easiest to start with meals. God created us with a natural desire for food, eaten at regularly occurring times. Therefore, when making a list of activities, jot down times for regular meals, snacks, and drink breaks. You should schedule times for keeping the dishes clean – always remembering to set a good parental example of order. It also helps to organize your kitchen and eating areas for ease of use.

Next, take a peek at your budget so that you know how much you can reasonably afford to spend on groceries. I have personally found that I'm more motivated to keep order in my kitchen and prepare regular, healthy meals when I know that I can't afford to go out to eat. (We tend to only go to Pizza Edge when I've forgotten to defrost the chicken.)

Once you know what you can spend, get into the habit of preparing a weekly menu. I really like choosing a different type of food to serve each day of the week so that I cut down on how much creative thought I have to do on "Menu Making



Day.” For instance, we often have roast chicken on Friday evenings, Monday is stir-fry day, and we enjoy breakfast for supper on Wednesdays. I also make out a standard menu for breakfasts and lunches.

On “Menu Making Day” (which is Monday in our home, and yes, I’ve scheduled a weekly time for this), I open my favorite cookbook or recipe magazine and choose recipes for the coming week or two. I write all the recipes (with page numbers from the cookbooks) onto a sheet of paper. On another sheet, I jot down any ingredients that I need to purchase.

Before I leave for the grocery store, I also check for any staples that we might need. First, on the side of my refrigerator, I have a pad of paper that my husband and I use to jot down anything that we need to remember to buy at the store (deodorant, cat food, etc.), written down promptly as soon as we notice we’re running low. Second, I have a page in my planning notebook on which I’ve written a list of all the grocery staples I want to have in the house. These lists keep me from forgetting things.



Shopping List

Produce	Meat
lettuce	whole chicken
apples	ground beef – 3 lbs.
onions	deli meat
Canned Goods	Frozen Foods
tomato sauce	ice cream
pineapple chunks – 8 oz.	strawberries
applesauce	mixed veggies
Boxed Goods	Dairy
pasta	milk – 3 gallons
oatmeal	eggs – 5 dozen
crackers	cheddar cheese - shredded
Baking	Misc.
flour	lemon juice
cake for daughter's birthday	ice
vanilla extract	

My weekly (or bi-weekly) plan keeps me on schedule with my time, helps me save money by preventing too many unnecessary trips to the store, and saves my brain from having to think about dinner until my daily schedule reminds me to start making it. With the money I save, I try to purchase some foods in bulk and save even more money and time.



My schedule so far...

7:00 a.m.	
8:00	Breakfast
9:00	Dishes
10:00	
11:00	
noon	Lunch & Clean-up
1:00	
2:00	
3:00	
4:00	Supper Prep.
5:00	Supper
6:00	Dishes
7:00	
8:00	

Let me take a moment to remind you of the importance of eating a good breakfast each morning. You as Mom need it! How will you be a good mother when you don't have enough energy to drag yourself through the morning hours? Your children need it! Are you expecting them to have brightly shining brains when they don't have enough fuel to even have a good mood?

A good breakfast in our home consists of homemade oatmeal, served with not-too-much sugar



and plenty of good fats that growing bodies need. I also provide protein in the form of eggs and farm-fresh milk. Finally, I serve a good source of natural vitamins.

Old-Fashioned Breakfast Porridge (Serves 6)

adapted from *Nourishing Traditions*,
by Sally Fallon

Before you go to bed, put 3 cups of oatmeal, 3 cups warm water, and 1/3 cup plain yogurt or buttermilk in a bowl. Cover with a towel and place it somewhere slightly warm (such as on top of the refrigerator or in the oven with just the pilot light on).

When you wake up in the morning, boil 3 cups water, plus a little salt, in a large pot. Add the soaked oatmeal mixture, stir, and gently cook for 3 or 4 minutes. Cover and remove from the heat for about 5 more minutes.

Divide it between all the bowls and add fixin's (like cream, butter, raisins, apple slices, a touch of honey or brown sugar, maybe some cinnamon or real maple syrup).

To save time, be sure to rinse the pan and the bowls so they are easy to wash after breakfast.



Old-Fashioned Scrambled Eggs (Serves 6)

Before you go to bed, crack a dozen eggs into a bowl, add some heavy cream, and stir well with a whisk.

Pop it in the fridge.

When you have finished making oatmeal (above), place a heavy, cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat, and melt 2 tablespoons of butter or coconut oil. Pour the egg mixture into the hot pan, add fixin's (like salsa, dried chives, some shredded cheese, some shredded meat, or a few tablespoons of cream cheese). Stir every few minutes, and remove from heat when the eggs are just as you like them.

Serve the eggs with a slice or two of fresh tomato or apple, plus the oatmeal, plus a drink such as farm milk or warm tea. Mmmmm... Even your kids will eat it!

Babies also thrive on predictable, regular mealtimes. One of the easiest ways you can begin to establish order and peace in your home is by feeding your new baby completely and regularly.

Especially if you're nursing your baby, be sure to offer a complete feeding each time your baby breastfeeds. If your baby only snacks, eating for a



few minutes then popping off the breast for an hour or so, your little one will never get the rich, high-calorie-content hind milk that is necessary for helping her grow and feel satisfied. Breast milk is similar to cow's milk in that the fat separates. The thin "fore milk," like skim milk, contains much less fat than the thick, creamlike "hind" milk. The thin milk comes out quickly to satisfy a hungry baby, but the hind milk is where most of the calories are. It takes only a few minutes to empty the fore milk but, depending on the age of the baby, 15-20 more minutes to empty the hind milk. This is why it's not healthy to let the baby "snack" here and there.

I suggest feeding a young baby for 30 to 40 minutes per feeding, regularly offering the breast every 2 ½ to 3 hours. As your baby matures, feedings might shorten a bit and occur every 3 to 4 hours. At night, you can let your baby sleep longer between feedings, but try not to extend the time between nursings longer than 4 to 5 hours for a newborn and 8 hours for a six-month-old child, day or night.

So can you actually "schedule" a baby's feedings? Well, yes and no. When your baby is new, the only thing written on your schedule should be "rest." Allow family and friends the blessing of serving you, and allow your body to rest. How else will you have enough energy to be an effective mom a few months from now?

As your baby grows, you'll notice that she develops a schedule of her own, although you can



certainly guide it by avoiding becoming a “snack machine.” However, never become so closely attached to the clock that you miss your baby’s cues for hunger, especially during periodic growth spurts.

As babies begin to eat solid foods, you now have reached a golden opportunity for teaching. As your baby sits in her high chair, you have before you the first and best chance to teach her to obey you. Your young child needs to learn what “No” means now, and if you do your job effectively, she’ll figure out that “No” means the same thing in the living room by the breakables.

Before you begin your baby’s meal, always take her little hands and fold them in yours, and teach her to thank the Father for her food. You may feel foolish praying with a baby, but remember that you have to begin her spiritual training sometime.

Begin to teach your baby self-control by holding her free hand as you feed her the mashed peas. Don’t allow her to grab your spoon and smear the peas on the tray. Think ahead! Do you want your one-year-old smearing peas on the tray, on her head, in her ears, down her front, on the dog’s ears, under that table, and across the room? Don’t make the mistake of allowing freedoms and then having to re-train later. Set boundaries.

Don’t allow Baby to spit or blow bubbles. Don’t let her toss her bowl over the side of the tray. Don’t let her throw a fit if she doesn’t get her way.

If she persists in doing something you don’t want, a sharp squeeze on her hand or a flick on her



cheek is appropriate, while you firmly say, “No.” If she arches her back in defiance, remove her to her crib for a few minutes, then try again. The battles you will fight in the high chair may frustrate you, but remember that little battles won now will prevent major wars waged later.

As your baby grows, you will notice that she tries to communicate with you. Now is a great time to teach her to “talk,” even though her tongue hasn’t yet caught up with her brain. Your local bookstore has many books on teaching babies sign language, but I’ve found that just a few signs help a lot. We’ve even made up our own!

For instance, my baby will rub her hands in a circular motion on her bib when she wants to say, “Please.” Blowing a kiss means, “Thank you.” When she raises both arms in the air, we know she is saying, “All done.” And when she bangs her fingertips together, she is telling us she would like “more.” Of course, she very quickly learned to nod her head “yes” or shake it “no.”

As your children get older, you can teach them to pray by themselves before meals. Begin by having them repeat a simple prayer after you. Later, allow them to pray using their own words.

It is important to teach basic manners to your children. Expect them to use a napkin to wipe their faces and hands. Require appropriate and kind language at the table. Have them say, “May I please have more potatoes?” and “Thank you for the yummy dinner, Mommy. May I be excused?”



Children can help you set the table and pass out the napkins. A three-year-old is capable of taking his dishes to the kitchen when he's done eating, and a five-year-old can rinse his plate under the faucet. Expect your children to finish what you have served them before they ask for something else. Don't allow complaining, whining, or fighting over who gets the red cup.

Play Time

In our home, we prefer to keep our baby awake for a little while after each meal, partly so she can let her dinner digest before lying down and partly so that we can later lay her down awake and teach her to fall asleep on her own.

A newborn baby will probably only be able to keep her eyes open for a few minutes after eating, long enough to be burped and to have her diaper changed. As she matures, you'll notice that she can stay awake for longer periods of time.

This is one time that I do tend to keep my eye on the clock. If I know that Baby is characterized by needing to eat every three hours, I try to plan for a minimum of 90 minutes of sleep time before the next feeding. For instance, if Baby started eating at 8:00 a.m., I can guess that she might be hungry near 11:00 a.m. next. Therefore, I know she needs to be asleep no later than 9:30. If she didn't finish eating until 8:40, then I changed her diaper and gave her a



sponge bath until 8:55, I know that she needs to play no longer than 35 minutes. No, actually, I would like her to be sleeping by 9:30, so I will plan to lay her down at 9:20.

If at any time during play time she starts to rub her eyes, get a little cranky (and it's not gas), or yawn, I quickly bring play time to a close and lay her down a little early.

It is very important not to over-stimulate a baby. Take notice of how many sensory things a baby is observing, feeling, hearing, smelling, and touching – I get over-stimulated just thinking about it! Often, a fussy baby has simply had enough of playtime for now.

As Baby becomes a toddler, I need to teach her that playtime is a privilege. If she is old enough to walk, she is old enough to begin helping with “chores.” Of course, I’ll need to help her.

First I change her diaper. Then I help her walk to the garbage can to dispose of the diaper. Soon she enjoys doing it all by herself. Then I walk with her to the dresser for clean clothes and show her where to put her pajamas.

Next, I help her make her bed by tugging and pulling on her blanket and sheets, and I smooth the wrinkles out for her. I help her place favorite dolls and blankets on her pillow. (To make it easier for little ones making their beds, I only use a fitted sheet -- not a top sheet -- with a comforter on top.)



Then I walk with her into the bathroom and plop her on the counter and brush her teeth. As she gets older, I let her have a turn holding the toothbrush when I am done. Finally, I brush her hair and show her where to put the brush or comb when I am done.

You'd be surprised – in no time at all, much younger than you'd think – my kids can do all of these steps completely on their own. In the meantime, it takes no more than five minutes for me to walk through these steps with them, and what habits are formed! I expect that any potty-trained toddlers should also be able to mostly dress themselves and do most of their chores without help.



My schedule so far...

