

4 - Hands-On Learning and Life Experiences

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Twice a month we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to use today. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast for future episodes.

Let's get started. Today we are blessed to be here with Stephanie Kisner. She has a degree in psychology with an emphasis in early infant and child development and has over 15 years of childcare experience.

Stephanie is in her fourth year of homeschooling her two boys ages eight and four while also teaching part-time at a small homeschool style private school in Oklahoma City.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Her topic today is hands-on learning and life experiences and Stephanie we're going to jump right in. I've had the opportunity to talk to you for a while now and I follow you on some of your social media and you just do the most amazing things, and the topic is so relevant today and we're just so excited that you're here so thank you so much.

Stephanie Kisner Speaker: Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it and I'm so excited to share some of my experiences with everybody.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, Stephanie, you said that when you first started your homeschool journey that you knew nothing about it. What made you want to begin homeschooling your boys?

Stephanie Kisner Speaker: Yes, so it took me about a year of looking into it, and actually, I saw a post on Facebook of a mom who I really respected, and she was talking about homeschooling. I kind of talked to my husband about it, and I said, "You know, we should look into this a little bit more. We should see what this homeschooling deal is all about." Neither of us had any experience; we didn't really know anybody that had homeschooled. So, we spent about a year looking into it, and at first, he was really hesitant. I would send him little bits of information here or there, just kind of putting that little plug into his ear, and then before we decided to begin homeschooling, we said, "Let's try it."

There were a couple of reasons and a few of them that were really defining for me.

You know, one of them---I really liked that we could move ahead in any topic if my boys were really understanding something, and we could kind of push through and go ahead. At the same time, if we hit a topic that they needed a little extra support in, we could hold back a little bit more and take some extra time on those things. So, we have that aspect. We have the aspect of flexibility.

But I think two of the most defining moments for me---the first one was when my son, he was in a young fives program. That is equivalent to... it's between preschool and kindergarten in Michigan. So, his birthday deadline wasn't ready for kindergarten, but he would have been an older preschooler. He was in a young fives program, and we would get him up in the morning, and it was a battle every single morning.

He was tired, he was grumpy. We never left the house happy. We'd bring him to school, and then he'd come home from school tired and grumpy again after a long day at school. He did really, really well in the classroom. He excelled, you know. His teacher only had great things to say, and he was the helper. He was very advanced in a couple of main topics that we had worked on at home previously before he had joined this.

He'd come home, and he would just be grumpy. I tried everything under the sun that I knew how to---having snacks ready, letting him have downtime, everything that they tell you to try to help with that transition from school to home. Then we would go to a sports practice, and we'd come home, and he would go to bed, and we were just in this cycle.

I remember thinking to myself, "This cannot be it. This cannot be how family is supposed to feel, where I don't know my son. I don't see anything that he is experiencing in his life at this point in time." Come Christmas time, I didn't know what to get him because I didn't know what his interests were---not because I didn't care, but because we didn't have that time together.

So, that was one of my most defining moments, just thinking, "This is not how it's supposed to be."

And then my next main defining moment would have been when I was reading through my Bible, and I came up to Deuteronomy. It talks about teaching your children God's Word---when you wake up and when you go to bed, when you walk along the way. I remember thinking to myself and then telling my husband later, "How are we supposed to do this if we don't see our children?"

How are we supposed to teach them? A quick prayer in the morning, a quick prayer before bed... but how am I supposed to truly teach them through life experiences God's Word if we're not with them?

That is something that completely transformed our family as far as the homeschool journey that we began and now what we get to experience.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: wow so I don't even have to ask you why it's a passion you just told me

Stephanie Kisner Speaker: yeah

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: why this is a passion and that is amazing I love every part of it. So I guess when you're talking to families because we have listeners on here that may want to start doing this and that are doing it now because of the pandemic so how do they find things that fit their needs how did you choose a curriculum how if someone's interested what would you tell them how do they start?

Stephanie Kisner Speaker: So, one thing that I think is really important to know is that not every child has the same learning style. We go into homeschooling not knowing anything. Again, I didn't know anything, and I went in completely blind. So, finding a curriculum that was made by a teacher for homeschool moms---something that had a complete lesson plan already laid out where I could literally open up the book and basically have a checklist---she even had things written up of how to say certain things, how to ask certain questions, and I used one of the programs my entire first year.

And I had to understand that even my two boys may not learn the same, so finding their learning style was important. When they're younger, that's a little bit harder, but I do know that boys tend to learn better with hands-on material.

And so, I personally chose a curriculum that included multiple learning styles in it, so I could see where he really excelled at, and then we could dive in more into that learning style as we kind of grew into our homeschool program.

