

## **10 Things You Might Experience Transitioning from School to Homeschool** **by Laura Gadbery**

Whatever time of year it is, you—like many others—find yourself at the beginning of a brand-new journey: homeschooling.

Somewhere along the way, you decided that the current system your child was participating in was not serving him or her well, and you feel like just maybe you can do a better job delivering the education your child needs. It could be for one of many reasons, or for many reasons all at once. You're excited, nervous, and puzzled by well-meaning folks who give you a forced smile when you announce that you're going to homeschool instead.

By the middle of our oldest child's 1st grade year (about 18 years ago), we were having a miserable experience. In spite of receiving lesson after obvious lesson as to why my child was supposed to be taught at home, this mama had her child finish out the year at school—because I'm not a quitter. Don't be like me. Be a quitter. Move along and make the best decision of your family life and don't look back.

Once you've made the decision to bring your kids home, it's important to read up on Arizona homeschool laws, understand what homeschooling is and is not, and file an Affidavit of Intent to Homeschool for each of your children ages 6-16. Check out the helpful tips on the Get Started page.

I want to offer you some real-life encouragement with these ten things that might happen along the way in this wonderful new journey.

### **1. You might be unsure of yourself**

You may not have gone to school to be an educator, let alone have any college experience at all. You may have a degree but feel like staying home to teach your own kids would be a waste of that degree. Maybe someone has asked why you would want to be home with your own kids all day.

Remember, you know your children best. If you taught them to walk, talk, use the bathroom, and eat with a utensil, you can most certainly teach your own children academics at home. Before public school became compulsory, children learned everything at home from parents, grandparents, siblings, and others. Not only did they learn the 3 R's, but skills that would serve them well out in the real world and workplace. Yes, times have indeed changed, but these skills are still important and no teacher has time to teach a classroom of 30 children academics along with manners, cooking, money management, home-keeping, and other valuable life skills. Even if they did, some of what they'd teach might not be a good representation of your own family values.

No one has your child's best interests at heart like you do, and there's still no place like home. You might be unsure of yourself at times. That's normal. You're fine! Just keep learning and growing alongside your kids. You can do this!

## **2. You and/or your kids might get frustrated**

There's not a parent in the history of parenting who has not been frustrated. This will seem to multiply since you are now both parent and teacher, and since you'll be spending a whole lot more time together.

You will hear others say, "I could never homeschool. I don't have the patience." You may have said those words yourself. But you might also be the person who thinks, "I don't have the patience either, but I love my children enough to learn how to be patient with them." Trust me. You will learn patience and so will your children. Homeschooling provides a unique opportunity for each of you to develop this character trait.

Frustration might appear as you discover your child has a different learning style than you, and you have to figure out how to communicate effectively with one another. You may experience frustration as you juggle managing your home, preparing meals, teaching your children, participating in enrichment activities, nurturing your marriage, and maybe even working, too. Your children may become frustrated at times as well. They'll be frustrated with you, with themselves, and sometimes both at the same time. As your vision for the value and benefits of home education grows, and as you and your children practice patience and kindness and diligence day after day, you'll see the end result is worth every ounce of effort and frustration, too. Keep calm and carry on.

## **3. You might buy too much curriculum—or the wrong curriculum**

It's tempting to buy that full-year boxed curriculum on the first day because it seems a little less terrifying if the books and schedule all come prepared for you. There's nothing wrong with a grade-level packaged curriculum, and it may be the perfect fit for your family. However, keep in mind that curriculum is just a tool for you to use and there are many approaches and types available to you.

Just as important as what you teach is how you teach your kids to learn. Figuring out how to help your kids learn best is invaluable right from the start, keeping in mind that your understanding will develop over time as you work with your children on a day-to-day basis. An abundance of books on learning styles and left/right-brained learning are at your disposal, but don't get too bogged down in the details or pigeon-hole your children. Almost everyone has a primary learning style, which isn't really recognized until around age 7 or 8. Relax and observe them for a month or so and see what works. In addition to teaching to your child's strengths, you'll also help them develop their weak areas. So you'll want curriculum that works with their primary learning style, and you'll also want to make sure they are exposed to learning through other modalities.

