Checklist: Getting a Homeschool Started

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Research Homeschooling

Taking charge of your children's education is a big responsibility. Thus, parents need to understand exactly what homeschooling entails before they jump in with both feet. Some background research is essential.

√ Read books about homeschooling. (See Suggested Reading)

√ Check out audio and video tapes on homeschooling topics. (Several support groups around the state maintain tape lending libraries.)

√ Talk to other homeschooling families about their experiences (curriculum choices, daily activities, successes and failures, etc.).

√ Attend homeschool support group meetings. (Member support groups are also listed each month in the CHECK News.)

√ Attend homeschool conventions, workshops, and how-to classes.

Investigate the Legalities

Each
state has its own rules and regulations that affect home schools. These rules range from states requiring annual notification, testing, and oversight, to states where home schools operate as private schools and are thus virtually unregulated. It is essential that homeschooling families determine exactly what their state requires.

√ Obtain legal information from the local or state homeschool support group. (Ask for CHECK's Kansas Legal Packet.)

√ Contact Home School Legal Defense Association for information about the legal status of homeschooling in your state.

Evaluate Your Family's Needs

Homeschooling
allows the opportunity to make the school accommodate the family, rather than the other way around. To do this, families must take time to analyze and identify their specific characteristics and needs. Some of the things to be considered are:

√ Is this the family's first year of homeschooling?

√ Will there be more than one student and grade level?

√ What are the students' learning styles?

√ Is the teacher confident and experienced, or insecure and in need of guidance and assistance?

√ Is there access to other resources (public or private school programs, museums, libraries, homeschool resource centers, etc.)?

√ What is the family's budget for educational materials?

Select a Curriculum

Once your family's characteristics and needs have been analyzed and identified, these should be used to guide you in acquiring a curriculum. For example, families desiring a strong measure of structure should consider curricula offering pre-planned lessons and a well-defined course of study, perhaps even considering enrolling in a satellite school offering ongoing counseling and oversight. On the other hand, families desiring less structure might consider a unit study program or perhaps even developing their own curriculum from

resources available at home and in the community. The purchase of a curriculum is one of the most important homeschooling decisions your family will make, so care should be taken to thoroughly investigate all the options available.

√ Consult curriculum and educational materials catalogs and homeschool curriculum guides (e.g., Mary Pride's Big Book of Home Learning; Cathy Duffy's Christian Home Educators' Curriculum Manual).

√ Attend curriculum fairs and homeschool seminars.

√ Visit a homeschool resource center.

√ Most importantly, talk to other homeschooling families using a particular curriculum for a first-hand evaluation.

Plan the Paperwork

Once your curriculum decision has been made, the next step is to put that curriculum into action on a daily basis.

√ Set goals for completion of school work (e.g., which books, which chapters and pages, which special projects, etc.).

√ Establish a general schedule: a school year (which months and weeks), a school week (which days), a school day (which hours).

√ Create
lesson plans which fit your school's work completion goals into the schedule you have established. Please note that schedules and lesson plans are tools, not masters. If your schedule isn't working out, change it. If an opportunity for a terrific field trip comes up which isn't in the lesson plan, find an eraser and fix the lesson plan. Don't be a slave to the lesson plan, especially since the whole point of homeschooling is to make the school fit the family, not the other way around.

√ Determine what records your school
needs, based on the homeschooling program you have established, and keep them current. For example, if your school uses a graded system, then a grade book is necessary. Other types of records which might be considered are attendance records, medical and dental records, portfolios of student work, and student journals.

Get Organized

Now that your homeschool program is ready, create an environment conducive to learning.

√ Prepare a place in your home to homeschool, with good lighting, seating, ventilation, storage space, etc.

√ Gather the necessary supplies to implement your homeschool program (paper, pencils, notebooks, art supplies, etc.).

√ Realign your family's priorities. To be successful, homeschooling must come first!

√ Allocate chores and other family responsibilities so that everyone pitches in and mom isn't overloaded.

√ Maintain discipline, for both parents and students.

Establish Your Homeschool Legally (Kansas Information)

Before your homeschool can be officially ready to open for business, you must fulfill the legal obligations of the state.

√ Enroll with Home School Legal Defense Association as soon as possible. (It's not required, but it is a very good idea!)
Use CHECK's group code (293199) to receive a discount membership.

√ Register your homeschool as a non-accredited private school with the Kansas State Department of Education.

√ If your children are currently enrolled in a public school, formally withdraw them, by letter, phone, or in person. (Don't just disappear!)

√ If a homeschool questionnaire is utilized by the authorities in your county, secure a copy from the local homeschool support group, complete it, and file it away with your school records, in case you are contacted in the future.

Socialization

In all the hubbub over curriculum, lesson plans, and registration, take care not to lose sight of the social element.

√ Subscribe to the local and/or statewide homeschool support group's newsletter, to stay informed on news and upcoming events.

√ Consider teaming up with other homeschoolers in your area, for co-op classes, team teaching, group activities, field trips, etc.

√ Take care not to over commit to extracurricular activities.

Points to Remember

√ Be flexible. Don't get locked into doing things only one way, especially since that one way might not work out.

√ Your
family is unique, so your homeschool will also be unique. Don't worry
if your homeschool doesn't look exactly like some other family's
homeschool. Your family will need to make its own decisions and find
its own solutions.

√ Especially, don't feel like your homeschool has to look like the local public school.

√ Homeschooling
is equivalent to at least a part-time (and perhaps even a full-time)
job. So be prepared to sacrifice other activities on your schedule in
order to have the time necessary to fulfill your homeschooling
responsibilities.

√ Homeschooling is not an "easy way out."
It will not allow you to escape or even avoid family problems. However,
it does provide the best opportunity for family members to spend
quality time together so as to work to build a strong family.