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A DAY IN THE LIFE: FROM A VARIETY OF HOMESCHOOL FAMILIES

When Dave and I go for evening walks through a neighborhood, I enjoy getting a glimpse into homes to see what families might be doing. I love to spot a family gathered around the dinner table. I even get curious about the glow of a television, with news or a movie dancing across the screen. I might catch the silhouette of people working in the kitchen or tidying up at the end of the day. And if I spot a cozy fireplace scene, I will not hesitate to stare.

My husband does not share my fascination with gazing into strangers' homes (quite the opposite: he thinks it's creepy), but I am not ashamed of my curious nature.

Whether or not you would be eager to join me on an evening ~~stalk-session~~ walk, I think we can agree that getting a glimpse into other people's lives can be interesting and informative. And when it comes to homeschooling, learning about how other families "do school" can be super helpful. It can offer us insight, inspiration, and if nothing else—a ton of reassurance that there are countless ways to offer your kids a home education!

Chapter 13 of *Becoming Homeschoolers* is titled "A Day in the Life." In it, I talk about planning a yearlong school schedule as well as a general daily schedule. I offer some helpful guidelines for planning your school day ("stay flexible" and "don't be afraid to experiment," to name a few), then I share a "Day in the Life" from when my boys were seventeen, fifteen, thirteen, and six. Since we are just one family, I asked a few homeschooling friends to share their families' "Day in the Life" as well. I'm excited to share those with you here!

Below you'll find: Rebecca, homeschooling one freshman son in Tennessee; Tiffany, homeschooling two middle school daughters and one elementary son in California; Leanne, working from home while homeschooling three elementary kids and taking care of her baby (whew!); and Jessica, homeschooling a high school freshman son, a seventh-grade son, and a third-grade daughter in North Carolina. I hope you enjoy this little glimpse into these amazing families' lives as much as I have—even if we don't get to peek into their living room windows. (See my husband shaking his head at the thought.)

Rebecca: Homeschooling an only child starting high school in Tennessee

Homeschool is still new to us, but goodness, it's been such a blessing! Our son, Nolan, is an only child and a freshman. He begged to homeschool for over two years. Finally, after a lot of prayer and many "God signs" (including Monica!), we started our homeschool journey last semester.

Many parents homeschool where we live, so there are numerous support options available. Since Nolan was older and, honestly, I had no idea what I was doing, we decided to try a local tutorial where he could attend classes in person two days a week. During the other three days, he works on assignments from his instructors given on their weekly syllabus or in Google Classroom.

Nolan is self-sufficient and does a great job of managing his work. This year he is taking three classes through the tutorial and three classes fully at home. Below is what a “typical day” looks like, but we don’t follow a strict schedule. When we made the leap to homeschool, I read the most successful homeschoolers don’t try to mimic traditional school. I love that! The flexibility to think and learn outside the box is a huge advantage. My husband is a pilot, so we are blessed with flight benefits. That means we can go experience different places and cultures and visit where history actually took place!

At-Home Days

On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, we are at home. Since Nolan is a freshman, I give him autonomy to manage his own schedule. He appreciates it, and it’s preparing him for college. He wakes up somewhere between 7:00 and 7:30 a.m., eats breakfast, and completes his morning chores. Schoolwork usually starts around 8:00 a.m. He begins with lessons from his tutorial classes and prioritizes assignments that are most challenging or take the longest, since he has the best energy first thing. He then continues with lessons from the three classes he’s doing fully at home. I give him freedom to take a few breaks to stretch his legs, play with the dog, and eat lunch when he wants. He typically finishes schoolwork by 1:00 p.m. on these days. We then do exercise in the afternoons, which varies depending on the day/season (e.g., gym, mountain biking, baseball practice, etc.).

Tutorial Days

On Tuesday and Thursday, Nolan wakes up between 6:00 and 6:30 a.m. and starts schoolwork right away, focusing on the three classes he does fully at home. Around 8:00 a.m., he breaks to eat breakfast and complete morning chores. We leave home around 8:50 a.m. to drive to the church that hosts tutorial classes. Based on his class schedule this year, Nolan is at tutorial from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. He has three classes, study hall, a mentor meeting, and lunch. Between his early morning focus and study hall, Nolan is typically done with the three at-home classes by the time I pick him up from tutorial. Tutorial days also give me a break to run errands, get a pedi with a friend, or just spend some time at home by myself!

I am certainly not an expert, but my advice is to think outside the box, be open and flexible, and include your child in the planning!

Tiffany J.: Homeschooling three kids (girl, 13; girl, 11; and boy, 10) in California

Every day is a tad different from the next in our typical homeschool day, but isn’t that what makes homeschooling so special?

