

# HEALTHY HOMESCHOOL HABITS



**Proven ways to buy back time  
for the things that matter most**

**By Michelle Morrow**

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### *PROVEN WAYS TO BUY BACK TIME FOR THE THINGS THAT MATTER MOST*

Author: Michelle Morrow

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction.....                                  | 3  |
| 1. Eat Well.....                                   | 5  |
| 2. Sleep More .....                                | 6  |
| 3. Get Active .....                                | 8  |
| 4. Focus - The Multitasking Mother's Mission ..... | 9  |
| 5. Think & Consider.....                           | 11 |
| 6. Margin .....                                    | 12 |
| 7. Trade Offs - Choices and Sacrifice .....        | 13 |
| 8. Hobbies and Play.....                           | 15 |
| 9. Kid's Habits and Boundaries.....                | 15 |
| Charlotte Mason on Habits .....                    | 16 |
| 10. Have Faith .....                               | 18 |

## INTRODUCTION

When you're homeschooling, caring for your family is a 24/7 job. If you're not cleaning the house, preparing meals, or doing the washing, then you're probably supervising homeschool lessons, running kids around or organising the family schedule. And of course there are the commitments outside the home as well. It never stops!

It's not uncommon to see a homeschooling mother who always puts herself last. Even going to the doctor, eating healthily or having friends can be pushed aside for family needs. However there is a great difference between looking after yourself and being a [selfish homeschool mother](#). And we need to make that distinction and give ourselves permission to look after ourselves.

Being the family lynch pin can be very exhausting. And without some intentional strategies it isn't long before we can find ourselves running on empty. [Unrealistic homeschool expectations](#) are often at the route of many of our frustrations and in my early days of homeschooling I found myself quite vulnerable to them. I learnt I needed to give myself permission to set boundaries.

These days it's easier to find time for myself than when I had [babies and toddlers](#). Sure my kids are older but I've also become older and learnt how to make sure I find the time to recharge my batteries.

I have a little saying that is very liberating. When I say it I am reminded that I make choices in my day and I can be intentional with how I spend my time. Unfortunately super mum guilt trips are always competing for attention but this little saying helps drown those out. So what's my phrase? It is this - **I give myself permission**; this is how I use it.

- I give myself permission to stop work each day. Just like your family have a knock-off time I set one. I use that off work time to pursue some things I want to do.
- I give myself permission to let the house get a little messy. Let's face it a super mum's work is never done, and if we got everything clean in our home that we knew needed doing we would never rest.
- I give myself permission to say no. We don't have to do all the things asked of us.
- I give myself permission to have a rest or even a day off.
- I give myself permission to read books that nourish my mind and soul.

- I give myself permission to watch a movie and read books just for fun.
- I give myself permission to educate myself.
- I give myself permission to have friends and spend time with them.
- I give myself permission to have an interest that isn't about the kids.
- I give myself permission to have a rest day and for our family that is Sundays. On that day there's time for Church and rest. There is no school work, washing, major cooking or cleaning.

### *Give Yourself A Mother Time Permission Slip*

Here are some wise words from a veteran homeschool mum of seven kids.

*“Do not let the daily grind of laying down your life make you forget what really makes you come alive, because that is what your children need MOST - a mother who is truly alive to God, to them, and to herself.”* [Interview with Elizabeth B.](#)

You need to give yourself permission to look beyond the daily grind and set up strategies for a sustainable homeschool routine.

A healthy homeschool will also help you eliminate distractions and **give you time to focus on the things that matter most.**

Here are ten key strategies that will help you make your homeschool healthy and happy. Some you already know (but it's good to be reminded) and others may be new to you. None of the ideas are about curriculum or homeschool styles. They are grass root ideas that will prepare you emotionally, intellectually, physically and spiritually to tackle the demands of the rewarding job of homeschooling your children.

Happy Homeschooling!

Michelle Morrow

## 1. EAT WELL

*“Good food is healthy food. Food is supposed to sustain you so you can live better, not so you can eat more. Some people eat to live, and some people live to eat.” Yolanda Adams*

Opening a packet of biscuits or sticking a frozen pizza in the oven is a lot cheaper and quicker than baking some muffins or preparing a soup. So how will eating well create more time for you? The simple answer is it will improve your time. You will be more efficient, healthier and have more energy to do the things you need to do.

