

***Your Trusty Homeschool Emergency Kit!!
by Ann Lahrson-Fisher***

Here's the scene: after months of DOUBT and inner turmoil, you finally decide that this is the day! You stop by the school to withdraw your children. You then help them collect belongings and the phone numbers of their favorite friends, and drive them on home, all the while confidently assuring your children that you will all have a blast learning together at home.

Your cool demeanor reassures your children. Fortunately, they cannot hear your knees knocking or feel the swarm of butterflies ravaging your insides. They cannot hear your inner voice wailing, "Can I really do this? What have I done? Have I ruined my children for life?"

NOW WHAT? Trembling, you sit down to your computer the moment you arrive home. You log onto the Internet and type "homeschooling help" into your search engine and here you are.

NOW WHAT? Read and follow your Trusty Homeschool Emergency Kit instructions below, that's what. Whether you are find yourself bewildered by the avalanche of wonderful resources you've discovered, or completely unable to lay your hands on even ONE single resource that could possibly work for your family, this survival kit will help you to a gentle and fun beginning.

Your Trusty Homeschool Emergency Kit!!

First, relax!

Take heart in knowing that there are no educational emergencies! Remember, a day without doing math problems is not necessarily a day wasted. You have time to think this through and make it work. Take a deep breath, and begin when ready.

Some families take a family trip when they begin to homeschool to break up entrenched negative patterns children may have about learning. Consider that option seriously. If you can't sail the Caribbean, can't even take a weekend trip to Grandma's house, then how about a picnic at the park? Take day trips a visit your favorite local sights or take nature walks. If it rains on your outdoor parade, picnic under the dining room table and play games all afternoon. Stay home and catch up on hobbies.

If you begin to homeschool at the beginning of the regular school session, find out whether a homeschooling group offers a "not-back-to-school" special event, such as a Homeschool Amusement Park Day, on the first day of school. These events are usually open to all homeschoolers, and everyone has a great time. If you don't find an event that works for you, plan your own outing for that day. What a great way to celebrate the beginning of a new educational era!

While you probably won't want to park in front of television for weeks on end, it is important to spend time together as a family while exploring the course your homeschooling experience will take. You might take a few days or weeks or even more: while your kids spend time re-discovering how to explore their interests, parents spend time learning about homeschooling styles, methods, and resources. While your children decompress, perhaps reading for fun or working on personal projects, make it your project to learn all you can about homeschooling so you can begin to chart a successful path. Do take the time you need as do the following.

Read everything you can about homeschooling — books, magazines, and Internet sites.

Now, repeat after me: "The library is my friend." So is the librarian, as is your neighborhood bookstore. Many bookstores offer discounts to homeschoolers, so be sure to ask. Public libraries have computers available for both you and your child to use. Local support groups often maintain a library of homeschooling books. Borrow or buy as many how-to homeschooling books as you can find. Subscribe to at least one national homeschooling magazine. Read sample copies of several magazines. If you prefer to surf the 'Net, a simple search on the word homeschooling will provide you with more links than you can ever read. Subscribing to e-mail groups is another useful way to get information.

As you read, some material will appeal to you and other material will seem impossible. That is

perfectly natural — already you are finding your homeschooling style! And it doesn't matter if what you like is the exact opposite of the recommendations of your admired friend who has successfully homeschooled for years. Some ideas will work better than others because of your natural teaching and learning style, as well as your children's learning styles. You may figure out your homeschooling style, methods, and content as you read. Great — but keep on researching!

Naturally, I think my book, [Fundamentals of Homeschooling: Notes on Successful Family Living](#) is a great first "read" about homeschooling. It is packed with many treasures for different ages and stages of the homeschooling lifestyle, items of interest that will help you find your rhythm with ease. If Fundamentals doesn't quite suit your style, though, I am not offended, and happily include an extensive bibliography of well-regarded resources.

Two respected print homeschooling magazines are [Home Education Magazine](#) and the Christian homeschooling magazine [Homeschooling Today](#). If you prefer to search the Internet, a huge homeschooling resource that lists information of every stripe can be found at [A2Z's Home's Cool](#).

If you have special educational concerns (TAG, LD, ADD, autism, or other special needs), be sure to seek out books and websites with that information. You will benefit from general information as well as specific. You should also seek out other families who have homeschooling experience with a child who has similar special needs to your child.

Get in touch with local homeschoolers.

