

fundamental knowledge to instruct our children in the basics, and we could easily learn what we did not know already or refresh our knowledge as we went along. Such is not the case when we teach teenagers. Beyond sixth grade, the subject matter becomes increasingly complicated and requires more knowledgeable input from the teacher. This fact does not necessarily mean that we need a strong educational background to educate our teens at home. But we need to know our strengths and weaknesses, and we need to be willing to seek help if necessary.

If our math skills and background are weak, we need to have someone else available on whom we can rely for assistance. Our choice might be Dad, a correspondence course, a tutor, or another home schooling parent. If we did fairly well in high school math, we might do fine just reviewing as our children learn, keeping current on what they are learning so that we can lend a hand as needed.

Writing is an essential part of our teen's education. If we are weak in the area of writing, we have no means of evaluating our child's written work. We need to have someone else available to assess writing assignments and advise us on problem areas.

A correspondence course can be very useful for those of us with poor educational backgrounds, but it is not a total solution. Correspondence courses take time for paper work to travel between teacher and pupil. Quite often, the student needs immediate help which is not available. Sometimes, correspondence teachers are available for telephone consultation, but that can get quite expensive.

Some parents have hired tutors to help with individual classes. Other parents have banded together for mutual benefit, trading skills and talents. (See Chapter Eight for possible options to consider.)

Before you begin, honestly evaluate your capabilities. Make sure that you do not take on more than you can handle. If your child "graduates" from high school without the ability to write a decent paper or solve basic algebraic or geometric problems, his future choices might be seriously limited. At the same time, do not underestimate your potential.

Logistics

Have you ever tried to explain an algebra concept with constant interruptions? It is impossible! I would advise you to think twice about teaching your teen if you already have your hands full trying to educate your younger children. I have often found it frustrating trying to work with two teenagers and just one younger child. My youngest still needs quite a bit of assistance with his work — often just a brief question. But all it takes is one brief question to blow your train of thought when you are *explaining* a difficult concept. Younger children cannot always tell when you are occupied or when it is the appropriate time to ask questions. And, of course, babies have no concept of proper timing. On the other hand, teenagers generally are able to study much more independently than younger children, so overall you should be spending much less time with them individually. You may be able to time classes so that interruptions are not a problem. Consider saving subjects that cannot be interrupted until evening when Dad can either teach or hold down the fort and run interference for you.

Some families have found it helpful to have older children tutor younger children. This is a great idea since it reinforces the knowledge of the older child while freeing Mom from having to be everything for everyone. However, all older siblings do not make good tutors, and sometimes the friction between older and younger children created in tutorial situations is worse to live with than the pressure of Mom doing it in the first place.

Be realistic in assessing the personalities and relationships in your family for tutoring and working together. Our children do not automatically develop wonderful personality characteristics when we home school. More commonly, they irritate each other from constant togetherness.

Shared Responsibility

Housework is an important topic when we discuss the logistics of home education. It can be very difficult to maintain a home school if the schoolhouse is rotting beneath our feet. Between lesson planning, research, teaching; checking work, field trips, music lessons, Scout activities, sports, and friends, we somehow must find time to maintain the homestead. I am not talking about "House Beautiful" but about keeping the health department from investigating. Some families are fortunate enough to be able to hire someone to come in every week or two to clean. It costs less than visits to the psychiatrist, so consider stretching the budget to cover the cost.

Even better is the situation where home maintenance is every family member's responsibility. Time is set aside for housework. Even the youngest children can help dust or pick up. Older children can mop floors, launder the clothes, prepare meals, wash windows, and mow the lawns.

In our society we have grown used to the idea that children should be involved in "activities" and parents are responsible for providing everything else to allow their children to participate in the activities. We end up shipping our children off elsewhere hoping they will acquire all the skills they need for life. We provide athletics to get them in shape, and then we hire gardeners to do the physical labor in our yards. We sign them up for "culinary arts" while Mom struggles to do all the cooking at home alone. We sign them up for activities to rescue them from boredom and to help them burn up their excess energy while we work ourselves into physical exhaustion.

Home schoolers are making radical changes in educational approaches. It is only right that those changes should extend to the way we view our family life and activities for children. If we have our children take an important role in maintaining the home they will learn far more than by participating in all manner of outside classes. Beyond that, it is important that children realize that the home belongs to the family, not to mom. My family knows not to say, "I *cleaned* the floor for you, Mom." They clean for the whole family! Every family member wears clothing and can see if the laundry basket is full. Any child older than ten should be able to sort and run a load of laundry with minimal help. Our daughter should never be blaming Mom because her favorite blouse is still in the laundry. Teenagers, especially boys, have a vital interest in food. They

are entirely capable of fixing meals, and what better way for them to realize how much work is involved? The point is, to make home education successful, it has to be a joint venture for all family members. One person (Mom) cannot be all things to all people.

