

Homeschooling During Tough Times

Vicki Tillman 7SistersHomeschool

Sometimes unexpected things disrupt the homeschool year. When this happens it seems like all the best-laid plans go out the window. We will discuss how to make realistic adjustments to academics and life rhythms, manage stress and model resiliency for your teens.

Have you noticed that real life does not actually look like:

- The Pinterest-perfect pictures on your well-curated Pinterest boards?
- Or the Instagram filtered and perfectly staged IG posts?
- Even the Facebook fabulous, perfect family photos?

If you are like most of us, then your family looks like a real family living in real life, real circumstances.

Homeschooling high school has its ups and downs. In fact, life has its ups and downs.

Some times go well. Some times don't.

When life happens while you're homeschooling high school, what do you do? What happens if you have:

- Curriculum fail?
- Illness?
- Accident?
- Financial stress?
- Good but busy career changes?
-

We can't make life calm, quiet and perfect all the time. Goodness, we can't even make it happen some of the time. That is really God's domain.

What we are in charge of is managing ourselves and role modeling God's grace...even during times that are stressful and things are going wrong.



Here are some ways to homeschool high school during tough times.

1) Make adjustments to academics and life rhythms

Take stock realistically of what you have available:

- Time
- Energy
- Finances
- Focus
- Resources



2) Set aside the four-year plan and this year's plan

Rewrite the goals for right now. Make a temporary “action plan” for right now. Revisit it weekly or monthly as you need to.

Action plan may include:

- Setting aside normal academics
- Log hours for Carnegie credits in life experiences
- Watch documentaries
- Online courses
- Audiobooks while you drive
- Set up a bird feeder outside the window and learn birds
- Home Ec and Home Maintenance credits
- Real-life Health credit
- Real-life Human Development credit
- Real-life Psychology credit

Our friend, Latonya Moore, shares that during tough times it is important to be open to new things and remain flexible. She found that rigidity would not help her succeed. She educates her homeschoolers in the way that works at each phases of life (good times and hard times). This is a marvelous example of [growth mindset](#).



3) We can model resiliency for our homeschool high schoolers

Daily practice for yourself:

- Self-forgiveness (we all mess up, how do we show our teens that we can accept God's forgiveness and also grace towards ourselves)
- Humility (saying, "I'm sorry," when we need to...because we all make mistakes sometimes)
- Asking for help (we all need to do that sometimes)

Learn to view the tough times as a time for unasked for growth. Recently, 7Sisters Sabrina had a conversation with a person who has been working through some challenging circumstances. Through this unasked-for time of growth, he has learned to frame the way he is handling life by saying:

Circumstances being what they are and me being who I want to be, I have decided to...

Notice what he has discovered: We know in tough circumstances, we humans can tend to think this way:

Circumstances being what they are and me being who I am...

See the difference? If we focus on who we are right now, we can become focused on our limitations. On the other hand, if we focus on who we want to become, we open the door to possibilities and even more availability to God working in and through us!

(However, remember to keep things balanced. God made us in special ways and each person is unique. When we remember and build on our God-given gifts and personalities, we are available to making good things happen.)

While we are working on balance, then, think about who you are and who you want to be at the same time. With that in mind, hold onto God's grace and allow him to help you grow.



4) Remember, that God is a God of redemption. He likes making new things out of brokenness

So in the brokenness of your imperfect circumstances, you can trust God to help you become the homeschooling mom he wants you to be.



5) Allow yourself (and your teens) to feel your feelings

Our friend, Meredith Curtis, has been through some tough times. She advises that sadness or disappointment need to be acknowledged. Sometimes we need to tell God exactly how we are feeling. Sometimes we need a good friend to talk to (or even a counselor). Eventually we will find strength to keep going...and even move on.

We can share this with our teens and validate their feelings.



6) Remember that no matter what things look like, God loves us

Meredith also reminds us that just because you are going through adversity does not mean that God is loving you less. You are not a failure as a homeschool mom if you had to make dramatic adjustments to the year.



7) Sometimes it helps to find a Scripture to pray and meditate on

Pray for a Scripture to help keep in mind. In difficult moments, a well-meditated Scripture can give you strength.

Our friend, Latonya, has adapted Joshua 1:9 as a prayer for herself and for her family:
God has commanded us: We are strong and courageous. We are not afraid; we are not discouraged, for the Lord our God is with us wherever we go.



8) You will get so much unsolicited advice, ignore what is not helpful

Remember: no one is perfect, so if you are hearing guilt-inducing advice, turn it over to God and get it out of your mind. It is not your responsibility to explain to or appease folks who give unasked-for advice.

9) Another bit of wisdom from Latonya: Take a Break.

When we take a break, we give our minds and bodies a chance to rest and apply.

- Taking a break allows us to listen to others and think creatively.
- It allows you to take a nap or just do something light, if you need to do so, check your calendar (self-care is SO important). It allows time to ask, "What do I need to let go of?"
- Beware of "I can't because..." (especially if fear of what other folks think is keeping you from taking a break).
- Take stock of the privileges you have and take advantage of them.
- Don't talk yourself out of taking a break when you need it.

