

Designing A Homeschool Rhythm  
and Curriculum Plan that Works for Your Family

# PLAN TO BE

*Flexible*



## **Sample Chapter of Plan to Be Flexible**

Chapter 2: What's Working (and What's Not)

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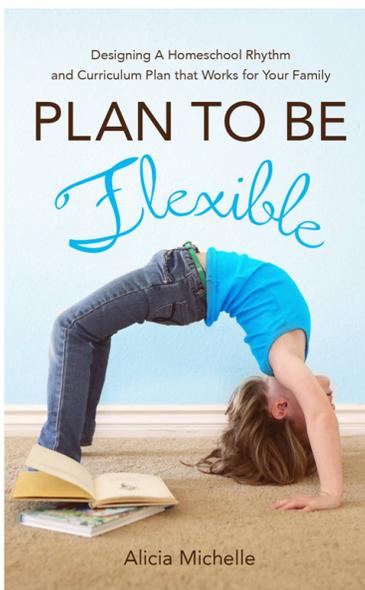
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## **Chapter 2: What's Working (and What's Not) (Part 1)**

If you've set goals in the past and accomplished them all perfectly, you have my permission to skip this chapter (and the next one).

For the rest of us mortals, let's talk about the ugly side of goal-making.

Goals can be beautiful, precious things—lofty plans we make before we set foot on the path. They can seem easy—too easy—to fulfill. They lure us in with their wonderful promises (“if you work out three days a week, you can lose 20 pounds and drop two dress sizes!”). We convince ourselves that if we only meet these goals then our lives will be truly happy and complete.

We make our plans on the mountaintops, but oh, [we must still trudge through the valleys](#). While joys do exist in the valleys of everyday homeschool life, the valleys can also be filled with bad attitudes, ineffective curriculums and overcrowded schedules.

Otherwise known as “stuff that's not working in your school.”

Thankfully our homeschooling cycles come equipped with a summer break. This is our opportunity to climb back up the mountain, breathe the fresh air and grab a new focus for the year ahead. We can revisit our goals, determine what is working (and what is not) and continue back down the mountain with a new game plan. I suggest you do this every year as a healthy part of your homeschool routine.

But sometimes we get so off-track from our goals that we have to climb up the mountain much earlier than the planned summer break. We even may have to climb

up there several times in a single school year. Life may have smacked us around a bit, or [a child might be going through an especially difficult season](#), and we just need to be able to stand back and take a look at the big picture. We can't be afraid to step away from what's not working and take a hard look at what's causing all the frustration.

## **My Lowest Point**

In early 2010 I found myself burnt out. I was [tired of the endless pushing through the curriculum and fights each day to get school done](#). I felt like no matter how hard I'd tried, my children were still not the happy homeschool kids I'd wanted them to be. School became a burden and learning lacked joy—for me and my kids.

At that time we were schooling under a local public charter school and were required to meet with an educational specialist (ES) from the school every five weeks to assess our progress.

I clearly remember one meeting around that time. We were sitting outside a local coffee shop with the ES, school papers in hand. My students were not engaged in our conversation but were extremely distracted by the birds flying around the tables that were gathering bits of muffins and other pastries left behind by other patrons.

As the meeting progressed, my frustration level increased higher and higher as I listened to my kids' responses to her questions about what they'd been learning: "Huh?" "I don't know." "I don't remember." They continued to look everywhere but at her and it was all that I could do to keep them in their seats.

Toward the end of our conversation I finally gave up and let the kids leave the table and chase the birds around the courtyard instead. I was embarrassed by my children's lack of attention... and seeming lack of knowledge. I'd been working incredibly hard—perhaps harder than ever before—week after week to diligently teach my kids, and yet here was the extremely unsatisfying result of all my labor?

True, I couldn't expect them to perform like trained monkeys, but it was obvious that [something wasn't working in our schooling](#). I'd seen further evidence of this in the previous weeks when I'd spent an inordinate amount of effort barking at my squirmy boys to "sit down" "pay attention" and "finish the workbook" while they moaned and groaned.

It was an understatement to say that this driven perfectionist felt shamed and humbled by homeschooling. And now my failures were evident to others outside our home (a school official, no less!).

While the kids chased the birds a few tables away, the ES leaned in closer to me and asked me if everything was alright at home. She said that I seemed to be stressed and that my tone with my kids had been "sharp."

Could this meeting get any worse? I thought. Now not only am I a poor homeschooler but a terrible parent as well?

