

# “HELP! I’M DROWNING IN A SEA OF CURRICULUM!”

A Seasoned Specialist Gives Advice on Choosing Curriculum

By Jennifer Kearns

Choosing a curriculum can be an overwhelming task for a homeschooling family. Many parents search the internet for publishers only to find themselves overwhelmed and unsure if they are capable of instructing their own children. They seek help from friends and family who have homeschooled or are educators but end up more confused about which curriculum to start with!

There is a plethora of curricula available to homeschool students. Some are completely online while others are workbook based. There are a few with video instruction and those where the parent is the sole teacher. So where does a parent start?

First, do not compare your child or school to anyone else. Your best friend who has homeschooled twenty years and seems to have it all together may have the perfect curriculum choice that works for her, but it may not be right for your family. A fellow veteran homeschool

mom, Amy McKenzie once said,

“If anyone tells you that you have to use a specific curriculum, co-op or homeschool approach – RUN! Run from their advice and speak with someone else who will encourage you to find what works for you and your family.”

There is no “right” way to homeschool. It is about what works best for you, the teacher, and your child. No one has it all together, so be confident in what curriculum you choose!

Next, consider your child’s strengths and weaknesses. A child that can read a book in two days may enjoy a literature-based or reading intensive program. If they struggle with reading, choosing a literature-based program will only intensify the frustration for both of you.

An advanced math student may do well with traditional or even fast paced programs. However, for a student that struggles in mathematics, a hands-on or mastery-based curriculum can help build confidence without overwhelming them as they learn at their pace.

Another step in choosing curriculum is to figure out which homeschool approach interests you. A few students may learn well with the traditional textbook approach. If you have more than one child and are interested in family learning, integrated studies or unit studies are a great place to start. If you are just getting started and have pulled your student from a traditional school setting, you might consider a relaxed approach or even unschooling for the first year.

I also recommend thoroughly reviewing the curriculum you may be interested in using. Compare that curriculum to other publishers. Take the time to find a local bookstore, like Gullion’s Christian Supply and Homeschool

Headquarters, to sit down and physically look at the program. It is difficult to compare curricula with just a small online sample. Four guiding questions for reviewing a curriculum are:

- What approach does the program use?
- What learning style works best with the curriculum?
- How do you use the program?
- Is the curriculum fast paced or more relaxed?

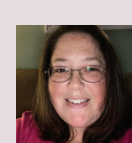
Having a full understanding will give you confidence in your decision and make the year a little less daunting.

Another consideration is your budget. How much do you have to spend on curriculum? Purchasing curriculum secondhand is a great choice for those on a budget. Ensure that you take advantage of your local library’s free resources. You may take a little out of each paycheck or set aside part of your yearly tax return. Either way, knowing what you can spend will help you get the most for your money.




Finally, have fun learning together! Learning does not have to happen solely from a textbook. Teaching from everyday opportunities gives our children the knowledge of how everything works. Utilize the curriculum you have chosen but have fun doing it! Choosing science or history activity books instead of a full curriculum, especially in the elementary years, brings a bit of fun to the school day. Our sons remember more of the activities that we did together with our curriculum than the words on the page.

Remember that you are a teacher! You have taught your children everything from how to use a fork and spoon to how to tie their shoes. Many parents of school aged children already work with their children at home helping them complete homework assignments. Do not let anyone tell you that you are not qualified. You know your children better than anyone else. God has given these children to you, and you can choose the right curriculum to help your child succeed! ■



Jennifer Kearns has worked at Gullion's Christian Supply and Homeschool Headquarters for 6 years counseling homeschool families, helping them choose curricula and organizing transcripts workshops in the local community. She homeschooled her two sons, Joseph and Joshua, for 15 years, from prek to graduation. They are now both college students at Liberty University. Joseph is pursuing his Masters of Divinity in Apologetics and Joshua will finish with his Bachelor's in Commercial Music in May. She and her husband Michael have been married for 25 years in September. Michael has served as a senior pastor of a church in Lexington for almost 13 years.



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