



Getting Started!



An Oak Meadow Guide to
Homeschooling Success



Welcome!



Homeschooling is a grand adventure! Like any grand adventure, it is likely to be filled with discoveries, detours, successes, obstacles, and, above all, a steep learning curve! At Oak Meadow, we've been supporting homeschooling families for nearly 50 years, and we've talked to thousands of homeschoolers about what works, what doesn't, and what they wish they knew when they started.

This Getting Started guide draws on the collective wisdom of generations of homeschoolers. It offers practical tips on setting up a homeschooling space, organizing your day, coordinating learning activities for one child or many, and taking the time to enjoy the learning process together. We hope you find that homeschooling is not only doable for you and your family, but also it becomes one of the best things you've ever done.

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SETTING UP YOUR HOMESCHOOL SPACE

Here are some tips as you envision and establish a practical spot in your home where homeschooling can be comfortable and productive.

Many new homeschoolers wonder how best to set up their homeschool room or learning space. The possibilities can seem overwhelming.

Remember that your homeschooling room doesn't need to look like a classroom! You will just need a work area with a flat surface, comfortable seating, good lighting, and space for storage. Ideally it should be located near wherever the parent or home teacher will be so that they can be available for questions when they are not directly involved in the student's work.

Some families set up a homeschooling space by dedicating a room in their home that is just for school time, while others use the kitchen table. Make sure to have all your supplies handy, and have your children keep things organized. Locate shelves and organizational units so that materials can be kept easily at hand.

You'll want some combination of shelves, drawers, and other storage options to keep supplies organized. You will also need a place to store curriculum, reference books, and library books. An inbox and outbox or a set of dividers can be helpful for sorting work in progress.

Rotating items for play frees up space for creative uses. Some toys might be put away for many seasons and only brought out for a few weeks before they are put away again.

Don't forget to consider the spaces that are available outdoors! Perhaps there is a porch, gazebo, patio, or garden table that could be used in warm weather. Some of the same principles apply to outdoor learning spaces: comfortable furniture, shelter from the bright sun, and a flat space to work on. Older homeschoolers might expand their horizons and study at the park, the library, or a local cafe.

As you consider how to set up your homeschooling room, ask the student who will be using it what they would find most helpful. Be flexible and allow your learning setup to evolve as you discover what works best. Reassess your space periodically, and make changes and improvements with the input of those who use it most.

Above all, don't worry if you don't have the perfect space! Let your heart, creativity, and experience guide you. Homeschooling, like life, is a work in progress.



10 TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU DESIGN YOUR HOMESCHOOL SPACE

KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Your homeschooling room doesn't need to look like a classroom!

Find a dedicated table or large desk where work can be spread out.

FIND YOUR WORK SURFACE

PRIORITIZE COMFORT

Make sure there is comfortable seating for each student as well as the adult(s) who will be helping.

Keep supplies organized on shelves or drawers in the work area.

KEEP MATERIALS NEARBY

ELIMINATE DISTRACTION

During school time try to eliminate background noise like music, television or computer.

If you have the option of repainting the walls, choose a restful, peaceful color.

CONSIDER AESTHETICS

MAKE CLEAN UP SIMPLE

Place a trash container and recycle bin near the workspace.

A hammock can be the perfect place for reading and studying.

GO OUTSIDE!

CONSULT YOUR STUDENT

Be flexible and allow your learning setup to evolve as you discover what works best.

Homeschooling, like life, is a work in progress.

KEEP LEARNING

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Do you wish you had a better system for measuring and recording academic progress? A planner can help.



As a homeschooler, you are the parent, teacher, and school administrator all rolled into one. In the middle of juggling science experiments, spelling lists, math practice, research reports, art projects, and all the rest, you still have to track and assess your student's progress. You might already have a good system for measuring and recording academic progress, or you might wish there was a more efficient, effective way to do it.

There is! Consider the weekly planner.

