

What Does a Typical Homeschool Day Look Like?

“Typical Homeschool” is somewhat of an oxymoron because each family’s day can look entirely different; even an individual family’s schedule may look different from day to day. Most of us are used to thinking that school has to look the way it does in traditional brick and mortar schools with kids sitting at a desk from 8:30 – 3:30 Monday through Friday. But one of the great things about homeschooling, including distance learning, is that it can look any way you want.

Before we go further, it’s important to take a minute to discuss the variety of homeschooling styles. Just like most things in life there is a range, in homeschooling at one end of the range there’s the “unschoolers” and at the other end of the range are those that “school at home.” Unschoolers use very little, if any, formal curriculum instead allowing the child’s interest, and general life activities, to lead the learning. They learn through reading books, playing games, hands on experiments, trips to museums, zoos and other places, and exploring life around them. Students may take classes at learning centers, libraries, museums, or even community colleges. The opposite of unschooling are those that try to recreate school at home. They use formal curriculum for most, if not all, subjects and have very structured days similar to a traditional school setting. Most homeschoolers tend to fall somewhere in the middle.

How you set up a typical day for your school depends on where you fall on that continuum which will be influenced by your comfort level and the needs of your child. If you are distance learning through your school district your day will also be somewhat dependent on any specific requirements they layout. It is also important to check the homeschooling requirements of your state; some do have requirements for instruction time. Even with any requirements from your school district or state you will have a lot more flexibility than with traditional schooling, so let’s explore the possibilities.

First, as I’ve mentioned in previous articles, I encourage you to engage your child in the process as much as possible. We all like to have control over our lives and make decisions for ourselves; our children are no different. Plus, listening to their input gives your children some ownership and is likely to increase their participation and compliance.

Second, as much as I personally like the idea of unschooling, I think structure is crucial for our kids who have PWS. Our kids need consistency and get anxious about the unknown. So while I don’t advocate for the other end of the continuum where you try to recreate the classroom at home, I do encourage you to establish predictable routines. I also suggest that you have your schedule visible in some way, on a piece of paper, wall hanging, or computer program; just something that your child has access to and can reference.

Finally, here are some specific areas to consider as you plan what your homeschool day will look like:

Time of Day: Do you hate the morning battle of getting your child dressed, fed and out the door to race to the school for drop-off? Put that behind you. Now you can start your school day when it’s convenient for your child or your family. If you have an early riser school can start in the morning and

be done before lunch. Conversely if you have a child who needs more sleep and rises late, school can start late morning, after lunch, or even in the evening. Your day can even be split with some lessons done in the morning, free time in the middle of the day, and the rest in the evening. Anything is possible. Your decision may also be influenced by when you notice that your child learns best or their concentration is highest. And of course if you are distance learning you may have to at least do some of your work at specific times for any live online classes. The rest of your day can be on your terms though.

Length of Day: As I mentioned above most of us are used to thinking about school as an all-day endeavor, but school at home is typically much shorter. Don't think you are not doing enough or that your child isn't learning enough if your school day at home isn't as long as a traditional school day. Remember that there is a lot of down time in schools, transitions between subjects as the whole class puts away stuff and gets out material for the next lesson, waiting for papers to be passed out, waiting for the class to come to attention, bathroom breaks, waiting for the teacher to come around to help each child, moving between classrooms, etc. All of these are necessary for the classroom environment, but at home those transitions are minimal, so children can often get through a lesson much faster. One-on-one instruction also allows you to focus on making sure your child is understanding the concept or material instead of the possibility of getting left behind in a classroom. Sometimes you might be able to skip ahead if your child already knows material. Bottom line is that school at home doesn't need to be as long as a school day.

Days of the Week: Many traditional homeschooling families chose a four-day-a-week schedule, and leave the fifth day for park days, museum outings, errands, or other adventures. Same as with the length of the day, as long as your child is getting their lessons done, don't worry about it looking the same as traditional school. Some curriculum companies even have schedule guides with a four-day schedule option, or when you plan out your schedule you can divide up the year's lessons based on a four-day week.