If there are several support groups in your community, you may want to try more than just the one that is most geographically convenient. One easy way to find homeschooling groups is to go to the website of the National Home Education Network, and search for your state. Usually the various groups are very different in focus, and you may prefer to drive or bus a little farther to be with like-minded folks. Go to support group meeting, events, field trips, conferences and workshops. Talk to both new and experienced homeschooling families. Ask "stupid" questions. Find out what they do and what they like, and what mistakes they think you should avoid.

There are two more IMPORTANT reasons for connecting with local homeschooling groups.

Legal issues.

I wish I could tell you how to comply with your homeschooling law in just a few simple words. Unfortunately, laws in the fifty different states vary widely. Some laws are simple and others are very complex. I can tell you that homeschooling is legal in every state, and that the best source of information about homeschooling in your state is your statewide homeschooling group. Again, the National Home Education Network can direct you to current information contacts for your state. You can also find a summary of the homeschooling law at your state available at that site.

If the law still isn't clear to you after you have read it and the explanation, contact a local or statewide homeschooling group listed at the [NHEN site](#). They will know, or if they don't know a particular detail, they will know how you can find out. You can't depend on the local school personnel to give you the correct information — it is neither their business nor their responsibility. Some people find that they prefer to get a copy of the state law and regulations that pertain to homeschooling first, and then ask clarifying questions. Simple Internet searches can quickly provide the information you seek.

Next, connect with local groups if you want to —

Homeschool cooperatively.

Cooperatives are wonderful ways to extend your homeschooling dollar as well as your precious time. Just be sure to take the time to find a cooperative situation that meets your needs and those of your children. You'll want to start looking for a group you feel compatible with as soon as you can. Some cooperatives may be closed to new members shortly after the beginning of a school year. It may be harder to start a co-op in the middle of the year, although cooperatives seem to fill whenever they are offered. Remember that cooperatives are created by busy parents just like you, so be sure to pitch in and help, or offer an event of your own, once you reach your homeschooling stride.

Another great place to get connected for activities is via local, state, and national newsletters and e-mail groups. You might meet homeschoolers throughout the country and world via the Internet through homeschooling news groups and e-mail loops. And, if you just can't find another homeschooler in your local community, post a notice at the local grocery or library, and wait until you are found by the next person.

After you have done some research and reading, you will want to —

Plan what and how your family will learn.

Some families plan together from the beginning and set up regular family meetings. In other families one or both parents do the planning. Will you be highly structured, unschooled, or somewhere in between? Perhaps you will experiment with several organizational models before finding the best fit. Consider your homeschooling style, your personal style, and your children's learning styles and interests before you purchase materials. Again, your extensive research will be invaluable as you seek the best approaches for your family. Go to homeschooling conferences, workshops, and support group meetings if you can, or peruse catalogs, books, and magazines.

Take your time before deciding to purchase an expensive curriculum

While the \$600/year packaged curriculum your friend raves about may seem "safe," it can tie up a good deal of the homeschooling budget. On the other hand, the "library card and a math book" model of homeschooling, while it may fit the budget better, might be a bit too relaxed a model for your first year. Research, research, research! Do be prepared to make some purchasing and planning errors. More than once, I bought an item that I loved — I just forgot to check with my children to see if they would love it too!

Make friends in the homeschooling community.

The most successful homeschoolers avoid becoming isolated and get involved with other homeschoolers in various activities.

Two more points:

Do stuff you've always wanted to do and teach the kids as you go!

If you have always wanted to learn more about French Renaissance hairstyles, now is your chance! Or maybe you want to take up weight lifting. Get yourself and the kids some appropriate equipment and resource books and get started. Maybe you can hire a trainer or go to a gym. Could you trade piano lessons for weight training? The only limit is your interests and imagination!

Finally, evaluate your routine regularly —

— at least every month or two until you get the hang of homeschooling. You'll have some ups and down for certain. Children who have attended school often take a while to adjust to a homeschooling lifestyle — so do their parents. You are probably going to make some mistakes, and you may need to start over once, twice, or more. Learn what you can from your flubs, apologize as needed, then adapt your plans and goals and get on with family learning. Whatever you do, though, don't put off starting until you think you can get it right. If you have even a glimmer of how to begin, then begin. Make adjustments as you go. That is what successful homeschooling families do. And remember, homeschooling is a terrific lifestyle —

— *so have fun!*

Copyright 1994, 2002 Ann Lahrson-Fisher. Read more from Ann at her own website
<http://www.nettlepatch.net/homeschool/>