

CHAPTER 8: TRADITIONS AND TRIALS: YOUR FIRST FEW DAYS

From cleaning out to setting up, and from establishing rhythms to creating learning plans, we've covered quite a bit of ground so far in this book! And at this point in the back to school process, **we're only a few days away from the big start date!**

To celebrate the start of a new year, many moms enjoy incorporating fun back-to-school traditions in their planning. So, in that spirit, I'm sharing our family's favorites.

OUR 6 FAVORITE BACK TO SCHOOL TRADITIONS

1. A special dinner and family game night the evening before school starts.

Set the tone for a fun school year with a special dinner (ours is always "make-your-own-pizza night") and plan a few [awesome family activities together!](#)

2. The kids complete a fun annual "back to school questionnaire."

Spend a few minutes on [Pinterest](#) and you'll find some adorable, [fill-in-the-blank-type questionnaires](#) where a child can write his favorite toy; something he loves to do; his favorite summer memory, etc. These are priceless, wonderful little treasures that can be [stored with other precious school artwork and papers.](#)

3. Take a first-day-of-school picture with some sort of prop that tells their grade.

This has become quite popular over the last few years. Some moms create a special board or print a fun paper that tells each child's grade. The child then holds the sign in the picture, thus marking that child's first day of school in that grade.

I love that idea... but honestly, I never seem to be organized enough to print out one of those cute signs for each of the grades in our school!

So, instead, I take the non-fancy, low-tech approach. I hand each child a whiteboard and tell them to write their name and grade on the whiteboard (in a fancy design) using dry-erase pens. My only request is that they make their name and grade legible for the picture. I actually prefer doing it this way now because it also incorporates the child's artistic abilities at that age/stage into the photo.

4. Special time of prayer with my husband the night before.

The night before school starts, my husband and I talk through all aspects of the school year and any concerns we anticipate (behavioral issues, curriculum concerns, etc). Then we take some time together to pray aloud as a couple through those concerns.

5. Special celebration at the end of the first week (no matter how rough it was!)

At the end of our first official week of school, I plan something *super fun* for us to do that following weekend. Whether that's going for a hike, riding bikes together, or simply making a fun dessert as a family, I try to find something that [focuses on building relationships](#).

6. I plan a date night with my husband at the end of that first week.

Back to school is a culmination of weeks and sometimes months of hard work. And yet, at the same time, it's also a beginning of a new learning chapter for the family. I believe that both are a cause for celebration! So we try to make time to go out and get alone together.

Would you like more inspiration from other moms? I put together an [Ultimate List of Back to School Traditions here](#).

A SLOW EASING INTO SCHOOL

Last week, we've had several idyllic blue-sky days, with lots of puffy clouds and a gentle breeze.

But this week, the weather was scorching-hot: the kind of sticky misery that keeps one

inside with the air-conditioning on.

Which doesn't quite make sense since we're supposed to be getting cooler instead of warmer as fall nears, right?

I'm sure you have something similar happening in your neck of the woods. As the days tick by, none of us know the exact weather pattern from now through fall, but we know that *eventually* our days will downshift into cooler temps and there will be no doubt that fall has arrived.

I mention these slow back-and-forth shifts in weather patterns because I love how our homeschooling can parallel this beautifully natural flow between seasons.

During the last few weeks of summer, I find us slowly beginning the process of starting our typical school rhythm.

Not that I even mention the word "school," mind you: **I just kind of start encouraging the kids toward learning projects and activities.**

These days are an unpredictable blend of outside exploration, and the beginning of some (very loose) traditional school learning. I may introduce a reading curriculum back in for the younger kids. Or perhaps we start playing some math learning card games together. Just like the cooler days of autumn eventually come, our school days eventually flow into more structured learning and less time for play.

And as our official "first day of school" gets closer, **I purposely tighten our schedule and routine so that it won't be a huge shock for us to suddenly be out of summer mode.**

I think this seasonal ebb-and-flow is a more natural way to teach kids. It's acknowledging that, like the seasons, the learning style is changing and we're embracing it.

If we homeschoolers really do want our kids to have an exploratory-type school mindset, (instead of a "sit down because it's school time" type), **then a gradual transition back to learning is an excellent way to support it.**

ANTICIPATING A (NOT SO SMOOTH) LEARNING FLOW

I will be the first to admit that, even with the most organized classroom and learning plans (and a slow ease back into learning), **there will be some back to school drama.**

It's a big, huge, enormous shift to go back to school, and there's no getting around that.