No matter what, I almost always have the kids start school by 9:00 a.m. I wish I could say they do chores from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m., but every morning is different depending on the season. Between 7:00 and 9:00 a.m., they can do whatever they want within reason—get themselves breakfast, craft, draw, go outside and shoot hoops, teach our dog new tricks, do their chores.

They also have a choice to start school early. But by 9:00 a.m., we start school, which includes daily devotions.

At the beginning of each week, the kids get a daily checklist with their daily assignments and subjects written on it. They can navigate their day according to how they want to accomplish it. They can start with math, science, piano, spelling, or whatever they want, but the checklist has to be completed by the time we are done for the day. If they want to do two math assignments or three science assignments in one day and not have to do science or math the next day, they have the freedom to do so. But by the end of the week, they need to be finished with the week's assignments. Most days, they just do their daily checklist unless they know something is coming up later in the week, such as a special event or someone coming to visit.

In the elementary years, there are a few subjects I only teach two times a week, such as science, history, All About Reading, and All About Spelling, but once the kids reach middle school, I have them do history and science four times a week. (We are on a four-day-week school schedule.) Most days, our academic checklists are finished between 9:00 a.m. and noon. Here's a typical daily schedule:

9:00 a.m. – 12:00. School.

11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Lunch.

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Elective/extracurricular classes. Kids have art one day a week, music two days, and foreign language tutoring one day.

3:30 or 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. Sports: Soccer practice, tennis training with a coach, or a fitness class at a local gym.

6:00 p.m.* Home for dinner as a family.

7:30 p.m. Preparing for bed.

8:00 p.m. Kids read in their rooms until they go to sleep.

*The two oldest kids go to youth group once a week, and, of course, sometimes other things come up, but our evening schedule is otherwise very consistent. We like early bedtimes and early mornings!

A few more notes: I like to give my kids the freedom to tackle their checklists on their own, because I want them to learn life skills like time management and organization. For example, math is difficult for one child, so she likes to do it first to get it over with. For another child, math is easy, so it's just part of her stack of books for the day. One does history first because she doesn't enjoy it, while another child who loves historical literature prefers to do history last. If cousins are coming to town, we need to set up for an event at church, or rain is coming in the afternoon and we need to switch tennis lesson times, we have the freedom to pivot, and the kids are motivated to complete their checklists in order to do the "fun thing" or "have-to-do thing."

By the end of our four-day school week, if the kids have not finished their checklists for the week or still need to edit their essays, then they may have to finish up on Friday. During Monday through Thursday, we do not watch TV or have mindless screen time; these are saved

for the weekend. Come Friday morning, if they have completed their checklists, they look forward to watching a TV show. During the week, they only use an iPad or computer if they need it for their studies or research.

Leanne B.: Working from home and homeschooling three kids (two boys and a girl) with a baby in Pennsylvania

Homeschooling my elementary children (ages seven and eight) with a preschooler (age four) and baby (a one-year-old) has been one of my greatest accomplishments to date. The juggle is real! I've learned in this season to be fixed in our priorities (educate!) but flexible in the method. I also work part-time and remotely in customer service for a streaming fitness platform. I answer emails pertaining to member experience, so it's a job I can do from home as long as I am responsibly managing my time. During the school year, I keep my hours to around 10–15 a week. During the summers, I can manage a bit more, sometimes getting up to 20–25. It is extremely flexible, allowing me to set my own hours each month, which I am grateful for. In return, I try to say yes whenever they have a need, so this works out well for all. My goal is to work as much as my time allows, but never in a way that will rob my kids, who are my first priority. I log in for a couple of hours on the weekend when my kids are busy, and the rest is done during a couple of mornings or afternoons a week.

On a typical morning, I wake up with the youngest child, and the thought of coffee after a sleep-deprived night lures me out of bed. I allow the older three children to do something quiet when they wake as long as it doesn't involve electronics. Usually, that means they're playing some sort of pretend game with Barbies or Legos and enjoying dry cereal or granola bars.

I come downstairs to change a diaper, monitor the playtime, and read my Bible while I enjoy my coffee and get my bearings. At some point, if it's a "workday," I log in to my computer and check any incoming emails. If the kids are playing well together, I allow them to, but if they're getting bored, we start schooling. Our start time is flexible depending on how they're getting along (bonding together is a priority for me with homeschooling) or if we have anything going on in the afternoon such that we need to finish quickly. If there's nothing, we take our days slow and as they come, knowing we will eventually accomplish our work but wanting to enjoy the time at home together.

I staple together some handwriting, spelling, or review worksheets before the week starts so the kids have some go-to work that doesn't involve me and gets their brains warming up. At this time, I oversee the work, answer any questions they may have, or give a spelling pretest while making breakfast for all the kids. The preschooler and baby play together, which—I must note—can get noisy. I try to tell myself that the kids are learning great life skills of tuning out distractions while working hard (as I also try to quiet down the little ones a bit).

