

Homeschooling with Toddlers

Terri Johnson

Do you get nervous when it gets really quiet around your house? Do you have to put markers, glue and other creative art supplies up on a high shelf? Do step stools located in unusual places around the house make you cringe? If you have answered yes to two or more of these questions, then you must have a toddler living in your home. Toddlers are a joy, there is no doubt about that, but they can also create havoc if left alone with nothing productive to do for too long . . .

There are three strategies to use when homeschooling with toddlers in your home and these are 1. Keep them busy, 2. Divide and Conquer and 3. Get Creative. Let's look at each one as you will want to employ a combination of strategies in your home to get the most enjoyment with your older and younger children.

KEEP HIM BUSY

1. Have a special school box for your toddler that they only use during school time. It may include special crayons to be used during handwriting time, snap cubes to be used during math time, etc. Our special preschool box is filled with Ziploc[®] activities - see Paula's Archives (parental note: there are some link problems on this site, so we have temporarily removed the hyperlink until the website owner can fix the problem) for tons of ideas. This box is to be kept aside for use only during school time so that it remains fresh and new for the child.
2. Offer special high chair activities during school time. Put shaving cream in a gallon Ziploc bag and let the child "write" with a finger on it and erase by squishing it around. Offer finger-paint or play dough. Have a big Tupperware container filled with dry beans or split peas and let your child use scoops or measuring cups to pour it from one container to another. Yes, you'll have to clean it up later, but it may buy you 30-45 minutes of teaching time with another child.
3. Put the step stool up to the kitchen sink, close the drain and run a drizzle of water into the sink along with a little bit of dish soap. Give your child some plastic cups, bowls and spoons to "wash". He'll feel glad to know that he is helping with the chores.
4. Get book and tape kits from the library. Your toddler can listen to the story through headphones while "reading" the book.
5. Have your read aloud time with your older students right outside the open bathroom door while your younger child plays in the tub.

6. Have special toys for use during school time. Rotate these toys so that they are always fresh and interesting.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

1. While working on a specific subject with one older child, have the other older child play with the youngest child in her room. This is a special play time together. Then switch off.
2. Have dad teach certain subjects. My husband teaches science and logic to the older kids. This frees me up to spend time with my younger children.
3. Have middle grade students do certain subjects independently. After giving instruction, send them off to work on the assignment on their own.
4. Hire a homeschool teen (or ask Grandma) to come over and play with the youngest child while you "get serious" with the older children.
5. Swap school time (or toddler time) with another homeschool mom. That way each of you can have two or three days of concentrated school time each week.

GET CREATIVE

1. Have school time during nap time.
2. Work on some school subjects at night while dad is home to play with or put the youngest to bed.
3. Do some fun activity with your toddler before you begin school. This will cause her to be happier playing for a while on her own.
4. Don't do every subject every day. Combine subjects or possibly double up on some school work on certain days. For example, do a whole week's worth of science on one day.
5. Be willing to do some school work on Saturday when dad is home.
6. Use smaller amounts of time for school. A block of 4 hours may not be possible at this time, but 45 minutes to an hour at a time may be doable.
7. Read aloud during breakfast and lunch (while youngest is contentedly eating in his high chair).

8. Understand that your homeschool day will not look like a classroom day during this season of your family's life. And this is OK!

Enjoy this season of your child's life, knowing that it will not last forever and that you are not alone. Your toddler will only be at this stage for a couple short years and next thing you know, he'll be in kindergarten. They are only young once and it is a precious, precious time. Don't wish it away! And try to stay flexible, toddlers change from one day to the next. Just when one strategy may be working for your family, he'll change and you'll need to try something else to keep the school day flowing. Above all, give him lots of hugs and kisses during your school day which will reassure you both that he is not an interruption, but a blessing.

Enjoy those learning moments . . .

Terri Johnson

Biographical Information

Copyright, 2009. All rights reserved by author below. Content provided by The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine, LLC.

Todd and Terri have been married 20 years, home teaching their children for 12 years and operating a publishing business - Knowledge Quest, Inc. (www.knowledgequestmaps.com) - that specializes in history and geography curricula for the homeschool marketplace for the past 8 years. They are currently teaching an online class – Homeschooling ABCs (www.homeschoolingabcs.com) – providing guidance and instruction for new and/or overwhelmed homeschooling parents. Their high school level course will be available this coming April 2009.