

## The Top Ten Mistakes of New Homeschoolers

Okay, I'll admit up front that I am not married and have no children. What could I possibly know about mistakes new homeschoolers make? I'm just a pipsqueak!  
By Raquelle Sheen

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My list of credentials is short but Very Weighty. (Every pipsqueak thinks their credentials are Very Weighty.) I was homeschooled my entire life. I got my accredited bachelor's degree and accredited master's degree from home via distance education. I have volunteered with a variety of homeschool organizations. I've watched many homeschooling families and seen some successfully raise wonderful kids. I've seen other families crash and burn. By dint of keeping my eyes and ears open and using my Acute and Intuitive Perception (pipsqueaks always think they have Acute and Intuitive Perception), I have compiled a reasonable list of common errors that trap new homeschoolers. Kindly be impressed!

**Error #1: Viewing academics as the primary goal.** Actually, homeschooling is first and foremost about character education. Raising an intellectual genius is pointless if he or she is lazy, dishonest, rebellious, and lacks integrity, right? Some of the world's wickedest men were very smart. But so what? They were evil. You are not just training your children's minds, you are training their whole lives. When any proposed activity or learning opportunity comes your way, first ask "What will this do for Johnny's character?" *Then* ask what it does for his intellect.

**Error #2: Having unrealistic expectations.** You know the rosy picture...crisp clean books, a spotless house, a never-violated schedule, and smiling children who like nothing better than dividing 34,867 by 253 and converting it from cubic centimeters to cubic miles. Better yet is the picture of *you*—the cheerful, patient parent who excels at communication and makes school delightfully fun at all times. Sure, that's a great goal. You'll probably have a few days like that. But you'll have more days when you overslept and the house is cluttered and the baby is sick and you burned the toast and everyone is cranky, including (or especially) you. That's normal! The point is not to have a perfect homeschool—the point is to persevere even when it's NOT perfect.

**Error #3: Creating a school-home.** Many new homeschoolers set out to copy the traditional classroom exactly. They have desks, a chalkboard, a set period for each subject and a scheduled recess. They do report cards. They stand at the front of the classroom and lecture. They make their children raise their hands before asking questions.

Many of these things are done in traditional classrooms for crowd control. But you're not in a traditional classroom anymore! You're home! Use the kitchen table! Have recess based on the children's needs, not the clock. Forget report cards—they are designed to tell parents how their child is doing and you already *know* how they're doing! Instead of lecturing at the front of the classroom, sit on the couch and talk over the material together. Institute hand-raising only if you desperately need to.

Sometimes new homeschoolers will ask professional teachers for advice about structuring their

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homeschool. However, keep in mind that professional teachers are trying to run a formal classroom. You, however, have a *home*. So it is especially helpful to ask *homemakers* for advice—other seasoned homeschooling families.

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**Error #4: Doing every assignment and test in the books.** There is no law, regulation, or tax shelter that requires you to make your children do every single assignment or test in the curriculum. Curriculum providers purposely provide lots of questions and tests and suggested assignments to give you as many options as possible. But they are just that—options. Feel free to pick and choose. Don't burn yourself or your children out by giving them repeated or "duh" assignments on material they already know.

**Error #5: Not trusting your judgment.** Most new homeschoolers lack confidence and frequently second-guess themselves. They either feel obligated to do what the "experts" say, or to blindly copy what their homeschooling friends are doing. Remember, your children are unique individuals. You as a parent know them best. Stop worrying about "methods" and what Dr. So-and-So (or your neighbor) says. Pray for wisdom and trust your common sense. Sure, ask advice if you need it. But remember that *you* are the expert on your children. If your friend has a wonderful homeschool and uses XYZ curriculum, it does not automatically follow that your children will also thrive on that curriculum. They might, but they might not. Slow down and mentally assess your children's needs, strengths and weaknesses and choose a curriculum that works for *them*.

**Error #6: Doing too much.** Some homeschool families are gripped by the fear of their children "missing out." To that end, they enroll their kids in Absolutely Positively Everything. Sports, music lessons, art classes, dance, karate, drama, horseback riding, pottery-making—there is no end to the list! While these extra-curricular activities are great, choose them judiciously. If you are spending all your time in the car and everyone is frazzled trying to run from one activity to the next, cut back. Your child does not have to participate in all of these things at once. Pick just one or two activities per semester and don't underestimate the value of quiet days at home. Days at home with the family are just as character-building and memory-making as a whirl of activities.

**Error #7: Assuming that co-ops and video/satellite schools are superior.** Co-ops and video/satellite schools sound great to many hesitant first-time homeschoolers. However, these are not necessarily optimal choices. Co-ops intrude greatly on your time and remove the highly desirable 1-1 teacher-student ratio. Video/satellite schools can be very demanding, inflexible, and time wasting. Why make your children sit there and watch the ins and outs of someone else's classroom (handing out papers, answering "duh" questions, etc.) when they could read the book and answer the questions themselves? Why let someone else disciple your children when you could do it yourself?

**Error #8: Not reading books and blogs.** There are countless books and blogs written by fellow homeschoolers who have been down the road you are on now. Don't assume that because you read one book and attended a few homeschool outings that you now know everything there is to know. Read, read, read! Learn from the mistakes and advice of others! If you have to turn off your

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television or use a phone to make time for this reading, do. You will find it more profitable.

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**Error #9: Looking back.** Homeschooling requires commitment. Stop casting a wistful eye on other school choices and thinking about how much easier your neighbors presumably have it. You chose to homeschool because you thought it was best for your child, right? Good. Then, having put your hand to the plow, don't look back! Do your best and enjoy the journey. Too many homeschoolers develop a "woe-is-me" attitude and over-focus on aaaaaaaall the sacrifices they've made and how much they'd *love* to "get away" from their kids and have some *me* time. These thoughts create immediate discontent. Put them from your mind and thank God for His blessings in giving you your children in the first place and using you to mold them and them to mold you. Then feed the kids a healthy snack (eat one yourself too!) and send them outside to play for ten minutes. You'll probably feel much better!

**Error #10: Too much peer time.** Kids don't need a peer group in order to become a mature, well-socialized adult. They need a family. They need interaction with *all* ages, especially adults. Too much time with their peers makes them peer-dependant (no kidding!), less likely to think for themselves, and much more susceptible to following foolish fads and opinions. Limit peer time and opt for family time!

I thought about adding an Error #11, that of not listening to the advice of Very Weightily-Credentialed homeschooled pipsque—uh, graduates. But my Acute and Intuitive Perception concluded that that would be considered presumptuous.