

Developing Your Homeschool Philosophy

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I shared my own mission statement in a post called “Why I homeschool.” In this post, I encourage you to develop a vision or mission statement for your own homeschool that encapsulates your personal values and philosophy about what education and success look like to you. I encourage you to get creative and dig deep. There are several reasons why I think this is an important early step.

Many people are wary of homeschooling because they think all parents aren’t “qualified” to teach. Accordingly, they think the worst thing that could happen due to homeschooling is that your children would get a bad education. I favor the opinion that any caregiver who has their children’s best interest at heart and has reasonable access to learning resources (such as a public library and other people) can offer a quality education. And any holes in education can be fixed when the need arises. The real danger of homeschooling, in my opinion, is that family relationships could be damaged. This is not likely, but if you put more thought into curriculum and benchmarks than you put into holistic wellness and relationships, it could happen without you realizing it.

Knowing your priorities is the foundation of your confidence as a homeschooling parent. There will be SO many opportunities and so many choices to make, and only so many hours in a day. If you aren’t sure where your priorities lie, every decision will be excruciating. You always want what’s best for your child, but you may waver on what *is* best.

What is a vision or mission statement?

Your homeschool vision or mission statement is a tool to help you steer your way through a homeschooling year with confidence and without anxiety.

You will craft a succinct statement--a very short paragraph--about why you’re homeschooling and what you most hope your children will get out of it. You will only name the most important benefits, not every single one. The statement should describe what you want childhood and

adolescence to look like (in your home), and what opportunities you think will prepare them to be the kind of human being you hope they will be.

If you are only homeschooling because of the pandemic, this exercise may be trickier, because the element of choice and the number of options are limited. Still, taking the time to create your vision will help you make the best of your homeschooling time.

What to do

You are going to interrogate yourself and get explicit about your values, goals, and priorities.

You will consider process versus product: how much weight does each carry for you? Are you determined to send your children to the Ivy League, whether they (and you) enjoy the process or not?

Are you committed to your family experiencing joy all the way, regardless of what profession your children choose in the end? How much can you trust the process? Are you determined to mold your children, or do you aim to support them to become who they want to be?

Your emphasis on process versus product may change as they get older.

Remember that homeschooling is essentially full-time parenting. Being around anyone 24x7 can strain a relationship. You must consider the process as part of the deal. If the process is hard, your end goal has to be worth that commitment.

How to start:

1. Observe your children. What do they do in their free time? When do you smile at what they're doing and think, I'm so glad they have the time to do that? When do you feel they're wasting their time and talents? A lot of what we need to know is right in front of us, if we'll pay attention. If you are the kind of parent who wants your child to figure out what they're passionate about, get good at it, and develop it so they can use it to contribute to the world, homeschooling is a great match for you. On the other hand, you may be a parent who is only happy when your child is reading quality

literature or doing math problems or reciting Quran. That's okay too (as long as your expectations are reasonable). Either way, know what makes you feel positive and hopeful as a parent.

2. Research different methods and see what resonates with you. I've listed some educational philosophies that influenced me (Charlotte Mason, unschooling, project-based, leadership education, Montessori). You can also look at more structured options such as classical, school-at-home, online or distance learning. You can mix and match to develop your own philosophy. But you must know what is most important to you, and especially what is non-negotiable, as that will guide your many choices and decisions.

3. Ask yourself questions like: What kind of lifestyle do you want your family to lead? What do you want your days to look like? What kind of memories do you want to make? When you look back and your children look back, what do you want them to remember? Hard work? Joy? There is no wrong answer.

An example of a lifestyle question is this: some homeschooling families lean toward sending one child to school (given that different children have different needs), but because the pick-up schedule would disrupt the flow of the homeschool day, they choose to keep everyone home as a lifestyle choice.

4. Also ask yourself: what are the skills and knowledge sets you absolutely want your child to have by the time they leave you? This can be as focused as the *ability* to learn and confidence in that. Or you may want them to have a thorough academic program, a quality STEM education, *and* advanced religious studies. Do some research on the benefits of various skill sets, and remember that an individual's stance toward academics plays a large role in how you facilitate their learning and how much of it gets accomplished. Also consider life skills (things like budgeting, car repair, etc) as part of your home education program. What do you think your children will need to succeed? You can come up with a long wish list, but only the most important should make it into the mission statement.

Once you have some answers to these questions and have observed your child(ren), you should be able to start drafting your vision or mission statement. You may draft one statement, or one for each age group, or even a separate one for each child if they are very different and have very different needs. You'll want to revisit your statement at least once a year and see if it still reflects your top values. But for motivation, you can read it every day as an affirmation before beginning your day with your family, or every week as you plan the coming week's activities. It puts everything into perspective and motivates you to stay focused on what's important to you.

I drafted three different mission statements, as I have different reasons at each stage of development. I wrote them down only a year or two ago, so they're a distillation of what I've found most valuable about homeschooling over the years.

My statements lean heavily on lifestyle goals rather than on specific knowledge bases or academics. Honestly, if academics were The Most Important Thing to me, probably all of my kids would be in school by now. That's another story for another post. The point is, you have to know how badly you want a thing and why you want it. Your homeschool mission statement should encourage you to keep going and guide you on which "battles" to take up every day. It will help you to recognize your small successes that make your days add up into a life that's worth your sacrifices.