

TEACHING
REFERENCE
GUIDE

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THE FIRST TEACHER

As a parent, you are your child's first teacher. Your child has been with you since birth and has learned everything they know already from you. You are the one who knows them best. You know their abilities, their limitations, their personality, and their daily routines. You are the superhero of their life and you can use this power to teach them. This is why homeschool works so well. In a classroom, there is one teacher and one curriculum. At home, you can change the curriculum and you can focus just on your child. Your child will be allowed to learn and grow at their own pace and do the activities that they want to do. Homeschool is sometimes intimidating, but you already have all the tools you need to help your child succeed. So lets get started...

SETTING UP YOUR HOMESCHOOL

There is no right way to set up a school in your home. It all depends on you and your children. Some families find it helpful to have a special room just for school. Our family always just did it at the kitchen table. Some families have school wherever they happen to be when the children are ready. One thing we have found helpful is to have a basket with each child that holds supplies and papers that are needed for the month. Wherever you have school, make sure your supplies and lesson plans are gathered together in one spot.

Preschool and Kindergarten: A normal classroom usually roughly follows this routine: Check-in (10 minutes), Center time (45 minutes), Circle time (15 minutes), Story and lesson time (30 minutes), Activity (30 minutes), Singing time (15 minutes), Pack up and check-out (5 minutes)

While your homeschool can follow this schedule, you are more likely to go through the routine more quickly. You only have one or two children, instead of 20 and you have the freedom to work at your child's pace. Some days the lessons will take less time and other days your child will be very interested and want to spend more time learning.

Elementary: With a little help and organization most elementary children can work on their own for a majority of lessons. There is usually some instruction from parents at the start and then a worksheet or activity your child can do. Younger children may need help with reading. As they get older, they are able to run their own school experience in several ways. We allow our children to choose the order they do the activities, giving them some control over their day. This helps to reduce the struggle of getting children to do the work because they feel that they have some ownership in the process.

CONSISTENCY MATTERS

No matter where or what time your family decides to have school the important thing is consistency. It is much better to do a little bit every “school” day than to try to crunch all the lessons into one day. Your child will retain the information better and you will be less stressed. Our family has found that mornings work best for one child and afternoons are better for another. Of course, there will be times when life gets in the way. There will be crazy days when you just can’t get to your lessons. On those days, have lessons at a different time or on a different day. Do what works for your child and your family. The important thing is that if your child sees that school is important and fun to you, it will be important and fun to them. That’s the beauty of being a homeschool!

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

An important part of learning to be an effective teacher is understanding your students' developmental milestones. As a parent, you have seen your child grow from infancy and celebrated each of these milestones with them. As a teacher, it is helpful to look at typical development for children their age. This gives an idea of what your child should be doing and why. Children learn and grow at different rates and some skills will come easier to one child than another. Remember, you must learn your child's level and help them build up to, or expand upon, the typical level for their age. While there are several models and ideas about child development, we use Erik Erikson's model. Once you understand typical development, you can better meet your child's needs as a teacher. A summary can be found on the next page (and more information can be found online).

Age	Stage	Encourage Positive Outcome	Positive Outcome
Birth-18 months	Trust vs. Mistrust	Respond to baby's attempts at communication	Baby cries and trusts their needs will be met by caregiver
18 months-3.5 years	Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt	Encourage toddler to exercise independence when safe, allow them to make simple choices	Toddler begins to develop independence, "I'll do it myself"
3.5 -6 years	Initiative vs. Guilt	Encourage preschooler to experiment and learn about the world in their own way, ask questions, hands-on activities	Preschoolers can act for themselves, take risks, learn from experimentation and experience
6-12 years	Industry vs. inferiority	Use encouragement and celebrate successes. Help child to see what they are doing to be helpful	School-aged child feels competent in skills valued by society. Feel successful in relation to peers

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES

Teachers talk about Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) for children all the time, at any age. Basically, all DAP means is that you are teaching each child at their level and appropriate for their age. You wouldn't expect a 2-year old to be able to write their name as well as a 4-year old. On the same line, you would expect a 4-year old to sit still longer than a 1-year old. DAP's are the beauty of learning and the goal of every teacher. In a classroom setting, however, they are nearly impossible to implement as every child has their own level of development and grows at their own pace. In order to teach at their level, a teacher must constantly assess each child, write curriculum appropriate for each child, as well as for the class as a whole, and then implement that curriculum in a way that each child is learning. The more children you have in a classroom, the more difficult and complicated this gets.

