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Am I Homeschooling Responsibly?

Tags: high school HSLDA milestones responsibility spirituality teaching time management

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! And welcome back from what we hope was a joyous and memorable Christmas break. Can you relate when we confide that it's a bit difficult for us to get re-engaged into the real world of responsibilities after the holidays? Or, are we the only two sluggards we know?

A new year always brings fresh resolutions and goals, so we want to suggest that you consider reviewing and reevaluating your goals for the rest of the school year. The overarching question to ask is: "Am I homeschooling responsibly?" We'd like to help you honestly assess how well you are managing your high school homeschooling responsibilities.

The word "responsibility" rightly carries with it the idea of being accountable to somebody or for something. Often accountability is viewed in a negative or discouraging way. But as we look at homeschooling responsibly, we want to emphasize the positives. You may discover ways you need to change or to do things differently, but if the end result improves your homeschool and the quality of education you are providing for your teen, then it is a commendable and worthy objective!

Let's look at some areas to keep in mind as you appraise your homeschooling:

The Use of Time

Each of us is given 24 hours in our day--no more, no less. In general, how are you using your time? If your mind begins to add up the number of days when other priorities took too much of your time, leaving too little to adequately devote to schooling, then it may be that you need to re-prioritize. When we homeschooled, we clearly remember the constant tug-of-war between preparing and teaching our children's lessons and completing other tasks--cleaning, cooking meals, laundering, service and ministry activities, and on and on. If schooling is left on the back burner more days than not, perhaps it's time to structure your day differently. Would it work better for you to start school a bit earlier in the day? On the other hand, if you and the children took just 30 minutes at the start of the day to get the house in order, would the remainder of the school day be more productive?

Staying the Course or Switching Gears?

To evaluate another area, discuss with your teen his academic course load. How did last semester go? Was the number of courses just right? Too few? Too many? The academic schedule you planned may need adjustment because sometimes you can't discern if it's too much or too little until you are in the midst of it. Don't be afraid to make adjustments. You may need to drop or add a course--remember the "Drop/Add" period in college? Mistakes do happen--you bite off more than you can chew; or on the other hand, an opportunity only comes around once (such as your sister saying she would love to teach your teen Trig) necessitating that you carve out time to take advantage of this option. Homeschoolers are famous for saying that we have flexibility--but then we find ourselves being rigid and unwilling to see or make changes that would be helpful. Are there changes that you should make academically this year?

Out With the Good, In With the Best

Do you ever notice how many times our choices involve distinguishing the good from the best? Take time to chat with your

teen about each of the extracurricular activities in which he is currently involved. Each of them when considered individually may be "good." But, as you think about all of them--including jobs, sports, music, clubs, hobbies, volunteering, etc.--are there any that should or could be eliminated? In our experience, homeschoolers are more often involved in too many activities rather than too few. If you and your teen are running ragged, it's time to take inventory. Cutting down on the miles driven to and from activities will not only save money, but it will free up time so you and your teen can unwind, read a good book, or discuss important issues without being interrupted. Down (or margin) time is essential if you want to conserve energy and finish the high school years strong.

Also, it is possible for your teen's schedule to fill up with so many extras that course work begins to suffer. If this is the case, then remember that a few activities well done are much better than many activities participated in half-heartedly. Be ruthless in evaluating this area, and you'll reap the benefits of a leaner--but more fruitful--schedule.

Interruptions as Detours--or Simply a Dead End?

Unforeseen circumstances can catch us off guard. An elderly parent suddenly needs care, a home remodel project veers out of control, a child incurs an injury, or a homeschooling parent becomes ill. These are definitely interruptions that set us on detours! But, hopefully, even when you come to a homeschooling detour, you will still be heading in the right direction, though it may take a little extra time to get back on the interstate highway.

However, if the detour leads to a dead end rather than returning to the expected course of action, then careful consideration and judgment may need to be exercised to implement a new plan. Begin by drawing up an overall plan to recover, enlist help from others if needed, and prudently map out the precise steps required to keep moving forward. Remember, there are no hopeless cases, but always a number of options to consider. For example, you may find revamping your school schedule from days to evenings or from a weekday to a Saturday will allow for necessary recovery. Or, if circumstances have prevented much math or history from being accomplished this first semester, then you and your teen may need to map out a summer course that puts you back on track to complete the material that needs to be covered. Maybe the English compositions were not evaluated because mom was tending to a sick child. If that's the case, then an alternative might be to sign your teen up for an online writing course with an outside instructor who evaluates the compositions for you.

Taking a Spiritual Inventory

Homeschooling responsibly is foremost a matter of integrity. You are involved in a mighty work with the ability to have a major impact on your teen. Ask yourself these questions and honestly reflect on how you can improve:

1. Do I have a lazy or unmotivated attitude towards schooling?
2. Do I push my children too much academically out of pride?
3. Do I share openly with others about my homeschool struggles and in humility ask for their input?
4. Am I careful to plan, or do I just hope for the best?
5. Do I fall into condemnation for things I am not doing well, but then make no effort to improve?
6. Can I mentor another family and encourage them to also homeschool responsibly?

True conviction in any of these areas is not a millstone. Instead, see true conviction as a stepping stone to change for the better. Each of us has room for improvement! Think of just one or two items that need revamping in your homeschooling, and then start off this new 2008 year by making revisions to your homeschooling that will benefit both you and your teen. Trust the Lord to give you wisdom, guidance, strength, and energy to homeschool responsibly for His glory and for your teen's good.

Next month, we'll give you some suggestions for chasing those February winter blahs away.

Keep going, stay the course, and know that there is abundant grace for you today,

Becky Cooke and Diane Kummer
HSLDA High School Coordinators

This resource is an article from the *Homeschooling Thru Highschool* newsletter (1/3/2008), and is provided by the Home School Legal Defense Association as a service to the homeschooling community.

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Author: Becky Cooke
Diane Kummer

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