They break to all eat breakfast, and then we pick back up. Now is when I sit down with one elementary child at a time and teach a subject. The other child gets to play with the younger

ones (we call it “brain breaks,” but really, it’s also very helpful for me!), and then we continue to swap out back and forth a couple of times so I can give one-on-one instruction to each (this would be for math, English, phonics work, etc.). Sometimes the little ones aren’t interested in playing, so we make room at the table for them to color, play with Play-Doh, or eat snacks. They really love being part of the mix, and while it’s a juggle keeping everyone busy, I do appreciate us being all together in our school day. On workdays, I also have my computer up and take customer service emails as they come in.

Once these subjects are done, it’s lunchtime. We eat, sometimes while listening to an audiobook, talking, or watching a science video. I sneak in a workout, load the dishwasher, or turn over laundry that I somehow managed to get in the washer between subjects. We end with science, social studies, or a read-aloud before getting outside for a walk (sometimes bringing along our nature journal). In the afternoon, my kids need a little downtime and all pile on the couch together with a snack and watch *Superbook*. I take a mom-break and sip some afternoon coffee before I dive into the second part of my day: house chores, sports, or playdates. I have the kids help with some chores, because as the saying goes, “many hands make light work!” The preschooler and the baby join in for plenty of our school day, and while it can be a challenging distraction when they’re whining, climbing all over, or even being silly but loud, it’s the season we are in. We are together, and that’s part of the joy and why we homeschool!

Jessica S.: Homeschooling a high school freshman, a seventh grader, and a third grader in North Carolina

I wake up third. I know, I know. I have been homeschooling for eleven years and still haven’t mastered the early wakeup. Maybe that gives someone hope. This year I am homeschooling a freshman, a seventh grader, and a third grader. My younger two wake up and read recreationally or sit with a cat on a heating vent until I’m up. Ha! I often use my rice cooker’s delay setting to make oatmeal so it’s ready in the morning. I’ll make eggs, sausage, and smoothies around 7:45 a.m. My high school son often sleeps until 8:30 a.m., and I’m happy for him to have this well-needed rest. He likes to get up and immediately do math before eating breakfast. The other two finish breakfast and do morning chores (taking care of the chickens and cleaning their rooms). I clean up the kitchen and it is usually around 9:00 a.m. when we officially begin school.

This year I only have my youngest doing “morning time,” and this is sad! Sometimes the boys will listen in if we are reading an especially good book. While my daughter and I do Bible, a read-aloud, *Mystery of History*, and our *Apologia* science, my older sons are working independently. Since we attend a co-op where they receive instruction on literature, science, and history, they have a planner already full with their assignments.

If it’s the day before or after co-op, we’ll each have a meeting to make sure they have a good plan for the week. Otherwise, they work through these subjects independently, with my

checking in every so often. They often have me read a paper, brainstorm ideas for a project, or help them research on the computer. But they pretty much work independently for most of the day.

They use an online math program to help them work through their Saxon math textbook. If they get stuck on a math problem, I have usually been able to help them, but I imagine those days are quickly becoming numbered! My oldest also takes classes online at a wonderful academy for some electives. My middle son is currently working through a “50 Book Reading Challenge” that I designed for him for this year. This has been amazing! He usually spends an hour or so a day reading his latest book. (By the way, he was not a big reader before this!)

So the bottom line is that most of my hands-on time during the day is spent with my third grader. After we do morning time, she does her math on the computer using the same program with video teaching lessons. She usually needs help working through the day’s worksheet and we do math facts together. Then she and I do language arts, which includes reading, grammar, spelling, and writing. We have loved *The Good and the Beautiful*!

It’s usually about lunchtime at this point. My kids like to watch *World Watch* before eating lunch. Often, they will listen to an *Adventures in Odyssey* episode as they are eating lunch. They make their own lunches, and this is a wonderful development. My daughter will typically practice piano after lunch and clean her room. Then she is free to play! My sons usually still have schoolwork until around 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. They are supposed to do chores before they head out to play, but sometimes they have been working so hard that I let them play for an hour or so, and then I holler out at them to come in and finish chores. I’m not sure I recommend! 😊

I hope these examples were helpful to you. And remember, if you asked a hundred homeschool families what their “Day in the Life” looks like, you’d get a hundred unique stories. And that is one of the great blessings of homeschooling. You get to make it look however you want! And at the end of the day, as your family gathers around the table, the television, or the fireplace, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have the freedom to plan, adjust, and create the schedule that works best for you.

And don’t worry, I won’t be peeking into your living room window (unless I’m invited! Haha.).