No matter where on the organized/spontaneous spectrum you land, you can find support and a sense of ease by using a weekly planner. Once you get in the habit of spending a bit of time each week planning the week's goals and recording accomplishments, you'll have an easy-to-reference record of your student's successes as well as areas that need work.

There are many ways to use a planner. Keep reading for some tips for getting the most out of it...



IDENTIFY THE WEEK'S GOALS. Look over what you would like to accomplish in the coming week in each subject. This is what will go into your planner.

PRIORITIZE. Write down the top-priority tasks first, dividing them up according to subject and spacing them over the days of the week. By putting the high priority tasks at the top of the list, they are most likely to get done. Let's say there's a book report in English that must be done this week because your student will be beginning a new book next week. The book report will go at the top of the list for English and be scheduled early in the week. This gives some wiggle room if it takes longer than expected.

BREAK UP PROJECTS INTO SMALLER TASKS. Maybe an animal research paper is on the science list this week. Day 1 can be for locating research materials; Day 2 can be for reading research and taking notes; Day 3 is for organizing the notes and creating a detailed outline with topic sentences for each main idea; Day 4 is for the rough draft; and Day 5 is for revising, editing, and proofing the final version of the report. Each of these tasks will take about the same amount of time, making a big, daunting project suddenly feel doable.

USE COLOR-CODING TO KEEP TRACK OF MULTIPLE STUDENTS. This lets you see who will be doing what on a particular day. Seeing everyone's schedule at once helps you coordinate visits to the library, field trips, larger projects, and time for one-on-one student support.

PLAN FOR SPONTANEITY. If something comes up, or if you and your kids just need a day without expectations, go for it! Spontaneity is one of the greatest joys and benefits of homeschooling. Your planner makes it easy for you to go off and enjoy yourselves, and then get back on track afterwards. Everything is still there—you just shift the tasks over one day.

GET KIDS INVOLVED. Involving your students in creating the weekly plan gives them a sense of ownership, encourages autonomy, and teaches time management skills. They learn how to divide tasks into smaller steps, budget their time, and prioritize what needs doing. And—here's the fun part—they get to check off items as each task is completed to celebrate their successes!

TRACK MILESTONES. For record-keeping purposes, you can highlight larger projects as they are completed each week or month. This makes it easy to flip back through the planner and find them when it is time to create a homeschool portfolio or report to a supervising teacher.

CELEBRATE A SUCCESSFUL YEAR. At the end of the year, your planner becomes a record of your child's academic accomplishments. Make sure to take time to savor and celebrate all the hard work!

Using a planner may take a little time to get used to, but it's well worth it. Once you get comfortable and find a pattern that works for you, the planner will help you prepare for success so you have more free time to enjoy your homeschooling life.





Many homeschooling families wonder how long a typical homeschool day should be. The answer is that this varies for each student and each family, and will change as the child gets older.

In the younger grades, the curriculum is presented in a natural, informal manner, providing opportunities for focused work as well as active exploration.

Middle school is an important time for your student to practice taking ownership over their homeschooling day. Present different options for organizing the school day, but ultimately let your student set their daily schedule.

In general, most high school students work best when a specific time of the day is dedicated to doing school work, and there is a healthy mix of focused book work and creative, experiential projects.

Use these suggestions of how much time to spend homeschooling per day as guidelines, and remember that every student and family is different. Continue to embrace the things that work and gently let go of the things that don't. With a little flexibility and creativity, most families and students quickly discover a rhythm to their school day and week that works well for them.

HOW LONG IS A TYPICAL HOMESCHOOL DAY?

K-3

approximately
3-4 hours per
day

4-8

approximately
4-6 hours per
day

HS

approximately
1 hour per
course per day

TIP: Remember, these are just guidelines. Every student and family is unique, and homeschooling is all about flexibility. Experiment and discover a schedule that works best for your family.

ORGANIZING YOUR HOMESCHOOL DAY

There is no one right way to approach homeschool planning, so go at it with an open mind!

Consider your family's routines

When thinking about your schedule, consider the default rhythm that is already happening as well as any changes or habits that you'd like to foster.