7:00		Mom's Chores
8:00	Breakfast	<p><u>Monday</u> Clean Out Fridge, Make Menu</p> <p><u>Tuesday</u> Mop, Run Errands</p> <p><u>Wednesday</u> Pay Bills</p> <p><u>Thursday</u> Garbage, Clean Bathrooms</p> <p><u>Friday</u> Vacuum House & Dust</p> <p><u>Saturday</u> Rest</p>
9:00	Dishes, Chores, Start Laundry	
10:00		
11:00		
noon	Lunch & Clean-up	
1:00		
2:00		
3:00		
4:00	Supper Prep/Pick up Toys	
5:00	Supper	
6:00	Dishes	
7:00	Clean-up, Sweep Floor, Fold Laundry	
8:00		
9:00		

For children who can't yet read, I have placed a chore chart on the refrigerator.⁴ The kids “read”

⁴ See <https://anneelliott.com/free-downloads-2/> for a free chart you can download.



the pictures every morning and do their chores in this order. By the time they are old enough to read, they're in the habit of doing these chores first thing in the morning and don't really need the chart any longer.

Be sure to include chore time on your schedule. Choose daily chores for yourself so that your home stays clean and uncluttered, the bills get paid, and you have time for errands.

Begin to teach your children how to do household chores, such as vacuuming the floor, dusting low shelves, cleaning sinks, wiping mirrors and glass doors, rinsing and drying dishes, filling and emptying the dishwasher, taking out the garbage, swishing toilets, and fluffing couch pillows.

I often prefer to just do the housecleaning myself. After all, I do a better job! However, I know that my children need to learn responsibility and important life skills. That's why I began scheduling even simple things like *when* to teach chores. For instance, I made a master list of all the skills and chores I wanted my children to be able to do. Then I took out my calendar and *planned* which week I would begin teaching each skill. During my morning chore time (9:00 a.m.), I take a few minutes to work on the week's skill. Planning keeps me from getting frustrated and ensures that my children learn what they should.

An important part of keeping our home orderly is teaching my children to clean up when playtime is over. We plan small times for picking up



toys right before lunch and right before bed. Our major toy cleaning time is before Daddy is expected home from work. I often forget about the mess in the other room, especially if I'm having fun reading my e-mail in the afternoon. Therefore, I try to set a timer to remind me to get up, start supper, and have the kids start cleaning.

I don't enjoy nagging my children, and I have to admit that making them clean up toys is one of my personal weak areas. To make it easier on all of us, I like to play fun children's music while we clean. I often have them race to put away certain toys before the end of a song.

They also do better if I'm in the room with them, even working beside them. They're also better motivated if I set a timer for a reasonably short time and offer a reward if they can have the room finished before the timer beeps.

The best advice for keeping a toy room neat, however, is to have efficient storage for all the toys. We've all heard that there should be "a place for everything and everything in its place." It's tough, though, when we're discussing Barbie® shoes, Legos®, and an assortment of cars and wooden blocks. We purchased clear plastic containers, with lids, from our local discount store. I labeled each container with colorful labels and drew ("attempted" to draw) pictures on the labels as well. For instance, my daughter knows that the box with the stick-figure girl contains Little People®.



Our plastic bins have lids and are stacked in the closet so that our children must ask our permission before getting toys out. This prevents catastrophes such as having every toy out at the same time. Except for special occasions, we also ask our children to confine their toys to a certain area. This makes clean-up time much easier.

Finally, when a child receives a “junk” toy (a toy that requires no imagination and will be boring in a few hours, such as a Happy Meal® toy), we allow him to play with it for a week or so, then we put it away in a special “Rainy Day” box where it can retain its special status. Some junk toys are quietly thrown away when their attractiveness fades.

We’ll discuss more ideas for playtime in chapter 5.

Sleep Time

Ahhh... we’ve eaten well and played hard. Now it’s time for some rest!

Did you know babies can be taught to nap and sleep? Sure they can! When you can see that your little one is tired, simply lay her down in her bed, possibly singing a sweet lullaby to her, tuck her in, and leave the room. She may coo and play for a few minutes, then she might realize it’s naptime and fuss a bit, but soon she’ll drift off to dreamland.

Don’t, however, get in the habit of rocking her or nursing her to sleep. This doesn’t mean that



you'll never rock your baby. You'll just rock her during mealtime and playtime, as a way to cuddle and love her, not as a tricky way to entice her eyelids to close. Otherwise, you'll be a slave to naps, gingerly rocking your baby, trying to lay her down when her eyes close, and sneaking out of the room – only to hear her howl and have to start the entire process again.

After she has been asleep for forty-five minutes or so, you'll notice that she becomes restless. Don't rush in! She's probably just passing through an active dream cycle. Let her settle down naturally, and you'll find that she profits from an 90-120 minutes of good sleep each naptime.

Remember that your baby's brain is still forming and will continue to mature until she is eighteen months old. She not only needs good nourishment during this critical stage of intellectual growth – she needs rest!

During the second half of the baby's first year, you'll discover that she transitions to needing two naps per day, with an occasional cat nap before dinner when life is a little crazier. Sometime between her first and second birthday, she will drop her morning nap and begin to follow a normal toddler pattern of napping after lunch.

Require naps of your preschoolers! They're still growing so much! No other advice can prevent as many behavior problems as simply requiring a two-hour afternoon nap of your children until they reach five or six years old. As they near school age,



you'll notice that naptime naturally gets shorter or that your child simply lies in bed and rests in the afternoon. However, requiring a daily nap allows your child the opportunity to sleep if she needs it. (Mom gets a much-needed rest as well!)

Naptime is easier if it's a standard practice in your home. When lunch is through and the table is clear, have your preschool children use the bathroom and get their blankets. Read them a short story from a favorite book. (I like Ken Taylor's *The Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes*.) Sing your family's traditional "night-night song" as you walk them to their beds. (It is best to have each child nap in a room in which no other child is sleeping.) Tuck them in, give them a kiss and hug and possibly a favorite stuffed animal, close the blinds, and expect them to sleep.

Do they need to have some naptime rules? They're helpful, and a simple rule that any talking child can repeat is, "Head stays on pillow." I have my children repeat this rule every afternoon, and I've found that it prevents most problems before they start. If they disobey, punish them swiftly and quietly with a meaningful swat on the bottom, and let them get on with the business of sleeping.

When evening comes, follow the same basic routine. Have a bath and a fun tickle time with Daddy, possibly have a quick snack and drink, read a story together, sing a "night-night song," and settle them into their beds.



Having a consistent time for going to bed helps. In our home, the sun is a guide: If the sun is in bed, they should be, too! Aim for your preschool kids to get at least ten hours of actual sleep each night. (Parents would be wise not to stay up so late at night either....)

If your child shares a bedroom with a sibling, expect a small period of good-natured talking, singing, and giggling before little bodies settle into quietness and sleep. However, if the noise gets excessive, warn them and follow through with any necessary consequences for disobedience.

Quick Guide to Maintaining Order in Your Home:

- Plan healthy meals and schedule regular mealtimes.
- Schedule chores and playtime activities. Organize toys for easy pick-up times.
- Provide adequate naps and nighttime sleep, predictable bedtime routines, and consistent bedtimes.



Teaching Respect

Chapter 4

The second foundational rock upon which a successful education is built is respect for others. We've already discussed how difficult it is to teach a child who won't even listen to instructions. Respect is essential for all children to learn, whether they are homeschooled or taught in a traditional classroom.

Before we talk about specific areas in which respect is needed, let's remind ourselves that respect starts with the parents. If a parent is rude to the clerk in the store, how can he tell his son to be respectful to his teachers? Respect includes abiding by laws and community regulations, as well as learning to disagree in a proper way. As we continue



our discussion, check your own heart. Are you respectful to authority, to your peers, and to others' personal property?

Respect for Parents

The Bible tells us that we are to honor our father and mother (Exodus 20:12). God knows that when a child learns early in life to respect his parents, he will grow up with the capability to honor other authority – especially God Himself! The home is where all training begins. If a child doesn't have essential skills mastered in his own home, why should we expect him to change when he enters school or begins a career?

Unfortunately, children aren't born with a natural desire to obey you as soon as you speak. When you tell them it's time to pick up their toys, they'd rather keep playing. Sometimes I get frustrated when my children don't obey me immediately, yet – while I must correct them – I have to realize that respect and obedience must be *taught*.

Furthermore, I must realize that respect for parents is the most important skill my children need to learn! I need to constantly be on guard against any sign of disobedience or disrespect and correct it immediately. If my child will obey my commands the first time I speak, happily and with a willing



attitude, then I can trust my child to be obedient in other areas as well.

When my child is very small, as soon as he can communicate with a simple sign or nod of his head, it's time to teach him to acknowledge my commands.

“Son, don't touch the remote control.”

“Yes, Mommy.” (Or, “Mmm, hmm, Mama.”)

“Son, please put this diaper in the garbage for me.”

“Yes, Mommy.”

In addition to a vocal response, I expect him to look me in the eye when I speak. I've found that this really helps my commands to sink in, especially if I need to speak to my child in the midst of many distractions.

“Son, look at me.”

“Yes, Mommy.” (He makes eye contact, or if he's small, I turn his little face toward mine.)

“Son, don't touch the remote control.”

“Yes, Mommy.”

Some children have trouble processing commands. In this case, I have my child repeat back to me what I've asked him to do.



“What did I tell you to do, Son?”

“Don’t touch the remote control.”

“Very good!”

I’ve found that using this simple dialogue each time I give an instruction cuts down on most problems, especially if I start when my child is very young (before a year old) and *IF* I follow through with consequences if my child does not obey me the first time.

What if I give a command and my child ignores me? This is disobedience, not a hearing problem. There will be consequences.

What if my child tells me, “No”? This is certainly disobedience. I need to correct my child immediately so that it will not happen again.

Again, if I start working on obedience when my child is young, and consistently train my child to obey me the *first time I speak*, most problems that arise will be easy to correct. All my children have tested my resolve on occasion. They soon find out that I mean business, that respect is important to me, and that obedience is the priority in our family. When I am consistent, I rarely feel like raising my voice or losing my temper. We can all exhibit self-control.



Respect for Authority

As your children learn to respect and obey you, they also need to learn to listen to and respect other authority figures. The first authority figure they might encounter outside your home is probably a grandfather or grandmother, maybe an aunt or uncle or other adult relative. Teach your children proper terms of endearment for their relatives. Require them to show the same respect for others as they do for you.

“Son, what did Grandma ask you to do?”

“Pick up my dirty shirt.”

“So how do you need to answer her?”

“Yes, Grandma.”

Sometimes a family member might ask something of your child that you don't agree with. What should you do? Teach your child to be respectful even when it's hard. Privately, you could speak with the relative and explain your family's normal standard, but in the meantime, have your children learn to be respectful and obedient.

Your children will probably also encounter authority figures such as babysitters, your elders or teachers in your congregation, or children's workers at the local library. Teach your children to say, “Yes, Ma'am” or “Yes, Sir.” Teach them to look at adults in the eyes when they are speaking. Teach them not



to answer back disrespectfully when they are asked to do something or are reprimanded. Teach them to answer properly when an adult compliments them or asks their name.

(Don't forget... all of these things require *training*. Again, your children are not naturally born with these skills. You'll probably be embarrassed once or twice as your children do *not* rise to your expectations. It's often helpful to role-play some of these skills in advance.)

Respect for Peers

The first peers to whom your children must show respect are their siblings. You'll probably need to pray for wisdom many times as you try to fairly decide who was playing with the toy first. Don't be dismayed! Home is the perfect place to learn how to get along in relationships. Sibling arguments are simply tools for you to use as you teach.

Scripture offers many wonderful verses that you can teach your children to recite. The book of Proverbs especially contains nuggets of truth that will help you children learn to respond correctly. Begin to study the book of Proverbs on your own, and make a list of verses that could be used when someone is angry, selfish, or envious.

Some Scriptures should be memorized *before* there is a need, before times of conflict arise. An easy verse to teach a very young toddler is "Be ye



kind one to another” (Ephesians 4:32). One of my daughters couldn’t even speak, yet she could grunt it after me.

