

Teaching Multiple Ages in the Homeschool

People often wonder how homeschool parents can teach so many different ages at once. Society has been conditioned by the public school experience of different ages being segregated. It makes what should be a normal part of family life seem like a daunting task.

I love having my boys (16, 12, & 7) all working together at the table. Even though my youngest might not be able to fully comprehend all that we're discussing, he definitely gets the benefit of repeated exposure to new concepts. Plus my older boys get the benefit of repeated practice on the basics by helping him.

It might take some juggling to find what best works for YOUR family when you're schooling kids at different levels, but remember that grade levels are a very arbitrary thing and they don't have to rule your homeschool.

You decide what you want your children to learn and just dig in. I'm sure that there will be something for everyone--from oldest to youngest.

Enjoy every minute!

~Nancy Carter

Teaching multiple ages. My first thoughts went something like what Todd Wilson's might be:

Babies--put them in the swing with a good dose of sleep inducing music.

Toddlers--send them to the backyard with a loaf of bread, a jar of peanut butter and a big spoon.

Elementary kids--Buckle them to their little school desks making sure their hands are free to write down the answer to every problem in every workbook--correctly.

Older kids--Banish them to their separate rooms to mope until their work is done with threats of having to baby-sit the others if they don't.

Okay, I am totally not serious, but some days we just wonder how we can teach all these ages all at the same time. Well, the beauty of home educating is that you don't *have* to do either--you *get to* do them:

You don't have to teach: A lot of learning is done without you specifically setting time aside to instruct. Learning happens in living life together. What kind of learning? Older kids learn how to interact with younger ones; young ones hold conversations with adults; everyone learns how to be on the same team working toward the same goals, and they all learn to serve and love each other. You *get to* teach whatever you choose as a family to learn.

You don't have to teach all at the same time: While I am working with Caleb & Mercy on phonics, Hannah is working with Joshua on science, Christopher is reading to Hope, and Jonathon is working with his computer math tutor. And then we can switch subjects and partners. Other days, Mom is doing her computer work right next to the table where all the independent students are gathered around doing their assignments while the younger ones are playing games nearby. You *get to* teach all at the same time as you gather together to study the Bible or history, or read aloud their favorite books.

Multiple ages can mean multiple challenges. It can also bring multiple blessings as we multiply our time in prayer. Then we certainly see God multiply our creativity. (I think I am finally learning my multiplication tables). Okay, I'll stop now.

No matter how you multiply it, you can do it. What Johnny doesn't get today because you are working with Susie, he will get tomorrow when you are working with him. Do as much as you can all together. Being together as a family reading and talking and laughing and learning--it can't get much better than that!

~Deborah Wuehler

At one time the public schools believed in mixing ages in one classroom, and many schools tried it out. The idea did not catch on universally, mainly because teachers needed retraining to handle the new kinds of groups. Many educators still believed in the advantages of mixed age groups. It was more like real life, younger can learn from older, and older grow more sympathetic and helpful to younger. But they could not manage it efficiently in the public schools.

Homeschool parents are trained in mixed ages year-by-year as their families grow. They don't need to switch over from handling a class of thirty age-mates. And they are reaping the advantages, possibly without even realizing it. Their children do treat the younger more kindly and talk with adults more naturally. The younger do learn from the older. These and other real-life skills develop even while many parents try to imitate the artificial life of school age-segregation.

Teaching the whole family feels like a struggle. Parents try everybody on one history or science topic, try some independent studies for independent students, try different curricula, and search for new kinds of curriculum. But the struggle pays off. You're always doing the best you can at the current time.

The age mix in your home is exactly right. Even if you have only one child, he is better off with parents and friends and relatives than he would be with a herd of thirty age-mates at school.

~Ruth Beechick

From my wife's point of view, teaching multiple ages is probably one of the hardest things about homeschooling; especially when you have a truckload of kids. I know she often feels like she doesn't have enough time to devote to each individual child. From what I can gather from some of the phone calls that she receives from other stressed-out moms, apparently she's not alone.

But from my perspective, the one that sits in a nice, quiet office in the basement, that's the *best* part of homeschooling. In fact, I think it's the best way to learn . . . being surrounded by a bunch of other family members. Why? Because your children are learning a whole bunch more skills than math and English.

They are learning how to function as a family, that life doesn't revolve around them, that sometimes they have to wait or help others, and that they have to work as a team to accomplish anything.

Those are vital skills that need to be mastered. By teaching a bunch of children at the same time under the same roof, they will master those skills.

So, I'm not going to give you any advice on how to devote time to each individual child . . . because you may not be able to do a lot of that. But let me say, that's OK.

So keep up the good work . . . while I go back to my nice, quiet office.

Be Real,

~Todd Wilson, The Familyman

Biographical Information

Copyright, 2009. All rights reserved by authors above. Content provided by [The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine, LLC](#).

Nancy Carter is happy to call herself a relaxed homeschooler. After years of teaching in the public school system, she cherishes being able to learn together with her own children. She and her husband Tony have three sons and are learning all kinds of new things together on their farm. You can read more of her family's Lessons Learned on the Farm at www.HomeschoolBlogger.com/tn3jcarter or you can email her at tn3jcarter@wildblue.net.

Dr. Ruth Beechick is a lifelong educator who now writes mostly for homeschoolers, whom she sees as bright lights in these days before Christ returns. Dr. Ruth Beechick has taught hundreds of people to read, Her own newest books are World History Made Simple: Matching History with the Bible (www.HomeschoolingBooks.com or 1-800-421-6645. and A Biblical Home Education.

Todd Wilson, “The Familyman,” author of Lies Homeschooling Moms Believe, Help! I’m Married to a Homeschooling Mom, and The Official Book of Homeschooling Cartoons, is a dad, writer, conference speaker, and former pastor. Todd’s humor and gut-honest realness have made him a favorite speaker at homeschool conventions across the country and a guest on Focus on the Family. Todd and his wife Debbie homeschool their eight children in northern Indiana when they’re not traveling around the country encouraging moms and dads. You can visit Familyman Ministries at www.familymanweb.com.

Deborah Wuehler is the senior editor for The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine. She resides in Roseville, California, with her husband Richard. They are the parents of eight children: three teenagers, three elementary, a preschooler and a baby. They have been homeschooling since the birth of their firstborn who is now graduated from high school. Many of her articles can be found on www.Crosswalk.com, and many other homeschooling sites. She is a group leader in her local homeschooling support organization and she loves digging for buried treasure in the Word, reading, writing, homeschooling, and dark chocolate! Email her at senioreditor@TheHomeschoolMagazine.com.