

Advice from a Homeschooling Mom

By Vivian Leon ~ March 16, 2020

A few weeks ago, no one would have guessed that a virus would cause such an unexpected change in our daily lives. Nonetheless, here we are with the great challenge of calming the fears of our children and continuing their education at home for this brief period in history. As a Catholic homeschooling mom, I'd like to share a few ways I hope will make the task a little less daunting.



The best way to begin this turn of events is with a family meeting. Gather everyone together and allow your children to express their questions, fears and concerns. Listen to your children calmly and intently allowing them to express their feelings freely. Acknowledge their fears and concerns. Then, explain the current facts about the Coronavirus, reassuring them that they are not likely in danger as long as the prescribed guidelines are followed. Give them reasons for these extraordinary precautions. For example, you can say, "People can have the virus without showing symptoms. Therefore, it is our responsibility to maintain social distance at this time to protect those who are vulnerable." Remember that if you are confident, calm and happy, they will likely be confident, calm and happy. Let your children know that although they are at home, with grandparents or caregivers, their education remains important. For more information on holding a family meeting go to: <http://myscienceschool.org/index.php?/archives/7354-How-do-we-hold-family-meetings.html>

Once you have allowed your children to express themselves, together make a list of your daily expectations (school hours, chores, beds made, etc.) allowing them to have input. Assign older children to help wherever they can (unloading dishwasher, folding towels, helping younger sibling with their math). This list can be posted somewhere visible later and be used as a reminder of what the expectations are. Offer your children some kind of reward for meeting the expectations. A family game night or a midday family game is something both free and fun. Finally, end your meeting with a prayer that you can say as a family as part of your daily routine such as the Guardian Angel Prayer or if you're ambitious, a daily Rosary, as Our Lady of Fatima requested, holds great value. Pray something that will give your family a sense of peace and trust in God. Remember, children will generally live up to the expectations you have of them. By positively discussing what needs to happen and how each family member can help to get both schoolwork and household duties done, you are empowering your children.

Once expectations are in place, it helps to sit down with each child individually and work out a study schedule with them. Your child's teacher will likely be sending you assignments. Your study schedule would simply be a list of what subjects need to be covered daily and in what order. Let them have a say in the order they want to do things when possible. Since working at home is short term, it might be easier for your older children to focus on fewer subjects each day rather than all subjects. For example, your child might want to get all history work done in one day rather than doing daily assignments over five days. It's sometimes more effective to allow them to stay focused on one subject rather than trying to cover every subject every day. However, it's important to note that math, spelling and foreign languages need to be done daily

and are best done in the morning. These are subjects that are tedious and require daily practice for learning retention. By having a schedule/list of subjects, it is easier to keep track and hold them accountable. They can check off each subject as they complete the work for the day or week.

Next, it is a good idea to work with your children individually in 30-minute blocks of time, if possible, while sending the other children to do independent assignments. Trying to work with all your children at the same time is difficult, distracting and stressful because they are not working on the same subject or level. It is therefore, better to find a quiet room and make that study time a quality moment with one child at a time. You can start early in the morning still in your pajamas on a reading lesson with the youngest child who is



usually the early bird. Once the reading lesson is done, you can move the child on to breakfast and their morning routine while you work with the next child for 30 minutes. The incentive for the child is finishing their schoolwork early in the day. I often have a child at my side doing math problems while I am eating my breakfast or folding a load of laundry. I can tell the child to do a set of 5-10 problems while I run to the washroom to start a new load. Then, I check the problems upon my return. Also, keep in mind, not everything has to be done at table. When it's time to read, find a comfortable couch with good lighting and make it a warm, endearing experience.

Regardless of how you choose to do things, be consistent about your day by staying on schedule as if your children were in school. That doesn't mean you have to operate on military time. It's okay to allow certain older children, especially your teenagers to take advantage of a little extra sleep and starting later in the morning. Having your children on different schedules, works to your advantage as long as they commit to going to bed at the same reasonable time and getting up at the same time every weekday. In short, consistency breeds order and a sense of security.

Regarding the overall curriculum, your child's teacher will likely be assigning work that can be done by the child independently. Keep in mind that your child does not need to work at a desk or table all day. Allow your children to find their comfy place and encourage them to work in 30-minute time blocks as well, with the goal of trying to finish an assignment or segment within that amount of time allotted. Give them lots of praise when they finish on time or meet another goal while extending more time as needed. You can use the timers on the oven and on your phones. Using timers will often help them stay on task. Timers are also useful to keep track of breaks. For example, I often tell my child/children, "You have 15 minutes to grab a snack..." Then, I set the oven timer.