“Kiersten, say, ‘Be ye kind.’”

“Uh, uh, uh...”

“...One to another.”

“Uh, uh, u-u-uh.”

Sharing bedrooms, sharing toys, sharing candy – all of these life experiences can also teach your children to put the needs of others before their own. We are all naturally selfish when we’re born, and only with training can we learn to overcome our selfish tendencies. It takes great effort for us to think of others first, doesn’t it? Of course, it won’t be any easier for your children.

Therefore, take every opportunity to model selflessness before your children and to help them memorize Scripture that applies. Act out situations in advance. Give plenty of verbal reminders. Apply appropriate consequences for disrespectful behavior when necessary.

As your children begin to interact with friends in the neighborhood or from church, you can teach your kids to show hospitality by sharing toys and treating their friends as honored guests in your home.



Respect for Property

Showing respect for people's property is actually just showing respect for the property's *owner*. A child can begin learning this by respecting the property in your own home. When he begins to crawl, teach him what things he may or may not touch. Again, think ahead! Do you really want your child to play with the remote control or with the buttons on the front of the television? What will happen when you're at Great Aunt Martha's house and your child breaks her expensive television? What will happen when your child bangs the remote on the coffee table and ruins it? Always parent with an eye to the future, putting yourself in others' shoes and asking yourself how they would feel.

*"And as ye would that men should do to you,
do ye also to them likewise."*

Luke 6:31

You can set an example in this area by not walking across your neighbor's lawn or picking the flowers in the park. Clean up after your pets, and change your baby's diaper somewhere where an accidental spill won't harm a nice bedspread or expensive carpeting.



If your child does break something, intentionally or by accident, then you'll need to teach your child the principles of restoration. If we break something, we fix it or replace it. If we lose something, we get another. If we steal a toy, we use our own spending money to buy something nice for the other person, in addition to restoring what was taken. When we do something wrong, we apologize, freely confessing our faults, and we make it right.

Freedom

Wouldn't it be great if children always did exactly as we asked? No conflict, no frustration, only joy? Unfortunately, as long as we're dealing with sinful human nature, our children will choose to disobey sometimes.

We adults are no different. God has given us a free will, the opportunity to choose to follow Him or to choose to go our own way. We realize that our choices have consequences and that we must live with the results of our decisions. God loves us very much, and I'm sure it must hurt Him badly when we make evil choices and must live with the unpleasant consequences. However, in His sovereignty, He still lets us choose.

Our children also quickly learn that choices have consequences. Our job as parents is to show them that good choices have good consequences, while bad choices have bad consequences.



Some children learn that bad choices have no consequences or even pleasant consequences. Or they decide that whatever consequence comes is worth the momentary pleasure of doing wrong. This is dangerous thinking that can lead to disaster later.

Our goal as parents is to help children learn how to make wise choices. When our children are very little, we make most of their choices for them. They simply don't have the knowledge they need to be able to choose well.

“Susan, would you like ice cream for dinner, or would you like this vegetable casserole?”

“Ice cream, Mommy...”

Choices can be very addictive. Once you have the freedom to choose, you don't want to have that freedom taken away. So be very careful about the amount of freedom you give to your young children.

For instance, when your baby is just learning to crawl, set specific boundaries. Do you really want your child to freely move through every room of the house? Is every room safe? Will you be able to effectively watch your child at all times and in every place?

We found that an easy solution was to teach our child to be happy in a small space before we increased his boundaries. We would set our crawling baby on a blanket and teach him to stay within the boundaries it provided. If Baby crawled off the



edge, we would gently say, “No, Baby,” and set him back on the blanket. If he continued to try to crawl away, a firm smack on his diaper would let him know we were serious.

When Baby learned to obey our word and stay on the blanket, we would allow him the privilege of crawling further. Room by room, we would teach him proper boundaries. In effect, our words (“No, Baby”) became sufficient to teach him where he could and could not go. If we were visiting at Grandma’s house or spending time at church, a simple “No, Baby” was sufficient to keep him out of trouble.

Some parenting experts refer to this technique as “tomato staking.”⁵ Just as a young tomato plant is tied to a stake until it is strong enough to survive the storms of life, our children need to stay close by our side until they have proven themselves worthy of our trust. Our family has chosen to follow this advice literally. If Mom is typing at the computer, Baby is playing by her side on the floor. If Dad is watching the football game in the living room, Baby is occupied with toys by the couch. If Baby begins to be naughty, Mom or Dad is close by to immediately correct the behavior and teach Baby how to do right. Many problems are prevented.

As the child grows, he will want to begin venturing further or making choices. How can a parent know if the child is *ready* to make wise choices? First, what is the child’s attitude if Mom

⁵ <http://raisinggodlytomatoes.com>



says “No”? Does the child throw a fit or argue with Mom? If so, the child is not ready for that choice.

This:

“Mommy, I want chocolate milk, not plain milk.”

“No, Son, you don’t need any more sugar this afternoon. You may have plain milk or nothing.”

“Yes, Mommy.”

Not This:

“Mommy, I wanted the red cup, not the blue cup!”

“I’m sorry, Son, but I’ve already poured the milk into the blue cup.”

“Waaaaaa....”

Attitude is the key. Pay close attention to your child’s tone of voice as he answers you. A bad attitude is actually disrespect in disguise. Do not let it continue!

One area of choice in which a child is often given too much freedom is his schedule. Many problems with young children can be prevented simply by not allowing inappropriate freedoms with his time. Plan the majority of his time so that he is occupied constructively, and only allow a small



amount of “free” time. Remind the child that “free” time is a privilege, and if he chooses badly how to spend that time, you will remove that privilege until he has proven his obedience again. (Untie the tomato from the stake, but if the wind is too strong, don’t hesitate to tie the tomato again.)

Consistency

What will you do when your child crosses a boundary or disobeys your instructions? You need to have a plan in place, and the name of that plan should be “Consistency.”

Your child will certainly test you, to see if you really mean what you say. In fact, I’ve found that I don’t get nearly as frustrated with my children if I just realize they’re searching for my boundaries. How far can I be pushed? I just make up my mind not to be pushed.

If I ask my children to do something, I expect them to obey. In our home, **obedience is defined as obeying immediately and completely, with a happy spirit.**

So I ask myself:

- Did the child obey immediately?
- Did the child obey completely?
- Did the child have a happy spirit?



If I had to answer “No” to any of these questions, then I must be sure there are consequences.

However, especially when I’m tired... or if I just sat down and don’t feel like getting up... or if my husband is home and I feel like I deserve a break and it’s his turn to deal with the kids... or if I’m just tired of being “The Bad Guy,” I find that I’m very vulnerable to the three enemies of Consistency.

Enemy #1: Repeating

“Son, did you hear what I said?”

“Don’t make me repeat myself!”

“I’m going to count to three, and I expect you to obey! One... two... three... three and a half...”

“Go... Go now... Right now... Come on, Honey... Do as I said...”

Enemy #2: Threatening

“Either you do as I said right now, or you can’t have any dessert tonight!”

“You just wait ‘til your father gets home!”

“You better do as I say, or I’m going to get the spanking spoon!”

“You’re gonna get it!”



Enemy #3: Bribing

“If you do as I say, I’ll give you a piece of candy.”

“Don’t you want to be Momma’s special boy? Do as I say right now.”

“I bet you can behave better than your sister.”

“If you’re a big boy, you’ll do as I say.”

Why are each of these strategies so dangerous? Because our children aren’t obeying because they have learned to do right. Rather, they’re learning that they can gamble with evil. (“I guess I don’t have to obey until Mom says ‘3.’”) Or they’re learning that love can be bought, as in the case of bribery. Or they simply decide that they don’t care about doing right but they really are afraid of their father coming home.

Actually, these enemies of consistency are quite cruel. Consistency means that you say what you mean and mean what you say. Life is predictable again for your children. They know what to expect, they know where the boundaries are, and they are content to live within your expectations. Instead of losing your temper, you simply follow through with what you said, carry out any consequences as needed, and you all get on with your life. Case closed.

Why must you use consequences? Consequences provide outer motivation for obedience until your child has filled his heart with



enough moral resolve to choose to do right for the sake of doing right. Until the heart is trained, consequences help motivate correct choices.

So what kinds of consequences can you use? You want to choose consequences that “fit the crime,” so to speak. Just as grown-ups face some time of pain or discomfort when they make bad choices, so we need to provide unpleasant consequences for our children’s wrongdoing. Children need to learn that their choices affect themselves and others. In providing consequences, we aren’t being mean; rather, we’re being merciful and sparing our children potentially bigger problems down the road.



“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

Hebrews 12:11

If your child is disobedient or disrespectful, you’ll need to bring consequences. It seems to us that a proper spanking is the most merciful way to bring justice and teach our children right from wrong. Why is a spanking merciful? Because the child knows ahead of time what to expect if he is disobedient or disrespectful. Because we carry out the punishment immediately, we can quickly wipe away the tears, forgive, and go on with life. The pain is gone, the lesson is learned, and our home is happy again.

On the other hand, I’ve seen small children have to sit in “time out” for more than half an hour. Every two minutes, the child might ask if the time is up. Mom says, “If you would just sit there quietly, then I’d let you up.” Soon the child starts to wiggle and play with a toy within reach. Mom hollers and adds five minutes to the timer. On and on it goes until finally Mom gives in... and the child wins? Or maybe Mom finally loses her temper and grabs the child, administering a spanking in anger.

In our home, we’ve determined that a proper spanking follows six important rules:



1. **Who** – We’ve found that the *younger* the child, the more effective a spanking is. On the other hand, by the time your child is five years old, if you’ve been parenting properly, you’ll rarely need to spank anymore. Never spank for accidents that happened innocently. Spank only for disobedience and disrespect.
2. **What** – A spanking consists of one or two *effective* whacks, only on the child’s clothed bottom, using an instrument chosen ahead of time, such as a wooden kitchen spoon.
3. **Where** – Spankings should be administered in private, never in front of siblings or relatives or friends. The purpose is to apply a consequence, not to embarrass your child to obedience.
4. **When** – Spankings occur immediately after the offense. We don’t make our children “wait for Daddy to get home,” nor do we spank as a last resort, after repeated threats and angry voices.
5. **How** – We take the child to a private place, ask them what they’ve done wrong, and explain *why* it was wrong. Then we spank, give hugs, dry tears, and forgive. We don’t mention it again. For very young children, we simply say, “No, no,” spank effectively, and move on.



6. **Why** – We spank, not to get even or to vent our frustrations, but to teach our children that evil choices have consequences.

Of course, there are lots of other consequences that could be applied in place of spankings. For instance, if a child steals, he needs to make restitution. If a child isn't playing nicely, he should lose the privilege of play for a short time. (Timers are helpful.) Again, we only use spankings for direct disobedience and willful defiance.

For instance, what if your child obeys but whines or complains? Is this really obedience? We don't think so. We would punish the child for disobedience.

What if a child asks for something in a whining voice? Since this isn't the right way to ask, what consequences should apply? We think that if a request isn't made properly, the consequence should be having to wait. We set a timer for a few minutes, at which time the child can ask again, using a good tone of voice.

What if the child becomes angry or throws a temper tantrum? If the child is very young (18 months or younger), we isolate the baby in his room until the anger subsides. We don't let him have any audience for his display. If the child is older, we would isolate the child, wait until the crying stopped, and then punish the child for disrespect.



*“He that hath no rule over his own spirit
is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”
Proverbs 25:28*

Don't forget that good behavior also brings consequences. Have you noticed your child acting in an especially kind way toward his sister? Reward him! Did your son remember to do all his chores without having to be reminded? Praise him! Rewards are not the same as bribes. Rewards are given in recognition of proper behavior. To forget to reward our children would be unkind and frustrating. A hug, a big smile, an extra piece of pie, or a small toy are all appropriate rewards.