I wish I could tell you that I have fully accepted this fact, but my nose would be growing if I did.

Every year I seem to be caught off guard by the back to school madness.

After only a few days "officially" into our school year, I often find myself upset, defeated and disgusted because all the luster has worn off my homeschool plans.

It's not that learning isn't happening or that the curriculum plans aren't a good fit. **Instead it's just a clash between the theoretical attempts at organizing the learning, and [the messy, not-always-predictable reality of teaching children.](#)**

It's similar to when we endure a hard workout for the first time after several months of inactivity. Muscles hurt and ache, and the entire experience feels like a major shock to the body!

So I've found that it's critical that I [prepare myself for these big changes, and that when the changes come, that I appropriately re-frame them](#) so that I can see them from a truth-filled perspective.

BACK TO SCHOOL: 5 EXPECTATIONS EVERY HOMESCHOOL MOM NEEDS TO ADOPT

We'll talk more about facing back-to-school fears in the final chapter of this book ("The Most Important Thing I Want to Tell You").

But first, I want to mention some expectations that we homeschoolers should adopt, especially in those first few days of school.

1. Expect grouchiness.

This is a big, enormous shift back for our kids. Seriously. There's a lot being thrown at them (and most of it brand new curriculum and ideas). So while we shouldn't allow rudeness and disrespect, I also feel that we need to give our children extra grace during this time of transition.

2. Expect the learning to take much longer than normal at first.

For several weeks now, our kids have been out of their typical school rhythm and, in addition, they may have simply forgotten certain learning skills. It's amazing [what summer break can do to juvenile brains](#) (even when summer break still includes pockets of learning!).

3. Expect each of your kids to have at least one meltdown that first week.

This kind of goes without being said after talking about the two previous expectations, right?

4. Expect yourself to have at least one meltdown that first week.

Uh, yeah. Just know that it's probably coming. And expect that it may involve sobbing, passionate prayers behind closed doors, and maybe even a few sessions of pounding-your-fists-into-the-bed (I know, I know... we're way too mature to do something like that. But if you *do* find yourself in this situation, just know that you have company.)

5. Expect that something in your subject plan or overall homeschooling approach will need to be adjusted.

Once the tears have subsided and you're able to get past those initial first days of back-to-school craziness, it's a good idea to take an honest look at your learning plans.

Please hear me: I'm not saying that you should automatically abandon your homeschool plans if things are difficult at first.

What I'm saying is that **there may need to be some small adjustments made, such as adding this part in or taking that part out.** These kinds of little changes are par for the course since we're always trying to be sensitive to how to best introduce learning to our children.

THREE FINAL THINGS TO REMEMBER

In addition to what we talked about above, can I mention three other mindsets that are helpful to adopt during that first week back to school?

1. Try to lighten your load in other areas, if possible.

It's probably not the best week to introduce a new sport or activity for your child. Or to give yourself a new commitment outside the home that week. I know that seems like common sense, but this can be hard to do, especially since so many things "start back up" at back to school time.

2. Plan something nice for yourself.

Girl, you just busted your tail putting all of this together! This homeschooling stuff isn't for wimps! Make sure you [do something \(anything!\) nice for yourself during that back to school week](#). Even if it's just taking a relaxing bath one night. Or maybe you can treat yourself to a pedicure or a night out for coffee with friends. Determine what you would consider relaxing and enjoyable, and make it happen!

3. Take it one day at a time.

Remember, you don't have to take on all the cares and concerns of the entire school year right now. You don't even have to take on the whole back to school week at once! Just take each day one breath at a time. You can do this!

Points to Ponder

- Which of these techniques will you try this year as you do your final prep for back to school?
- What would you consider relaxing and rewarding after the first few days of school? How could you plan to treat yourself?

For Additional Info

- [The Ultimate List of Back to School Traditions](#)
- [Out of School? Here's How We Fight Summer Brain Rot](#)
- [Stolen Moments: How a Stressed Mom Can Find Everyday Rest](#)
- [Homeschool Sanity Savers Part 3: 50 Practical Tools to Manage Stress and Encourage Peace](#)

Helpful Resources

- [Plan to Be Flexible](#)

Related Activities and Printables in This Book

- Back to School Checklist