

**Mid-Year Doldrums:
And How You Can Beat Them
By Robin E. Williams**

Sooner or later every homeschool mother feels them. A feeling, most commonly in January or February, of burn out, weariness, or despair that comes upon us like a slow fog or sudden storm. I call these feelings the doldrums in reference to the area near the equator known to sailors for both stagnant calms and abrupt squalls. As the sailors in the days of the great clipper ships had to face the Doldrums in order to reach their destinations, so must we face our own doldrums in order to reach our goal of a successful homeschool year.

How the doldrums manifest themselves can vary from mother to mother and from year to year. Some may find themselves questioning if homeschooling is what they really should be doing. Others may find themselves in a panic about the quality of their child's education, worrying about their child being "behind". Still others may find boredom setting in. The monotony of their days seems endless and the end of the math book so far away.

So, what's a homeschool mom to do when staring into the face of the doldrums? Well, the first thing to do is be aware that you aren't the only one to ever feel this way. Such feelings, in one form or the other, are common among homeschoolers especially at this time of year. Don't you for one second believe that all the other moms have it all together, no matter how all together they look or sound. Be willing to open up and share your feelings either in person or online, and you will find just how common the doldrums are.

What NOT to do

While in the grip of the doldrums is not the time to make drastic changes or decisions concerning your homeschool. It may be the doldrums are the stimulus that sends you searching for new curriculum, but delay spending money or setting anything in stone until the feelings have past. Give yourself time, maybe lots of time, before making any radical decisions so that you can avoid the possibility of serious regret later.

Try something new

I know I just said not to purchase all new curriculum during this time in your homeschool, but sometimes adding in a single new thing can go a long way toward breathing new life into your school year. Whoever said you have to begin every subject fresh at the start of August? Maybe you could start a new Art curriculum or take a week off of your normal work to do a unit study on some topic of special interest to your family. If you are worried your child is behind take a week off to work through one of the *What Your ... Needs to Know* books. There are too many ideas for fun and fresh things you could try for me to list them all here.

Do something different

Sometimes the best way to get a more realistic picture of your homeschool is to get out of your home. If you haven't been taking part in a local support group's Field Trips or Events, maybe now is the time to do so. What better way to bring history alive than visiting the Renaissance Faire, and Science Fair projects are a time honored rite of passage for generations of American children. Another idea would be to start a new small group; the theme of the group is less important than the getting together. Let me let you in on a couple small group secrets: If you organize it, they will show up. And: Other people care less about how clean your house is than you think they do.

In contrast, if you are already busily involved in extracurricular activities and homeschool co-ops, maybe the cause of your doldrums is that there isn't enough *home* in your homeschool. There is nothing like the pressure to get everyone ready, with whatever gear or materials needed, out the door and across town without

being late to raise the level of stress hormones in your blood. Changing the level of your out of the house activities and commitments, either adding more or dropping back to less, may be all that is needed to improve your homeschool environment.

Maybe the problem isn't your homeschool

Because of the day-in day-out intimate nature of homeschooling our children, sometimes problems that would exist whether we homeschooled or not make homeschooling more unbearable. Character issues, in the children or in you, are particularly difficult on your school day. From a habit of laziness to just plain rebellion, the possibilities are diverse. Addressing character faults isn't easy, but at least you can comfort yourself that it is work that would need to be done no matter what method of schooling your family used.

Another possible cause of problems that is not related directly to homeschooling is a continually messy or clutter filled home. Taking a week off your studies to focus on "Household Management" (aka deep cleaning, decluttering, and organizing) may be just the ticket.

Seek positive help

I purposefully wrote "positive" help, because the middle of the homeschool doldrums is not the time to confide in a homeschool skeptic friend or relative. It would do more harm to you than good. Rather, seek out those you know that will give you positive and supportive help, and the first person you turn to should be your husband, if at all possible. At the minimum tell him that you need more of his prayers and understanding now than before.

Lastly, I urge you to seek the help our heavenly Father. I mention this last not as an afterthought or because it is least important, but rather because if we remember best what we read last I want this to be what you remember best. He has offered us many precious promises that will sustain you during the trying times of the doldrums, but we have not because we ask not (James 4:2).