Your speech in the home can go a long way toward providing a peaceful atmosphere and encouraging good behavior. Notice some things the Bible has to say about our speech:

*“She openeth her mouth with **wisdom**;
and in her tongue is the law of **kindness**.”
Proverbs 31:26*

*“The heart of the righteous **studieth** to answer:
but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things.”
Proverbs 15:28*



*“A **soft answer** turneth away wrath:
but grievous words stir up anger.”
Proverbs 15:1*

*“The **wise** in heart shall be called prudent:
and the **sweetness** of the lips increaseth learning.”
Proverbs 16:21*

*“The heart of the **wise** teacheth his mouth,
and addeth **learning** to his lips.”
Proverbs 16:23*

*“In the multitude of words there lacketh not sin:
but he that **refraineth** his lips is wise.”
Proverbs 10:19*

Teaching Biblical Values

We're all born with a sin nature. Proper training by faithful parents can replace our natural foolishness with Godly living. When your children are very small, most of your parenting consists of *correction*. You see error, you point it out, and you apply consequences. However, as you see your preschooler beginning to reason (big clue: You'll hear the word “why” repeated over and over!), you should be sure that you are not only correcting but *training*.



Training involves teaching your child not only what to do and what not to do, but also *why*. If you teach your child the reason behind proper behavior, hopefully applying Scripture if possible, your child will begin to accept *your* values as his own.

Child knows *what* to do:

“Johnny, why shouldn’t you hit your sister?”

“Because Mommy said so.”

Child knows *why*:

“Johnny, why shouldn’t you hit your sister?”

“Because it would be unkind. It wouldn’t be showing her love.”

The best way to teach your child *why* is to hide Scripture in his heart. Do you know why certain behaviors are wrong? Search the Bible for answers. Write down the verses and put them in categories. (Again, the book of Proverbs is a wonderful place to start.)

You could teach a verse each week, reciting the verse five times a day, each morning at breakfast. Be sure to discuss what the verse means. Have the children act out the verse or make skits showing how the verse can be applied to everyday life.

Or, when a conflict arises, you could take your children to the Bible and read aloud to them what it says. Ask them if they know how God wants them to act. Lead them in asking God for forgiveness,



then ask them to apologize to the one they've wronged. Require them to memorize the verse.

As you faithfully turn to God's Word for the authority for parenting, you'll be amazed at the character that blossoms in your children. The Bible has the power to change us, to mold us, and to correct our errors.

The Joys of Parenting

Sometimes being a parent can feel like too much work. We get discouraged. We think we're doing everything right, yet our kids continue to show their "human" side. Sometimes their childish antics wear us down. Disrespect angers us. We feel like giving up. "Let the schools fix them," we moan. "I've done my duty!"

Yet God's Word is clear that the responsibility for training rests upon the shoulders of the parents. By now, you understand that much of your work begins at birth, not at age five.

Your job is to teach order, respect, values, and love for the Father. Your goal is to one day have your child as a friend, someone who shares your values and desires.

But in the meantime, be a parent. Don't, in the name of love and friendship, allow your child to make choices that are beyond his ability. Don't, in the name of mercy, allow your child to willfully sin and get away with it. Rather, diligently train, teach,



and correct your child. Do it in love, with a kind tongue and a soft answer – but do it!

Then reap the benefits of a happy home and a well-behaved child who is ready to learn.



Developing Attention

Chapter 5

We've discussed some aspects of setting a good parental example, as well as the importance of maintaining order and teaching respect. Each of these areas is important if we want our children to be prepared for school.

However, when I think about getting my kids ready for school, I would prefer to think about all the fun “educational” activities that can fill the days of a preschool child. I like choosing good toys, reading interesting books, and going on nature walks. This is the *fun* part of parenting!

Playing is fun, but it also has a purpose. Play teaches a child to focus, to pay attention, and to control her thoughts, movements, and actions.



Even if you're planning to homeschool, take a moment to picture a typical classroom. The teacher's desk is in the corner, the students' desks are neatly arranged, maybe in rows or in groups. Cubbies along the wall hold lunch boxes and coats. A learning center holds art supplies, while another center houses a reading collection and yet another center contains educational games. The walls are decorated with festive colors, exhibiting parts of speech, classroom rules, or samples of students' work. A blow-up globe ball hangs from the ceiling. The chalkboards take up the front wall. A window to the left allows some natural light to come in. Near the door is a garbage can and a pencil sharpener. We can all picture it (and maybe even smell it)!

Why does a child, preparing to enter this environment, need to learn to pay attention? First of all, the child needs to learn to focus on the teacher – her voice, her commands, her intentions, and her routine. The child needs to learn to pay attention to the directions in workbooks, to color within the lines, to circle something even though she would rather X it. She needs to learn to pay attention to the words in her textbook, for if learning is to take place, she must do more than decode letters – she must comprehend information!

Sometimes, though, the child must learn how *not* to pay attention to certain things. The boy sniffing with a cold. The ticking of the clock. The children playing on the playground outside. Her friend's new toy.



Even more stimuli are attracting her from inside her head. Her lack of breakfast is making her sleepy. She is pretending that her desk is really a spaceship, and she's flying to distant planets. She wonders if she'll be the first one to the swing sets at recess.

Amidst all this mental clutter, a child must learn to concentrate. Even as grown-ups, whether sitting in a meeting or watching a football game on television, we must continually pay attention.

Children (and adults) who are unable to pay attention are routinely labeled as having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). It is estimated that over six percent of all children display the symptoms of ADD, which amounts to almost 400 million American children. The three classic symptoms of ADD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.⁶

I am certainly not an expert in mental disorders, nor do I want to suggest that all cases of ADD are simply children who have not been taught to pay attention. However, I firmly believe that we can prevent many of these symptoms by careful parenting of children between the ages of 0 and 5. In cases of true ADD, the symptoms can often be lessened by our parenting choices.

I believe that attention-span skills are simply a manifestation of the amount of self-control a child has learned. In other words, just as a child must

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/data.html>, June 28, 2020. This statistic has doubled since the first edition of this book in 2004!



learn to control her temper or her motor skills, she must also learn to control her mind.

Let's discuss a basic philosophy of self-control, talk about some ways you can begin to teach self-control to a very young child, and then finish with a discussion of some focusing skills that help prepare children to learn.

The Philosophy of Self-Control

My husband was an administrator at a public high school, during which time he had a conversation with one of the school counselors. They were discussing strategies to help teenagers who were disruptive at school and failing their classes. As they talked, they began to wonder why some students succeed while others have so much trouble.

The counselor stated that since children are born basically good, the problem must lie in the environment in which children are raised. She reasoned that if the school could convince parents to provide a helpful learning environment at home and schools could provide a safe, supportive environment during the day, most problems could be solved.

While there are grains of truth in her conclusions, my husband wisely discerned that her philosophy wasn't biblical. In fact, the Bible teaches that we are all "by nature the children of wrath"



(Ephesians 2:3). We have all been born with a nature that wants to do our own thing rather than please God. Since the idea that humans are born with a sin nature is certainly not “politically correct,” let’s look at some more Scripture verses that support this view. (Note that our sin nature corrupts our ability to think correctly.)

*“In whom the god of this world hath **blinded the minds** of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”*
2 Corinthians 4:4

*“And even as they did not like to retain God in their **knowledge**, God gave them over to a reprobate **mind**, to do those things which are not convenient...”*
Romans 1:28

*“Having the **understanding** darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the **ignorance** that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...”*
Ephesians 4:18

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”
Psalm 51:5

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”
Romans 5:12



Theologian Charles Ryrie explains it,

Total depravity does not mean that everyone is as thoroughly depraved in his actions as he could possibly be, nor that everyone will indulge in every form of sin, nor that a person cannot appreciate and even do acts of goodness; but it does mean that the corruption of sin extends to all men and to all parts of all men so that there is nothing within the natural man that can give him merit in God's sight.⁷

Because the Bible says my children are born with a sinful nature, this means they're like a tree that grows crooked. They have a natural "bent" toward sin. Only by careful pruning and staking by the gardener (that's Dad and me!) can the tree grow straight.

I think the sin nature shows up especially well in the area of self-control. Actually, the word "self-control" can be a little misleading. We don't really want our children to be in control of each situation, making all the decisions, do we? After all, we certainly have much more life wisdom than they to make good decisions. Our children can't possibly know all that they need to know, especially when they're very young.

⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p. 111.



So when we say we want our children to have “self-control,” don’t we really mean that we want them to be able to tell Self, “No,” when Self wants to do something that wouldn’t be good for them? Self-control means they can “control” their sinful nature, submitting instead to authority or to wisdom.

This is important. I’m sure your child loves to play. But is your child willing to play with toys that *you* choose? I’m sure your child likes to drink from colorful cups. But is your child willing to drink out of the green cup that you chose, even if she likes pink better?

“He that bath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”

Proverbs 25:28

It appears that all children have a natural curiosity to learn and discover. But will your child continue to be curious and develop a lifelong love of learning when she discovers that sometimes school is hard work?

All children are born with a sin nature, the Bible says. This means that your child is naturally curious – to do what *she* wants to do and to satisfy her own desires. Self-control comes when your child is willing to do what *you* want her to do and to learn



something new, even when it might not first appear to be very interesting.

It's obvious that self-control would be very helpful in a classroom. But if you choose to homeschool, your six-year-old child needs self-control to continue doing her handwriting lesson, even when her four-year-old sister is playing with dolls on the living room floor. She'll need self-control to study history, especially if she'd rather be learning about art. She'll need self-control to practice her piano lesson daily, even when it's not easy to control her fingers or to remember the names of the notes.

Teaching Self-Control

There are many ways you can begin to teach self-control. We've already talked about several:

- Expecting a child to communicate properly, with words or signs, rather than by screaming or demanding.
- Planning the child's day into a flexible routine, so that a sense of order is conveyed.
- Teaching a child how to help with chores to keep the house running smoothly, so that she learns to think of others besides herself.
- Requiring a child to put away her toys before she plays with something else.



- Requesting that a child obey you respectfully, immediately, and cheerfully.

From a very young age (before a year), you can begin to teach your child to have self-control over her emotions. An outgoing child will probably first have to learn to control her temper.

A mother of three children recently wrote about their family's attempts to teach their two-year-old daughter self-control:

...The only way that I knew of to make the tantrums stop was to get control of her. She needed to feel like the tantrums didn't work and that they weren't worth it. That means I needed nerves of steel!

I tried reasoning. It doesn't work. She knew that eventually, she would get what she wanted if she held out long enough. I would first take away all her choices. She thought she could control my husband and me by throwing tantrums. So I needed to take away her entire freedom of choice. She wasn't permitted to choose when she got up, what she ate, when she ate, what she ate or drank out of, what she wore or when she went to bed. She could have NO free time, but did only what I told



her to do. That doesn't mean she had no playtime, but she needed to play where I told her to and with what I told her to.

At first, this caused more tantrums because she was not used to being told what to do. She rebelled and tried to get back the control. But if I gave in, it only made it harder the next time. She had to know that no matter what she did, it would not work to get what she wanted.

I COULDN'T GIVE IN TO HER FOR ANYTHING! This included distracting her away from what she wanted. Distraction was not really dealing with her real issue!

...Now, she is a very happy seven-year-old. I cannot remember the last time she threw any kind of tantrum. She is willing and obedient. The process of teaching her to obey was awful, but she is a joy now. You would not even know what kind of toddler she was.