Tears began flowing down my cheeks. "School has not been going so well," I finally managed. "I'm working so hard and we're doing all the assignments, I swear..." My voice trailed off.

The ES, herself a homeschool mom, sat silent for a moment and then said, “Maybe you need to step back and re-examine how you’re doing things.”

Yeah, duh! I wanted to say. Did she really think I hadn’t thought of that? I’d spent each evening with my husband venting about my school frustrations and we’d yet to come up with workable solutions. The big questions were of course was what to change? And what to change it to?

I left that meeting feeling [utterly defeated, frustrated and at my wits’ end](#). I wasn’t ready to throw in the towel but had no idea what to do next.

Over the next few days I spoke with several veteran homeschool moms about their times of greatest frustration.

Their advice was unanimous: I needed to back way off with school.

“It doesn’t matter that you are in the middle of the school year,” they explained. “You don’t want to hurt your relationships with your kids or destroy their love of learning. That is far more important than completing the expected tasks and satisfying school requirements.”

I have to admit that I didn’t completely agree (I was still convinced that book knowledge was the main goal of homeschooling) but I trusted these women who’d been on the path much longer. I began the extremely humbling task of ceasing our homeschool routine.

For the next few weeks, I nursed my wounds and cried out in prayer. I was angry and disillusioned. Not only did I need direction, but clearly there were some deep hurts and disappointments inside of me that needed healing.

Time passed, and I began slowly introducing school again through games. Monopoly, Bananagrams and card games like Go Fish were brought out of our board game cabinet and into the core of our days. We spent a lot of time outside in our backyard and at the park playing. We read a lot (not “school-ish” books, mind you, but old family favorites that we’d read over and over).

I felt like I was [re-introducing learning to my kids...and to myself](#). It was as if we’d had a cancer removed, and were now in the hospital healing and recovering.

I found a math curriculum that was completely workbook-free (Math had been one of our biggest battlegrounds and I think my forced time in the workbook had made this subject extremely unappealing for my kids). Very, very slowly we began working through a few sections with each child. On days when they could “sniff” that we were “doing school” and began to show signs of resistance, I backed way off again.

It was a slow and painful recovery but oh, I learned so much. Instead of forcing a “correct” method or style of learning on my kids (no matter how good it had worked for someone else), I learned to trust my kids’ behavior and their responses to how I’d been teaching them. These were unique creations of God. How could I expect a prescribed formula or curriculum to address and meet their one-of-a-kind needs?

I also learned to respect their viewpoint and to value our relationship above any school task that needed to be completed. [I learned to sense](#) when I was offering them a

healthy challenge that would stretch and grow their skills, and when I was just pushing them and needed to relax. It was a major turning point in my skills as a teacher, and as a mom.

## **Making Your Own Assessments**

Whether we're going through a difficult homeschool time or it's just time for an annual check-up, we need to be honest about where our students (or where we) are, and then be prepared to make whatever changes necessary to make school engaging, productive and effective. Regardless of when or how often, it's critical to weigh the current health of our school against our ultimate homeschool motivations and goals.

At the end of the school year (or whenever your homeschool needs a fresh start) take some time to examine the key components of your homeschool. Look at each aspect of your child's current educational experience. Ask your spouse for his take on what he sees as working (and not working) in your school.

Specifically speaking, what should you consider? To get your wheels turning, here are a few questions (the Appendix has a more comprehensive list):

### **About the Curricula/Learning Style:**

1. Is real learning happening here? Do you see evidences of the child not only understanding the concepts but applying them in other school subjects and even in everyday conversation?

2. Do you battle with a child to complete a particular subject, and do you believe that the curricula may be partially to blame?
3. Do the curricula allow for the type of learning that you've chosen for your homeschool (for example, interest-led learning, literature-based learning, etc.)?

### **About the Student(s):**

1. What are his areas of weakness and areas of strength? What can you do to strengthen the weak areas?
2. Are there core skills that you want him to learn by this time next year?
3. Does he need assistance from outside sources (such as a tutor)?

### **About the School Structure/Routine:**

1. Does the time spent on school work for your students' needs and for the entire family schedule?
2. Will there be an expected life change next year (for example, a new baby, a planned move, a part-time job for mom) that will require a change in the annual homeschool routine or in the daily hours of schooling?
3. Should you consider adding additional out-of-the-home learning experiences, such as sports, clubs, or co-op teaching classes? Or do you participate in those experiences now and plan on eliminating them next year?