Prioritize unstructured time and rest

Plan daily time for free play, down time, or other unstructured activities, ideally at the same time each day.

Set aside time for academic planning

Set aside a dedicated time each week to look over your homeschooling materials and curriculum and figure out what needs to be accomplished in the coming week.

Map out regular times for focused learning

Academics can be strategically woven around active play and down time to make learning time as efficient as possible.



Many parents wonder how best to organize their time when using Oak Meadow or any homeschooling curriculum. There is no one right way to approach homeschool planning, so go at it with an open mind! Try something that appeals to you, then fine-tune your process as you discover what works well for you and your children.

It can be helpful and calming for children and parents to have a predictable daily routine. Start by sketching out a typical week. When does your day begin? When do you and your children normally rise in the morning, eat meals, and tuck in at night? After you have mapped out the daily basics, think about your family's outside commitments and how they fit into the week.

When the fundamentals are in place in your schedule, it's time to work out in detail how academic time will be spent. Identify regular times for focusing on academic learning and practice. It may take some trial and error to figure out how much time you need to block off for academics in each day or week. If you are unsure, start by reserving more time than you think you need.

Keep in mind that a great plan on paper is sometimes not a good fit in practice, and this may not become apparent until you've given it a try. Homeschool scheduling is an ever-shifting process. You'll make adjustments along the way as you discover what each person in the family needs most.





HOMESCHOOLING MULTIPLE CHILDREN

How can I homeschool multiple children? If you've asked this question, you're in good company.



Meeting the needs of multiple children is a challenge for any parent. But homeschooling parents need to be able to do it all day long. How is that possible?

THERE IS NO ONE RIGHT WAY

Homeschooling families run a wide gamut, from “regimented” to “easygoing.” Where does your family fit on this spectrum? Some parents would ideally prefer a more structured approach, but reality requires them to be more laid-back to make it work. Others find that a carefully planned rhythm helps them stay on track with everyone’s needs.

Set the tone of adaptability in your home and model it for your children to follow. If you are calm, creative, and flexible in meeting their needs, they will learn in time to be patient and flexible in getting their own needs met.

LET YOUR OBSERVATIONS GUIDE YOU

Think about each of your children individually. What engages each one’s attention like nothing else?

Use your observations to create tools that help them stay occupied while you are working with the others. Finding safe, reliable ways to keep little hands and minds busy when you need it will go a long way.

CREATE A PREDICTABLE BUT FLEXIBLE RHYTHM

By using your children’s own rhythms as a starting point for the whole family’s rhythm, you can maximize the chance of success. When everyone in the family knows what to expect, less time is spent in communication about what each day will hold. Provide a general rhythm to guide the whole family. If you try something and it doesn’t work, use that information to adjust and continue moving forward.

CAPITALIZE ON THEIR INDEPENDENCE

In what ways can each child be independent? Independence for an older child might mean reading or working on lessons by themselves for a set period of time. For a baby, independence might mean naptime, time with toys on the floor, or an extended ride on someone’s back.



The ability to work independently is also something that can be built up over time. Try creating a stamina chart to allow your students to set goals and track their progress reading or working on their own. Small increases every day can lead to big gains in your child's ability to work independently for extended periods of time.

PRIORITIZE THOUGHTFULLY

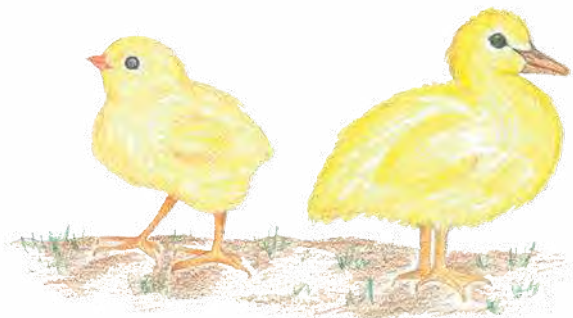
You'll also need to note the areas where your students need your help to complete work. You may need to spend some time observing and assessing your children to figure out where they need the greatest support. The most successful cooperation happens when those involved feel their needs are recognized and valued.