I've also learned that I needed to be more proactive with the next baby. If you don't give in to the temper tantrums when they are babies, they learn quickly that it doesn't work and they stop. I have a seven-month-old



who already has thrown a tantrum. I knew he was not hungry, not tired, not messy, etc. He just didn't want to sit in his car seat, so he was arching his back and crying very defiantly. So I spanked his little leg and said, "NO" in a very firm voice. He stopped mid-scream from shock, but he has not tried it again. He has already learned what the word "no" means. When I use it, he immediately stops what he is doing. I have had to slap his little hand or leg a few times, but already he is learning! He has learned to lie still while I change his diaper, and when I say, "Okay!" he can play again! It really is amazing what they can learn even at that young age....

This wise mother also shared that when her daughter was having a temper tantrum, she needed to let her calm down *before* she spanked her. It seems that children in the midst of a temper tantrum will happily endure the pain of a spanking if it means they might get their way. She would isolate her daughter so that she didn't have the satisfaction of an audience from Mom. Only when the tears subsided would she administer a spanking.

Some children will never lose control with a defiant temper tantrum. Instead, they'll try to challenge your authority with a whine and a



complaint. If they know you won't allow whining, they might even attempt a slightly poochy lip or a dejected slump of the shoulders. Be careful! Remember that obedience needs to be respectful, immediate... *and* cheerful.

As your children get older, you can begin to teach them Bible verses about self-control. As the Bible says, when God's Word is hidden in our hearts, we will have the power to not sin (Psalm 119:11). An excellent resource is the book *For Instruction in Righteousness*, published by Doorposts.⁸

Another area where you can teach self-control is potty training. There are many views on when you should teach this skill, and while I don't want to dive into too many specifics, let me give you some things to consider.

I wait to potty train my children until they have shown me that they can consistently obey. Why? Because I can't really control their bodily functions. It doesn't take long for a child to figure out that they can do what they want when it comes to potty training. After all, I might yell, bribe, fuss, and nag, but can I *force* them to use the toilet? No, this is a physical skill that they have to learn – *if* they want to!

So obedience comes first. Ideally, my children have learned to obey me by two years of age. (It seems that our biggest battles happen between 18 and 24 months.)

⁸ <http://www.doorposts.com>



Secondly, if I truly want my child to be able to practice self-control in her toilet habits, I need to teach her to use the potty independently of me. So months before I introduce her to the potty, I teach her how to dress and undress herself. I make sure she has matured enough that her little fingers can slip her own pants up and down.

When the big day (or week) comes, I spend several hours teaching her what a potty is for, how to use it, and when to use it. I give her plenty to drink so that she has lots of practice identifying the correct muscles. I teach her how to run into the bathroom, pull down her pants, climb up on the toilet, go potty, wipe and clean up as necessary, get down, pull up her pants, flush, and wash her hands. My goal is to teach her how to perform all these functions without any assistance from me. When she succeeds, I reward her with plenty of hugs, lavish praise, proud calls to Grandma, stickers, and even candy. Within a week, she has perfected her first major skill and is feeling heady with accomplishment.

Now my child is getting older, and I need to teach her self-control over her attention span. Two areas I work on are requiring my child to sit still in church and teaching her to pay attention as I read stories to her.

To teach my child to sit still in church, I begin by practicing at home. Every morning at breakfast, I read a short passage directly from the Bible to all my children. I expect them to sit quietly and listen as I



read, without touching things on the table or poking siblings. I ask them questions to be sure they're listening. I will often ask them to re-tell the story in their own words.

We also have specific rules for church. For instance, they are not allowed to turn around in their seats, whisper to a brother or sister, or make inappropriate noises. If they drop a Bible or hymnal, I do not allow them the privilege of picking it up again. When I have a young toddler, I require her to sit quietly on my lap, possibly holding a favorite blanket or sucking her thumb. All my children are taught to fold their hands at my command so that if they begin to get unruly, I can immediately control their little fingers. (This skill is also helpful in the grocery store or in the car.) We sing many church songs at home so that our children will be familiar with them and able to sing along with the congregation. We pray often at home so that they know to bow their heads and close their eyes when someone is praying at church. I personally feel that even young children can benefit from being with the adults in the "adult" worship service, rather than always being entertained and having little expected of them.

Learning to listen as I read aloud at home is helpful preparation for learning to listen to an adult at church. In addition to our after-breakfast Bible reading, I expect all my children (age two and up) to play quietly and listen as I read a chapter from a book each day. I might begin with simple story books (such as the excellent *20th Century Children's*



Book Treasury). We enjoy books such as the old-fashioned *Bobsey Twins* series or *Little House on the Prairie*. As I read a few pages each day, the children learn to pay attention, to remember facts from the stories over many days, and to imagine scenes in their minds. (An excellent listing of read-aloud books can be found in *Honey for a Child's Heart*, by Gladys Hunt).

On the other hand, I have to be especially careful not to undo all my careful training by permitting excessive television viewing. Television needs to be watched “with a purpose.” Sure, sometimes that purpose can be having fun, but be careful that you’re not popping in a video or turning on a children’s program to give yourself half an hour of free babysitting.

Before you allow your children to view a show, consult with your husband about specific standards for your home. Set time limits, and enforce them strictly. I have a specific time for TV set aside on my schedule, to ensure that our time limits aren’t exceeded. Finally, I feel that television is a privilege that must be earned (and that can be revoked if needed).

Teaching Focusing Skills

You’ve been teaching valuable skills to your children! Now it’s time to zoom in on some specific things you can do to prepare your kids for school.



You've taught them to obey cheerfully, to control their tempers, and to sit quietly and listen. What else can you do?

I strongly believe that play is a child's work. Of course, I expect my young children to keep their rooms clean and their toys picked up and to help with simple chores. However, when playtime comes, I don't want to simply provide toys and no boundaries and expect my children to stay out of my hair.

Play gives children a chance to use their large and small motor skills as they stack, snap, fit together, take apart, and move. Their minds are exercised as they learn to build, as they pretend, and as they make sense of patterns and shapes.

All these benefits affect which toys we purchase for our children. If your home is like ours, it's very easy to let toys take over the house! It is wise to choose a time, once or twice a year, during which you sort through your children's toys and get rid of those that don't serve a purpose. Choose toys that are classics and will last your children for many years. Sell, give away, or toss everything else.

I like to *teach* my children how to play properly. I used to think that children naturally know how to play, but I've found through experience that they don't. Without my guidance, playtime quickly evolves into a minute with this toy, a minute with that toy, a few minutes of goofiness, and then maybe a sibling war over a favorite toy,



followed by tears and... before I know it, what a mess!

So I begin playtime training at a very young age. When my baby can sit up, I begin to plop her into a playpen for a few minutes each morning, at a time when she is content and not too sleepy. I give her a plastic bowl filled with age-appropriate toys, such as rattles or brightly colored blocks.

The playpen offers her a safe place to explore these toys. The walls of the playpen provide a natural boundary. Because she's not interested in wandering around the room, she can learn to focus on the handful of toys I've provided. At first, she might just chew on a block, but in time, she'll attempt to stack the blocks, knock over the stack, and do it all over again. She is learning to focus without the distractions of a huge room.

As she looks at objects, turns them over, shakes them, and chews them, she is gradually increasing her attention span. During the first days in the playpen, she'll probably only last a few minutes before crying for you to rescue her. But as you consistently make playpen time a part of her daily schedule, you'll be able to gradually increase the time to thirty or forty-five minutes.

She'll also learn to be creative. Our society often thinks that creativity is the result of unlimited freedom. This is why kindergarten children are often given an array of paint supplies and a blank canvas, and are expected to produce a childhood masterpiece. However, in years past, instructors



gave a picture to their students and asked them to copy it. Musicians learned to compose by hand-copying manuscripts each day. Writers learned how to write an essay by copying and analyzing the works of great authors. In the same way, our children will learn to be creative when they are given boundaries and expected to use problem-solving skills as they play.

The development of creativity can start in the playpen. Rather than allowing your children unlimited freedom in her choice of toys, give her a stack of blocks. She will have to think creatively as she builds first a tower, then a house, then a garage or a rocket or an entire city.

Finally, when playpen time ends (and I set a timer so that I don't abuse the free time that playpen time gives me), teach your child how to clean up her toys. You can help your child, but gradually begin to teach your child the value of neatness.

Sometime before your child's second birthday, she'll outgrow the playpen. Now is the time to simply schedule a daily independent playtime in her room each day. Be sure the environment is safe, and require her to clean up her toys when playtime is over. Schedule playtimes for all your children, rotating the times if they share a room. Individual playtime can continue for most of their childhood.

I also like to schedule times for my kids to play with their siblings. Since I homeschool, I want my children to learn how to play kindly with "peers." On my schedule, I pair off the children so that they



have the opportunity to become better friends with each of their siblings. When scheduling playtimes for young children, I make sure I'll be in the same room to monitor all the activities.

I also schedule times for outdoor play. Children need plenty of exercise, opportunities to run and make lots of noise, fresh air, and sunshine. Charlotte Mason, a British educator from the nineteenth century, believed that children should be exposed to God's creation each and every day. She took her pupils on nature walks, discussed the things they saw, and taught them to keep journals of their observations. I've found that even a young child likes to draw a bird and color it red, like the one she saw in the tree on our walks. Kids enjoy discovering the first tulips of spring, smelling them, feeling their texture, then drawing them in their journals. Nature walks also provide excellent opportunities to reinforce that God made the world and that He lovingly cares for all His creation.

Preschool children need healthy breakfasts, simple chores, and structured routines to their mornings. (In the afternoon, I require all my children to take naps until at least age five.)

After chores, we spend time teaching musical skills. Actually, I have simple music playing in the background throughout breakfast and during much of the rest of the day. At garage sales and school auctions, I have collected children's music books and school textbooks so that I have an ample supply of songs to teach my kids. We sing together, clap



rhythms, and dance around the room as we beat on pans and make drums from empty food containers. Mothers who don't feel confident about their musical skills could easily turn on YouTube or a CD and simply enjoy the music. Start young! The ability to "carry a tune" or appreciate good music isn't so much talent as it is exposure – often and early!

We also have "school time," which consists of learning many different skills. Children need to learn important pre-reading skills that can only be obtained by frequent exposure to books. They need to know that we read by following letters from left to right. This can be taught by simply running your finger under the words as you read from picture books. Show your child that the book has an author and an illustrator.

As you cuddle on the couch with books, in the morning, before naps, and before bedtime at night, your child will discover that letters are just a code to be deciphered. She will be introduced to worlds unknown and will be furnished with lots of great ideas for creative pretending. Don't be afraid to read books that are above her reading level. Children can understand much more than we give them credit for. Reading aloud will expand her knowledge of the world as well as her vocabulary.

Morning school time should also consist of putting together puzzles, stringing pattern beads on shoelaces, putting stickers on calendars each morning, and listening to the rhythmic flow of poetry read aloud.



Teach your children to count. Hang a “hundreds chart” on your wall, which is simply a display of all the numbers from 1 to 100, arranged in rows of ten each. You can make one or purchase one cheaply at a school supply store. Use the chart to count, first to ten or twenty, then eventually to 100. Then you can “skip count,” which simply means counting by 2s or 3s or 5s. This is excellent preparation for multiplication. Count together as you ride in the car, as you shop, and as you weed the garden.

Spend time together in the kitchen. Count out the silverware and plates as you teach your child how to properly set the table. Learn fractions as you bake cookies together ($\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup, etc.).

Math skills will be developed as you play board games together. Store-bought games often display a recommended age, and I’ve found these to be fairly accurate. Children will learn how to count out spaces, how to take turns, how to “subtract” as they lose a turn or have to move backwards, and how to follow directions. Of course, they’ll also be learning to take turns, play fairly, and even lose with a cheerful attitude.