If you are bringing an older child home from school, you may want to take the opportunity to decompress and adjust to being home together. Some people call this a school detox period or "de-schooling" when first making the transition from school to homeschool. The first month or so can be a great time to let your child explore areas of interest, do a unit study on a topic they are passionate about, read good literature, and get outdoors to enjoy and observe nature. The goal is to help reconnect your child with a love of learning and discovery.

Spend time getting used to the idea of homeschooling, get a plan together, and include your child in the process. You'll get into a rhythm and the academic rigor will fall into place. And understand there might be some trial and error, and that's okay, too!

#### **4. You might want to replicate the school life they've become accustomed to**

As you envision what your homeschool experience will be like, you might be tempted to recreate school at home. A schoolroom with desks, a whiteboard, and maps on the wall, a regimented schedule changing subjects every 50 minutes, reading textbooks and writing out all of the answers, or other elements you or your child consider to be "school."

None of this is needed to homeschool successfully. You can set an alarm in the morning, have breakfast at 7:00 am, devotions at 7:30, and lessons at 8:00. You can schedule science from 1:00-2:00 pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. You can, but you don't have to. Sure, schedules are important or chaos will ensue. You can make a firm schedule, just don't be surprised when it's thwarted by sickness, a family emergency, or just because you need a time out.

Be flexible, let go of those expectations and self-imposed regulations, and learning might happen in a much more fluid way than you ever thought it could. You might discover unit studies, lapbooks, outdoor excursions, hands-on experiments, and fun. Your teens might enjoy a little extra sleep that they need, and that's a wonderful thing.

#### **5. You might want to sign up for every extracurricular activity**

You've undoubtedly heard—or maybe even asked the question yourself—"What about socialization?" A common misperception exists that homeschooling means missing out on things like having friends or spending time with people outside your family, lacking opportunities to develop social skills, or forfeiting a rich educational experience. The reality is quite the opposite.

There are homeschool P.E. classes, choirs, prom, music lessons, Spanish classes, sports teams, field trips, science fairs, spelling bees, history fairs, geography bees, speech and debate clubs, theater groups, political activities, and so much more. You'll discover pretty quickly that there are so many opportunities and activities for homeschoolers that you're going to have to pick and choose the best for your family or you'll never be home to do any schoolwork.

Part of your mission in bringing your children home for their education may be to make sure they are well-rounded individuals. This is a good goal. Keep in mind that each individual has certain gifts and talents and you have the opportunity to nurture those abilities and interests in your children in a way that doesn't lend to a frenzied, chaotic, stressful life. Choose activities that enhance your homeschool journey.

This may come as a surprise, but you can homeschool successfully without co-ops and outside classes. Use those opportunities for areas where your child is gifted or has an interest and you are not. For example, if your teen is a math whiz with aspirations toward computer science or engineering, but your math experience ended with Algebra 2, you might consider a co-op class or community college classes for that higher level math, or trade teaching with another homeschool parent who is mathematically inclined. If your child is passionate about theater and the arts, participating in a homeschool drama club can be rewarding.

The ways to meet your child's education and development needs are endless, but balance is key. Don't be so busy doing all the things that you miss the blessing of the homeschool adventure for your family. The close relationships, the time to stop and think and explore. By teaching our children at home, we are choosing to be different than the cultural norm. You might be tempted to sign up for every extracurricular activity, but something to consider is that being different might just be better all around.

#### **6. You might want to compare yourself to other homeschool moms**

The temptation to compare is strong, but you can't compare yourself to anyone who isn't you. Your family is unique, in your own unique set of circumstances, and you should never play the comparison game. Put the blinders on and focus on what's before you, not what's around you.