## **About the Teacher:**

1. Are there things about your teaching style that you'd like to change?
2. Do you regularly exhibit the classroom behavior that you want your kids to have?
3. Would you choose you as your teacher?

Make a commitment to do whatever it takes—reading books, talking to other moms, going to a homeschool conference—to discover solutions to whatever issues are present. This can be the hardest step, but hang in there! Real answers to your issues will be revealed.

## **Action Plan:**

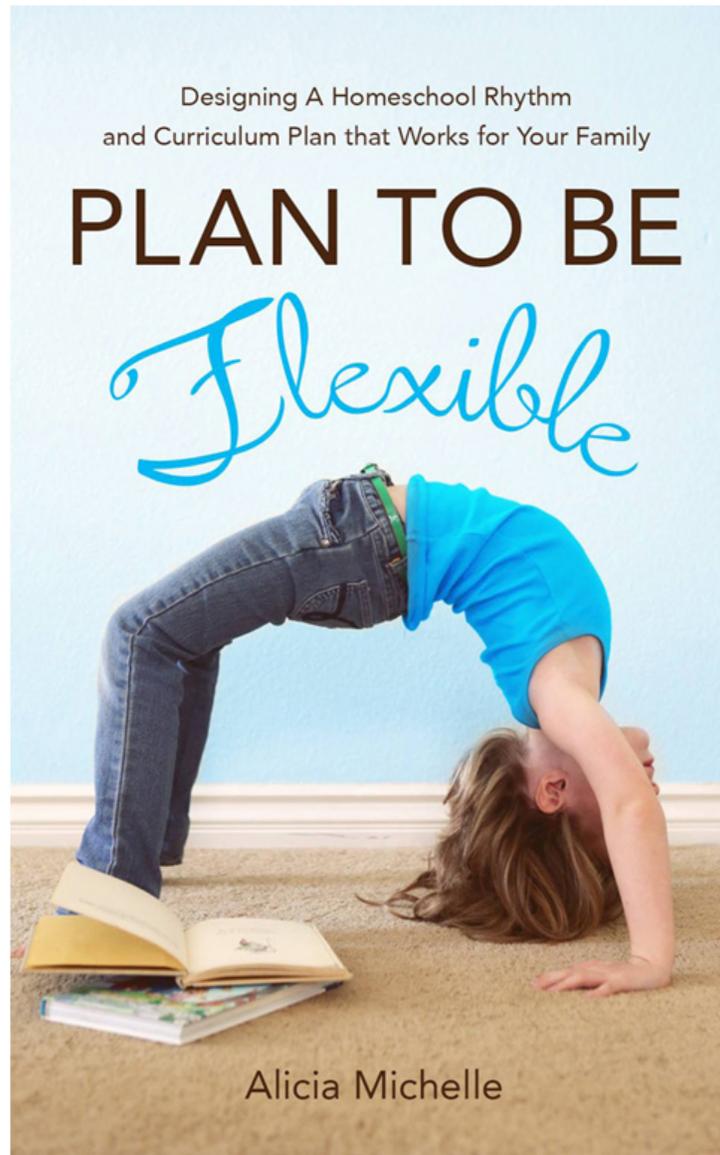
1. Take an afternoon and think through your school's current status. Using the questions listed in the chapter (and additional questions in the Appendix), take an honest assessment of your school, your students and your teaching. Are you still on track with the ultimate homeschooling goals you've established?
2. What are the hot buttons in your homeschool? Are there sources of ongoing stress, or of a feeling that things "just aren't working"?
3. Is the curriculum still working for your students? Do you need to examine new teaching styles and methods?

## **For Additional Insight:**

- ["Standing at the Crossroads of a New Homeschool and Parenting Phase"](#)
- ["My Homeschool Is Not Working: Part 1: New Hope and New Plans"](#)
- ["When Homeschooling Is Lonely and Hard: An Honest Conversation from One Homeschool Mom to Another"](#)
- ["My Homeschool Is Not Working: Part 2: The Beauty of Simple, Everyday Learning"](#)
- ["Homeschool Confessions: Letting God Lead Our Homeschool"](#)
- ["The Fine Art of Homeschooling: Homeschooling Lessons from the Master Artist"](#)
- ["Homeschool Not Working? Answers to Your Biggest Homeschool Issues"](#)

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This 5-star-Amazon-review book is an incredible resource to establish the flexible, rhythm-based homeschool lifestyle your family has been looking for!

Plan to Be Flexible is available in three formats: digital e-book, Kindle and paperback.

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