

Beating the Winter Home School Blahs

by Cory Bennett

The winter months can be tough for home school moms and families. While, the holidays are a break from academics, they often leave families exhausted from all the activities and travel. After the excitement of the Christmas and New Year holidays pass, most families face five months of academics with few breaks. Maintaining a high level of motivation and making home education interesting and effective can be a challenge. I would like to suggest a practical family strategy for beating the blahs.

Before we look at specific blah beating ideas, it is important to look at the major components of a successful plan. I would like to explore rest, spiritual preparation, and brainstorming. Rest is often the forgotten key to beating or avoiding the blahs. Fatigue is the enemy of mental freshness, physical and emotional health, and enthusiasm. Families today are often guilty of over scheduling. The results can ruin your home school experience. Plan time for physical rest for yourself and your children. This may involve hard choices like cancelling activities, doing less outside the home and putting the kids to bed at an earlier hour. Rest coupled with a healthy diet can reduce illness and increase enthusiasm. Plan a weekly school schedule that allows time for rest, and increase rest time when things start to fall apart. Some families choose to put children in bed at an early hour and allow time for quiet reading before lights out.

Another key element in beating the blahs is to remember to keep the spiritual component of your life in place. This is always easier to do when you get proper rest. Early morning or late night time with God is more difficult if you are exhausted. One idea is to start your school day with a few minutes of quiet time for everybody. You can also fill your house with godly music that enhances the atmosphere and ministers to the spirit. In our media rich world it is easy to obtain great music. One free quality source is Pandora internet radio. Pandora allows you to insert the name of your favorite artist, group, or music genera, and then it will play music of the same type until you tell it to stop. Pandora can be found at www.pandora.com.

Our family greatly benefited from listening to Focus on the Families' Adventures in Odyssey audio dramas. We would play them in the car or at bedtime. There are many excellent radio dramas and videos available on today's market.

Prayer is often the forgotten element in spiritual activities. Build a prayer team of family and friends who will pray for your home school. Pray with your children as you start the day and offer to pray for other close friends who are home educating. Home schooling is not just an academic exercise, it is a strategic battle in a spiritual war. This means that you will experience spiritual resistance and you will need spiritual help.

Before I end this article with specific suggestions, I want to discuss the role of brainstorming. My suggestions and ideas may help, but your family is a limitless source of creative opportunities to beat the blahs. Take time with your children to brainstorm creative ideas for your school year. Field trips, ministry opportunities, volunteer activities, creative cooking, hobbies, and arts and crafts, are just some of the areas you can explore to add variety and spice to your home school schedule. Be sure to limit

what you do so that you do not hurt your studies or create an exhausting schedule. Once you get started it will be easy to go overboard in this area.

Ideas for Beating the Blahs

Ideas for Moms

Before you set your schedule ask yourself "What does rest look and feel like for me?" and "What does rest look and feel like for my kids?" What motivates you, your kids, and your husband? Discuss these questions with your husband and ask him to help you prepare a schedule that provides adequate rest and motivation.

Moms need regular breaks and adequate planning time. Build down time into your weekly schedule. I made a commitment watch the kids for at least three hours every Saturday. This was time when my wife could window shop, meet friends, or do whatever. It was not grocery shopping time, it was her down time. This might require sacrifice on the part of the husband, but the rewards are worth it. In today's economy, husbands may travel for work or work six days a week making this difficult. An alternative would be to partner with another home schooling mom and watch her kids while she gets a break and vice versa.

Another idea is to plan for an extended break for mom one or two times per year. After learning the hard way, I began to send Barbara to a hotel for a couple of days over the weekend. She could catch up on her sleep, read, do home school planning and spend time thinking and praying. Swapping with another mom and watching her children also works here. Hotels are often cheaper on the weekends and the internet is a great place to look for specials.

Schedule weekly planning time for your home school. Sunday afternoon is often a good option.

Take time to improve your home school motivation and skills by attending a home school conference or women's retreat.

Set a predictable weekly schedule for your family which includes rest and downtime.

Have the kids help you plan a schedule for house work and chores. have them help you create a list of all the things that need to be done and work them into a schedule. All home education is not academic education. These activities help build character and help them learn how to run a household.

Ideas for the Family

Use field trips to add variety. Have the kids help plan them. Field trips can be whole days, half days, or even a couple of hours. It is even possible to plan an internet field trip where you visit sites dedicated to a specific animal or location. Plan a lunch oriented around the theme of the field trip. Have the kids help prepare the food and decorations. Visit the website of your community or the visitor's bureau for ideas of where to go. Do a Google search on home school field trips. You will find dozens of opportunities for fieldtrips within an hour or two drive in our area. Many of them are free or quite inexpensive.

A related idea is to plan an extended lunch with kid friendly cooking. Try a new food or recipe. Give each child a job.

Here is an idea for a creative writing project. Invite an interesting guest for lunch. It could be someone with an exciting occupation or someone from a foreign country or another part of our country. Have the children prepare the meal. Before the event, work with the kids to plan a list of questions that they can ask the guest and then have them write a paper or report about the event.

Change the location of your home school. Rent a chalet or hotel room. Swap homes with a friend or visit grandparents or other relatives. Plan some unique study projects related to where you go. Study the geography of the location or use the project above to ask questions and prepare a report.

Plan a special time with each child each week or month. Give them options of what to do, but let them make suggestions and choose which option to pursue. This is a great idea for both mom and dad. This can be done in the home if activities are scheduled for the other children.

Plan times for ministry or volunteer opportunities. Work at homeless shelters, visit nursing homes. Volunteer opportunities are everywhere. Make sure they are age appropriate and supervised by you or trusted adults.

These are just a few ideas to get your creative juices flowing. Home schooling is hard work and can be boring if we don't put effort into creating time for rest and renewal. Your friends can be a great source of creative alternatives. A phone call or a visit can go a long way to provide perspective and rest to help you beat the blahs.