Each of my children has his own crayon box, filled with crayons, a pair of children’s scissors, a small bottle of glue, and pencils. I have coloring books and simple preschool workbooks in which my children practice tracing (a great tool for learning to control hand movements), coloring (fabulous for learning how to stay in the lines, a form of self-



control), cutting (a skill that seems to be more difficult for boys than girls), and more. They learn their colors, their shapes, and simple artistic principles. They develop fine motor skills that will aid them when learning to write, attention-span skills as they learn to finish coloring the picture they started, and discipline.

I'm not a terribly artistic person, so I need to schedule times for "arts and crafts." After naptime on Monday afternoons, we do "art," which is simply another name for pulling out the paint supplies or play dough. Tuesday is the day to study a page or two from a picture book that shows great historical paintings. On Wednesday we do "crafts," which are projects with a purpose. Maybe we'll make a gift for a friend or bookmarks for school or a mobile that displays the things God created on each day of Creation Week. Throughout the week, I try to schedule fun projects that teach my children as they also occupy time.

You can also prepare young children for history and science by reading stories about real people, looking at pictures of historical places on the Internet, and taking "field trips" to sites of interest near you. Do simple science experiments, learn about each of your five senses, grow plants from seeds, take care of pets and other animals, and continually talk about God's creation.

All of these activities require a little advance preparation on your part. Set up a schedule that will work for your family, take a few weekend minutes to



gather supplies, and begin purchasing resources that will give you ideas.

As you teach your children to have self-control and to focus on simple activities, you'll be amazed at how much they learn. I've only touched on the possibilities, but I think you can see the potential that your children have. Start early, be consistent, and dream big. "Redeem the time" (Ephesians 5:16).



Beginning School

Chapter 6

As we conclude our discussion on getting your child ready for school, we need to talk about why formal educators use the methods they do and what your early elementary student needs to learn. We'll close with ideas for parents who have chosen to homeschool.

Educational Goals

Educators across America are searching for a model of education that brings consistently good results. We need well-educated children who have



certain bits of knowledge in common with each other so they can communicate intelligently. We need young people who can help our country compete effectively in the international marketplace. We need smart people who can help us solve the many social problems our culture is facing.

Since ancient times, philosophers have been debating the purpose of education. In ancient Sparta, for instance, the goal of education was to train young people to serve the city-state. Boys were removed from their homes at very early ages and taught to be effective soldiers.

On the other hand, ancient Athens emphasized an individualistic, free-thinking method of education. What would help the individual further the culture? Art, music, and even gymnastics were all important parts of a curriculum that really had no standard. Each person learned whatever interested him.

If we study the education of ancient Israel, we find yet another method. Children began formal studies as soon as they were weaned, and they began memorizing large sections of the Old Testament by age five, beginning with the book of Leviticus. The fathers were principally in charge of their children's education, but this responsibility was often delegated to wise teachers. Teachers were highly respected, yet they were expected to maintain a high moral standard and to be an excellent example to their pupils.



Many have observed the way Puritans in colonial America built their educational system. While many of the first universities in this country were established primarily to train ministers of the gospel, it was expected that all people should be able to intelligently discuss matters of theology. The Puritans knew that our beliefs in God affect every area of our lives, whether we are bench makers or members of the clergy.

Philosophers such as John Dewey (1859-1952), who is called the Father of Modern Progressive Education, believed that man's reason is sufficient to discern all truth. Since Dewey's ideas became the backbone of our nation's schools beginning in the 1960s, we have seen a dramatic swing back to beliefs that reigned in ancient Greece – either that education should help children serve the state, or that education should be individually tailored to the needs and desires of each child.

So what is *your* philosophy of education? Do you have one? Were you even aware that your values in life have a dramatic influence on the way you teach your children?

Proverbs 4:7 says that “wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” Our children can have high IQ's and can learn advanced mathematics, and science, yet they can be fools.



*“The fool hath said in his heart,
There is no God....”
Psalm 53:1*

According to Jewish author Abraham Heschel, “Wisdom is the ability to look at all things from the point of view of God.”⁹ When we have adequately prepared our children for school by teaching them to honor us, to listen when we speak, to obey with a right attitude, to respect others, and to have self-control, we have already taken an important first step in teaching them to see life from God’s perspective. We will have taught them to think about God first, then others, then themselves last.

Facts are important, but facts learned in a void of self-control are inadequate. Daniel and the three Hebrew boys that were taken into captivity in Babylon were “well favoured, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace...” (Daniel 1:4). Our children need knowledge *and* character. When they have good moral character, they will be released to gain knowledge at a greater speed and to apply it to the world around them. Think of the potential!

⁹ Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), 75.



So as we discuss learning styles and methods of education, keep in mind your goal. Why are you educating your child in the first place?

How are you going to educate your child? Public school, private school, home school? I often tell parents to make a list of all the reasons they want to homeschool, but if you've chosen a more traditional method, you should also know why. (Both Mom and Dad should participate in this.) Tack the list to your refrigerator for a few days and jot down any later thoughts that pop in your head. When you're sure the list is complete, mark your top three reasons for your choice of school.

Check your list. Is your primary goal to promote wisdom? Or are you following the style of the ancient Greeks, hoping for a socially adjusted child or aiming to teach your child to be a free thinker? Take your list to Scripture and if possible, attach a pertinent Bible reference to each of your main goals. Some families even like to work up a "mission statement" for their children's education, a sentence or two that summarizes their parenting and educational goals.

Your family's way of expressing these goals will probably look different from ours. This is not a problem as long as the essence of our goals are the same: we desire God's wisdom for our children. Do not underestimate the importance of goals.

Of course, your children may learn differently than mine. If you were in college, preparing to be a public school teacher, you would surely take many



hours of educational psychology classes (many of which, unfortunately, are based in modern humanistic philosophy and follow the ideology of John Dewey). You would learn that there are four basic ways in which all people learn.

Carolyn Morrison, in her website for homeschoolers, tells about these styles:

At birth we are all essentially **tactile learners** (by touch) – we know what we feel. Our most highly developed sense of touch at that early age is in our mouths, and yet, so many people are surprised that babies automatically put everything into their mouths. Those little learners are simply exploring their world in the only way they know how. I'm quite sure that babies realize they will not obtain nourishment from their own fists, but instead attempt to learn everything they can about that first "toy" by sucking, chewing, biting – *studying* it with a highly trained sense of touch.

Kinesthetic learning (by movement) begins when Baby starts moving voluntarily. Every flailing movement of those tiny arms and legs is a major accomplishment for him. He is working on mastery of motor skills, from struggling to hold his head up to



grasping a crayon and beginning to scribble.

As children grow through toddlerhood, they learn the dimension of speech. With the understanding of language comes the ability to learn by hearing: **Auditory Learning**. Now Junior can be given oral instructions and is able to respond to them. Some parents regret this stage.

Visual learning (by sight) doesn't get fully under way until reading skills are mastered. Some early responses are visually motivated: Junior can easily determine that his brother has two cookies and he only has one, but it takes reading to completely open up the world of visual learning.

It is our greatest accomplishment as teachers to teach our children *how* to learn. If we can teach them to learn in many ways, we have achieved even more success.

We each have a natural tendency to learn in one style more readily than the others, but as we gain knowledge and confidence, we can expand our learning abilities as well. Take a moment to list the name and grade level of each child you teach. List each one's strongest subject (the one for which they need



the least amount of assistance/motivation) and his weakest subject (the one for which they need the most assistance/motivation). Keep these details in mind as you read through the sections on individual learning styles. Take notice of *why* each child is strong or weak in any particular subject area and gather ideas for what you can try as a new approach.¹⁰

I appreciate Carolyn Morrison's observation that "it is our greatest accomplishment as teachers to teach our children *how* to learn. **If we can teach them to learn in many ways, we have achieved even more success.**" I think that the educational movement in America has been so focused on providing each child with a personally tailored education that we have forgotten that it is to their advantage to know how to learn in *any* style.

For instance, if you wanted to teach your child the alphabet, you would probably take into account his learning style. A tactile learner would benefit from tracing his letters on a cookie sheet filled with sand. A visual learner would love having ABC flashcards shown to him. A kinesthetic learner might enjoy jumping up the stairs, saying one letter on each step. An auditory learner would sing the letters of the alphabet.

But when your child is eighteen and heading off to college, do you still want him to only be able

¹⁰ <http://guiltfreehomeschooling.org> (used with permission)



to learn by tactile or kinesthetic methods? Like it or not, will his future employer understand his need to always be up and moving?

Our world is set up to favor visual and auditory learners over tactile and kinesthetic. While learning styles are helpful and can guide us when teaching our children, I think it is wise to choose a method of teaching that will give your child experience in all the learning styles.

In addition, are there certain minimum standards that tell you what all children should learn? States are fighting over this very topic now. Some people say that our country needs a standardized curriculum so we can guarantee that all graduates meet a minimum standard of excellence, ensuring us a place in the world economy and providing good employees for our businesses.

While most homeschoolers agree that lawmakers and liberal educators should not choose what our children learn, for fear we will be required to teach subjects we oppose, I again wonder if we're swinging to the other extreme. Are we so afraid of accountability that we resist teaching essential skills to our children? Is it not true that our children *need* to learn how to read, write, do arithmetic, and think logically? Aren't there certain historical and scientific facts that all children should know?

Educator E.D. Hirsch has written a book entitled *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. He argues that unless our citizens have a basic skill level, a common ground of information,



we will not continue to excel as a country. We need common points of reference so we can freely exchange ideas. He has co-authored an extensive collection of books designed to help parents and teachers give their children a common “core knowledge.”

While Hirsch has also published a dictionary that lists thousands of things children should learn, I have to wonder if his list should be the final authority. Who should decide what our children need to know? Should researchers or educators? Should politicians? Should churches? Should parents?

*“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes:
but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”*
Proverbs 12:15

We return once again to our educational goals. My goal for my children is to train them in wisdom. I believe this includes a common cultural literacy, but my highest aim is for them to read and understand the Bible for themselves and to be able to apply it to every area of their lives, whether politics or employment or family living or using money wisely.



Learning Styles

Once we've established our basic philosophy of education, it's time to decide how we'll reach our goals. We're going to look at traditional methods of homeschooling as a model of the various kinds of education. As homeschooling has evolved, many different ideas have emerged. Let's take a look at some of the most common:

- **School at Home**

These homeschoolers want to reproduce classroom techniques in their own homes. They tend to use many textbooks and workbooks and often purchase a complete curriculum. Their children might sit in desks, and you might find colorful charts on the walls. This is a “parent-directed” type of homeschooling in which the parent chooses what each child should learn and when.

- **Literature-Based Education**

These homeschoolers feel that textbooks are inferior to “real” books. Rather than use a packaged curriculum or workbooks, many parents choose to read books together and to experience history and science through the eyes of authors throughout time. This is often



a “parent-directed” type of homeschooling, in that the parent chooses either what the child learns or when. Sometimes it is also “child-directed,” in that the child might ask to learn something that especially interests him.

- **Classical Education**

These homeschoolers divide the stages of learning according to an ancient “Trivium.” During the first years, called the Grammar stage, children are taught to carefully observe and memorize details. The middle years are called the Dialectic stage, and children are taught the rules of logic and how to reason. Finally, in the Rhetoric stage, children learn to present knowledge effectively. This is usually a “parent-directed” type of homeschooling and includes the study of classics throughout the centuries.

- **Relaxed Education**

These homeschoolers don’t fit into any particular style except that they provide a rich environment of books, learning resources, and activities and stay available to have long discussions with their children. This is often a “child-directed” type of homeschooling because the parents do not require any



type of study that does not interest the child.

