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My husband and I conducted homeschool workshops for parents interested in homeschooling. We wanted to share a portion of that workshop information with you in hopes to give you some insights and direction. Let us share from our heart and experience.

HOMESCHOOL INSIGHT WORKSHOP Part 1:

Congratulations! You either decided to homeschool or you're investigating this educational option. Homeschooling can be exciting and rewarding and at the same time, it can be confusing and challenging.

Without a doubt, homeschooling is the fastest growing educational movement in United States. Families homeschool for a number of reasons. Compared to formal education, there's no labeling, teasing, bullying, intense pressure, peer group reliance, state mandated objectives, age segregated classes, no violent outbreaks, opposition with faculty or administration, demeaning punishments, etc.

Homeschooling allows parents to decide who, what, where, when, and how to educate their children. In PA we have a homeschool law that defines what subjects have to be taught. But the parent decides what history course will be taught. The parent decides whether or not to use textbooks. The parent decides which 180 days out of the 365 calendar days to homeschool their child.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES:

As the parent, you have the unique opportunity to develop an educational program tailored just for your child resulting in a **superior education**. Students are free to explore subjects they are *interested* in at the *level* and *speed* they can handle. One added feature most **parents** don't expect is that we also **learn** as our children are learning.

ADVANTAGES:

Homeschooling has many advantages. The longer you homeschool, the greater the opportunities to develop family unity and open communication. You will be able to **stress values, morals, build characters, and life skills**.

Another advantage is to enjoy the **flexibility** that comes with homeschooling. It's not unusual to start with an array of textbooks only to find yourself relaxing and realizing that children learn best from life experiences. History comes alive when children read a biography of a famous person. The results from hands-on science experiments will make more of an impact than being part of a large group, observing at a distance.

Some other **flexible** factors would be homeschooling in the mornings, afternoons, or evenings. Studies can also be accomplished on the weekends, from field trips, or on vacations. You also have the choice of teaching subjects separately or as unit studies.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

Homeschooling calls for a **commitment of time and money**. We are forced to deal with family issues. Especially **attitudes**. Often we are together 24/7. And we have no one to blame if there are difficulties with our educational program.

You will have days that run smooth, days when nothing seems to get accomplished, but truthfully most days are somewhere between the two.

Maybe you've researched the subject of homeschooling. You read books, attended homeschool orientation meetings, and talked to experienced homeschoolers. You may have the vision that homeschooling will be the answers to all life's problems. There are definite advantages to homeschooling. But there will also be times when you may feel at your wits end.

It's important to remember that homeschooling is not only about academics. If it were, our job would be easy. But there are also toddlers, laundry, meals, interruptions; job lay-offs, sickness, non-supportive contacts, etc.

Let's examine some keys for success:

Key: Don't homeschool without your spouse's blessing. You don't need the added pressure of someone coming home at night, questioning what and how you fulfilled your educational duties. Pray for the Lord to change your spouse's heart. Ask if the spouse would investigate homeschooling along with you. Invite a homeschooling family over.

Key: Make homeschooling your priority. Some things may have to be eliminated or minimized. In America, we feel uncomfortable if there is a blank spot on our calendar. We feel we have to make everything fit into our schedule and life style.

Key: Declutter the house. Rule is Don't need it,
Don't want it,
Don't use it,
Get rid of it.

The more space we have, the more clutter we accumulate. There are a number of books on the market to help motivate you to declutter. (Don Aslett's book for example.)

Key: Enlist all family members to help with the chores. Don't try to do everything yourself. Take this opportunity to teach responsibility. One way to build self-esteem is for each to see their vital role in the family. Everyone has a job and is expected to do their best.

It's also a good idea for the parent to work beside the child. This makes a huge difference especially on big projects such as yard work and spring cleaning.

KEY: Teach the oldest, they in turn teach the younger.

Key: Organize your homeschool workplace. If you can't find it, you can't use it. Consider having shelves or a bookcase close to your study area. Organization not only goes for school materials and project supplies but also for your glasses, cell phones, mail etc.

KEY: Understand our state homeschool law.

Key: Develop your own homeschool philosophy. Why do you want to homeschool? Expect to develop and refine over a period of time.

Key: Decisions have to be made. Know what you **want** to teach, **why** you want to teach it, and **how** you are going to teach it. The state law has the subjects that are required but you decide what grades to teach world history, American history, PA history, civics, and economics. You will gain direction if you know why you are teaching a certain subject. You have the choice of using textbooks, books we call living books, and/or life experiences to accomplish your teaching goals.

Key: Avoid the trap of trying to gain approval from others outside your immediate family.

Key: Understand, if coming from a formal school background, the first year will definitely be a time of transition.

Key: Eliminate or minimize time-consuming activities such as TV, DVD's, computer games, web, etc.

Five star Key for Success:

You want to **challenge but not frustrate** your child when it comes to the amount and depth of expected work. I attended a panel of different homeschooling moms who shared about their school days. One mom, who has six children, said they finished their school day about 11:30 in the morning. This included her 9th grade son. Challenged??? I don't think so!

Key: For added support, take advantage of being part of a local and state homeschool association. Consider subscribing to homeschool newsletters, web sites, and magazines. However, use advice from other homeschoolers with discretion.

Key: Homeschooling becomes a lifestyle and a joy rather than something to be endured. If it becomes burdensome, **check your priorities.**

Key: There will always be something to do. So take time for yourself, especially if you have small children.

Key: If falling behind, correct math and writing assignments. Read together for science and history.

Key: Put the books aside and capture those teachable moments

Key: The web is a great resource; however, make sure the information is on your child's learning level. Another downfall with the web is spending a considerable amount of time surfing for that "perfect" site.

Key: In reference to projects, field trips, etc. If you initiate 1/2 of what you plan, and if you accomplish 1/4 of what you initiated, you are doing a great job.

Key: It's tried and true, give praise whenever possible. There are plenty of internal and external forces to belittle family members. I challenge you to daily give genuine words of affirmation and encouragement. Would the atmosphere on the home front be different if "Great job", "Excellent", "Show me how you did it!" were common place?

Final Key: Learn what and how to motivate your child. Take time to listen, love, laugh, and to build a common bond. You're not going to motivate someone who doesn't respect you.

Great discussion. LET'S TAKE A BREAK! When we come back we will discuss motivating your child, learning styles, special ed, homeschooling teenagers, and more.