



THE *Waldorf* HOMESCHOOL CONNECTION

Homeschooling Tips, Training and Support

WHERE TO START & WHAT TO DO FIRST

So, you've decided to homeschool your child (or children) using Waldorf-inspired methods.

Great! Kudos for taking on the enormous responsibility of educating your young one(s). It is an important decision and one I know you have not made lightly.

So, where do you go from here?

Homeschooling is an amazing path of joy and growth for you and your child.

Waldorf-inspired homeschooling is unlike many other homeschooling methods out there. It is much more "hands-on" for the one doing the teaching, but I'm here to say that it is so worth the time it takes to become a "Waldorf Homeschool Teacher".

It's worthwhile to let your child unfold, to use a curriculum that meets your them where they are developmentally, and to see how that nurtures and feeds their souls.

A Waldorf-inspired homeschool embraces the traditions and philosophies of Waldorf education but allows flexibility as you tailor the curriculum to your child's needs and your lifestyle.

Just as a Waldorf teacher has years of training and certification, there is some "training" for YOU- the Waldorf Homeschool teacher. You wouldn't expect to walk into a new job without someone showing you the ropes. And this is no different.

"Where to Start and What to Do First" is an introductory guide into Waldorf Homeschooling. It will point you in the right direction to find the information you actually need and help to keep you on track to creating a successful Waldorf Homeschool.



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Step 1: Understanding What Waldorf Is

The first step I suggest, is to understand the method you have chosen. Waldorf may be an unfamiliar concept to you and your family. It was to me; I had never heard of it before I searched for homeschooling curriculum. There is a plethora of information out there about the creator, Rudolf Steiner and his first Waldorf school set up for the factory worker's children of the Waldorf-Astoria company in 1919.

Waldorf education was created to meet the unique needs of each child and to nourish the child's body, mind, and spirit. It is very linked to the developmental stages that a child goes through, according to Steiner's

beliefs.

Waldorf is a living breathing form of education. It requires you to be constantly observing your child. You make changes based on where the child is and work together with what is present at the time.

Through Waldorf education, Steiner wanted to provide an antidote to modern times and materialistic thinking. Waldorf honors the whole child -- body, mind and spirit -- through arts, music, handwork, sculpture, and movement. It educates the child's mind, nourishes their soul and meets their spirit at developmentally appropriate stages.

7 Year Cycles

Rudolph Steiner believed that there were different developmental periods of a child's life, divided in seven year cycles. Ages 0-7 are considered the period of early childhood or the physical stage; the time when they are growing into their body. Ages 7-14 are the heart of childhood is where they use their imagination and see things in pictures. Ages 14-21 are adolescence, where ideas and discovering themselves as individuals comes into being.

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Waiting for Academics

Steiner felt that academics should not be taught until the change of teeth. A child is born with a set of teeth, but now that he is making something of his own (permanent teeth), he becomes a more grownup human being. He's on the path.

There are many physical factors that indicate a child might be ready for academics.

Examples include:

A child who has been living for seven spring seasons successfully hopping on one foot reaching a hand over the head and touching the opposite ear (indicating longer limbs).

It essentially comes down to your child being physically ready. The child need to have had achance to master these movements, these physical things, before starting work on thehead. New studies are popping up everywhere on the benefits of letting a child "be a child". It seems not pushing early academics has far greater benefits and long-term results. This is what Steiner introduced almost 100 years ago!

Natural Toys & Materials

Waldorf encourages natural materials and beautiful surroundings. Wooden toys, silks, pine cones, acorns and other items from nature are preferred for achild to get the feel of real materials. Art & school supplies are also high quality to give thebest and truest experience. While these may cost more up front, the quality and value of these items is well worth it. We still have crayons from when my girls were 4! The materials last and the wooden toys can be fixed instead of discarded. And they feel and look amazing.





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Limited (or no) Media

Especially in the 7 and under age. Real connections need to be made through actual playing, talking and relationships. Media can foster being entertained, short attention span and a sedentary lifestyle. Children need to experience life through their own imagination and not the way things look on tv/movies. They will only imagine what they can at the developmental stage they are in, but outside influence can give more than a child can handle.