When I first began homeschooling it seemed curious to me how many homeschoolers were into a range of alternative diets from raw food to Paleo. However the desire of each family was always the same; they wanted to feed their family with the right food that was going to give them optimum health.

I don't wish to lecture you on food philosophies but I would urge you to make eating well a part of your home strategy.

When you have fussy eaters and sugar lovers in the home the temptation is to feed rather than nourish. In our home we have made gradual food changes (and a few radical ones) that have meant we are now making better decisions when it comes to our food intake.

Soups, smoothies, fruit snacks and leftovers are quick to prepare and popular menu choices that help our family make good decisions during our homeschool day. The slow cooker and some forward menu planning will also take the stress out of what to eat for dinner. Online food shopping is a time saver if you find it hard to get to the grocery store.

Our food journey also provides homeschool lessons in food choices and opportunities for the children to prepare their own food in a healthy way. Farmers markets are a fun excursion for the kids. And if you have the space and inclination growing some fruit and vegetables is a worthy natural science experiment.

Boost your energy with good food for you and your family.

## 2. SLEEP MORE

*“Do but consider what an excellent thing sleep is; it is so inestimable a jewel that if a tyrant would give his crown for an hour’s slumber, it cannot be bought; yea, so greatly are we indebted to this kinsman of death, that we owe the better tributary half of our life to him; and there is good cause why we should do so; for sleep is that golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.” Thomas Dekker*

When you have young children a broken night’s sleep is the usual rather than the exception. “That’s just life,” you tell yourself. Wanting time alone, means it is also tempting to stay up late at night just to do something you want to do. You become a [bedtime procrastinator](#). Dragging yourself out of bed becomes common place and you learn to survive on much less sleep than the eight hours that most experts recommend.

Getting the right amount of sleep, finding time for a nap or rest would be on nearly all homeschool mothers’ wish list. In our sleep deprived state this precious indulgence seems impossible to fit in with all the things we have on our daily to-do-list. And how can more sleep possibly help us get more time in our day.

- Sleeping helps you stay sharp. When you are tired your mental performance is dulled and you find it harder to think, focus and make quick decisions.
- Sleeping helps you learn, grow and remember. Many studies are now talking about the importance of dreaming for processing our day and sorting out the complexities of what happens in our waking hours.
- Sleep refreshes our emotional state. You are less irritable and moody when you have slept well.
- Sleep rejuvenates your body. Your body clock works much better when you are sleeping well. Weight gain, high blood pressure, fatigue, depression and more are all associated with a lack of sleep.

And don’t forget that your [children also need more sleep](#) than you. Regular bed times for them will help them establish good sleep routines and ensure they get their needed sleep.

How much sleep do you get? Don’t count the time you are in bed lying there trying to fall asleep but the time you actually sleep. If you need more sleep then here are a few ideas to help you get more:

- Decide on a realistic bedtime for you and the kids.
- Establish a sleeping ritual such as a warm shower, herbal tea, a novel, and a chat with your husband before bed.
- Exercise during the day but not just before bed. Research shows morning and afternoon exercise benefits your sleep.
- Dim the lights and shut off screens and devices an hour before bed is recommended.
- If you are prone to over thinking when you get to bed then practice writing down your worries or to-do-list before bed as a tool to help you forget about duties.

### *NANNA NAPS*

Take an afternoon nap during the day when possible. I did this religiously for the first 8 years after I became a mother. I still regularly take a daily nap.

Set up a routine at home for naps. My kids were trained to go and rest in their rooms for this time while the baby or toddler slept. They were to lie on their bed, read books or play quietly in their room. Switch off your phone. Set a timer if you need to.

Don't feel lazy taking a daily nap. Even the corporate world is harnessing the power of the nap as a secret weapon for productivity and mental acuity. Just 20 minutes will give you an energy boost and help you get over the mid-day slump.

