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## Dear Parents: You Can Do This

### Take It From a Home School Educator

*By Susanne Allen*

If the idea of homeschooling your children is scary and overwhelming, you're not alone. But if your first thought is, "I can't do this," well, you're wrong. You can do it. I have a dear friend who can't balance her checkbook, and her homeschooled son got 5s on the AP Calculus test. That's the highest you can get. As for me, I'm a veteran homeschooler. I homeschooled five children and four went on to college. Two are autistic, two had learning disabilities, and one was deaf until fourth grade. If we can do it, so can you.

[Research](#) has shown that students taught by parents outperform those taught in traditional settings by 15 to 30 percentile points. While traditional education outcomes are often tied to income and parent education, at home, those elements only carry so much weight. Your belief in your child and your love for your child will make up for a wide variety of real and imagined failings. Trust me.

Those of you homeschooling for COVID-19 have the best of both worlds, at least in regards to homeschooling, because in addition to your inherent belief in your child, you likely have a professional educator as a resource, too. Hopefully, you've been given a list of what you need to accomplish in a given week. If not, don't despair; there are plenty of resources out there. And remember that learning can happen in all sorts of ways: through textbooks and lesson plans, yes, but also through experiential learning, investigation, and play.

Your best bet is to simply give it a try and to stay flexible in your approach. But to help you get started, here are a few pointers from a professional homeschool teacher and parent:

Go at your child's pace. One benefit of homeschooling is that you have the freedom to go for mastery. In a more traditional setting, teachers may not have time to make sure every child in the class understands a concept before moving on to the next subject. But at home, you can, and should, work at your child's pace. If you start on a lesson and the child clearly knows it, there is little point in belaboring the point. Move to the next thing. You'll find that some concepts are understood very quickly and some need more time to sink in. Focus on what needs more time.

Foster self-reliance. For older children, share information ahead of time: show your student a checklist of subjects and tasks that will need to be completed the next day. Not only will this give them a sense of what's to come, but it encourages independence. With this information and the promise of fun and freedom after, my children often got started on their work before breakfast. Then, all I had to do was check their work, talk it over with them, and school was done for the day. That said, don't forget to check their answers and talk about it. After all, it's just as important to know *how* to get the right answer as it is to simply know the right answer. As they say, show your work.

Be their rubber duck. It's not enough for kids to simply read the reading assignments. Get them to explain to you what they learned. In software engineering, this is called rubber duck debugging. The name comes from a story in the book *The Pragmatic Programmer* in which a programmer carries around a rubber duck and catches errors in their code by explaining it, line-by-line, to the duck. By being their rubber duck, you ensure that your child has internalized what they read. Also, you occasionally get to correct some amusing misconceptions. (Once, my daughter quite proudly told me she'd finished *all* of her history reading for the week. When we sat down for her to tell me all she'd learned, she had all the facts and dates right, but she was telling me all about "Mess-Oh-Spot-Oh-Me-Ah" and "Baby-Lawn" instead of Mesopotamia and Babylon.)

Encourage education by inquiry. One of the things I enjoyed most about homeschooling was child-led science. Rather than relying on lesson plans, we would investigate things that interested the kids. When my children wanted to make chocolate chip cookies, for instance, we turned it into an investigation: We broke down the origin point of each ingredient and learned how it was made. For us, that involved going to a dairy and a mill, but for kids at home, there are virtual tours and sites to explore. In the end, it took months to make chocolate chip cookies, but when we were done, we used the recipe as a math exercise for years to come. It can be boring to learn to manipulate fractions in math, but when your mother lets you make 1-and-7/16ths of a chocolate chip cookie recipe, simplifying a fraction can be highly motivating.

Think on your feet. By nature, we tend to present information in the manner in which we learn best. I'm a visual learner, so that's my go-to teaching method. This worked well with my daughter, who learns the same way, but for my son, I needed to adjust. He learned better when we got up and moved around, so we practiced numbers by counting the stairs as we went up and down them. This will be a time to gain understanding about how your child learns best and to put that into practice. But for the little ones, when all else fails while teaching them their letters, try my standby: have them practice letters on a sheet of parchment covered in pudding.

In the end, try to think of this time as another first. We buy baby books when they are born and diligently record first smiles, first words, first steps. But the truth is, there are a thousand other firsts: their first use of the Pythagorean theorem, first understanding of osmosis, first realization that "Wow, Shakespeare was naughty!" Oftentimes, we parents miss out on firsts that occur in the classroom. But for these next couple of weeks and months, you get to hoard those little moments to yourself. I promise that will make the

uncertainty worth it. When in doubt, remember: you can do this. And you'll do great.

SUSANNE ALLEN

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