Regarding math or other difficult subjects, your child's teacher will hopefully provide you with an answer key. Request one if the teacher does not provide it. It is helpful to keep the answer

key in front of you, checking their progress regularly. When teaching, keep in mind that children tend to be more visual than auditory. For instance, when it comes to math, demonstrate by doing one problem for them. Using few words, allow them time to see and process your steps. Have the child demonstrate the exact same problem, telling you the steps to solving the problem as he or she goes. Repeat as needed using the answer key to check their work one problem at a time, until it's clear they can do the work independently. Then, have them complete the rest of that set of math problems on their own. The same approach can be applied to other subjects. Just ask yourself, how can I demonstrate this task using few words?

To build understanding, you can also find free printable worksheets online. Simply google, "free multiplication (or other subject) worksheets." The following are some educational and fun websites you can use for tutorial help or rewards:

<https://www.khanacademy.org>

<https://phonograms.logicofenglish.com/chart>

<https://quizlet.com>

<https://readaloudrevival.com/favorite-booklists/>

<https://www.k5learning.com/free-worksheets-for-kids>

<https://www.coolmathgames.com/iqgame/index.html>

<https://www.chesskid.com>

You can also use YouTube for help with science subjects as well as audio books. YouTube has many educational videos for children on a variety of subjects. Just make sure children are supervised when on the Internet and you have parental controls set on your browser.

Here are some good Catholic resources:

Holy Heroes has some wonderful free Lenten reflections and activities for children at

<https://www.holyheroes.com>

Adults and teens can find free Lenten video reflections by signing up via email on either of the following websites. My children and I take a 10 a.m. break to watch one or both reflections and pray the Rosary, especially during Lent.

Dynamic Catholic: <https://dynamiccatholic.com/best-lent-ever>

Formed: <https://formed.org/#how-it-works>

Magnificat is offering free access during this pandemic time: <https://us.magnificat.net/free>

EWTN offers Masses and family programs: <https://www.ewtn.com>

Finally, in order to maintain your own peace of mind, you might consider getting up a little earlier to have some quiet time for yourself. Reading scripture, a little prayer time alone and/or listening to calming music with your coffee is especially helpful. I highly recommend 2 apps: **Laudate** (which has added prayers related to the pandemic) and **My Catholic Life**. Both apps have daily scripture readings, reflections, prayers, many good Catholic links and all kinds of great Catholic devotions.

May this experience bring your family closer with unexpected blessings. Remember, your faith and trust in God will give you strength. As, "This too shall pass," here are a few quotes from the saints for reflection when things get difficult,

"Be patient with all, but especially with yourself. Do not trouble yourself about your imperfections. Always have the courage to pick yourself back up and begin again every day, for there is no better path to success in the spiritual life than always to begin again and never to think that you have done enough." - St. Francis de Sales

"In all our needs, struggles and difficulties, we shall find no better, no surer way forward than prayer and the hope that God will provide in the way he desires . . . When means fail us and we see no way of dealing with our difficulties, it only remains for us to lift our eyes to You, so that You might provide as You see best." - St. John of the Cross

"Didn't you see the light in Jesus' eyes as the poor widow left her little alms in the temple? Give him what you can: the merit is not in whether it is big or small, but in the intention with which you give it." - St. Josemaria Escriva

"Stay in the boat in which Our Lord has placed you, and let the storm come. You will not perish. It appears to you that Jesus is sleeping, but let it be so. Don't you know that if He sleeps, his heart vigilantly watches over you?" - St. "Padre" Pio of Pietrelcina

"A soul that trusts God is invincible." - Mother Angelica

A note from the writer:

Vivian Leon is a member of St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish. The recommendations and suggestions mentioned in this article are based on the most recent reports available when this article was written. Vivian has 20 years of experience homeschooling six children, K-12 teaching credentials, 8-plus years working in public education, and a B.A. degree in Communications. These recommendations are not medical, therapeutic or psychological prescriptions. Every parent needs to assume the responsibility for their children and make their own decisions as to which specific methodologies they wish to utilize with their children. Neither the author, Vivian Leon nor the Parish of St. Catherine of Alexandria staff are licensed professionals in medicine, psychology or other related fields.