In a homeschool, however, you have only your children. You know what level they are starting at better than anyone else. Included on the webpage for each grade is a list of each core standard for that grade. There is space to assess your child each quarter for each standard. This helps you understand what the goals for your child are as well as where they stand on each one. Once you have the lesson plans in hand, DAP is up to you and you can adjust each lesson, review, and school day to meet your child's needs. If your child quickly understands a concept, you can move

on. If they are struggling, spend extra time on it or try learning it in a different way.

DAP is more than curriculum, it is also how you teach that curriculum. This is where you come in. DAP lessons are flexible, relatable, they and provide scaffolding.

Flexible: Lesson plans come customized to fit your child's needs but you are the one teaching them. You know what your child needs better than anyone else. As a teacher, you must be flexible in almost every way as you teach. As you teach, you will become more comfortable with implementing your own flexibility into your teaching style.

Timing is flexible in that, if your child is really interested in a subject or a lesson, you should expand upon it, let the child explore it, and spend extra time on it. Conversely, if they are having a hard time getting into a lesson (or just having a rough day), cut the lesson a little short or change it.

The lesson schedule is flexible. If you don't want to learn about dinosaurs this week, skip ahead and come back to it. If you want to spend time outside one day, go out and focus on a science aspect your child is interested in. If your child has a busy or a rough day, let them do their favorite lesson again, instead of the one that is planned. The curriculum will be there later if you decide to come back to it. If not, your child will learn from the lesson they did get for the day.

No matter what, we try to get a lesson or two in, even if it's not the lesson planned. The best lessons use real-life to

teach. For example, if we are learning about fruit that week, but our son refuses to do the activity for preschool, we will take him to the grocery store and have him name all the fruits, the colors of the fruits, which ones he likes, which ones he's never tried (maybe try that one), etc. Or, if our daughter is learning about U.S. history but having a hard time focusing on her reading, we will pull up a video and use that instead. The best thing about homeschool is that you don't have to stick to a set lesson or schedule.

Relatable: When you were in school, maybe you dreaded learning about algebra, because "When are we ever going to use this?" This is a common theme in learning no matter the age of the student. You naturally discard information that you do not find useful or relevant to your life. There is so much to learn and you want to keep the most important bits. Children have this same mentality. Your lessons should be relatable to your child's life. As we develop curriculum, we try to make that happen. We will learn about holidays as they are happening or seasons as they are changing. We will learn about leaves in the fall and flowers in the spring. This way, your child can learn during the lesson, and expand that learning as they go out into the world and see how the lesson is happening all around them.

As the teacher, it is your job to help your child draw these connections. As you teach or review the lesson, or even later in the day, ask your child what they learned and how that applies to their life. For example, if you are learning about dinosaurs, ask them how a dinosaur is like a family pet, talk about which dinosaurs lived in your area, ask if

they've ever found a fossil, let them go out and "dig for fossils," talk about the time you saw dinosaur bones at the museum. As you learn to ask your child connecting questions, your child will be learning to make those connection. Soon, they will stop you in the middle of a lesson and say, "This is like that time we...." These connections are what takes learning from memorizing facts in a classroom to remembering and loving what they learn.

Review often in natural ways. Point out concepts from lessons as you go throughout your day. If you are on a trip, point out the historical sites you've learned about this year. If your child is learning algebra, show them a problem you use in daily life (grocery shopping prices is a good one). Show them that what they are learning is practical and useful and give them a natural chance to review.

Scaffolding: When you imagine scaffolding on a building, you probably see layers of boards that help you to reach the next level of the building safely. Scaffolding in learning is exactly that. As a teacher, you want to help your child reach the next level. DAP's mixed with scaffolding is exactly the way your help your child do this. When your lessons are taught with scaffolding, your child is not doing "easy busy work." At the same time, you are not pushing your child into work that is too difficult for them to the point that they become frustrated and want to quit. There is a fine line between the two that is your child's optimal learning level. Our curriculum should be in that level. The way you teach that curriculum should also be in that level.

How do you scaffold? There are two sides to it. First, let your child do what they can do. If you have seen your child time and time again cut a straight line, let them cut this one. Children, like anyone else, have rough days. They get frustrated. They get tired. They don't want to do things sometimes. These days are where confidence can be built. If your child is having a hard time with something you know they can do, allow them to struggle. Encourage them. Be patient with them. They may take more time, but eventually they will do it themselves. The rule is, I am happy to help, but if you can do it yourself, I won't do it for you.

