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Home schooling – Raising an independent learner

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“When it comes to the difference between surviving and thriving in home education, raising an independent learner is the key. It’s also in your child’s best interest. Kids learn best when they take responsibility for their learning.” So says Debra Bell, a home-school expert from America.

I totally agree with this statement, having experienced the benefits of having an independent child (13) in home education myself. We do not stop with our home education programme when we travel for 10 days of ministry every second month. My daughter is trained to take responsibility for her daily programme, not just academics, but also serving the household by doing daily chores and serving the Dynamis ministry. It is only possible to pay attention to all the necessary areas of her development because we initially took time and effort to train her to become an independent worker.

Think back to your children’s early years. They were remarkably independent little learners, weren’t they? They spent the entire day exploring and investigating on their own, especially what you didn’t want them to. They didn’t need you to motivate them or organise their exploration. But look what happens when these highly motivated, independent learners are packed off to school at age five. We make them dependent upon the teacher for their learning. Now she decides what will be taught, what projects will be tackled, and what schedule will be followed. By high

school, many of these energetic children have little motivation to initiate learning on their own. The system saps them of their interest.

Unfortunately, we often repeat this same pattern in our home education programmes. We wish our children would take more responsibility for their own learning, especially as they grow older. But we take our five year old independent learner and turn him into a dependent learner by following traditional teaching methods and models. And then we wish he would mysteriously turn back into a self-motivated student once again. The solution? Don’t turn him into a dependent learner in the first place. Debra Bell gives some strategies that I have made my own. I can assure you, they do work! Always find some new and helpful ideas at the Home School Channel on the website.

<http://homeschool.crowwalk.com>

Strategy 1: Give Your Child Control
Of what? His time, his choices, his curriculum.

“When my twins were nine and Kayte was seven. I took steps to transfer responsibility for their learning from me to them. The first area in which I relinquished control was the management of their time.

“I gave each child a daily assignment book. On Monday mornings I met with each one of separately to assign goals in every subject area for that week. It didn’t matter to me (or so I said) how and when they completed their work, I just wanted all the goals met by Friday afternoon. It was interesting for me to see how my three kids uniquely managed their time once they had the chance to do so. Here’s what my kids did:

“Kayte chose to do all her spelling for the week on one day, all her maths on another, all her piano practicing on another. She doesn’t really like breaking projects down into bite-size or shifting

gears so frequently (as in a traditional school model.)

“Gabe, on the other hand, is like his mother and works best under pressure. That first week, he had pretty light days on Monday and Tuesday, and I kept quiet because I really wanted to see what would happen when each of my kids had control of their time. By Wednesday the pressure of the approaching deadline was beginning to build, he did a little maths. Come Thursday and Friday, he was cramming a week’s worth of work into two days. But he got it done.

“His twin brother, Mike, had a pretty traumatic experience that first week. He had asked when I set up the programme and what would happen if he didn’t meet his goals by Friday afternoon. I was offended that he needed something other than the implicit joy of learning to keep him motivated.

“You don’t eat dinner on Friday until you done, ‘I snapped.

“You can’t do that, ‘He retorted.

“To make a long story short, Mike pattered around and had three math lessons undone come Friday afternoon. I stuck to my guns, and told Mike he could not have dinner.

“Now I don’t know if you’ve ever had one of these kinds of dinners at your house, but it’s not fun. The family sat at the kitchen upstairs silently eating with Mike’s sniffing in the background. Somehow we all got through that dinner and Mike finished his last math problem around 9pm. I didn’t even care if they were correct. I was just glad he could now eat.

“Come next Monday morning, Mike was at his assignments by 6:30 am and whether it is because of that traumatic experience or just his highly disciplined temperament, he continues to be an early riser who chooses to tackle schoolwork early in the week.

“How it has evolved.? My sons are now 17 and Kayte is 15. They’ve been

managing their time ever since. Kayte still prefers to do subjects in large chunks, Gabe can let things go until the last minute but always manages to pull things off well in the end. Mike doesn’t like the pressure of ‘things to do,’ and so he gets started on assignments promptly.”