Learning through stories, art and movement

Through stories, music, verse, movement and art, a child first experiences information physically and soulfully. The morning lesson incorporates many different subjects all based around the same theme. Children learn their letters through movement, first by walking the shape of the letter before writing or painting the letter strokes. The letter is then reinforced through rhymes with actions, stories, and music.

By first doing, children come to a concrete, tangible understanding of a concept before they are expected to apply it intellectually.



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Waldorf's lack of pre-made textbooks doesn't mean your child will not get a full rich dose of literature. Children create Main Lesson Books to document their progress through drawing, painting, writing and formdrawing. Storytelling is a lost art these days, but brings life back into teaching in this method. The ability for you to look into your child's eyes and gauge their feelings and reactions by watching is amazing! It brings part of you into the mix and that is the key to all Waldorf homeschooling.

Think in Pictures

Rudolf Steiner suggests that we use images to grow on. It's important that the imagery we're teaching inspires the imagination and sparks the joy and adventure in learning. For example, when teaching the letter "T" you might have your child draw it in the shape of a tree in their lesson book. When teaching multiplication, you can tell a story about a gnome who is saving apples for winter.



Practical Work

In Waldorf education learning is applied to "real" life. Each day unfolds in a predictable, rhythmic manner. In the pre-school / kindergarten years, the child is learning primarily through imitation. Most of the child's day consists of meaningful work and activities with a purpose such as cooking, baking, gardening, doing laundry, cleaning, and taking care of art supplies and the homeschool learning area.

Step 2:

***Work on Your Daily & Weekly Rhythm/Schedule**

Our rhythms are yearly, monthly, and seasonal... like the ebb and the flow of the tides, the waxing and waning of the moon, and the rising and setting of the sun each day. In times gone by, people lived and worked by these rhythms. Humans were used to rising with the sun, plowing fields, and planting seeds at the right time of the moon cycle.



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Something that you do over and over is considered a ritual or arhythm. Rhythm encompasses all the rituals we do. It includes everything from the smallest increments of our hours to the daily and weekly activities that make up our lives. Rituals and rhythm include waking, dressing, and preparing meals, to changing diapers, shopping, playing and sleeping.



However, we have become increasingly out of touch with rhythm and ritual as we live in houses with electricity and shop for food from the market instead of our gardens. The ability to give children a sense of rhythm and consistency is very beneficial. Not only does it help them feel secure to know what is coming next, it helps you as the parent to create the flow of the day.

Like the ebb and flow of a tide, the rhythm in our days has an ebb and flow. This is what in-and out-breath means. To create a comfortable daily rhythm, it is important to seek a balance between in- and out-breath activities. Think of a young child forced to sit for too long -- what does she need? She needs to stretch her legs, run and play. The same goes for a child who is kept in an over-stimulating situation with no "down time." He will crave quiet, and rest.



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***The Foundational Layer** contains the points that anchor your day. Meals, naps, school lessons, errands, and laundry; all of those “must-do's” of the days and weeks. When creating your daily rhythm, add the foundational points in first to create a structure. You will then see the gaps in between where you can plug in the fun stuff!

•**The Changeable Layer** is that which is seasonal or lasts a set time, like kids’ sports, swimming lessons, and gardening during the summer. This will affect your weekly schedule and of course the daily as you sprinkle in these temporary activities.

•**The Fun Layer** is exactly that! Your extra time to do all the things you have been waiting to do! It could be activities with your family, playgroups, yoga, a beach day, park time, painting, or just being outdoors in nature.

***Setting Up Your Homeschool**

“Homeschooling” means just that -- you are schooling while living your life in and around your home. That includes the chores, feeding baby, naps, errands, and telephone calls that go on in your typical day. Homeschooling simply becomes another part of your routine.

Picking a firm time to begin school will help keep your morning flow going (and fend off time wasters like checking emails). It is so nice not to have to get up and get your child off to school early. You have the freedom to decide what works best for your family.



For the early grades (Kindergarten, First, and Second) the time it takes to complete Main Lesson, Circle Time and any other additional supporting classes like handwork and foreign language should be about two hours.



