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Getting the Most out of the MÂCHÉ Conference

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Whether you are attending a homeschool conference for the first time or just know that you benefit from reminders of what you need to do before attending one, we hope that this article will help you get ready for and enjoy your annual homeschool conference in the best possible way.

Benefits of Attending.

The opportunities brought together in this once-a-year event can renew and expand your vision for teaching and training your children. Be encouraged, rejuvenated, inspired, motivated, and better equipped to homeschool.

- **Speakers** can broaden your horizons as they expose you to new ideas, methods, materials, and approaches – as well as remind you of the basics.
- **Workshops** will give you practical training in various and specific topics to make your teaching more efficient.
- **Exhibit Halls** enable you to examine, compare, and purchase a great variety of the latest and best of home education materials, technologies, and products from hundreds of selections – all in one place. Discuss products and speak to authors or knowledgeable representatives to learn more and to get your questions answered. You can also usually save on shipping if you purchase while there.
- **Networking** with other like-minded homeschoolers can offer valuable friendship and support.
- **Extras.** Check to see if any of the following are offered:
 - Used curriculum sale.
 - Teens' or children's programs.
 - Audios of general sessions and workshops.
 - Luncheon or meeting for Support Group Leaders.
 - Workshops or meetings for special groups
 - Special on-site gifts.
 - Graduation ceremony.
 - Boxed lunch, snack bar, or in-house cafeteria.
 - Special hotel room rates.
 - Reduced rates for area attractions

Who Should Go with You?

- **Spouse.** It is ideal for a husband and wife to go together to share perspectives and to keep focused on family goals and budget.
- **Friend.** If it is not possible for your spouse to attend, a friend can help you in many ways by sharing her experiences and perspectives about homeschooling and various curriculums.
- **Nursing babies,** of course, stay with Mom.
- **Teens.** If your convention offers special programs for teens, you may want to consider this option.
- **Younger children will be a distraction.** Either you will not be able to get all you can out of the convention or you will not be able to give adequate care to your children. They often tend to distract other attendees, as well. It is best to leave your young children at home with a relative, friend, or older sibling.
- **Grandparents and/or pastors.** Many conferences allow grandparents or pastors to attend at no cost. Check your brochure to see if this applies to your state conference.

Registration.

Check out these cost-cutting options:

- **Preregister early.** This can save you money that you can spend on buying materials.
- **Volunteer to work.** A few hours or more can be a real help to the organization sponsoring the event and you may be rewarded by a reduced entrance fee or other benefits. You will also get to know some great homeschoolers while working with them.
- **Join MÂCHÉ.** By joining, you help support homeschool efforts in your area, plus you may receive discounts on your conference fee and membership fee in Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). To join or renew your membership now, click the "Membership" tab at the top of this page.
- **Special incentives.** Check your conference brochure to see if there are any special discounted-fee incentives for you or those you might bring with you.

Keynote Sessions and General workshops.

The workshops that MÂCHÉ has prepared for you often give you the vision and encouragement that you need to help you get through the next year of homeschooling. The Keynote Sessions are "the ice cream on the cake", so to speak. There is no doubt that homeschooling can be frustrating and overwhelming at times. We know that, because we have been there, too. Although there are many great facets to the annual conference that we want you to experience, the workshops are the most important and will give you the training you need to help you teach and disciple your children. Plan to focus on what these workshops have to offer you, then build your other conference activities around them.

Preparation.

The vast array of workshops and exhibit booths combined with limited time to take it all in can be overwhelming when you walk into a conference unprepared. On the other hand, if you go with a plan and focus on your purpose and priorities, you can spend your time more wisely and get the most out of the conference.

- **Set goals.** This is an ideal time to discuss with your spouse your overall and yearly homeschool goals and plans. First, accept our gracious Lord's offer of wisdom and direction to those who ask in faith. Then pray about who should attend the conference and what your purposes are in attending.
- **Gather information.** Obtain a conference schedule and list of exhibitors.
- **Make selections.** Choose speakers' sessions and workshops you want to attend. Prioritize and mark as

"must attend" or "would like to attend if possible". Make a list of the audios that you will want to purchase for the workshops you will not be able to attend.

- **Download workshop "Handouts"**. Download workshop handouts before the conference. This will give you more detailed knowledge about what will be presented and help you decide which workshops to attend. Be sure to take the handouts with you to the conference!
- **Compare your agenda** with that of your spouse, friend, or grandparent attending with you and see if you can each cover several different sessions separately and then share their content with each other.
- **Research**. Check out publishers' and suppliers' catalogs (in print or online) to plan exactly which materials you would like to examine and consider. The more you know beforehand, the more you will profit from the opportunity of hands-on comparison shopping and the more time you will have to enjoy the conference. MÂCHÉ has included a list of attending exhibitors and their websites at www.mache.org. 
- **Shopping list**. You probably would not go to the grocery store without a list. Make a list of specific materials or the types of materials you will be looking for to meet the instructional needs of each of your children according to the goals you and your husband have discussed.
- **Identify four or five "must see" exhibitors**, and then prioritize the rest. Make a list. When you receive your Program Booklet at the conference, mark your exhibit hall map where these exhibitors are located.
- **Questions**. Make a list of questions to ask exhibitors, speakers, and/or other attendees.
- **Budget**. Determine your budget with your husband. Along with your shopping list and goals, this will help you make purchasing decisions.