### 3. GET ACTIVE

*“The secret of getting ahead is getting started.” Mark Twain*

I think when you are homeschooling it can be very difficult to exercise. Gyms, exercise classes, power walks and jogs are not usually a kid free option. You may be a naturally energetic person and if fitness is a priority, you will make it happen. But for many homeschool mums fitness seems an allusive goal especially if you have some underlying medical condition.

Don't give up and put it all in the too hard basket, our bodies were made to move and in our sedentary state we need to compensate for our lack of physical activity. When we exercise we increase our circulation, get rid of toxins and strengthen our heart muscles. Exercise improves sleep, mood and helps regulate sugars. Physical fitness is important for a long healthy and productive life.

Remember it is not just you who needs to exercise - your kids do as well. They may need some strategies to get moving.

As a homeschool mum there are things that you can do that will boost your fitness and boost your energy:

- Get active - when I went to Weight Watchers a few years back they emphasised the importance of just being more active. Park the car a little further and walk. Play an active game with the kids. Take the kids for a swim. Get on your feet more!
- Try intensive workouts - some studies are showing quick intensive workouts are just as good as prolonged slower paced workouts. The [Seven Minute Workout](#) which you can have as a phone app or do via YouTube, is a quick *over-and-done-with* exercise routine that has a good scientific base.
- Nature walks have many benefits including sunshine and exercise.
- Play music and dance with the kids. What little child doesn't enjoy having a boogie with mummy!

## 4. FOCUS - THE MULTI-TASKING MOTHER'S MISSION

*“People often start multi-tasking because they believe it will help them get more done. Those gains never materialize; instead, efficiency is degraded. However, it provides emotional gratification as a side-effect. (Multi-tasking moves the pleasure of procrastination inside the period of work.) This side-effect is enough to keep people committed to multi-tasking despite worsening the very thing they set out to improve.” [Clay Shirky](#)*

Asking a mother to not multi-task is like telling the sun not to shine. It's how we survive and how we manage our multiple responsibilities. However there is a myth to multi-tasking that we accomplish more but in reality multi-tasking decreases our productivity and creativity. I know our homeschool days get dragged out to longer than needed because we haven't given them our full attention and we allow ourselves the luxury of procrastination and distraction.

In Carolyn Leaf's book [Switch on Your Brain](#) (2013) she talks about the need to stop [milkshake multi-tasking](#) and direct your thoughts into deep focused attention. She explains how we don't actually do one hundred things at once. We actually keep switching our attention to different tasks. This constant switching means we decrease our capacity to learn.

In most cases of multi-tasking we are our own disturbers much of the time. We get bored and we start looking for something else to do. It might be going online, checking our emails or just becoming absorbed in a new interesting task that isn't really important but it's fun. Undoubtedly mothering and homeschooling can be chaotic especially if all of your children want your attention at the same time. However there are quite a few strategies that we can adopt to help us be more attentive and focussed.

Learn to prioritise and get the most important things done in your day. Try to eliminate all of the clutter of your to-do-list and focus on what needs to be done now. If things are plaguing your mind it might help you to write it all down and spend some time in prayer or reflection looking for ways to prioritise your list. [The Six List Principle](#) is an idea that you make a list of the six most important things you need to do each day and then you do them before you start anything else.

Disconnect from online distractions. This can be a real time suck for many homeschool mums. According to [Salary.com research](#), Facebook is the biggest time waster but all social media sites are time drainers. I can recall a few cases

when mothers, who seem to always be online, are ironically complaining that they can't seem to get any homeschool work done with their kids. I wonder if they were taken offline if their situation would improve.

Here are some tips to help you get offline:

- Set a period of time where you will be offline from time wasting sites. I can set my [Cybersafe 24/7 modem](#) to block sites. You can also get [apps and software to help you with this](#).
- Avoid mindless surfing on the web. Setting a time limit to your internet time will help with this.
- Switch off any ringers, pings and notifications to stop the checking temptation.
- Check your emails in batches. Don't leave it on all the time.

Play music. [Instrumental music can help you stay focused](#). You can make your own playlist (but watch out that you don't become too distracted in this activity- we are trying to save time after all) or you can use a service like [Focus@Will](#).

Teach your children to work independently for periods of time. [Workboxes are perfect for this](#). They also need to learn to focus and it will also help you focus if you are not being constantly interrupted with little things.