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Choose a Homeschool "Space"

We transformed our previous (rarely used) dining room into our homeschool and craft space. We love it! We have a large table with adjustable legs. When the girls were younger they used stools; now we have small office chairs that adjust for height. The cabinets in the back of our space house our supplies such as painting materials, wool roving, yarn, craft supplies, and extra paper. If you don't have a dedicated room to use, you can simply use a kitchen or dining room table, or even a desk or coffee table! You can make your schoolroom or space look however you like. It is beneficial to have a cabinet or shelf to store your supplies and have them all in one spot. I store crayons in baskets and colored pencils in glass jars.

Here are some basic supplies needed to get started:

- yellow, blue, red block crayons
- yellow, blue, red Stockmar brand paint
- 1" paint brush(es)
- painting board(s) (white or birch-wood)
- main lesson book(s)
- beeswax for modeling
- colored silks • chalkboard and chalk





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Choose a Waldorf-inspired Curriculum

There are quite a few to choose from when it comes to done-for-you curriculum, but some are more done-for-you than others. Some give an overview and ideas for Main Lesson blocks, while others list lessons day-by-day.

It can be overwhelming at first to figure out what will work best for you and your family. Take a look at your personality, your free time and organization to find one that will work best. You can look at samples online and The Waldorf Connection has a curriculum review audio package you can purchase (6 reviews by moms who have used a type of curriculum to give an idea of its benefits.)

Nature Table

You may use a small table or shelf (we use the end of our cabinets) to create a nature or seasonal table. Decorate the nature table with items from nature -- found in your backyard or on hikes -- as well as wooden animals, felted or crafted items, beeswax models, small paintings, silks, and anything else you like. I use a silk as the base in a color that reflects the season and add to it. So, for March we may use a light green silk and add a few daffodils in a glass jar along with our felted spring maiden. Then in April, we might add new blooming flowers, baby animals, and Easter eggs.





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Step 4:

***Get Familiar with the Material**

Start familiarizing yourself with the material by collecting books, checking them out from the library, or reading through the stories in your purchased curriculum. This is to give you an overview of what is to come, the feeling of what these stories will bring to your child, and what is actually going to be taught. It is extremely helpful to know what you will be teaching.



You can start making notes of which stories you like and want to bring to your child. Also start a supply list for items you may need to have on hand for crafts/projects that go along with the stories.

Main Lesson Blocks

Waldorf homeschooling is usually set-up in 3-4 week “units” or blocks. This block is a main piece of the curriculum that will be covered during that year.

During that block you will teach a math or language arts, science or social studies piece. Steiner believed that subjects were best taught, then left “to rest” and then brought back again later on in the year for review and going deeper. Rather than teach a bit of math, a bit of grammar, a bit of science the entire block is one subject. Though as the child grows into higher grades daily math practice, writing, grammar etc are sprinkled within each block.

Whether you use a prepared curriculum or create your own lessons, you will still need a plan (and a planner) to keep yourself on track. Planning is the foundation of your homeschooling. It is a vital piece that will make or break your school year. Having a solid plan is a lot like having the pillars of rhythm in place. You may not always follow your plan exactly, but it will be the backbone of your teaching. A plan gives you the confidence that you are covering the material and an accountability of what has been learned



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You Can Do This...

I wanted to give you the first basic steps of homeschooling with Waldorf-inspired methods. Each family is different and that means each homeschool will be too. Copying a neighbor or favorite blogger will not give you the authentic, joyful routine that fits YOU and YOUR FAMILY. That is something you will work out yourself.

Start at the beginning and work through the first steps first to create an amazing foundation for you and your child. There is so much here to embrace and enjoy! Your child will be inspired by your enthusiasm and your passion. Don't try to tackle all of this without support. Again, teachers aren't thrown into a classroom hoping to wing it. There are some excellent resources and training available at The Waldorf Connection.

The Next Step?

If you are ready to go forward and get some further training to save time, energy and a lot of frustration by trying to figure it out by yourself, then the following are some great places to start!

“Rhythm & Organization:

How to Manage Your Time, Simplify Tasks, & Align with Your Family Values”

<http://thewaldorfconnection.com/ebookrhythm/>

The Waldorf Homeschool Handbook

Living the Waldorf Life online course

What you are giving your child is one of the most important things you can give an education. You can do it.

Good luck and Shine on!

Mentor & Founder of The Waldorf Connection

www.TheWaldorfConnection.com

