

Fact or Fiction: Parenting Through Public School

Fact: Babies don't typically sleep through the night during the newborn phase.

Fiction: Life or parenthood will get easier when the baby can sleep through the night. Each season and milestone come with their own challenges. We can bicker and complain about these, or we can rise up, with the Lord's help, to face and conquer them with a happy heart.

Fact: Feeding your baby will be the most important thing you do during the first twelve months of life and hopefully after, for many more years, to help avoid malnutrition.

Fiction: The bottle is equivalent to the serpent in the Garden of Eden offering Eve a piece of fruit. For reference, I fed my babies both ways. My daughter was exclusively breastfed for the first nine months until mastitis gave me a run for my money and I decided to go bankrupt and move to the bottle. My son was nursed initially, but significant issues necessitated speech therapy for a shallow palate at two months of age. Layla, my exclusively breastfed baby, has had more ear infections with five sets of tubes compared to Ezra, who has been fairly healthy with fewer trips to the pediatrician for ear infections or sickness. Though my data is limited, it suggests that as parents, we must do the best we can with our resources and trust God to fill in the gaps.

The first year of life is filled with numerous fact or fiction statements, but the purpose of this article is to offer hope and encouragement for parents considering public school for their children. We'll address some common misconceptions and replace them with facts, recognizing that whether you choose homeschooling, private, or public school, there is an element of faith that God has His hand of power on your child through the formative years of their life and on into adulthood if they will choose to pick up their cross and follow Him outside of your home. The saying goes, "time will tell," and my advice is not to squander the time God has given you to train your children.

Fact: Parenting begins and ends with prayer. Homeschool, private, and public school parents should be rooted in prayer for their children. Beyond the four walls of the church, prayer should be in the home. Pray purposefully for your children without ceasing, throughout the day. This doesn't have to be a send-off prayer in the car rider line, though that is good. We can pray better and deeper for our children. I encourage you to pray scripture and truly intercede for them daily. Be patient and partner in prayer with your child. Praying with a preschooler or kindergartener and a sixth grader or junior in high school looks vastly different. Allow them the grace and time to understand prayer at their developmental stage. A preschooler might say a quick prayer about trivial matters such as "Lord help me and my family as we cross this bridge and the ant that I just stepped on", while a sixth grader might pray awkwardly because that is an awkward time in life. A junior

in high school might pray out of fear that they will get it all wrong or miss God's voice for their college choice and career. The main thing is to pray for them and with them so that they grow accustomed to speaking to a God they cannot physically touch or see and develop an ear to hear when He speaks.

Fiction: The schoolhouse is my kid's mission field to be a soul winner. The schoolhouse is for education in math, reading, writing, science, and history. I am not sending them there with a sign around their neck that says, "Listen to my next exhortation or prophecy." Rather, in a dark world, they will be known for the light that has been birthed in them from the "homeschooling" done by their father and me. 1 Peter 2:9 states, "But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light." Our students will shine light, intriguing others. Through family devotions, kids' services, Sunday school lessons, prayer meetings, worship sessions, and memorized scripture, our kids will develop a Christ-centered character and worldview. From there, friendships can be made, and our students can begin a disciple journey with their classmates (a stranger becomes a friend, and hopefully a disciple of Jesus Christ in time). As early elementary-aged students, there is no pressure to win souls at school. They are expected to work as unto the Lord in every subject and to love their neighbor as themselves.

Fact: We are homeschooling our children. All parents should be homeschooling. Traditional homeschool parents are the base camp for everything academic, social-emotional, fine arts, gym class, and more. Public school parents outsource academic subjects to the schoolhouse for teachers to partner in. Public school parents get the added benefits of specials like art, music, gym, library, and field trips. Notice, I did not say I want the public school to be my child's moral compass. So, my husband and I are homeschooling our children and teaching them truth and principles from the Word of God that will be a light unto their path. John 10:10 states, "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." The enemy wants to destroy our children, but the Lord wants them to have a rich and satisfying life. Public school can be a place where students become educated and mirror Christ's character in an amoral world. If you are not homeschooling your child, public school will not work. Key items on the homeschooling checklist include talking with your children daily, turning off screens, and sitting at the dinner table to discuss the day. You can be creative with conversation starters such as, high-low, rose, thorn, and bud, etc. Allow them time to reflect on the day. Remember, it is not an interrogation but a discussion ongoing throughout the school year or better yet, their whole life. It is not a sprint; it is a marathon. My kids are most chatty before bed, when I am ready to turn in for the night, but it's their timetable, not

mine. Slow and steady wins the race. Other key items for homeschooling include family devotions, worshiping together, attending children or youth events, and making Sunday worship a priority, not a fallback plan.

Lastly, I want to conclude with the three C's that have helped us in our journey through public school: communication, connection, and consistency. These aspects are multifaceted and interconnected like a web. Communication includes my husband and I talking and approaching this journey as a united team, communication with the administration and faculty, communication with the teachers, and communication with the school family by attending events and engaging with other families. Connection mirrors every avenue listed in the communication web. It involves showing up for school events like parties, field trips, field day, fun run, or donuts with dear ones, creating connections with people. Most people function better on routines, and our children thrive on routines and consistency. Consistent communication and connection with our children mean I also consistently follow up with their teachers to navigate tough situations or unmet academic needs. Follow-up is crucial in a public school setting. There is nothing wrong with a gentle, kind, and direct follow-up, which produces results that help your child, the class, or the teacher. Additionally, we have been consistent with discipleship at home through keys for kids (every morning in the car rider line), helping our kids learn scriptures, and prayer.

Before I sign off, remember that parenting is hard whether it's exclusively homeschooling, private school, or public school. It takes an immense amount of work, time, and effort. A relationship with Christ does not happen by osmosis; it requires active engagement. Similarly, children do not get educated just by sitting in a classroom; work is involved. A good parent is not just good by title but by function. As godly parents, we need to allow God to guide and direct our words and actions as we raise our children. The fiction that sending your kids to public school will make them walk away from God is just that—fiction. Serving ten years of youth ministry alongside my husband, I have seen homeschoolers, private school students, and public school students both leave the faith or continue their faith journey. The fact is, we expose them to the kingdom of God and the beauty of a relationship with Jesus, hoping and praying they continue this journey. Parenting is a vast and ongoing investment, and perhaps in a few years, I will have more insights to share.