Routine also helps with setting up separate time slots for particular tasks and lumping like activities together helps train our attention. Prayers, morning chores, school time, read alouds, email checking, phone calls and errands can all be slotted into a loose schedule. Setting up focussed time will help you achieve more when you know that your other time is allocated elsewhere.

Make your calendar work for you. Plan your activities to suit your needs when possible. For example, whilst I could do a piano lesson at 10am on a weekday it suits us much better to do it in the afternoons.

Multi-tasking is a necessary activity when you are homeschooling but we can reduce some distractions that are self inflicted or scattered about. If you can improve your focus you will find you get much more done.

## 5. THINK & CONSIDER

*“Our minds need time to understand what our spirits already know.” C Leaf*

Our brains give us the ability to examine ourselves; to meditate on our own circumstances and lift our thinking to a level where we can circumspectly look at our situation. This intellectualising of our lifestyle, habits and relationships can lead us to set new goals, take new directions and make changes. Not only does this activity safeguard our mental health, it also helps our brains to grow and make new connections, and it improves our intelligence. Yet in the business of life we often forget to make time for this important activity.

With kids around all the time it can be hard to grab five minutes peace but being intentional in making that time will benefit your emotional and physical health enormously. Some call this skill mindfulness, others prayer and meditation and others concentration. This is a place of rest when we switch off from the external duties of our life and take time for some directed introspective thinking.

So how does the mother whose mind is full of distractions and activities make time!

**Start by allocating five minutes a day.** Research shows that 5 to 16 minutes per day of capturing your thoughts for focused thinking shifts your brain state and helps you engage more positively in the world ([Konnikova, 2012](#)).

**Slow down and let your thinking move to a higher level.** I usually try to do this in the morning in my room with the door closed for a short period each day. When the children were younger I would do it during nap breaks and sometimes it was in the still of night. Since I was so easily distracted I found keeping a journal to record my thoughts a very helpful practice.

Set up for yourself a routine that will work for you that you can keep. **Make habits:**

- Daily prayer or meditation
- Weekly Sabbath rest days
- Mummy retreats
- Time out

We need to rest our brains and our bodies. This regular habit produces positive results and if we respect this natural need then we will find we are much less prone to worry, depression, anxiety and other health issues.

## 6. MARGIN

*“Our time is limited so we need to limit our time.” Andy Stanley*

As a wife and mother of four children with a home to maintain, a home business to run and homeschool lessons to supervise and teach, I am busy. Then I can add in the extra responsibilities to my extended family and church. My life could run me ragged and it wouldn't care.

But each year I get a little better at “fitting it all in” and it's not just because my kids are getting older. People often think it's because I set good boundaries; in other words – I've learnt how to say “no”; and that is definitely a part of it. I have pruned down my to-do-list of what I will do and I'm learning not to feel guilty about it. I don't get involved in everything at church – I'm selective. I don't go out as often as I'm invited. I don't let my kids go out as often as they are invited.

I have also learnt to set a margin. I give myself time to relax and space to be creative. I make sure my life isn't always crowded with things.

When you are a homeschool mother it is tempting to try to fit in as many opportunities as you can for your children. We feel guilty if our child misses out on things and so we push ourselves and our children to a range of activities that can exhaust us and them. Unfortunately this is counterproductive. We are constantly pressed for time and in a hurry and we leave no time for a child to potter at leisure and relax.

I know when people just tell you to do less you probably just switch off because I know that you don't want to be doing as much as you are doing. However I encourage you to pull back and assess what you are doing and how you can give yourself the time you need. Andy Stanley calls setting a margin, [giving yourself breathing room](#) and I thoroughly recommend his talks. You'll need 30 minutes for each talk but they are well worth it. These free online videos are the most wonderful sermons on making room in your life. I encourage you to listen to them.

Frazzled days can become a normal experience if you let them. However when you leave some margin or gaps of spare time you can leave room for the unexpected: a call from someone who is in need, a longer wait at the checkout, a child who wants help with a particular activity. Margin allows you to say yes to the unexpected!

