

School in the Time of Coronavirus

In which a home educator attempts to take a bit of the scare from homeschooling

By: Anya Campbell

A lot of families have recently had a surprise induction into the homeschooling club. Welcome!

I keep thinking back to that one time when I took my kids to the dentist. After their checkups the hygienist called me back and began by saying something like, “You know most of the fear and apprehension of our young patients comes from the reaction of their parents. If you stay calm, they’ll stay calm. So, no grimacing or gasping. ”.... And then she told me that they each had bunches of cavities. Now, I’m a grimacer and a gasper, but because of her bit of prep talk, I was able to nod and look thoughtful instead of my natural (over?)reaction. Not sure why this story keeps coming to mind.

The kids will be ok. They’re much more resilient than us crusty old folk (or so I’ve heard). It’s so hard not to live in the hamster wheel of panic, do too much, throw in the towel, repeat. A little every day consistency beats the hamster wheel any day. I’ve been homeschooling for the past 5 years, so I don’t have many of the answers, but I do know what has worked well for our family, and during these uncertain times all I want is to set new homeschooling parents at ease. The kids will be ok. And so will the parents. Probably the best thing about homeschool is the one to one student-teacher ratio, giving the teacher the unique and special opportunity to tailor education to fit the child’s needs and ability. Homeschool doesn’t have to look like the replication of public school at your dining room table. Go at the student’s pace and don’t move on until they have understanding. No pushing. No rushing. Just daily diligence.

Homeschool Ideas

- **Keep a Consistent Schedule**
Life feels up in the air right now and everyone’s schedules are wacky, but keeping a consistent schedule every morning can maintain order and sanity for all! Have a morning routine and start school work at roughly the same time every morning. Plan for a couple hours of school work in the morning and leave the afternoon for playing outside/crafting/computer time/etc.
- **Use Short Lessons**
To keep attention high and interest keen, keep individual lessons under 20min. I know, it seems so short, but you’ll be surprised at how much you can get done in 15 diligent minutes with only a few kids at the table.

- **Set a Timer**

We use the timer on my cheap Casio wrist watch (that I absolutely adore and can't live without) for every single lesson every day. Make sure to honor the beep -- even if you feel like the student didn't work to their full potential. When the kids see us holding up our end of the deal they'll be more likely to put their full effort in, too.

The stories in the news are scary, loud, and pretty hard to pull ourselves away from, so maybe it's a good time to keep in mind that reading alllll the stories will not change anything -- we've gotta keep in mind that what we have control over are the times we have to share with our family. The great books we read, the classic movies we watched, the monochromatic puzzles we worked, and the walks we took. A little consistency. A lot of family togetherness. This time has 'memories for life' written all over it.

I do real life on instagram @ampc7 - feel free to dm me with any questions...I'd love to hear from you!

Sample Schedule for Short Term Homeschool

- 1) Read for 15 minutes -- everyone has their own book (parent, too!) set the timer for 10-15mins, then take turns narrating to each other what was read.
- 2) Write for 10 minutes. We use a method called copywork. No special supplies required. I'll detail it below.
- 3) Math for 20 minutes [worksheets sent from school/Khan academy/etc.]
- 4) Favorite Picture Book for 10 minutes (my kids are finishing 1st/3rd grades and they're always so excited when 'picture book' is on the schedule)
- 5) Snack or water break
- 6) Draw for 10 minutes
- 7) Dance for 15 minutes (you won't believe the number of simple routines on YouTube)
- 8) Read-aloud for 10-15 minutes, followed by narration of the reading.
- 9) Take a walk for 20 minutes
- 10) Lunch
- 11) Mandatory Rest Time for 1 hour (each child rests/reads/draws/plays quietly)
- 12) Free play outside (don't feel like you need to entertain the kids during this time...my mom didn't think up and facilitate fun games for us to play outside after school, and I'll bet yours didn't either.)

How we do Copywork:

- 1) Pick a sentence from a passage/poem
- 2) Set the timer for 10 minutes
- 3) Have the student study it carefully and pinpoint words she is unable to spell
- 4) Go over those spelling words together until the student can clearly see the individual letters of the words in her mind
- 5) Have the student carefully write the words in her notebook.
- 6) When the timer rings you're done for the day... if the student didn't finish the passage just pick it up where she left off at the next session!

I think copywork is the superfood of the school day. It's a power-packed 10 minute language arts package -- what's not to love? I have a 1st grader and a 3rd grader, and copywork is the only thing we've ever used to learn:

- Penmanship
- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Grammar

Copywork also covers:

- Memory work
- Habit of Attention

Remember, copywork is *not* just copying words letter by letter from a book that's open next to you. The student must hold each word in their mind, then write it without using the text for reference -- this practice turns copywork into a built-in spelling lesson. Have the student look over the first sentence and pinpoint any words they're not confident in spelling by memory. Help the student briefly study those words until they can literally *see* the word when they close their eyes. After spelling work, have the student do a scan of the text for punctuation. Close the book, then have the student write the sentence carefully in their notebook.

When practicing copywork, quality knocks quantity out cold every time. If the 10 minute timer rings and your student has 3 beautifully written words — *that's a day's work well done*. The goal is careful, attentive work. No rushing. No sloppiness. Set the timer. Work diligently. Pick it back up tomorrow.

You can find free homeschool curriculum for this type of teaching at <https://www.amblesideonline.org/>.

Anya Campbell contributed the [Homeschool 101 article](#) to the Doing What Matters blog. You can read more about homeschooling there and at [EverydayEducation.com](#).