

Week 3 (5/31/20): The Juggle: different ages and stages

Panelists:

Heather Wong: 6th grade teacher and Mom to 2nd grader and kindergartener

Jessica Jimenez: 10+ yr homeschooling vet with kids from high school to preschool & entrepreneur

Katie Tang: homeschooler for 3 years, also work part time

Sam: EC Director, Teacher for 10 years

Q: Whether we made the decision before or were pushed into it because of SIP, parents became homeschoolers. Though the school year is winding down, a lot of the principles needed to manage our kids are still going to be a factor while we are all still at home. What are some key things that you implemented to provide a healthy learning environment for your children? How does it differ with each of your children?

Heather Wong:

Since distance learning started, we made sure there was a **routine**...kids need routine and like to stick to it. We created a schedule that incorporated some of the things they do at their school - question of the day, math, recess/snack, silent reading, P.E., computer lab, and an after school program! My kids love their after school program so it had to be in our schedule. They get time to play, a little snack, and a family walk or bike ride. They both have different times for their video meetings with their classes, so while one is meeting with their class, the other kid is getting one-on-one help with some of their writing or math. We also make sure the kids get time to themselves...my son loves Lego so he gets time to build, while my daughter gets time to learn piano from an iPad app.

Katie Tang:

In terms of managing work/learning and being at home-having an "on call" parent, giving the other one focused time to work. Having a routine. Giving **clear expectations**. Specific to education: learning rich environment and experiences, encourage curiosity. Dealing with differences: Decide on your family's essentials. Give some freedom in other places (could be what to learn, how to learn, when to learn, etc). Lots of paths to same goal

Jessica Jimenez:

For me, the starting place is NOT what to DO, but what does it mean to BE? Are we coming from a perspective that education is something that happens to us, or education simply living our daily lives and seeing the opportunities within each moment? The Bible admonishes us parents that when we are waking, walking, eating, working, relaxing... we are talking to our kids and teaching them. For me, that means when we are using our everyday experiences to educate our children about living. So, I welcome the messy. I welcome the integrated. I welcome the mix-everything-together method with routines & schedules, but trying not to

segregate everything as though life is truly lived in compartmentalized boxes. This means there needs to be a lot of grace, a lot of slowing down, and a change in perspective at every moment: to see the opportunity versus the challenge.

Sam:

Grace. The world is different. We have to respond in turn.

Q: Parents have been juggling their work schedules with the added responsibility for caring for their children and their children's schoolwork. Though summer is around the corner, work is still required and with summer camps cancelled, I would imagine the juggling will continue. As you transition from schooling to summer mode, What rhythms do you keep to or recommend?

Jessica Jimenez:

Summer is a great time to teach the kids how to be self sufficient. "School" is teaching them to make their own breakfasts & lunch, how to clean up after themselves and play on their own. Plus a little bit of reading/writing/math... and really the day is good. It's again all about integration and see life as a whole versus compartments. It's just a lot messier, but also fuller and more colorful in a beautiful (and frustrating way if I do not have my head on right.) If you need some extra sanity, a couple hours of outside time a few times a week. Be ready to enlist a friend to help out at the park. You and your friend could be at the park while the kids entertain themselves and you two working on your laptops... or do a switch off. (I have a story about this week and having a "park day") Again, communication with your employer is key here that yes you'll get your work done, but it won't be in between 9-5. Pat Lencioni has a podcast called "At the Table" that addresses this topic specifically.

Heather Wong:

This summer will be quite different than previous summers (for obvious reasons)...we are still planning on doing some school in the mornings...summer school! A little bit of reading/writing and some math. We'll use some of the resources their classroom teacher has provided as well as some materials I have. We've incorporated a cooperation reward system where they get marbles to place in a jar if the two kids show kindness toward each other and cooperation during school time. Then we have a raffle where they put in tickets with rewards on them...that don't cost money (sleep in a sleeping bag in the other sibling's room, choose what restaurant to get take out, pick the movie for movie night, double dessert, etc). Also, we have them doing chores everyday too which I plan to keep going. :)

Q; How can I motivate my child(ren) to learn, write, read over summer? I am afraid with the effects of SIP my child(ren) will be behind.

Katie Tang:

Don't pile on work just because you're afraid. Know your kids. This will probably be best received if you either establish a routine with clear expectations or - learning doesn't have to look like school - you find ways of integrating into fun/real life. (There are tons of resources out there.) I could give a bunch of examples if you want.

Jessica Jimenez:

Again, please define education and what it means to you? Is it getting information? What is it for? My definition of education is learning how to see the opportunities within each moment and taking advantage of them, glean the lessons and messages of right now. Learning how to learn for a lifetime of growth. If that is your idea of education, then our children are NEVER behind, but constantly growing. Einstein was thought to be an idiot in school. Mark Twain has said he never let schooling interfere with his education. Winston Churchill HATED school, but how he loved to learn. How about Thomas Edison who was thought to be too stupid to learn anything? Isaac Newton also failed school. Stop comparing your child with another.