## 7. TRADE OFFS – CHOICES AND SACRIFICE

*“We need space to escape in order to discern the essential few from the trivial many. Unfortunately in our time starved era we don’t get that space by default – only by design.” Greg McKeown, 2014*

Realising that we have a choice with our time can be hard when you’re a mother. We can’t just decide that we are not attending to our toddler who just broke a plate on the floor, or refuse to help our child with math because we think they should know how to do it by now. However we do have a choice with how we spend other parts of our day.

We also only have a limited amount of time in our day and we can’t do everything that we would like to do. Greg McKeown, author of [\*Essentialism: The disciplined pursuit of less\*](#) encourages us not to run our day by default just doing the activities that present themselves but rather to be wise with our time; over estimating the time it takes for achieving our tasks and then eliminating non-essential activities.

According to Greg many of the activities we do in our day are non-essential. He encourages us to think about how much energy we have and then make decisions about non-essential items and then use your discernment and decide what can be sacrificed.

What really helped me in the early years of homeschooling was looking at homeschooling as a full-time job. It took me a few years to come to this conclusion.

I never actually sent my kids to preschool or school, I found that my focus had really just been on keeping the kid’s safe and helping them to be nice. Teaching was incidental. I read the Bible, read picture books, let the kids make mess and we just had the goal of getting through the week. I had church commitments and friends over (with their children) and it was all very social.

Then when I started homeschooling I still continued on with my social unstructured way of doing things. I saw the activities to do in the weeks (like Bible studies, coffee with friends, visiting relatives) as the things I did. I saw homeschooling as something that I had to find time to do but I was home a lot so it shouldn’t have been that hard. However I felt inadequate a lot of the time because homeschooling never really got done in the timeframe I had hoped, so I

was always cutting school but never cutting out the other social events I had planned.

Then I read how I needed to treat homeschooling like a full-time job. It changed my whole attitude. I reassessed everything and pulled out of almost all things. No more weekly Bible studies, no more friends over for 3 hour coffees, no more long conversations on the phone for an hour in the morning, no more volunteering for the church cooking roster, no more morning shopping trips that were supposed to take 1 hour (that really took 3). I cut it all out. I pulled the phone out off the hook.

Next step was to set up good routines. This took even longer but basically the morning was school time. We had no TV (no playschool, no news) in the day, no computer games, no shopping trips and no visitors. I had this 3-4 days a week. I established for my children, myself and my family and friends a school time zone. I then decided what could come back in to my life. Things I let back in were social engagements after 1pm that were mutually beneficial for the kids and I set them at a time I knew we wouldn't be doing homeschool lessons. This school zone remains even after 15 years of homeschooling.

**Setting these boundaries was essential for me.** Eliminating the other activities was a disappointment for some of the people in my life who wanted me to do more for them (work for the church, listen to their stories, help them entertain their toddlers). And I know that some thought I was selfish or a weakling because I couldn't "cope". However my new boundaries allowed me to focus and do homeschooling well. Now that my kids are older these boundaries also give me the freedom to run Homeschooling Downunder.

## 8. HOBBIES AND PLAY

*“Let the mother go out to play! If only she would have the courage to let everything go when life becomes too tense, and just take a day, or half a day out in the fields, or with a favourite book, or in a picture gallery looking long and well at just two or three pictures, or in bed without the children, life would go on far more happily for both children and parents.” Charlotte Mason*

Do you have something that is just for you, something you like to do?

Having our own interests is good for us. It stretches our minds, keeps us creative and helps us to relax.

We know our children need to play but do we let ourselves?

Make some time in your week to do the things you love!

## 9. KID’S HABITS AND BOUNDARIES

Making your days go smoothly is also about teaching and training your children. Setting boundaries for acceptable behaviour and expectations helps them self regulate their behaviour.

Finding the balance between over instruction and no instruction is difficult because so much of our parenting is wrapped up in our personality and the way that we were parented. Yet child training is in the parent’s manifesto and being diligent in this area will reap rewards for you and your children.

There is a school of thought that suggests that children should determine their own boundaries. I do not subscribe to that theory.

The Bible says:

*“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6 NKJV*

These wise words encourage us to take the role of training our children seriously so that when they are older they will benefit. When we train our children we work with them in their current situation. We don’t just set an expectation without teaching them how to achieve that goal.

