

# 6

## CHAPTER 6

### *Six Ingredients of a Successful Homeschool*

*Marlene is unexpectedly pregnant—again. Today she’s having a hard time getting started. From the bed, she listens to Timmy and James arguing in the kitchen. In the background, the television blares. She rolls over and sighs deeply. She hears the school bus pull up to the corner and swing open its doors. What she’d give to have her kids on it—especially the two-year-old. But no such luck. Marlene’s homeschooling.*

*She can tell you a spiritualized story of how she arrived at this decision, but the bottom line is that her pastor homeschools and she is eager for his respect.*

*Allen, her husband, left early this morning. He’s out looking for work. It’s a second marriage for both of them, and in the past seven years, he’s been unemployed three times. Just not much of a market anymore for printers. He really didn’t want Marlene to homeschool; he wanted her to get a job. But that wasn’t in her theology.*

*Her oldest, Robby, sticks his head in the room. He’s a bright kid. He likes to read and to play soccer. “Uh, Mom, what should I be doing for school?”*

*Marlene has borrowed books for the year from her school district. And she found some workbooks and readers at the library sale, all for five dollars. She tells a great story of how the Holy Spirit guided her to this overlooked pile of material.*

*“Can’t you just read the next chapters in science till I get up?” Her voice has an edge.*

*“That science book is really boring, Mom. I was wondering if I could finish the woodworking project Dad and I started.”*

*“Rob, you know you aren’t allowed to handle the tools alone. Listen, get Timmy and James breakfast while I get dressed.”*

*Sometime after nine, Marlene makes an appearance. Robby, seated at the table, is just beginning to find his place in the science book. James and Timmy are watching television.*

*The phone rings. Marlene’s voice brightens as she talks to a*

young mother from church. Her friend is having problems with a toddler, and Marlene is full of advice.

Robby stares at the pages of his textbook and intermittently checks the clock. The little guys spill into the kitchen. Marlene periodically covers the phone and tells them to be quiet. Each time, her voice raises another notch.

Timmy has a fork. He aims for James but misses and sticks his mother. Marlene screams. She manages to hang up the phone before she vents her anger on everyone in sight.

Robby sighs, picks up his books, and heads for his bedroom.

After lunch, Marlene leaves for a weekly Bible study, and Robby's left in charge. At four o'clock, Robby thinks of his friends at school just heading out to the soccer fields. He misses the team, and he misses his friends. He misses English class. He even misses grouchy Mr. Whittler who gave him in-school suspension last year. He sure wishes God hadn't told his mom to homeschool.

## Recipe for Success

It's been my experience that families who elect to home educate meet with varying degrees of success. But that success has little to do with teaching certificates or college degrees. Rather, it has a lot to do with Christian character.

This recipe for success is not meant to discourage you. If your family is unable to meet one of these prerequisites but is willing to seek change, you're on the right road.

If you can't or won't add one of these ingredients to your homeschool, it still may be the best option you have. But, honestly, you will not be able to give your children the education they deserve, and you are going to be frustrated and stressed.

### Is She Happy?

Probably the *key factor* in those homes that have happy, motivated children who are achieving at the level of their potential is *Mom's attitude*. Is she happy? Are we having fun yet? Does she enjoy homeschooling and maintain relatively consistent enthusiasm? Or does she have a pinched look on her face most of the time?

Here are the factors I find affect her outlook.

## **Ingredient #1: Family Relationships Are Healthy**

### **Common Vision**

Start with your spouse. Do the two of you have a common vision and goals? If you applied the principles of chapter 1 to your marriage, would your list of targets have any overlap?

When Kermit and I first married, we were still two very independent people with divergent plans for our lives. Our views on money, church, a woman's role, and the proper way to fold a towel (just to name the biggies) were often at odds. Now, over two decades later, by the grace of God (and what can feel like sheer force of will), we're both headed in the same direction and very happy to be doing so. How that happened is another story, and I know many of you can relate to that scenario. (Towels should be folded in thirds and stacked with the folded side out, by the way.)

It is very typical for one partner to have more of a vision for homeschooling than the other at first. It can take time to balance this out. But here are the necessary components in marriage for surviving the rocky first years of homeschooling:

#### **1. Quick Resolution of Conflict**

You resolve conflict quickly. Notice, I didn't say you don't have any conflict. The crux is, you know *how* to resolve it. In our house that means not letting issues fester, demonstrating humility and forgiveness, communicating constructively, and asking for outside help from spiritually mature friends when necessary.

#### **2. Dad's Attitude**

Dad is supportive of homeschooling. I believe this factor, much more than Dad's direct involvement in homeschooling, determines success.

The worst thing a husband can say to his wife is, "All right, I'll give you a year, and we'll see how you do." It is very unfair to put this kind of pressure on your wife. The first year of homeschooling is the toughest. In the best of situations, there are going to be

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mistakes, discouragement, and self-doubt throughout. To add to that the stress of having to get this right the first time or she's pulled from the game is a setup for failure from the start.