Learning takes place when you are outside of your comfort zone, when you push to do something new, when it's hard, but do-able. If you teach only at your child's level, your child will stay at that level. The goal of school is to push your child forward. This is where those boards to the next level come in. As your child attempts a new skill, it will be difficult. They have never done this before and are trying to figure it all out. Rather than doing it for them, offer your help. For instance, if they are trying to write their name and struggling, get your own paper and show them, letter by letter, how to do it. Let them copy each movement as you go. Instead of giving them a paper and saying, "Please write your name," take out two sheets and say, "This is how we make an A." Go through each line and encourage them to copy you. If that doesn't work, get out some paint and finger-paint their name together. Write in some flour or sand. Find a way that your child understands. Then,

when they make an attempt, encourage and congratulate their accomplishment (even if it's not perfect yet). Give them the tools they need, whatever those tools may be. Once they reach that next level, take the scaffolding away and help them climb higher still.

LEARNING STYLES AND WHY THEY MATTER

A good teacher can teach each lesson to a child's specific learning style. A great teacher will teach several different learning styles and help a child excel in them all. While we all have natural strengths when it comes to learning styles, homeschool is a great way to begin learning in each. You will know your child's strongest learning style and be tempted to always teach that way. However, your child will be expected to learn in several different styles as life goes on. College and a career will force them into settings that require all different types of learning. It's best to prepare them for this now. A great school will be hands-on, open-ended, and allow for exploration and questions. Our curriculum, along with your teaching and adaptation, can emphasize your child's strongest learning styles (especially on new or difficult concepts) and sneak in all the other styles as you go (especially on concepts that they seem to pick up quickly).

Common Learning Styles and How to Teach Them:

Visual	Use pictures, videos, examples
Logical/Mathematical	Use reasoning and association
Verbal	Talk, write, ask questions, teach using different voices
Physical	Hands-on, touch, feel, use real objects instead of pictures, role play
Social	Work in groups or partnerships
Solitary	Allow them to play and answer questions they ask
Auditory	Use songs, jingles, music, rhymes

HOW TO READ a LESSON PLAN

Title of Lesson: *This is the title of the lesson. Often it reflects the theme that you will be covering for the week.*

<p>Objective: <i>(This is what your child should learn from this lesson and what you should focus on when teaching. These are based on preschool and kindergarten standards in our program. The objective is not ALL the skills that they can learn from this lesson, just the focus)</i></p>			
<p>Days: <i>(This is the day of the week the lesson should be taught. At home preschool gives more flexibility here, but lessons usually grow progressively through the week and should be done in order.)</i></p>	<p>Materials: <i>(These are the items you will need to teach this lesson.)</i></p>	<p>Preparation: <i>(This is what you will need to do before you start preschool today. In our program the prep is minimal.)</i></p>	<p>Implementing the Lesson: <i>(These are the directions for the lesson. All of the lessons in our program are pre-tested and developmentally appropriate. Directions have been designed to be easy to follow and understand. If you have any questions, please contact us and we will clarify. For best results, read through the directions before you start preschool for the week. This helps you understand the progression</i></p>

			<i>and goals of the week and makes your teaching more focused.)</i>
Supplemental Activities: <i>(These are optional suggestions to add to the experience of the lessons this week. These activities give you the chance to expand your child's learning and help them be excited about the theme. They can be done as an introduction, a replacement to a lesson plan day, or a wrap-up and review of the week).</i>			
Assessment: <i>(These are directions to make sure your child is understanding the lesson and meeting the objectives. This is a short review and is not meant to be a stressful test or an absolute tool. It is simple a way to get an idea of how effective your lesson was for your child). This is best done as an observation as your go, rather than a checklist at the end.</i>			

The wonderful thing about homeschool is that the lesson plans are developed around your child's goals and abilities, and you have the power to change and tweak them as you see fit. Two children will get totally different skills from the same lesson plan if they are taught at their level and with their goals in mind.

EXPANDING LEARNING BEYOND THE LESSON PLAN

All great teachers and parents can take a lesson and expand it beyond a simple curriculum or lesson plan. Children need repetition and relevancy in their learning. Using everyday activities and natural experiences to expand and encourage learning makes it fun and more effective. The next section talks about ways to do this.

NATURAL LEARNING THROUGH PLAY, TEACHING OPPORTUNITIES, AND MAKING MESSSES

The good news is, children are natural learners. They are curious and love to learn about the world around them. This is why they are always into everything, always asking questions, and always pushing their limits. While, as parents, these traits can sometimes be less than desirable, as teachers, these are learning opportunities.

This makes natural play and learning a big part of a child's life. Learning does not end when the lesson plan is over. Your child is constantly learning and most of that learning comes through play and exploration. Your child can learn science and math from playing with blocks, social skills through playing pretend, and literacy skills from doing puzzles. The best thing you can do is let your child play and, when old enough, read. As your child explores, you can guide conversations and help them see what they are learning.