After we take a break, we have more energy to be present and available in the rest of life! Great lessons learned from great trial in her life; and good inspiration for us all.



Here are some tips on daily psychological first aid for homeschool high schoolers!

Psychological First Aid #1: Self-care

God made us whole beings: spirit, soul and body. Sometimes when we feel stressed or down, it can help just to do more basic physical care:

- Water
 - Our brain cells are mostly water. Water is the transport mechanism within the cell. Our nerve cells make our neurotransmitters that run all our body's thinking and doing. They need the water to move the neurotransmitter production through the brain cell. So if teens are low on water, their nerve cells can't do their work efficiently.
- Fruits and vegetables
 - Our neurotransmitters are in part made from the micronutrients in our food. So, if we want our neurotransmitter production to really work, we need those building blocks. Take, for instance, one of the necessary "switches" along the neurotransmitter process is made from folic acid. Or, for instance, the healthy bacteria in our gut give off by-products that travel up to the brain and give the signal to the brain to feel better. When we eat good probiotics (as in yogurt or kimchi) it helps us feel better!

- Exercises
 - When teens move their muscles, their nerves create dopamine. That's a neurotransmitter that helps with mood and focus. (Have teens experiment with doing a little exercise before they have to concentrate on a tough school lesson.)
- Good sleep
 - Whether teens like it or not, they need sleep (so do we moms)! Our brain cells bathe in spinal fluid while we sleep to keep our brain healthy and focused
- Breathing
 - Oxygen helps cut the stress hormones in our bodies. Deep breathing can help get rid of stress. Download this freebie from [Vicki Tillman Coaching on a deep breathing exercise called Progressive Relaxation](#).

Idea: Invite teens to keep a log for a week on these basic self-care items. Have them daily record how they are feeling emotionally and physically each day also.



Psychological First Aid #2: Variety

Too much same, same, same creates anxiety. Too much screen time causes anxiety. Try these:

- 20/20/20
 - Every twenty minutes, look at something twenty feet away for twenty seconds. This gives eyes a break and a bit of variety for the brain.
- Look at something green.
 - Plants and trees have some anxiety reducing hormones, but just looking at a tree helps the body calm itself. (Have you heard that Japanese and Korean cultures sometimes practice "tree bathing"? They take meditative walks where there are trees. The pheromones from the trees and the trees' beauty help keep the walkers feeling healthier.)
- Laugh
 - A merry heart does good like a medicine. When we laugh, our bodies create endorphins which help us feel better emotionally and help build our immune system. Ask your teen to make sure they are having a good daily laugh!
- Social contact
 - Family is important but teens also need other human beings. In person is nice but digital (if safe) is okay. Being with other humans is necessary for anxiety management.



Psychological First Aid #3: How to help teens manage stress of high school academics

High school generally lasts four years. It can be four stressful years for teens who have not learned:

- Manage their schedules
 - Time management is one of the top issues I have found with teens.
 - We have [some ideas for teen time management](#) that have worked for our homeschool high schoolers.
 -
- Find academic/life balance
 - Learning how to find a good balance of academics and the rest of life can be difficult
 - Some teens have a hard time knowing when enough is enough when it comes to their studies
 - Other teens have a hard time knowing when enough is enough when it comes to their leisure
 - A good time audit can help
- Ask for help
 - Sometimes teens forget to how to ask for help. Instead they get frustrated give up or waste endless time feeling anxious
 - You can help by checking in daily and asking, "What questions do you have about...?"
 - This can be tough if they are working on a subject you do not feel confident about, so model resilience skills and information-seeking skills:
 - "I don't know, let's see if we can find a YouTube about it."
 - OR "I don't know, but I know Aunt Suzy is good at that, let's FaceTime her."
- Work on 3R's: Routines, reassurance, regulation
 - Gentle **routines** help teens feel less anxiety
 - **Reassurance** of your love and protection helps, too
 - **Regulation**: teach them deep breathing and [the 3W's](#):
 - What am I feeling? Why am I feeling that way? What am I going to do about it?



Psychological First Aid #4: Handling grief from losses

If the family has lost a loved one during the pandemic, make sure your teens have had the opportunity to do some healthy grieving. Help them:

- Create a scrapbook about the loved one
- Or create voice-memo stories about the loved one
- Create a memory box of items from the loved one

If the loss is mostly the continued isolation that is still ongoing:

- Find outdoors things to do with friends and make it happen regularly:
- Hikes (log phys ed hours)
- Picnics
- Outdoor field trips (log those hours for history or science)

Homeschooling is possible, even in tough times...even when it must look completely different than the homeschooling we planned. Praise God we have a God of grace to give us strength to accomplish His goals.

Notes: Thanks to Latonya Moore of Joy in the Ordinary podcast and Meredith Curtis of Finishing Well podcast.