Help and Support

Physical help and emotional support are both important to home schooling parents to varying degrees. Interestingly, the two often come together. If another person is heavily involved in helping us teach our children, they are most likely also emotionally involved with us and our children. In some families, fathers provide both physical and emotional support. However, many families have unrealistic expectations about father's participation. When families first begin home schooling, they often plan on father teaching one or two classes in the evenings along with acting as principal of the school. After Dad has been at work nine or ten hours, he still has his share of home maintenance. Then there are the nights set aside for Bible study, Awana, Scouts, and sports. Dad is lucky if he has a free evening or two a week. Despite good intentions, such plans often do not work out. Even so, some fathers still manage to provide much needed emotional support even though they do not have time to teach classes.

In some cases, unfortunately, fathers may not even be interested in the educational process. Sure, they are concerned that their children are doing well, but they do not want to get into discussions of whether or not John is ready to handle algebra. Count yourself fortunate if your husband is really involved with home education, but, if not, keep in mind that he has other priorities such as providing for his family. Do not try to use guilt to manipulate him into a more active role—it rarely works.

If Dad is not a terrific help when it comes to support or assistance, where do we go? Trading teaching talents with other home schoolers or taking advantage of some of the options discussed in Chapter Eight can help us with physical support in the actual teaching. Emotional support can be more difficult to come by. I have met home educators who have providentially found just the person they need to be a friend and confidante about home schooling, yet I also know of veteran home educators who are still praying that God will supply them with a supportive friend. All it takes is one other person. Emotional support (or lack of it) is a crucial factor for many home schooling mothers deciding whether to stick with it or not. We need *another* adult with whom we can discuss discipline and motivation problems. We need input from other home schoolers about ideas for methods and materials. And, most of all we need some encouragement that what we are doing is worthwhile.

Many home educating mothers are surrounded with skeptics. At the merest mention of frustration or fatigue, friends and relatives quickly *chime* in, “Why don't you put them back in school?” Even experienced home educators occasionally consider what it would be like to put their children into school. (Especially on bad days.) Mothers without anyone supportive to turn to do not dare voice such thoughts because the reaction they know they will get is, “Well, it's about time you came to your senses!” It can be quite daunting when dealing with self-doubts to have everyone else reinforcing your fears.

Some home schooling moms have sought support from church or Bible study groups. However, it is rare to get the kind of feedback we need from someone who is not home schooling, even though it may be possible. I do know of many supportive grandmothers helping their daughters or daughters-in-law, who wish that they *had known* about home education when their own children were young. All of us are not fortunate enough to have helpful mothers in the wings. The most practical source of support is usually another home schooling mom — just one person with whom we can compare notes and share frustrations.

It takes time to develop a relationship to the point where we can be honest and open about our experiences. Often these relationships begin with both parties trying to make their home schools sound ideal and afraid to admit their shortcomings, but it does not take long before we are laughing together and commiserating over problems. I realize that this can be difficult if you live in an isolated area. But, even if you can establish a friendship that involves long distance calls, it can be justified like the housekeeping expense. It might be all you need to maintain your sanity and keep on going.

Enrolling in a program or joining a group is great as long as you can afford the time and cost, and if there is something available for you to join. Since many more families are educating teens at home than in the past, there are more possibilities than there used to be. In years past it was a rarity to run into a parent educating a teen at home. Now support groups specifically for home educated teens are springing up across the country.

Independent study programs and school services are better able to advise us about teaching teens as they gather more experience each year. We may find the support we need through such a program, but we need to carefully check a program's knowledge of and experience with teens. It is possible that we may end up paying to be their guinea pig. That in itself may not be bad if they are willing to do the research for us and ensure that we get the service we are paying for.

When We Need Some Part-Time Income

Whatever our family's reasons for home schooling, many home schooling mom's must supplement (or even provide) the family income. This adds a tremendous burden to the already challenging task of home education. However, many moms have discovered opportunities for working from or in their homes enabling them to be available for their children while also earning money.

Certainly, it is easy to let the work take precedence and end up abandoning our children to their own devices, a pitfall that I strongly caution you to guard against.

While some home school moms do work part-time away from home, that situation is even more difficult. I suggest avoiding it if at all possible. For those wondering what they can possibly do at home to earn money, I recommend Barbara Witcher's *Part-Time Jobs for Full-Time Mothers* (Victor Books). Although Witcher is not addressing home schooling moms in particular, she is speaking to Christian moms. She tells us how to find and get work-at-home jobs and also suggests self-employment opportunities. I especially appreciate the way she keeps family needs in the picture rather