Play can be unexpected and messy. We have all tried and failed to clean up that glitter they got into, or been frustrated when all they toys we just put away are out again already. However, as a teacher, if we use those opportunities as teaching moments, children will learn and grow so much faster. Be open and flexible to what your child wants to learn about. Allow them to guide your "lessons" outside of lesson plans.

So, when your child makes a huge mess, spilling flour all over the floor and running their fingers through it, use it.

Tell them where the flour came from, practice drawing letters in the flour, make cookies with them and teach them about counting out and measuring the ingredients. Then have them help you clean it up and talk about a better way to get the flour out next time. Yes, it takes patience and time. Children learn best, though, when the lesson is relatable to their life and something that is happening right now.

PRE-LITERACY, STORYTIME, AND READING

One of the most important academic skills your child can learn is reading. Reading begins before preschool and continues throughout life. Preschool is, however, the time when most children learn their letters and sounds. Some children will even start to read.

Pre-literacy skills begin early in life. Even toddlers will pick up a book, look at the pictures, flip through the pages, and “read” the story. As your child grows, he/she will begin to recognize environmental print, or the logos and signs we see all around us every day. Your child is learning that the shape, color, and layout of symbols mean something. Next, your child may start to recognize a few letters, usually starting with their name. Name recognition is one of the most basic forms of reading with letters. Your child will memorize the shape of their name, and then names of those close to them. Whenever you see or write their name, show it to them. Help them to find the first letter of their name in road signs or stories. Next, your child will begin to learn the letters of the alphabet and their sounds. Encourage them to name letters they see in everyday life (road trips, running errands, a walk around the block) and help them to show off what they know and expand upon it. As your child becomes comfortable with their knowledge of letters and sounds, begin to help them blend those sounds into words. Start small and build up. An example of this is: CAT (ask your child what letters are

in the word: C A T, ask what those letters say, and then ask them to put the sounds together quickly to make a word: cat). Go at your child's pace. This takes patience and practice, but the excitement that comes when they begin to read is a one-of-a-kind feeling.

The best and most important thing you can do to help your child with literacy skills is READ EVERYDAY. It doesn't matter if you read silly books, non-fiction, shark books, Dr. Seuss books, or fairy tales. Read anything. And do it every day. Have your child sit with you and look at the book. Ask questions about the pictures or the story. Ask about the characters. Relate the story to their own life. Books should not be rushed through. The goal is to enjoy the experience and help your child get comfortable with reading. Don't just read the words, make it a game. As they memorize stories, let them "read" to you. Point out letters in the story and ask for names or sounds. As they begin to recognize sight words, ask them to read those. Help them blend sounds of simple words so they can begin to read.

As your child masters reading on their own, encourage them to choose books at their level on any topic. Allow them to discuss what they read with you through informal verbal book reports. Read along with them and create your own little book club. Pay attention to your child's interests and suggest books that cover those topics. Make reading a fun, recreational activity, rather than something they only do for school.

MOTOR SKILLS

While our curriculum integrates gross motor (large movement) and small motor (fine finger and hand control) development into the lessons, these skills are learned in everything we do. From kicking or throwing a ball to being able to cut with scissors, the only way to get better is to practice. Give your child time to play outside. Run, skip, gallop, throw, kick, hit, swing, and practice balance. These simple, everyday things help your child to control their body and perfect their movements. Inside, allow them time to color, paint, cut with scissors, and play with tweezers. These smaller movements help develop the muscles they will need to control their hands.

SOCIAL SKILLS

One downside of homeschool can be your child's lack of social interaction with peers. There are several ways to help bring this into your curriculum. Host playdates with friends, go to the park, set up a time each week to have a lesson with friends, go to church, or visit family. Create or join a homeschool co-op. Join in community classes for dance, acting, coding, or a foreign language. Allow your child to play on a sports team. The best way to learn social skills is to be social. Allow your child time to work through the social expectations that come from interacting with others. Make time in your week to give your child the chance to play with other children.

CONCLUSION

We understand that learning is not a one-size-fits-all thing.

It is an individual journey that your child will take throughout their entire life. Each of us is different and those differences are what blend together to make the world the wondrous place it is. We believe that parents, more than anyone else, help a child through that journey and we are excited that you are making your child's education a priority. Children with involved parents are so much more successful, not just in school, but throughout life. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact us through email at:
ashley@phoenixhomeacademy.com.

We would like to leave you with three steps that will help you the most through this journey:

1. Read with your child everyday
2. Be your child's cheerleader, always encouraging
3. Trust yourself, you know your child better than anyone else

REFERENCES

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Utah's School Readiness Standards Age Three to Five
Booklet