So, finding a curriculum that might fit a learning style---you can even just jump on Google or Pinterest, which is actually a really great area to find learning style tools or tests that you can kind of pick from---and even just starting to recognize what their interests are. Are they really interested in playing with Legos? Do they love hands-on? Do they like to draw? Do they like to listen to something? Are they big readers? You can find a lot just by observing your kids and seeing where they really excel at.

So, finding that curriculum is important, but I will also note that something that is equally as important is not being afraid to change if something isn't working.

So, I went into homeschooling envisioning this---that it had to look like timed out; everything had to start at this time and end at this time, and we needed a special room and all of this stuff. While I do think that my boys thrive on a---I call it a flex schedule---and having that separate room, not all homeschool families have to have that. So, I gave myself that flexibility, and I would say, most importantly, giving yourself that grace on your homeschool day---not having to look like a typical school day in a public school.

Because most of us are comparing our school experiences to that, so we're seeing this is what it needs to look like. I would say to create something that works with you. So, having that grace for yourself---that it doesn't have to be spelled out minute by minute---and having that grace with your child. They are children. We have bad days as adults; children are going to have bad days.

One of the things I love about homeschooling is that when my boys have a bad day, when they're having a rough moment, we can literally stop what we're doing, and we can work through those moments. We have had days where we don't do any school at all because we're off, we're not clicking, and they have a bad day. Or, for whatever reason, they're harder on themselves. We will work through those moments and those challenges together, and they are learning and growing in how to work through those emotions and challenges. Then we're learning and growing together as a family.

We have begun---I mean, we've just gotten so close as a family, mom and boys, and dad and boys---and just working through these moments. So, you know, giving yourself that grace is so, so important.

And giving just your schedule that grace as well. So, I would say those things you really need to think about. You need to think about, too, why you're doing it.

You know, are we doing it right now because of everything that's going on in society and this is a priority? This is a need to keep your child healthy? Are you doing it for any kind of religious or faith reasons---that you want to focus on something that is maybe a more Christ-centered curriculum?

Why are you doing the homeschooling? Because that will help you find goals further on. If you have a specific goal in mind---one of our biggest goals is that our boys get to experience things outside of a classroom in a textbook.

That is one of our biggest goals, and knowing why we were homeschooling helped us reach those goals and is helping us continue to reach those goals.

So, knowing why you're doing it too is extremely important. And then understanding some of the changes you might have to make as a family. For example, we went from two full-time incomes to one full-time income, and it was truly---it was truly a leap of faith in this, just trusting God's plan.

Then having to work and change our plan around a little bit---going from two cars to one car, going from not as many larger field trips to finding a lot of free field trips that we could do, hands-on experiences that we could do that were free. So, all of those things play into that decision to homeschool---going from curriculum to why you're doing it to just knowing that you need to have that grace with everybody, including yourself.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: okay before we wrap up though I want you to tell me about your fun Friday because it goes along with your hands-on experiences, so I need you to tell me about that.

Stephanie Kisner Speaker: Fun Friday is probably my favorite thing that we do. I actually picked this up from my oldest son when he was in young fives in Michigan.

Every Friday, they did Fun Friday, and so I incorporated that into our homeschool. Mrs. Severance, she was an incredible teacher---I'm giving you a shout-out right now---and I took that from her. We spend Fridays, we wake up in the morning, and we do a little bit of a normal routine in the early mornings, but we spend Fridays on field trips.

So, we get out and about. It is so important for me that our boys---and my husband---that our boys experience people and different cultures and different things around them and that they get hands-on experiences. We just went to the Air Force Museum and looked at all the planes. We talked about POWs and MIAs. We talked about the history with that. The questions that they get from any of these experiences that you have far outweigh reading through anything in a textbook.

They do ask questions, and we'll watch videos on certain things, but sitting there and experiencing these things and answering these questions and feeling these moments together and watching them soak everything in when you are physically there is such a great experience, and they truly, truly take all of that to heart.

And then we do something fun. So, we get a special treat, and our treat is usually, you know, a half-off Sonic drink through the app or something small---a slushy from the gas station, something that they really enjoy---but we end it with pizza movie night as a family. So, Fun Fridays have truly become something that the boys look forward to, that we look forward to as a family.

But it's also very educational. Even on the rainy days, we do things like K'NEX or games inside the home that are really educational games, and we try to put the bookwork away. So, those are Fun Fridays.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love it so before we leave here can you give our listeners one challenge?

Stephanie Kisner Speaker: yes I would say if there was any challenge I could give you whether you homeschool or not even I would just challenge you to explore with your children to open them up to experiences in the world around them to open them up to different people around them because the growth and experiences you're going to take away as a family are completely irreplaceable.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: everyone this has been amazing Stephanie thank you so much.

Stephanie Kisner Speaker: thank you for having me.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: yes, you have provided us with great information so make sure you subscribe to this podcast, and we will see you next time thank you.