### **3. Mom's Attitude**

Wives, on the other hand, need to be realistic about their husbands' involvement. I've attended seminars and read books where the father's role in homeschooling is presented as something akin to the school principal: Dad should be directly involved in setting curriculum, reviewing work, and spending time daily instructing his children. As I look around the auditorium where this is being said, I see the fathers slowly sinking down in their seats under the pressure of one more thing on their plates.

#### **It Looks Different at Every House**

When our kids were younger, Kermit read aloud to them nearly every day and looked at their daily work. It was easy to use vacation days for special things. But by the time our kids hit the teen years, his responsibilities on the job had expanded and his work week became much longer. He could troubleshoot difficulties that arose, but a weekly update was really the best way for us to manage his limited schedule.

One day, I realized I knew countless home-educating families in the same situation. I'm grateful Kermit is gainfully employed. I'm happy that the free time he did have was devoted to his kids. But he wanted to play ball or take the girls on a field trip, not review papers or teach a course, when he had free time to give.

And he has always been willing to take over responsibilities at home so I can get away to plan or just have a break.

Some fathers do teach, but it's because they have an interest, not an obligation. Marie's husband, John, taught science to his kids. He had a lab set up in the basement. Pickling there were fetal pigs and cows' eyes. He loved it. I know several homes where the father is the primary teacher. And I've seen many fathers' involvement increase as the kids enter their teen years. In general, they seem more comfortable with the material at that level. The point is that there's a principle, not a pattern that must be adhered to.

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## **It's a Joint Decision**

Homeschooling needs to be a joint decision. Both spouses should be able to say, "We're going to try this for a year and give it our best shot. Then we'll re-evaluate the situation." During the year, Dad should be committed to tangibly encouraging and supporting his wife.

## **Predetermine Responsibilities**

Talk through with your spouse what responsibilities each of you will assume to contribute to the integrity and success of your homeschool. The job description for both of you will shift and change over the years, so don't expect this to be a once-and-done discussion.

If the primary teacher—usually Mom—starts showing signs of stress and exhaustion during the year, it's a good bet the other partner needs to either provide some R&R (a weekend away works wonders) or shift some responsibility onto his or her plate for a season.

Here is a book you will find encouraging and faith-building, especially in the midst of the demands of homeschooling:



*When Sinners Say "I Do": Discovering the Power of the Gospel for Marriage*, Dave Harvey

## **Check Out the Kids**

After assessing your marriage, be honest about your relationship with each of your children.

Kids need two things in order to learn well:

- A secure environment, free from stress and fear
- Praise and encouragement from someone they trust

Is your child motivated by your praise and still interested in your approval? Do you have an effective plan for dealing with discipline problems?

## **Say It Again, Sam**

If you have a strong-willed child or a rocky relationship with your spouse, homeschooling is only going to accentuate these problems, not solve them. I know too many families that thought

homeschooling was the solution. It isn't. These problems must be worked on at a deeper, more fundamental level. In some cases, you need outside help.

### Meaningful Church Involvement

I am very grateful to be involved in a church where the pastoral staff and small-group leaders are available to constructively guide us through the challenges of marriage and parenting. I cannot overemphasize how crucial a role this has played in the success of our family life. I credit that support with the fruit in my children and my marriage.

Marlene eventually put her children back in a private school, and she and her husband sought pastoral help for their marriage. Today their home is much stabler. Robby returned to playing soccer, and his confidence in God's loving care in his life has grown.

If you need sound advice in the parenting realm, these books that have had the greatest impact in our home:



*Educating the WholeHearted Child*, Clay and Sally  
Clarkson

*Our 24 Family Ways*, Clay Clarkson

*The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for the Prevention and  
Cure of Anger in Children*, Lou Priolo

*Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tedd Tripp

## Ingredient #2: Your Home Is Educationally Stimulating

A quick tour of my home tells people a lot about me. I'm not very committed to laundry or dusting or even interior decorating. But my commitment to reading and learning, I hope, is evident. Books, magazines, projects, computers, music, etc. dominate the landscape. There are bookshelves in every room.

My downfall is any bookstore. My husband and I have a sick, co-dependent relationship. He's not to be trusted near one either. Our family business was really an elaborate scheme I hatched

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to make sure I could get books any time I craved one. My heart sinks if the UPS truck passes my house without stopping. My library fines are so hefty they've mentioned naming me a major donor. Our kids are infected as well.

If your home does not reflect your commitment to education, your kids will clearly get the message that it isn't important. Your kids deserve to be taught by someone who loves to learn.

Is school time a pressured thing you rush to get through? Have you committed the finances to provide educational materials? I know what it is to live on a restricted budget. But I am committed to buying the best material I can afford.