Sam:

Kids learn when they are actually enjoying what they are doing. A big part of my training as an educator (and as a parent) is influenced by learning through experiences (including play). This includes Reggio techniques like framing activities (site example). This also includes documentation, and in my family, that means journaling. For Grayson it means a page a day. With name, date, picture, words, and page number (explain significance).

Heather Wong:

Most kids need a little boost in motivating them to do something that they don't really want to do. With my 6th grade class, I implement a management system where they can earn stickers for various things such as exceptional work, participation, acts of kindness, etc...once they earn 20 stickers, they get a homework pass. They love it and it doesn't cost me anything! So maybe try incorporating something like that...almost like the public library summer program where they read a certain number of books or do particular activities to earn something. Personalize the program to what your kids like and what they would want to work for. :)

Q: My kids argue because they have similar interests. I tend to expect my older child to understand by saying “he/she is younger than you?” Is that a fair approach?

Heather Wong:

Yes, it's fair-ish...we say that often...but I also try to remind both of them that we are all learning how to solve problems with other people...even mommy and daddy have to learn how to talk nicer to each other when things don't go a certain way or the way we want it to go. This is a hard one though because arguments happen everyday...multiple times a day. And many times my responses are different too. sigh

Jessica Jimenez:

depends on how much older. 1 or 2 years older is not fair. 3 or more... then yes. Most of the time, I actually just take it away from both if they can't agree to work it out. The first 3 times, I work it out with them to model how to have a conversation about sharing/taking turns. Then it's up to them. If it gets to quarreling and coming to me to work it out, they both have it taken away for the day. My kids now say to each other, "Come on!!!! That's not fair, and if we bring this to Mom, we both lose! Just be fair!" And it normally works out. Of course, I'm listening... and if it seems like one is going to be unfair to spite the sibling who really is trying, then I'll give it to the sibling who is doing the right thing and take it away from the spiteful one. Yes, it's complicated... and one has to see into the heart of it. Plus be willing to drop everything and address the heart issue.

Q; How can I find age appropriate educational activities for my child(ren) for the various ages/stages? (keep my younger child from disrupting the older sibling)

Katie Tang:

This is probably never going to happen perfectly (but if Jessica disagrees, just hand this one to her :) Two things that have helped when my kids were younger: 1. give the youngest focused attention at the beginning of the day 2. Allow them to “do school” in their own way (more like 3-4) and wander in and out.

Jessica Jimenez:

totally agree with Katie. Youngers just need to be able to sit on your lap. So important to train them that you are available for some time, but not all the time. Plus, important to train them to know they are totally ok playing on their own. Why does it have to be “educational”. Why can't they just be kids and play? If you have a backyard, let go outside with water guns or something. Legos. Coloring. Plus, depending on how old the older sibling is, maybe it's just a segment of time for school, then off to play with younger sibling. Most of the time, if the younger knows that the older will be available soon, she will leave

them alone. It's the not knowing that keeps them bothering. Again, integration in whole life learning is key.

Heather Wong:

In terms of finding educational activities, a great website to use is teacherspayteachers.com...and you do not need to be a certificated teacher to access these resources. There are all kinds of lessons, activities, worksheets, and more on there. There are also some sites that have great reading resources too...scholastic.com, getepic.com, kidsa-z.com. For math, prodigygame.com is a fun one...they solve math problems while playing a video game...even my 6th graders like this one! For science and other subjects, brainpop.com or jr.brainpop.com have short 2-3 videos on topics and quizzes, games, and graphic organizers to use. You do need an account for these, but there are some topics that are free. For the other question about keeping the younger one from the older one, what has worked for me at home is a little bit of separation...one kid in one room and another kid in the other room...with at least one parent checking in. :)

Sam:

Again, Kids learn through play. It may not necessarily be "book smarts", but just how to be functional people. I taught mixed age classes. There are times they can do things together. Older kids model. There are times they get their own things. That's okay, too. As long as everyone gets their shine.

Part 2: appropriate educational activities for children with autism

Heather Wong:

The autism spectrum is wide, so it really depends on the child. I've only had a handful of students with autism and they were all high functioning individuals with very specific interests that needed focused, achievable goals. One of my students loved DC and Marvel superheroes...he would read everything about them and share random facts about where a certain superhero was from or even imagine he was in that world with that character. When we used iPads in class for a project, I would catch him with a tab open to some superhero website. Trying to incorporate his interests into what we were learning, I had him create an iMovie about a superhero of his choice, but he had to include some math and science in the project, too. By doing this, my student learned some technology tools, which was a goal, and he was able to show his understanding of some of the math and science we were learning in class by connecting it to what he was interested in, also another goal.