The day before.

A few days before you leave for the conference, you should begin to make these last minute preparations:

- **Family needs**. Prepare meals and make provision to meet other needs which may occur while you are at the conference. Confirm child care arrangements.
- **Directions**. Make sure you know exactly how to get to the conference facility and what parking is available so that you do not lose valuable time and emotional energy just getting there.
- **Schedule**. Plan to be early to the conference. Otherwise, at the end of the day, you will wish you had another hour or two.
- **Pack items you will take with you**. You do not want to be laden down with too much stuff, but here are some essentials.
 - Directions and/or map.
 - Cash, checks, or debit card.
 - Highlighter to mark your program.
 - Canvas tote(s) for handouts and purchases.
 - Steno pad and pens to take notes.
 - Return address mailing labels to use in filling out forms.
 - Watch to keep track of time so you won't miss sessions.
 - Comfortable walking shoes.
- **Sleep and eat**. Get a good night's sleep and a good breakfast. You will be very tired before the end of the conference.

At the Conference.

Once at the conference, follow your plan.

- **Schedule.** If you have not already obtained and marked a schedule and exhibit hall floor plan, do this first.
- **Breaks.** Take breaks to rest your feet, reassess your progress, and write notes while your impressions are fresh.
- **Speakers.** Don't expect to agree with everything a speaker says. Compare everything to God's Word; accept and use what you can and let the rest go.
- **The unexpected.** Allow some free time to take advantage of an unexpected opportunity.

Exhibit Hall.

- **Work your plan.** Use your prioritized plan of booth visits and your shopping list to do your "must see" visits first, then go through the exhibit hall finding and learning more new things.
- **Talk to exhibitors** about their products' methods, goals, and philosophy, and how to use them. Use your list of questions.
- **Purchases.** Use the "Coat & Book Check", or take your purchases to your room or car rather than tire yourself carrying them around.
- **Busy.** If the sales representatives are busy at a "must see" booth, go on and return later, or ask to be included in the discussion by saying, "I'm interested in this product too. May I listen in?"
- **Sleep on it.** If you are attending two days, gather information the first day, and then think and pray overnight about the purchases you are contemplating before making the actual purchases.
- **Visit nonprofit and service organizations' booths** to find out what they can offer you (e.g., your state organization, Home School Legal Defense Association, and National Home Education Research Institute).
- **Give feedback.** When appropriate, tell an exhibitor about your needs, opinions, and experiences so that your input can help them produce products and services that better meet the needs of homeschoolers. Try to give a brief, succinct, one or two sentence statement that it is clear, focused, and does not take up too much time.

Conference Manners:

Your conference brochure lists several requests that we have received over the years from exhibitors, volunteers, and attendees. Please observe these guidelines to show consideration to everyone involved at the conference. Here are just a few important ones.

- **Conference rules.** Follow the rules described in your brochure, regarding food and beverage in the exhibit hall, children, strollers, etc.
- **Exhibitors.** Support the ones who help you. Do not take up an exhibitor's time in counseling and explaining his products and then go buy the same product from another exhibitor or from a discount supplier. Exhibitors help make the conference possible. If it is not profitable for them to attend our conference, they will not return.
- **Babies and children.** Immediately remove a crying or disrupting child from a workshop or meeting. Do not wait until a host or hostess asks you to do so. Ask your child to give his chair to an adult if there is not enough seating.

Networking.

- **Meet and talk to other attendees.** Greet old friends and make new ones.
- **Ask advice.** Get feedback on ideas and products and share opinions and experiences. You may get your most valuable information and encouragement from another homeschool mom.
- **Offer to help someone.** Hold a baby and give a mother's arms a rest. Find a new homeschooler (It will be obvious.) and give a word or more of encouragement. Find someone who is alone who needs you to just listen for awhile. Offer to help a speaker or exhibitor. Smile at everyone.

Follow-up.

- **Debriefing.** Have a debriefing discussion with your spouse or friend. Talking over the ideas and products you encountered at the convention will help you sort through things. You will keep some and discard others. Focus on how to get the most out of your experience.
- **Just do it.** Return home with at least one new idea that will make a difference in your home school to put into practice. Look over all your notes while they are fresh, and narrow down all the wonderful things you would like to do to no more than six. Then prioritize your list and start on the first one the following week.
- **Be accountable.** Ask your husband or a friend to pray for you and keep you accountable to work on your goal. It is good to have ongoing accountability to share ideas and objectives and require updates from each other on a regular basis. The results may surprise and encourage you.
- **Share the information** you have gathered with your support group or someone who was not able to attend. Let them know if you would recommend that they plan to attend next year.
- **Clean up.** Sort literature you received into four categories:
 - Take action
 - Save for future reference or reading
 - Pass on to someone else
 - Toss
- **Thank You!** Write a thank you note to those who put so much effort into planning and putting on the convention, a speaker that ministered to you, or an exhibitor that took time to help you.

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