It might seem like every mom has it all together and their kids are learning Chinese when you can barely get yours to understand the difference between a comma and a semicolon. One mom has a piano protege and another one has a child who is studying Latin root words at age 5. That's great for them. Not every child is gifted in the same ways and not every family homeschools in the same way. Your job as a homeschool parent is to help guide your kids in discovering their own set of abilities through your style of schooling.

You might be tempted to compare your homeschool experience to others, but don't. You might just find that focusing on what's best for your own family is the most important thing you do for them.

#### **7. You might want to be a martyr for the cause**

It's important to be diligent and take the education of your child seriously, but taken to an extreme you might find yourself dying on the altar of homeschool excellence. There are some days you just need to hand your kids five books to choose from and give them a reading day because you're sick in bed or simply need a break. Or you put a on favorite TV show or movie and let them choose a quiet activity like Wikki Stix or Legos or drawing. Or you get everyone into the car and go to the park and library instead of sitting around the table working on handwriting.

The beauty of homeschooling is that it should fit into your life, not the other way around. There is no reason you should not shower, tidy up your house, do your laundry, or get a cup of coffee with a friend on occasion because you are too busy homeschooling. There is no reason you should forego date night with your husband because of the demands of homeschooling. Yes, lesson planning needs to get done, grading and organizing schoolwork, and shopping for next week's art and science supplies. But the well-being of your relationships, your own self-care, and the condition of your home should not fall apart while you dedicate every ounce of yourself to being the best homeschool mom you know.

#### **8. You might have family and friends who don't agree with your decision**

People you know and love just might say you're insane because you are choosing to swim upstream as it relates to the education of your children. As if that's a bad thing! To quote a popular phrase, "We've seen the village and we don't want it to raise our children."

Perhaps you've been told you're indoctrinating your children or they won't be exposed to things that other kids their ages are. Perhaps that's the point. Your children are gifts from God that you are responsible for raising, nurturing, teaching, and loving. Your friends and family might think you're crazy, but the proof is in the pudding, so to speak. Your kids might just grow up to be caring, thoughtful, articulate, hard-working, skilled individuals who make the world a better place. So when Aunt Ruth or your next door neighbor shake their heads and wonder if you've lost your mind, or even if they get angry with your decision, smile and wave. Love them anyway. Be kind to them anyway. And keep on homeschooling.

### **9. You might be tempted to give up and put them back in school**

We have days when our kids won't cooperate, the house is a mess, and we feel like we haven't a clue what we're doing. As the yellow school bus passes your house again this morning, you might be tempted to end the experiment and put them back in school.

The best remedy for this is to acknowledge why you pulled them out in the first place. Write it down somewhere and refer to it often. Have a goal in mind for your homeschool and stick with it. Your kids might ask about going back to school at some point. When you have a firm grasp of your reasons for choosing to homeschool, a family mission statement and goals, you have a measuring stick by which to make decisions. And, as the parent, you are responsible for making these decisions. If you waver, they will notice and might feel you aren't committed.

Be committed to your family cause. Give them opportunities with friends through other avenues if that is their complaint. You can also remind them how much homework they would have after being in school all day and that everything they do at home is the homework. Stay the course and don't give up! You will enjoy the reward for your efforts if you stick with it.

### **10. You might discover a great family life**

Relationships are built, sibling ties become closer, and you all learn how important the family unit is. Road trips and vacations can be taken when it fits your schedule without penalty of missing class or homework to catch up on. You can teach and learn what you want, when you want. You might learn as much as your kids do and find a new interest along the way.

Sure, there will be rough days, but they occur no matter your schooling choice. And going through challenges together as a family often draws you closer, giving you a shared victory to relish.

It's up to you, not an over-burdened school system, to help your children learn, discover, and grow up to be productive adults. They will one day thank you for all you've invested in them and the incredible opportunities they experienced through the homeschool adventure with you!