Where You Do Lessons: Do you think your child needs to be sitting upright at a desk or table to do lessons? Think again. Let your child sit in a comfy chair, sit outside on the grass, lie on the floor, bounce on an exercise ball or jump on a trampoline...anything is possible. Reading or workbooks can be done in the car or in the waiting room of a doctor's office.

Accommodations/Modifications: In one of the previous articles I mentioned that schooling at home makes it much easier to make accommodations and modifications for your child. Even matching the time of day you do lessons to your child's natural concentration level or doing lessons laying down are great accommodations. At home you will also be able to easily modify lessons by adjusting the number of questions that need to be answered, or allowing your child to answer questions orally instead of having to write answers. When my son was young and still had difficulty writing I let him use magnetic letter tiles to spell out his spelling words instead of writing them and where possible I turned worksheets into multiple choice options so he could just circle answers or draw lines to the answers instead of writing them out. If you are distance learning and have to turn in assignments, you will have to discuss modifications with your child's teacher, but traditional homeschoolers are able to make these adjustments as needed.

So taking all of the above, here is what our homeschool looks like. Remember this is just one example, there is no right way. We do a five-day schedule, but when I plan out our lessons and weekly schedule I make Fridays a lighter day. I haven't put together the schedule for the coming year yet, so I'll tell you what we covered last year. Monday – Thursday we did Language Arts and Math. Tuesdays and Thursdays also included Science, while Mondays and Wednesdays included History. Fridays we did Health and Art. Every day we read (in addition to any Language Arts literature assignments) and we started each day with morning devotion, a brain warm-up and a movement warm-up. My son also took a cooking class on Wednesdays, a Harry Potter class on Mondays, had therapeutic horseback riding (which I count as PE) two Tuesdays a month, and book club once a month. The classes he takes are at homeschool learning centers, and the book club is with our homeschool park day group.

We use an online homeschool program to track what lessons are due each day. Because I am a night owl and get up later, our day typically begins around 9:30am. The first thing we do is log on to our program and review what is on the schedule for that day along with any extra items like doctors' appointments or errands that need to be done. After our initial morning review and warm-ups I ask my son what lesson he wants to do first (there's that choice and input). Sometimes if we have limited time due to a class or other appointment I might suggest what we should work on based on our available time, otherwise it's up to him. We sit on a futon couch and have his laptop on a small table in front of us; some of our lessons are on the computer and some are not. If we are reading a book we might move to the living room and cuddle up next to each other on the couch, or read outside if the weather is nice. Some lessons he does by himself, and others we work on together. We'll do lessons until lunch time, then after our lunch break finish up.

Because of outside classes and park days (both of which are virtual now) and the variation in daily lessons, each day looks a little different. Meaning we don't have a set time to finish. Some days we might finish before lunch, other days might be longer; some days a lesson might take a particularly long time, other days they are quick. There have been times when my son has fallen asleep and I let him sleep, because clearly he needs it, and just resume lessons when he wakes up. Or times when I can tell he needs a movement break and we take a few minutes to move our bodies (something I actually incorporated into our schedule when he was younger). Occasionally due to extra-long lessons or appointments in the schedule, if our day is going too long I will end before our scheduled lessons are done and make them up on a lighter day. When we are done for the day, we are done – there's no homework to worry about. The rule in our house is that lessons are the priority and once they are done, then Ryan has earned the privilege of free time, including TV time, which is his big interest. I would suggest that you also establish a similar approach; you can set a specific time when school is done, or do like we do and base it on what should be accomplished for the day (just be flexible if things are taking too long). Either way, reward your child with something they're interested in.

Hopefully this has eased your mind, given you some ideas and made you start thinking about other ways you can incorporate flexibility into your child's day, and boosted your confidence about schooling your child at home. As you can see learning takes place in many different ways, and next week we'll explore it a little more when we talk about working while managing your child's education. In the meantime [Homeschooling and Loving It!](#) and [Homeschooling the Child With ADD \(or Other Special Needs\)](#) are two good resources and guides for setting up your child's education at home.