TAKE TIME TO RECHARGE

Always remember to take care of your own basic needs so that you can be as patient, creative, and flexible as possible. Homeschooling multiple children is a mighty challenge. Try to connect with others who share your values, can relate to your struggles, and can offer ideas that you might not have thought of. Maintain patience. Feed your own needs so that you have plenty of inner reserves when you most require them. Approach the issue of nurturing multiple children as a problem that can and will be solved.

KEEP IT ALL IN PERSPECTIVE

When you have a challenging day or week, remind yourself why you started homeschooling in the first place. Chances are your reasons for homeschooling will be much more compelling than your challenges. Love your children, be responsive to their needs, do your best to be flexible and adaptable in your approach to homeschooling, and trust that it will be enough.



HOW TO INCLUDE YOUR HEART IN HOMESCHOOLING

Maintain Your Focus

Giving your full attention to your child is one of the best ways you can support their learning.

Use Humor

Be silly, tell jokes, and let your children know you delight in their laughter!

Understand your child's individual learning style.

Figure out how you can make learning most readily accessible.

Practice Self Care

We are most ready and able to do our job (as parents) and learn new things (as students) when our fundamental needs are well met.

Slow Down

Allow for spontaneous discoveries, whim-driven creations and heartfelt conversations.

Establish Rhythms

Routine can encourage a predictable and comforting flow to life and learning.

Be Gentle

Ride out the challenges with grace and optimism. Understand that some days will be easier than others.

Do Your Best

And let that be enough. There is no such thing as “perfect” homeschooling!

Let Love Lead

Let your love for your children be unconditional, so that they are free to explore and experiment as they learn, without fear of rejection.



BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION FOR LIFE

Excerpt from The Heart of Learning by Lawrence Williams, Oak Meadow's Founder



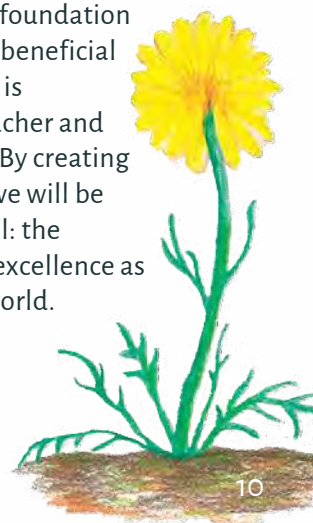
If we want to raise our children to be sensitive human beings—human beings who are supportive and responsive to the people and situations around them—we must create a space within which they can unfold naturally, in accordance with their own unique schedule, and not be forced to conform to the schedule of the prevailing culture.

A flower does not appear very early in the growth of a plant. Only after many long, preparatory stages does the flower appear, and it would not appear if those previous stages had not been nurtured carefully, each in its own order.

Seeing the overall pattern of development puts the parenting process in a much different perspective. As parents, we must strive to appreciate the tremendous potential within every growing human being. For our lives and the lives of our children to be rich and meaningful, we must be true to our inner natures, and encourage our children to do the same. [...]

Homeschooling gives us the opportunity to build a strong and sturdy foundation, supported by the wide variety of skills and concepts presented in this book. Each time you engage with your child's learning process, you can bring to bear your knowledge of the developmental stages of physical realm, emotional realm, and mental realm, and of how your child's head, heart, and will come into play. You can use your own awareness to bring about a flowing creative process, and remain mindful and present when your child encounters obstacles or presents you with challenging behaviors. You can incorporate nature-based play and creative physical activities into your child's day, and communicate clear boundaries that help your child understand responsibility and consequences.

This vision of how we can build a strong foundation for our children's learning can be just as beneficial to us as it is to them. The best education is transformative and encourages both teacher and student to unfold to their full potential. By creating this kind of rich learning environment, we will be giving our children the greatest gift of all: the opportunity to experience their unique excellence as human beings and to share it with the world.





