

Schedules & Homeschool Burn-out

by Mary Spinks

A common question from new homeschoolers is what schedule to keep. If you have decided to unschool, this question doesn't arise to the same degree. For those with more structured approaches, what schedule to keep is an important question. Most people end up doing what works for them, but this usually takes some time and experimentation to figure out. It may also require some rationalization of what constitutes 'school' for those whose states require attendance records. Some homeschoolers keep to the current public school schedules. Some homeschool in the mornings; some in the evenings. Some homeschool a varying number of days in the week. Some take off in the Summer. Some take off whenever they feel like it. Some homeschool year-round. There are so many viable alternatives and variations, and you can have a lot of fun experimenting with them.

A common schedule problem for new homeschoolers is that friends and relatives may have no idea what homeschooling involves. That you might have a schedule or that you might be doing anything in particular at any given time doesn't necessarily occur to them. They feel free to impose upon you and your family by dropping by whenever, ...or asking you to watch Johnny today because he's too sick to go to school, ...or my car won't start - could you give me a ride to work, ...or would you pick up Sarah from school because she's not feeling well, ...or the plumber is coming today and I can't get off work, ...or even suggesting that you provide full-time or after-school daycare for their children because you're homeschooling and obviously have plenty of free time on your hands!

Such encroachments need to be resisted, unless they are genuine emergencies involving persons who fully appreciate what you are doing and the favor they are asking. For the oblivious advantage-takers, a firm "No" with a calm explanation of why such expectations are unreasonable is usually sufficient to put an end to it.

Another common scheduling problem for new homeschoolers is that they're often nervous and unsure of themselves. They may feel a need to 'prove' homeschooling to themselves, to relatives, or to society in general. This can result in an overscheduling of academics. Relax. When administration and management time is factored out from a typical public or private school-day, the actual learning time is fairly minimal. The one-on-one and focused nature of homeschooling results in most homeschoolers having much more actual learning time available to them. As well as being a great bonus for parents with learning disabled children, this time factor also means you can spend loads of time on 'extra-curricular' activities, if you want. In addition, the one-on-one factor means that you don't have to follow a curriculum or educational plan, if you have decided to use one, exactly as written. Speed up, slow down, or omit portions altogether--as suits your needs. Some children thrive on schedules; some thrive in free-wheeling environments. Feel free to chop-and-change whenever you feel that things are not working out. There is no need to stick to a schedule or curriculum that is obviously not working just because it was recommended by an expert or because you think it SHOULD work. Trying to do it all or trying to stick to a typical school schedule without the additional 20 or 30 students to absorb 90% of the available time can result in unhappy and stressed-out children and parents ---and homeschool burn-out.

Homeschool burn-out is relatively common. It can happen at any time of the year. It can be the result of many factors: the days getting shorter, the days getting longer, the endless chores, being out-of-the-house too much, being in-the-house too much, stressful holidays, too many demands, boring or inappropriate curricula or materials, etc. Once again, you'll need to find what works for you and your family. Perhaps you've scheduled too much into your days. Having a 'school-is-cancelled-for-today' as needed might be sufficient for you. Or perhaps you haven't scheduled enough outside activities and are all sick of looking at the same four walls. You might want to plan more field trips, hang-out at the park more, or swap days off with another like-minded homeschooling parent - this can give each time for other tasks or projects as well as providing more variety for you all. If burn-out occurs, take off as much time as you need and re-evaluate your

schedule. Is it all necessary? What do we need to do less? What do we need to do more? What works best for us?

For a percentage of parents, 24/7/365 (twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year) with their children is what they always wanted, and they are very happy with this schedule and don't need any breaks. For others, down-time is a necessity, and this may lead to feelings of guilt or failure - "I can't be with my kids 24/7/365. I'm a bad mom/dad; there must be something wrong with me. Maybe I'm just not cut out to be a homeschooling mom/dad." Forget that; everyone is different. One's needs for mental, physical, spiritual, or emotional recuperation, be they large or small, are neither good nor bad; they just are. For some, the couple of hours after the children are in bed or before they get up, might be all that is required for avoiding burn-out. Others may need more time for their equilibrium. A percentage of parents think nothing is more relaxing or energizing than hanging out with the children after a day of working outside the home. This is great -- it gives the home-partner down-time if needed, and family-time is never a problem. Another percentage of out-of-the-home workers put in long, hard hours, over-time and weekends, to support their single-income homeschooling families. Getting to spend any time at all as a family, or either partner having any down-time, is a problem and can result in homeschool burn-out, to say the least. Or, perhaps, the work itself is so stressful and demanding that the parent can't deal emotionally or physically with the demands and attentions of children when he/she arrives home. Compromise, negotiation and scheduling may be necessary to ensure that each parent has what they need balanced with the needs of the children and family. Your physical, mental, and spiritual health and your relationships with your children and spouse are more important than any schedule. You're a homeschooling parent - 24/7/365 -relax and take a break.