



Hands-on Homeschool - Let's Get Messy!

By Jan Wilton, Homeschool Representative

We have known for years children learn best through a variety of methods. “Hands-on” learning is an important method in homeschooling. Although one of the oldest of all teaching methods, it is sometimes criticized because it can be messy and time-consuming and requires creativity.

Hands-on learning may be a reason some parents decide to homeschool in the first place. It is exciting to think about teaching your child using this method. You read about children learning math and science while learning to cook. A child could handle rocks to learn geology. A child who creates and uses simple machines learns more by doing than by reading about them. It allows the child to experience cause/effect and sometimes failure on the road to success.

Allison Baker, a homeschool mom from Duncanville, Texas, shared, “So we are studying ancient Egypt and making a burial mask. It appears to be a little more messy than I remembered, but Aubree got a ton of mileage out of the tactile stimulation. It was all worth it. I also didn’t remember it smelling — uh — not so good!”

Hands-on means more than just “touching” things. It implies getting messy and creative to connect an abstract idea to real life. For a young child, it could be making “moon sand” or play dough. It could involve using beans, blocks, or rice to experience math.

When children make their own bread and butter, a homeschool parent enhances a lesson about colonial America. Actively involved in the learning process with hands-on learning, children become engaged in

problem solving or critical thinking. When you plan weekly lessons, include activities that require your child to “do” something, which allows learning by doing.

Why Should You Use Hands-on Homeschool?

- It encourages real life understanding.
- It meets the needs of children through visual and large/small motor skills activities.
- It helps a child to understand abstract concepts.
- It develops cognitive and critical thinking skills.
- It keeps a child interested in learning.

Is Hands-on Homeschool Always Messy?

It can be messy depending on the activities you choose. Outdoor studies about nature are not always messy. On the other hand, a science experiment or a cooking project can be messy. Art projects may or may not be messy. Jess Moniz, a homeschool mom of three children from Gladewater, Texas, recently shared this about her two-year-old daughter: “Bonnie really likes to be fully submerged in her artwork. She called her finger-painting project, ‘Sunshine.’ She had red and yellow paint all over herself as well as on the paper.” Messy? YES! The goal was not to make a mess. The goal was about color and texture. You may say, “It takes a lot more time.” Yes and no, but children and parents will all agree it is worth the time and effort. Jess Moniz and Allison Baker will both tell you it was worth the effort to see what the children learned.

The Values of Hands-on Learning

The value is great when learning changes a child who cannot seem to understand a concept. The value is great when it frees your child from boredom to a new or renewed interest in a subject. You will discover that making the time for hands-on learning will be invaluable in the end as both you and your family engage in active learning.

Jan Wilton homeschooled her daughter. Jan is currently a coach for her daughter, who homeschools her autistic 8-year-old son. Jan has served on the NEW Council in several capacities for the past 11 years. You may contact Jan at revjan2008@gmail.com.