CRAFT ACTIVITY: RIBBON BOOKMARKS

Everyone needs bookmarks! Make a special bookmark to save your spot in your nightly read-aloud or your favorite book.



Directions

- 1 Cut ribbon to the desired length, adding an extra inch to allow for hemming the ends.
- 2 Fold over the ends and use needle and thread to sew down ends to prevent fraying. (You can use glue instead, if you prefer.)
- 3 Using a matching color of embroidery thread, create a string of beads and add a charm or large bead at the end. Sew this onto the end of the bookmark.

Variations

- You can also cut the ribbon long enough to hang over both the top and bottom of the book, and put charms or beads on both ends.
- The ends can be sewn into a point or on a diagonal, or you can use pinking shears to keep edges from fraying. If you are using synthetic ribbon, you can use a match to fuse the cut edge to keep it from fraying (and then you don't need to fold it over and sew it).
- Instead of beads, you can use felt shapes or a large button to decorate the end of your bookmark. Cutting several shapes (like stars or flowers) in different sizes using different colors of felt and then sewing them one on top of the other makes a pretty design that is easy for little hands to manage.

Materials

- 7-9 inch lengths of various cloth ribbons
- Needle and thread (or a hot glue gun)
- Embroidery thread
- Beads, buttons, charms, felt, and other materials for decoration



CRAFT ACTIVITY: BIRD FEEDER

Create this easy bird feeder to attract birds to visit your home (and to help them with a plentiful source of food!)

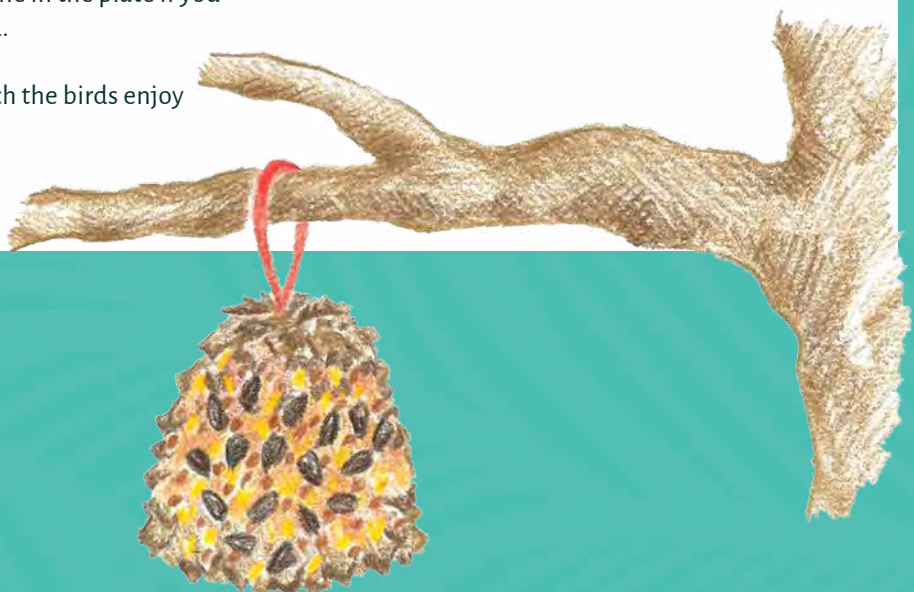


Materials

- String
- Large pinecone
- Spoon
- Peanut butter
- Birdseed
- Pie plate
- Newspaper

Directions

- 1 Spread newspaper on the table.
- 2 Tie the string very securely to the top stem of the pinecone for a hanger.
- 3 Spoon peanut butter between the scales of the pinecone.
- 4 Place birdseed in the pie plate.
- 5 With your hands, sprinkle the birdseed onto the dabs of peanut butter and push them in if they don't stick easily. You can also roll the pinecone in the plate if you prefer, coating it heavily with seed.
- 6 Hang the feeder in a tree and watch the birds enjoy their treat!





Oak Meadow

K-12 CURRICULUM AND
DISTANCE LEARNING

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Have questions? We're here to help!

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