



# Homeschooling with Multiple Children

Families who have been homeschooling for a long while know that their success depends upon five things: observation, planning, consolidation, delegation, guidelines, and patience. When these things are in place, it will result in older children developing empathy, communication skills, patience, and the ability to be a teacher and leader for younger siblings. Younger siblings will also feel a sense of belonging, as well as increased social and emotional skills.

## Observation

In order to make plans for your children, you will need to observe. You will observe what times of the day each of your children is more productive, times when they are calm and focused, times when they are active, times when they are tired, fussy, or cranky. You will record the times of the day that these things are happening, and make plans accordingly. If you know that your child gets cranky every day around 2 or 3 pm, that isn't the time to sit down and give them a lesson or ask them to take on something that requires a great deal of mental energy. Note when children are more productive and when they are less productive, and plan lessons to optimize productivity.

You will also want to observe in order to identify patterns of behavior as well as antecedents to conflict. Analyze the situation to determine why it is occurring. Once you understand what activates certain behaviors, you can collaborate with your children to find a solution. Implement agreed-upon solutions.

You will also observe what they love to do. From observing what they enjoy, you will create opportunities to help them stay occupied while you are working with your other children.

## Planning

You will make plans based upon your observations of their interests and areas skills they are developing. Your plans will involve creating a rhythm and routine. When planning, you will want to plan focused lessons around the quietest times of the day, which could be in the morning when everyone is fresh, or when the younger ones are napping. You will want to plan for one on one time with each child. When you start your morning, you might want to begin with giving attention to the youngest child in the home, because younger children have the hardest time waiting for everything, and that includes attention and connection. Having a special “treasure” box of trinkets that are put away and brought out for when a younger child is getting cranky and you are needing some focused time with an older child also does wonders! One-on-one time can also include long term projects that you and one of your children loves, or engaging in a household task together, or even running errands with just one child.

## Consolidation

Bring teaching and learning to all of your children whenever you can! While younger children can't participate in the same way as older children, they can be a part of lessons, (and often even do some sort of follow up work tailored to their age), they can listen to read alouds or audiobooks. If you have multiple elementary-aged siblings, differentiate their language and math work as appropriate, and combine all other subjects (history, science, geography, art, music). The lessons can be combined, and their follow-up work will vary according to their skill level. Your 6-year-old might dictate to you and then copy a few sentences about the lesson that they remembered, whereas your 11 year old might conduct additional research and write an extensive report.



## Delegation

The parents of homeschooled children are not performing all household tasks alone. Veteran homeschoolers KNOW that they need to enlist the help of their children in order for the household to run smoothly. Homeschooling can be like shoveling snow while it's still snowing! It's impossible to keep up with domestic duties without your children's help. Your youngest can start with sorting socks and folding washcloths. Your older children can be taking on dishes, laundry, and yardwork. If having your children participate as members of your household community in this way is new to them, it's never too late! Though the early you get them started, the sooner it will become automatic for them. It will take time for them to learn to do these tasks well, but after many opportunities for experience, they will get there.

## Patience

There is no pat answer, no magic wand, that will make every day easy and stress-free. You will have to be patient with yourself and with your children as you slowly turn over some tasks that were previously done by you and/or a partner, to your children.

## Guidelines

Having family guidelines that are clear and adhered to, and are based on respecting the wants and needs of every member in the family, will go a long way to foster a collaborative household. While it is not always possible to make everyone happy, with time and effort it is possible to create a win/win situation, most of the time.

## *Guidelines to Support a Harmonious Home Environment*

### Instilling the idea of sharing as “taking turns.”

Many parents think that sharing means that they are keeping track of time to give each child a certain amount of minutes with a coveted item, and after the predetermined time the child must give up the item to the other sibling. This concept of sharing not only is overwhelming to monitor and keep track of, but it doesn't allow for a child to extend their powers of concentration by using the item as long as their concentration will allow, and it doesn't allow for the other child to exercise their patience. Establishing the rule that sharing means taking turns, means that a child will be able to use something until they are finished, and then the next child can have a turn. This eliminates many power struggles over how to share items.

### Communal items vs. what are personal items

Identifying what is for everyone to use, and what are special items that belong to each child, and maintaining boundaries around this, is important. The more that children know that they have some personal property that is respected, the more they will respect both the communal and the personal property of others.

### Hands-on Activities that your child can engage in while you are otherwise occupied:

**Arts and Crafts:** Painting, working with clay, coloring, making a booklet, or anything that engages the mind and the hands!

**Games:** Board games, card games, online games.

**Outdoors:** Don't underestimate the value of outdoor time, and how it can appeal to multiple ages at once! Nature walks and outdoor games make great activity choices and have universal appeal.

**Practical life:** Food preparation can happen at various ages, with even the youngest children starting out with washing fruits and vegetables, and older children baking.



## Final Considerations

- If you try something and it doesn't work, then you can adjust your approach! Maria Montessori was a scientist and was always experimenting, refining, and adjusting.
- Arguments between siblings are healthy and normal. In fact, they offer opportunities for important social experiences, such as communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills. Give them some space to work it out, Facilitate rather than direct, and be sure to create physical distance for siblings when needed.
- Approach the idea of homeschooling multiple children from a problem-solving mindset, with the understanding that you will find solutions to challenges and the belief that you will be successful.