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Multi-level Teaching: Homeschooling More Than One Child

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floor.

Homeschooling one child can be challenging enough, but adding more children can make a homeschool mom feel like the juggler doing the zany plate-spinning act, rushing from pole to pole to give each a quick twirl to keep those plates in the air. Here are a few ideas for keeping the homeschooling “plates” from crashing to the

1. Set goals and prioritize. Map out your year but be flexible (use pencil!). “Add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge...” (2 Peter 1:5). You’ll want to include character training and Biblical discipleship as well as academics. (It’s much easier to teach an obedient, diligent, cheerful child!)

And speaking of academics: Don’t make it complicated. In the younger years, your goal is to build relationships within your family while nurturing their relationships with God, and facilitating experiential learning—“hooks” on which they can hang his learning about God’s world. Many parents feel most confident if they concentrate on mastery of the foundational skills areas of language arts and math at each child’s own level, and then add a multi-level approach in the content areas of history/geography, science, and arts by utilizing family-friendly, non-graded materials.

2. Organize your home and your schedule for success. Simplify your homemaking and your chores. Have a routine, but be flexible! Build in some “down” time as well as catch-up time. Have realistic expectations, and create an environment conducive to a learning lifestyle!

3. Encourage independent study. Train them to work without you right at their sides each moment; this may be difficult at first, but it really does get easier! Have educational “while you wait for Mom” materials on hand for those times that a student needs to wait a few moments for help. Consider using the computer for drills, research, educational software. Make it easy for them to correct their own work in skills areas such as math. Consider giving him his own planner with his assignments listed so he can move forward at his own pace, or try Sue Patrick’s workbox system. Categorize materials into “learning stations” to make self-study more user-friendly; some items to include might be cassettes or CDs, supplemental workbooks or coloring books, games, or drills, as well as books on various topics related to the studies at hand. Most of all, remember that they do what you inspect, not necessarily what you expect, so do stay nearby and available.

4. Include your little ones. Provide “mommy time” early and often; if you spend time with the little ones first, they will be more content playing nearby on their own while you work with the older children. (Need ideas? Check our resources section). Include your toddler as a young learner; you’ll be amazed how much he’ll pick up by the trickle-down approach! Include the younger ones in the discussions; don’t expect an answer, but don’t discount that possibility, either! Keep educational toys nearby for the younger ones during the lesson times. For more insights, read “What to Do with Your Preschooler” and Mary Pride’s “Top Tips for Teaching Toddlers.”

5. Read aloud. Hearing good literature read aloud encourages in children a love for language, builds vocabulary, motivates them to read, and encourages them to use their imagination. They have a much higher receptive vocabulary than reading vocabulary, so it’s okay to read books aloud that are well above their reading level, and stop to let them narrate back to you or to dramatize what you’ve read. Leave time for discussion and enjoy the experience!

6. Adapt curriculum or use multi-level materials, especially in content (non-skills) subjects. These might include:

- Textbooks or workbooks
- Workbooks
- Living books
- Biographies
- Historical fiction
- CDs and videos
- Games
- Projects/experiments

To adapt your textbooks, use the table of contents (from the oldest child's book) as a guide, then use "living" books for learning time, modifying assignments for younger ones. Skim chapters, noting vocabulary (bold words or vocabulary lists), timelines, important people, project ideas, and experiments or field trips. You might use just this one book, or you might find lower level texts that cover similar topics for the younger ones, then use them as references.

Or you may prefer to simply use the same multi-level, family-friendly, content-area program for all, such as *Konos*, *Tapestry of Grace*, *Trail Guide to Learning*, *Five in a Row*, or *My Father's World*, to list a few.

For additional practical tips for teaching multiple ages, listen to the archived webinar on "*Multi-Level Teaching*" at HSLDA's @home e-vents!



This resource is provided by the Home School Legal Defense Association's *Early Years* website as a service to the homeschooling community.

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