When my children were young and I wanted them to clean their room I would sit in the room and instruct them on how to clean it. I would say, “Put all the cars in

the car box. Put the blocks in the block box. Pull up the quilt on your bed.” I didn’t just say, “Clean your room!”, because that was too overwhelming.

#### CHARLOTTE MASON ON HABITS

*“By this formula we mean the discipline of habits formed definitely and thoughtfully whether habits of mind or of body.” Charlotte Mason*

Charlotte Mason’s teaching on habits reaches far beyond the educational realm. She emphasises how important it is to “lay down the rails” of good habits in our children’s lives (and our own). She wants us to ensure that they develop good habits in their educational pursuits and personal lives.

*“We have lost sight of the fact that habit is to life what rails are to transport cars. It follows that lines of habit must be laid down towards given ends and after careful survey, or the jolting and delays of life become insupportable.” Charlotte Mason*

Teach your kids how to stay on the rails!

Establish good habits! It sounds simple but it is not easy. The will is often present but the ability to implement these good habits can elude us.

*“If we fail to ease life by laying down habits of right thinking and right acting, habits of wrong thinking and wrong acting fix themselves of their own accord.” Charlotte Mason*

#### **Identify the habit.**

When we identify a new habit that we want to establish we then need to work at that habit. Charlotte wisely encourages us to only work on one habit at a time. I do agree that too many habits worked on at once leads to failure but as a mother I do work on more than one at a time.

#### **Spiritual Habits.**

A major goal for me as a parent is to lead my children into a strong relationship with God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is a relationship and I don’t want it to become a mechanical habit absent of true communion with God. But there are spiritual disciplines that I know will help them in this relationship. Bible reading, prayer, devotion, worship, giving and church attendance are all habits that need to be established for an effective Christian life. Therefore I make sure these habits are practiced in our home.

## Housework Habits.

I have tried to set up [chores](#) in my house so that the children can have success. There is no point trying to set up a habit that has a slim chance of accomplishment.

## Educational Habits.

This is hard in the early years before they can read but once they can read for themselves they need to start coming in to contact with the books themselves so that they can perform the *act of knowing*.

I used to wonder how to do this. How could I organise their day in such a way that they did the work for themselves? In the early days of homeschooling everything was so dependent on me and if I *fell off the rails* so did everyone else. Since I have been using the [workbox system](#) I have found it so much easier to keep them going when I was off on a needed detour.

## Physical Habits.

This encompasses personal habits plus exercise.

## Habits of the Mind.

*“It is as we have seen disastrous when child or man learns to think in a groove, and shivers like an unaccustomed bather on the steps of a new notion. This danger is perhaps averted by giving children as their daily diet the wise thoughts of great minds, and of many great minds; so that they may gradually and unconsciously get the courage of their opinions.” Charlotte Mason*

Allowing our mind to stretch and digest new ideas is a good thing for our children and for ourselves.

A more modern speaker on this topic is Steven Covey. Here is an interview he did for homeschool.com. [Seven Habits of a Highly Successful Homeschooler](#)

Again I have been challenged by the power of setting up good habits in my family and homeschool. We do have many established good habits already in our home that I am pleased with, but there are still many more to work on.

## 10. HAVE FAITH

So far all of the things that I have written about in this short ebook are all practical ideas that will help you take control of your life and be more intentional about the things that you want to achieve and make time for.

However there is one more key that, for me, is an essential part of finding peace and direction as I strive to do life better. That key is having a relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I like to be efficient. I like a peaceful home. I like to improve my mind. I like to have the freedom to do the things I want and need to do. But above all things there is a sense of purpose that comes from knowing that I am following God's will for my life.

“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,” Philippians 3:8.

My faith sustains me when I fail. My faith gives me a solid foundation when I need to differentiate right from wrong. My faith encourages me to make sacrifices for my family and others. My faith gives me purpose.

My faith is in God for He is the extra special ingredient that gives me courage and hope in this life.

*“I will lift up my eyes to the mountains;*

*From where shall my help come?*

*My help comes from the Lord,*

*Who made heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:1-2*

Look up! Ask for the Lord's help as you decide how to **buy back time for the things that matter most.**