I tend to think that each of these styles has merit as well as potential drawbacks. For instance, a mom might not want to have “school at home” because she’s a hands-on person who likes to go on many field trips, make extensive science projects, or engage in discussion. Other moms love books and hope to use a literature-based style to impart a love of learning to their children. I believe there is certainly room for all of us to express our various personalities and gifts when educating our children.

I also know that when I read other people’s reasoning behind the styles they use, I usually feel quite convinced. I’m ready to chuck what I’m doing and try something new. Everyone’s ideas sound so good!

*“The first one to plead his cause seems right,
Until his neighbor comes and examines him.”
Proverbs 18:17, NKJV*

*“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man,
but the end thereof are the ways of death.”
Proverbs 16:25*



Classroom teachers make many of the same choices. I enjoy observing the way different teachers set up their classrooms. Some have neat and orderly rows, each desk lined up like a soldier. Others place the desks in a circle so that students can see each other's faces. Some place the desks in groupings of three or four around the room so that students can interact. Still others toss the desks and have the students sit on comfortable pillows on the floor or migrate to various centers around the room.

If you are planning to homeschool, how will you choose a style for your family? Let's review the basics.

- ❑ **By which style can you maintain an orderly home environment?** The day you become your child's kindergarten teacher, you'll also need to continue being a wife and mother. You'll need to be able to continue fixing healthy meals, cleaning your house, and getting adequate rest. You'll probably continue to have duties in your church or community. In addition to helping you survive the busy life of a homeschooling mom, order provides security to your family and teaches self-discipline to your child.
- ❑ **By which style can you best teach moral character?** If you choose a child-directed style, will your child naturally choose to learn about trustworthiness, respect for others, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship? Will your choice help your child



go beyond simply knowing *what* to do and teach him *why*?

- ❑ **By which style can you enhance your child's focusing skills?** By which style can you teach your child to learn in various ways, visual and auditory as well as tactual and kinesthetic? Which styles will help your child learn self-control? Which style can help you impart wisdom to your children?

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” James 1:5

If you'll be sending your child to school, can you see how these options affect your choice of a teacher or school? Can you brainstorm some ways in which you can influence these factors from home?

Homeschooling Methods

Veteran homeschoolers tell us that when they began homeschooling several decades ago, they had few choices whatsoever, whether it was textbooks or methods or support. They had strong reasons to homeschool, however, and they persevered when it seemed impossible.



Now the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. We have so many choices that parents often give up before ever getting started! For instance, if I type “homeschool curriculum” into my Internet search engine, I will receive over 6 million websites to look at! Companies will flood my mailbox with catalogs and my email inbox with freebies. Vendors at conventions will all convince me that their style is the best for my child. The typical homeschooling mom is under great pressure to constantly switch to another company, being reassured that doing so will give her child the success he needs.

So if you’re planning to take the homeschooling route, I’m going to be bold and give you my honest opinion about the options available to you. My recommendations may not fit your family, but I hope to give you some things to consider that you may not hear elsewhere.

Each homeschooling style has many methods to help you reach your goals. You can purchase a ready-made curriculum, or you can venture out and make your own. You can partner with others in your community, or you can teach all the subjects yourself.

I’m going to list the common subject areas that you’ll want to consider, then I’ll give details on my favorite methods for the early grades. As I describe some possibilities, remember that thousands of good choices exist. You’ll want to pray



over your own options, ask your husband for his advice, and start researching companies early.

I generally favor using a ready-made curriculum, for several practical reasons:

1. **I can always benefit from the ideas of more experienced teachers.** I try to read books and attend seminars that will train me in my chosen profession of “teacher” to my children, but I also appreciate the specific, daily advice that a planned curriculum gives me.
2. **With several children, I don’t always have time to make my own curriculum.** Even if I did, some subjects are easier for me than others. I enjoy learning from authors who have been studying a subject their entire lives.
3. **I have to make homeschooling fit my budget!** As my younger children get older, I’ll have five children in five different grades. I look for a curriculum that can be used many times so that the expense is minimal. On the other hand, if a “consumable” workbook will help my children reach one of our goals, I am happy to spend the money. I strive for balance.



4. **I look for a biblically-based curriculum company that shares my educational philosophy.** I am looking for a curriculum that teaches that God's physical laws are absolute, not relative or arbitrary. I want to reinforce that God created the world. I want to show how God had a plan in history. I look for a program that reflects the order and logic of our God. If the curriculum requires my children to memorize rules, analyze passages, and get adequate practice, then I'm thrilled.
5. **Finally, I look for a company that requires children to enhance all of the learning styles, not just one.**

Learning to Read

I personally approve of teaching my kids with a phonics approach to reading.

The ABeka Book catalog summarizes the benefits we've observed:

These materials... give a thorough, enjoyable, and highly teachable phonics approach to reading. Besides building the necessary background for confident reading, teaching phonics trains students to listen carefully, to obey willingly, and to develop



good habits of thinking, analyzing, organizing, memorizing, and applying important facts and rules.¹¹

I prefer phonics to sight words because there is no guessing involved. The Creator made languages to be orderly, with precepts building one upon another.

I want to teach phonics thoroughly because I believe that phonics is the first step toward fluent reading. My ultimate goal is to help my children comprehend anything they read. But how can they worry about “comprehension” if they are struggling to simply decode letters?

I prefer a phonics program that teaches the letter sounds, followed by lots and lots of practice blending letters together. I used to think phonics was boring because one workbook would ask students to recite a chart of phonetic sounds:

ba in bat
ca in cat
fa in fat
ra in rat, etc.

However, as I’ve been teaching my kids to read, I’m realizing that this “boring” recitation each day helps cement these sounds in my children’s brains. Now they are able to identify any word

¹¹ *A Beka Home School Catalog* (Pensacola, FL: A Beka Book, 2004), p. 25.



quickly. The more quickly they can “decode,” the sooner they are freed to begin “comprehending.”

I’ve also noticed that a firm and thorough phonics foundation helps my children learn to spell. Otherwise, spelling becomes a matter of memorizing a list of words or photographically remembering every word you’ve read. I prefer a more systematic approach to spelling.

Many phonics programs also help you check for reading comprehension. However, since you’re tutoring your child one-on-one, you’ll be able to tell if he is comprehending what he reads by simply asking him to tell you about the story or by watching him as he reads. If he laughs at the story, he is comprehending!

Teacher curriculum and lesson plan guides can be indispensable. I didn’t think so a few years ago. I balked at the idea of spending twenty or thirty dollars for someone to tell me what to do and when. However, one year we purchased a used curriculum guide at a garage sale, and I discovered the wealth of ideas it contained. Most publishers seem to agree on the importance of using all learning styles to teach children. Teacher guides contain helpful ideas for teaching skills kinesthetically and tactically, but they also suggest ways for students to learn visually and audibly. I like how the various drills and games stretch my children to think quickly and accurately. (Of course, as “teacher,” I’m always free to skip exercises that don’t seem necessary.)



Through flashcards and charts, I drill my children on phonics rules, then we enjoy reading simple stories together. I ask my children to read aloud so that I can check their fluency, pronunciation, expression, and understanding. Workbook assignments give further practice, although if a young child's motor skills aren't ready for too much writing, we can do *some* of it orally.

If I didn't have enough money to purchase a complete phonics curriculum, I would purchase an excellent book by educator Ruth Beechick called *The Three R's*, which contains instructions for reading, language, and arithmetic. (In fact, it's so good, I would purchase it anyway!) This book lays out an easy but thorough approach to teaching the basics to children in grades kindergarten through third grade. For children in grades 4-8, I recommend her book *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*. These books together will provide you with an effective teacher education program, tailored to the needs of homeschoolers.



Learning to Write

Writing begins with handwriting and ends with the goal of effectively communicating words.

For handwriting, I prefer to teach cursive handwriting from the beginning, rather than only teaching the modern ball-and-stick or italic styles.¹²

Learning Math

I have been researching math programs for years. For me, a math curriculum was one of the most confusing decisions we made. When I went to my first homeschooling convention, I was absolutely overwhelmed by the variety of methods available and the claims to success they made. After spending too much money trying various programs and after being frustrated time and time again, I chose the simplicity and effectiveness of Abeka's Arithmetic series.

The series consists of a daily worksheet for my child to complete. The younger grades have lots of opportunities to color, which helps develop small motor skills, and the directions are easy to follow. However, I would never skimp on teaching aids (flashcards and charts) or curriculum guides. I have been impressed with the wealth of information the

¹² For more about the logic of teaching cursive first, rather than manuscript handwriting, visit http://donpotter.net/education_pages/11gth.html.



guides give me, to help me effectively explain math concepts to my children. I have noticed my own math skills improving!

I also purchase a speed drill and test booklet for each child. The speed drills let me check how thoroughly my kids have memorized important math facts, and the tests help me catch any gaps in their knowledge.

ABeka Arithmetic does the best job I've seen of consistently reviewing concepts learned previously. Math is one of those subjects that not only must be *understood*. It must also be *drilled*. Another benefit is that ABeka Arithmetic is more advanced than other curriculum I've seen. By third grade, your child will have a thorough grasp of multiplication and division, as well as how to apply math to real-life situations.

The curriculum guides and teaching aids are relatively expensive, but I only have to purchase them once. The consumable aspects of the program are quite inexpensive compared to most programs I've seen.

The negative side of using Abeka's curriculum is that they sometimes include story problems, pictures, and examples with holidays and doctrinal issues that don't match the way our family teaches the Bible. Because of this, I have been developing my own math curriculum, which I hope to have available for sale someday.¹³

¹³ Our *Foundations of Arithmetic* math curriculum is now available at <https://homeschoolingt Torah.com>.



Learning the Bible

We believe that knowledge of the Bible, God's Word, is essential for our children (in fact, for *all* people). How can we know how to live in a way that is pleasing to God if we are not familiar with God's instruction manual? That's why, several years ago, we began searching for a Bible curriculum that our family could use. While we do think it is possible to piece together a strong course of study from the hundreds of resources available, several factors began to frustrate us:

- Many curricula seemed to follow a haphazard approach to learning the Bible, leaving possible gaping holes in our children's knowledge of God.
- We could not find a company that followed a chronological approach to Bible study. Why was this important? If our children didn't come to a clear understanding of God's nature and character, their own sinfulness, helpless and hopelessness, and Christ's all-sufficient saving work through His death, burial, and resurrection, then how could they understand God's plan of salvation and have certainty of their faith in Him?
- Many curricula fail to teach the Bible consistently as one book, just as God has progressively revealed it to us. Instead, we



saw hit-and-miss teachings, full of cute Bible stories and character training devices. Large portions of God's Word are never taught at all. We were convinced that if our children came to know and understand God's plan for their lives as revealed in His Word, they would develop Godly character as a natural by-product.

- Since the majority of Christian teaching emphasizes individual doctrines of the Bible rather than presenting the Bible as one complete, interdependent revelation of God, the result is often heresy, as well as the misinterpretation and overemphasis of certain Scriptures. How many lifelong church members still do not know the Bible as one book? How many have even read through the Bible in its entirety just one time? We didn't want this for our children.
- Finally, if we found a curriculum company that seemed to meet our goals, it was written for just one child to use, usually in a classroom setting. We were searching for a curriculum that we could use to teach all of our children, all at the same time – at a price we could afford!

That's why we have developed our own Bible curriculum. Here are some benefits of our plan:

- We offer a 3-year plan to studying the Bible. Year 1 studies the Old Testament, preparing your children for the coming of Christ by



presenting them with a clear picture of God's nature and character, as well as the nature and character of sinful mankind. They learn about the necessity of the Law and about God's plan to provide a Savior from sin. They will have a clear understanding of the place of Israel in God's plan. Year 2 studies the Gospels and Acts, as your children see how Christ was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament. They learn how the early church was founded and how God has continued to build His church. Year 3 continues the study of the New Testament by surveying the Epistles and the book of Revelation. At the end, your children will have the necessary framework to study systematic theology as well as character traits that are taught in the Epistles.

