

OVERCOMING FIRST YEAR HURDLES

For the family whose children have previously been educated in a conventional school, the first year will be the most difficult. Challenges might surface in discipline, character development, self-esteem, academics, or even in your lifestyle. Just as our forefathers weathered obstacles while traversing unfamiliar territory in covered wagons, you will face your fears, insecurities, inadequacies, and temptations to throw in the towel. Along with these uncertainties, however, you will rekindle your relationship with your children, strengthen your family, and discover a network of homeschoolers who will befriend and guide you. Yes, your whole world *could* turn upside-down. Nonetheless, as you deal with your "Goliaths", you will gain insights into alternative ways of viewing life and learning.

Developing disciplined children could be your most significant accomplishment in your beginning months. Not surprisingly, undisciplined children pose the greatest threat to a successful home school.

Because many parents flounder in our culture's sea varied child training methods, children have become selfish and rebellious. To prevent this, parents must establish guidelines in their homes. Rules are like a fence to a small child; it protects him from outside intruders and keeps him within safe perimeters. While providing security for the child, rules also keep parents consistent in their disciplinary measures.

Our family used the "crime and punishment" method. Early in our marriage, my husband and I created a list of "crimes" with the appropriate discipline to fit each misbehavior. Note that we reserved spanking for rebellion only. Also, the list changed as the children grew older. The beauty of using this method is that the children know in advance what is expected of them. It also keeps the parents in unity as they consistently apply the same form of discipline. Consistency is key.

<i>Not doing chore</i>	Extra work duty
<i>Backtalk</i>	Spanking
<i>arguing with sibling</i>	Sit in opposite chairs and stare at each other (this inevitably resulted in hilarious giggling)
<i>Yelling in house</i>	Whisper for 15 minutes

With unity and consistency, the parents must include a *calm* response to the breaking of family rules. Dealing with a child in anger only pushes him away from you and produces rebellion instead of obedience. The child should also be expected to verbally confess his wrong doing, followed by forgiveness and a warm hug from the parent. Every child needs to know that he is loved no matter how disobedient. Unconditional love never fails to create a secure child who grows up with self-esteem.

A word of caution – there is a world of difference between *authoritarian* and *authoritative* discipline. "Children raised by authoritarian parents get distinct messages: 'Obey, or else . . . As long as you live under my roof, you'll do it because I say so, and that's that!'" (1) With a heavy finger pointing at the child (rather than the behavior), authoritarian parents punish instead of discipline. Instead of dominating their children and making all decisions for them, authoritative parents apply disciplinary measures that focus on the *behavior* of the child, *not* the child. What happens to children in this process is three-fold: 1) They become accountable for their actions. 2) Instead of making choices out of fear of punishment, they develop self-control, thus making wiser choices. 3) Then as they go through their teenage hormone changes, instead of rebelling, they usually make the adjustment into young adulthood with greater ease. Still, although rebellion is less likely, it is not guaranteed. These are times of difficult

changes. However, children brought under parental authority and made accountable for their actions in a warm and loving home, most often return to their roots even if they stray from the path for a season.

If your child is out-of-control, summer is a good time to concentrate on bringing him under authority. Nevertheless, if you have brought your child home mid-term, and have difficulty in this area, let your heaviest concentration be on discipline, with a very light academic load. Because a rebellious child cannot be taught, this *must* be a priority. Once you have established your authority, and your child becomes more teachable, you can increase his studies.

This first year will also provide an opportunity to assess your child's self-image. Hopefully, you will be delightfully pleased in his overall emotional health; however, you may observe some inappropriate reactions to situations or even witness damaging habits. Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay's research reveals that a child who knows he is worthwhile and useful has no need to develop destructive patterns. He does not turn to drugs and rebellion, but rather possesses a cooperative spirit, a sense of responsibility, and positive attitudes towards his family. His relationship with his parents is one of mutual trust and respect. (2) To encourage a positive self-image in your child, practice the *A-B-C's of self-worth* by letting your child know that he is *accepted*, he *belongs*, and feels *capable* in at least one area of his life. (3)

Another first year difficulty could be a shocker – your previous A or B student may lack in basic skills. If this is the case, spend your first year reinforcing your child's academic foundation. Pursue the studies planned for year one *only* when you feel convinced that he is able to move on – bearing in mind that real progress depends on the child's ability rather than age level. Careful attention in this area will save your child a lifetime of educational handicaps.

If you discover that your lifestyle or commitments do not gel with this new path, you will likely need to adjust your priorities. Perhaps you are accustomed to saying 'yes' to every church or community project. Then you may need to learn to say 'no' without any guilt feelings. Do not totally retreat from the world, but find a balance. Include your children in an occasional outside project. Enjoy an outlet just for you while your children participate in an activity. Be wise in your family planning. Unfortunately, the world tends to make us feel that we are cheating ourselves and our children if we are not involved in certain community or church activities. Not so! Treasure your family time, and guard it like a hawk, while sprinkling it sparingly with outside interests that harmonize with your family values and priorities.

Lack of confidence in your ability to teach your own children will sometimes sweep over you like a tidal wave. This is common even with seasoned home educators. Well-meaning friends, family, and neighbors may attempt to discourage you, thus increasing the pressure. Full support from your spouse, a strong link with a local support group, and determination are *musts* for survival. As you experience success in your first year, your self-confidence will blossom, and with it a deepening appreciation for your choice to home school.

Home schooling challenges and stimulates very family member. Opportunities for change and growth abound as you face weaknesses in both yourself and your children. With children gone all day at traditional schools, character flaws can go unnoticed until they are in full bloom. Home schooling, however, provides the opportunity to see and correct weaknesses when still tiny sprouts. In this way, true education occurs, providing well-rounded growth for the whole person.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Bringing up Kids Without Tearing Them Down, by Dr. Kevin Leman
Making Children Mind Without Losing Yours, by Dr. Kevin Leman
Survivors Guide to Home Schooling, by Luanne Shakelford and Susan White

NOTES

1. Dr. Kevin Leman, *Bring up Kids Without Tearing Them Down* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p. 26-27.
2. Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay, *Raising a Responsible Child: Practical Steps in Successful Family Relationships* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 11.
3. Leman, *Bringing up Kids Without Tearing Them Down*, p. 5-8.