When a parent's initial question is, "How cheaply can this be done?" I know his or her kids are going to be shortchanged.

I know many, many families who are homeschooling on a limited budget, but the best of these are getting to the library regularly, setting aside funds for the used-curriculum sale, and praying in faith for the provisions to come in. There is serious personal sacrifice going on to see that the kids have access to quality materials.

### **Ingredient #3: You Have a Biblical Conviction That God Has Called You to Homeschool**

Our initial decision to home educate has to be more substantive than, "Gee, that's a neat idea. I think I'll try that," or acquiescence to the subtle pressure (real or perceived) that it is more "spiritual" to homeschool.

Our conviction must be borne out of prayer, study of God's Word, and godly counsel. It is imperative that we take the time we need to hear God personally. These convictions are the foundation for appropriating the faith and grace we need to complete the task. Otherwise, when discouragement and disillusionment hit, we will dig a deeper hole by questioning if we should be doing this in the first place. Constant doubts such as *Am I really the best teacher for my children? Am I cheating them out of fun and opportunities? Is this going to be worth it in the end?* will wear us out.

The writer of James said a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Without this bedrock of faith that God said, “Do it!” we’re in for some rough seas. Firmly rooted convictions will be the source of endurance for the course.



Read Chris Klicka’s book *The Heart of Home Schooling: Teaching and Living What Really Matters* if you want a persuasive, biblical argument to help you build convictions about homeschooling.

## Ingredient #4: You Have Initiative and Discipline

To homeschool successfully, we don’t need degrees or loads of creativity and talent, but we do need some measure of maturity in our character. We need “get up and go” and the ability to restrain ourselves when discipline is required.

### There’s a Learning Curve

If you are new to homeschooling, then the hard part is now. You have to invest a lot of time in reading, preparing, figuring out what methods work best, and learning to manage your time.

Every new venture requires an initial outlay of time and training. I could not live without a computer. It is such a timesaver. But I spent hours reading, being frustrated, crying “Honey, help!” and learning in order to reap those benefits.

### Just Say No

We need to be able to say no to other opportunities and be at peace when others don’t understand why we do. Two things I’ve had to discipline myself to do are to go to bed on time and not answer the phone. I return the calls I can in the afternoon. Some I just can’t respond to. Sometimes people are angry and disappointed with me, but there’s peace in our day now.

Hobbies, friendships, ministries, jobs—many things may have to be sacrificed in order to homeschool with integrity. It all comes back to this vision that provides us with parameters for evaluating all the choices before us. Homeschooling successfully requires us to take radical control of our schedules. If you don’t, you’ll never hit the target.

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Here's a recommended resource to help you do this:



*Shopping For Time: How to Do It All and NOT Be Overwhelmed*, Carolyn Mahaney

## Ingredient #5: A Support System Is Available to You

Your support system may be formal or informal, but it needs to be made up of tangible people, not a state newsletter or a homeschooling magazine. You need folks standing with you and committed to helping you through. The more multilayered this support system is, the quicker you will surmount discouragement.

I am blessed beyond measure that my church, my relatives, and my friends support the choice we've made and are available to pick me up when I am down.

My network has not always been so thick—neither my parents nor my in-laws supported our choice at first. My friends were threatened by our decision. And I've talked to many homeschool families that have been isolated in their churches or even outrightly opposed by the leadership.

You need support. Get out of bad situations if you can. Find a church that is standing with families who make this choice, and find friends who homeschool. I guess you have to keep your relatives, but I've seen lots of grandparents change their minds once they see the fruit in their grandkids' lives. (They are only reacting out of love and concern, so don't be too hard on them.)

Some folks are going to call you a separatist, but your first priority when starting out is to lay a firm foundation. Get your house in order first. In the early years we immersed ourselves in the homeschool community. We talked about it nonstop and felt most attracted to others with our perspective. It was a necessary season of our life. It demanded our intense focus.

Eventually, our lives were much more balanced. Our family had many close friends who did not homeschool. We had other circles of interest we moved in. But we could only do this and remain effective at home because a solid foundation of support was in place first.

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## **Ingredient #6: You Are Willing to Seek Help**

Homeschooling should not be done in isolation. It's not healthy for you or for your children. Without the input of others, you won't have a balanced perspective of things. Even though I had a teaching certificate and a lot of experience working with kids, I still needed and pursued the input of others. I went to seminars, I read books, and I talked to parents further down the road than we were.

If you are a learner, you will always be looking and listening for better ways to fine-tune your program.

When you are discouraged or unmotivated, humble yourself and talk to someone with strengths in your area of weakness. The Bible says if we don't solicit the wise counsel of others, we are proud, and God will oppose our ways. Find a mature Christian woman who is obviously succeeding with her children and ask her advice. Be willing to serve her in return for her time. Annually attend seminars, listen to CDs, and read books—all with an attitude to learn. This is the fastest way to become qualified to teach your children.

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