- We follow a chronological approach to the Bible. We urge you to start with *Year 1: Preparation for Christ* (Old Testament), no matter the ages of your children, so that a firm foundation for Biblical understanding will be laid.
- We teach your children how to study the Bible for themselves, using inductive and deductive methods. Your children will learn, through daily use of the Scriptures, how to find Scripture passages, understand God's Word for themselves, and apply it to their daily lives. Your children will also commit large portions of Scripture to memory, hiding



God's Word in their hearts so that they will not sin against God.

- We have your children read through the entire Bible once every three years. If your children happen to start using our curriculum in kindergarten or first grade, they will completely study the Bible four times before they finish high school. You don't have to worry about boring them, however. We offer learning activities suited to many different ability levels, so that all of your children will be challenged.
- We think you'll love our curriculum, especially if you're teaching several children at once. You will all be memorizing together, studying together, and applying God's Word together. We've included easy lesson plans so that Mom doesn't have to spend hardly any time in preparation.¹⁴

Learning History and Science

For kindergarten, our family just continues studying history and science in the same way we did during the preschool years. We take nature walks, we read library books, we watch good videos and documentaries, and we just talk.

During the elementary years, I enjoy Apologia's elementary science curriculum, written by

¹⁴ Our Bible curriculum is available at <http://FoundationsPress.com>.



Jeannie Fulbright.¹⁵ I simply divide the number of chapters in the book by the number of weeks in my school year to determine how much to do each week. We usually have plenty of time left over, so I use this time to check out library books, take nature walks, do kitchen “science experiments,” and follow areas of my children’s interest.¹⁶

For history, we emphasize learning geography as well as world history. We have developed our own curriculum to be used with all of our children at once, using the Bible as our primary textbook and supplementing with wonderful literature.¹⁷

Learning Music

I am a firm believer that the piano is one of the most useful instruments a child can learn. I know I’m biased, since I taught private piano lessons in our home for several years while our first children were still small. However, since beginning to educate my own children, I’ve become steadily more convinced that *anyone* can learn to play the piano – even mom! The piano is excellent preparation for any other type of music that your children may want to someday enjoy.

So, if you already have a piano teacher, rejoice! Mom’s job then is to communicate weekly with your teacher so that you’ll understand exactly

¹⁵ <http://apologia.com>

¹⁶ Our Science for Littles curriculum is available at <https://homeschoolingtorah.com>.

¹⁷ Our world and American history curriculum is available at <http://foundationspress.com>.



how your children are supposed to practice each day. No matter how good of a teacher you've hired, your children simply won't progress unless you consistently require them to:

- ❑ Practice every day!
- ❑ Play their songs correctly!
- ❑ Play their songs enough times each day to get better at them!

As one parent speaking with another, I want to highly recommend that you read *A Parent's Guide to Piano Lessons*, by James W. Bastien. It will tell you how to select a teacher and purchase a piano. (We found ours in someone's basement, ready to be demolished, and the homeowners *gave* it to us). It will give you concrete ways to help your beginner succeed and show you how to help them practice each day. Plus, the back of the book contains brief outlines of musical facts, a dictionary of musical terms, and other invaluable hints for parents.¹⁸

If you cannot find a teacher, or you cannot afford one, please don't give up on piano lessons. I am firmly convinced that you can teach your children enough to get them started, although without an experienced teacher, they may not develop the polish that will set them on the road to musical excellence. Regardless, you can provide them with a firm foundation in music and assure them a lifetime of musical enjoyment.

¹⁸ A website I highly recommend is <http://pianoeducation.org>



If you want to teach your children, I highly recommend that you first teach yourself. Stay about half a book ahead of your children. It only takes 10 minutes a day to play through the beginning songs, so just make it a ritual in your day, right after breakfast. You'll be much more confident of your abilities to teach your children if you first teach yourself.

How old should your children be to start learning to play the piano? I suggest that your oldest child be at least in kindergarten, already knowing a few letters of the alphabet and some numbers. Let your oldest child get at least half a book learned before the next oldest sibling starts. Very small children certainly *can* learn to play the piano; however, you might want to be a little more “experienced” as a teacher before attempting it. Even my youngest children, at the age of 18 months or so, desire to “practice” each day. I let them sit on the bench and push the keys for a few minutes. Three years old is the youngest I've started to officially teach my own so far. (Note: If piano keys get sticky or dirty from little fingers, use a baby wipe to clean the keys.)

Let's talk about what “textbooks” to use. Every teacher has her favorite, but if you'll be teaching your own children, I recommend that you buy *Piano Adventures*, Primer Level, which contains four small, purple books:



Lesson book
Performance book
Theory book (a workbook – consumable)
Technique & Artistry book

After the primer level, you will move on to Level 1, which also has four books. At the pace of about one level every 4-6 months, your child will continue to progress, until he has finished all five levels. You can expect each level to cost around \$20, so budget accordingly.

In addition, CDs are available for each level so that you can hear what the songs are supposed to sound like, plus your child can play along with the CDs for fun. I make it a rule to never listen to the CD, however, until after at least three days of practice with a new song. Otherwise, some children will memorize the sound of the song and never learn to read the notes on the printed page.¹⁹

The “Lesson Book” for each level contains a schedule in the margins for progressing through the books. Take at least a week on each song or two in the Lesson Book, also practicing the corresponding pages in the other books. Each child can keep his place in the book with his own color of paper clip. Expect your child to:

- Practice *every* day (except on Sabbath).
- Play each song *at least* 3 times correctly. (I often allow my kids to play any songs they

¹⁹ These materials can be purchased from <https://pianoadventures.com>.



wish once they have first practiced their lesson for the week.)

If your children do not play the week's lesson confidently, or if they have not practiced according to your expectations (every day, 3 times each song), then require them to play that lesson for another week.

In addition to individual piano practice, our family sings together each day. We began by purchasing quality music CDs when our children were young. I have especially enjoyed the *Wee Sing* music series. The CDs come with a simple music book that you can use to teach the words or even illustrate how to follow along with written music.

At a garage sale, I purchased an entire set of public-school music books, published in the 1960s, entitled *This Is Music*.²⁰ The books are old, and the songs are classic. My kids love singing them! Because they are only printed music, you'll need to first be able to play simple melodies on the piano if you want to hear what they sound like. We sing one song per week, sung several times each day. If you can't find this exact series, musical textbooks published by Bob Jones University Press are also excellent.

Finally, I play lots of classical music in our house. I purchased an inexpensive workbook called *Focus on Composers*, by John and Patty Carratello. The book covers each period of musical history and

²⁰ Although out of print, I have been able to find these books used on the Internet. One possible location is <http://www.abebooks.com/>.



introduces the major composers. It includes coloring pages, puzzles, and learning activities. All the pages may be reproduced for use by your own family.

Learning Other Subjects

The beauty of homeschooling is that you can customize each child's education, finding help for the weak areas and reinforcing personal strengths. While every child needs the basics (reading, writing, arithmetic, history, and science), don't forget to add some fun subjects to your day – such as arts and crafts, physical education, and life skills like typing and foreign languages.

When you're just beginning to homeschool and your child is in the early grades, keep these extra subjects simple. Learning about art can consist of practicing the basics, such as texture, line, color, shape, shading and perspective. Have a well-stocked craft cupboard, schedule a weekly time for art, and you'll be well on the way.

Art appreciation can be communicated through beautiful books on art. I like to check out the selection of books at my local library. I especially enjoy books that show famous paintings and ask lots of questions. We usually take one day each week to discuss a new painting, find out a little about the artist, and talk about the style used. We also enjoy copying the painting or trying something



similar ourselves! These are all easy ideas that require little time or money.

To learn how to give my children plenty of physical exercise, I developed a set of simple lesson plans. Our curriculum is designed especially for homeschooling families and gives ideas that are easy for mom to prepare. Even my preschool children enjoy doing sit-ups each morning and playing fun games in the back yard.²¹

Finally, begin thinking about life skills that will help your child as he matures. Keepers of the Faith Company publishes an extensive catalog with lots of ideas for teaching skills like baking, basket weaving, budgeting, canoeing, cleaning, dollmaking, first aid, hygiene, and much more. They even suggest an award system so your kids can earn badges for skills mastered.²² Homeschool support groups are another great resource for learning skills. Moms all have unique talents and are often interested in “swapping” instruction in some of these areas.

Summary

Order, respect, attention, and parental example – these are the four foundations upon which a successful education is built. We have seen that our long-term goal is to impart wisdom to our

²¹ You can read more about our P.E. curriculum at <http://foundationspress.com>

²² Go to <http://www.keepersofthefait.com> and request a free catalog.



children, and we've learned that God is our ultimate source of wisdom.

Whether your child is a newborn baby or a mature five-year-old, I hope you see that your parenting choices today affect how well your child succeeds in his education. But even with the best of intentions, you'll have many days of failure as well. Learn to talk frequently with your Heavenly Father. Beg Him for His mercy and grace in your home. Ask Him for His infinite wisdom. Search His Word daily, and hide it in your heart. Walk in the counsel of Godly men and women. Be creative and willing to change.

May God bless your home!



Recommended Reading

The following are books that our family has found helpful.

- *Beyond the Classroom*, by Laurence Steinberg

Establishing Order

- *Managers of Their Homes*, by Steve and Teri Maxwell
- *Sidetracked Home Executives*, by Pam Young and Peggy Jones
- *Nourishing Traditions*, by Sally Fallon and Mary Enig
- *Infant Nutrition*, by Mark Percival
- *Secrets of the Baby Whisperer*, by Tracy Hogg and Melinda Blau



- *What Every Child Should Know Along the Way*, by Gail Martin
- *The New Bible in Pictures for Little Eyes*, by Kenneth N. Taylor

Teaching Respect

- *Proverbs for Parenting*, by Barbara Decker
- *For Instruction in Righteousness*, published by Doorposts

Developing Attention

- *Honey for a Child's Heart*, by Gladys Hunt
- *On Becoming Preschool Wise: Optimizing Educational Outcomes*, by Gary Ezzo and Robert Bucknam

Beginning School

Note: The following books would be helpful for all parents, not just homeschoolers.

- *Biblical Home Education*, by Anne Elliott
- *Assumptions That Affect Our Lives*, by Christian Overman
- *The Three R's*, by Ruth Beechick
- *You Can Teach Your Child Successfully*, by Ruth Beechick
- *A Parent's Guide to Piano Lessons*, by James W. Bastien
- *Focus on Composers*, published by Teacher Created Materials



Other helpful resources are mentioned in the footnotes throughout the book and on our websites at:

- <https://www.AnneElliott.com>
- [https://www.FOUNDATIONSpress.com](https://wwwFOUNDATIONSpress.com)
- <https://www.HomeschoolingTorah.com>



About the Author

Anne Elliott is an author who has been teaching women, teenagers, and children for many years. Her experience ranges from teaching individual and small-group Bible studies in the local church to speaking at ladies' retreats and conferences. She has counseled unwed mothers, disciplined new believers, mentored newlyweds and challenged retirees.

Anne enjoys homeschooling her seven children. Her hobbies include playing the piano and reading. (Her family and friends tease her about the stacks of books she lugs around). She loves to experiment in the kitchen and garden, but she freely admits to her share of burned recipes and dead plants.

Anne Elliott has talked to women across the country, in person and via the Internet. Her goal is to convince women that they can all be “experts” simply by applying the Word of God to their lives.

You are welcome to contact Anne by e-mail at anne@anneelliott.com.