



I NEED A CUP
OF COFFEE...

The Minimum Viable **Morning**

Five habits to get your
homeschool day
started right

by Pam Barnhill

The Minimum Viable Morning

Five habits to get your homeschool day started right

Copyright © 2016 Pam Barnhill

All Rights Reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted without prior written permission of the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

For written permission contact pam@edsnapshots.com

Cover and design by the author.

Cover art by [dollarphotoclub.com](#)

This quick guide is not going to tell you that you need to get up hours before your children. It isn't going to try to motivate you to exercise for a long period of time each morning, spend 30 minutes each morning in quiet devotion time with just you and Jesus (though that isn't a bad thing if you can do it), or get half of your to-do list done before 8AM. There are other books, courses, and online challenges out there that do that.

This handbook isn't about what mom needs to do to conquer the world before her day fully starts. **This handbook about what mom needs to do so that her homeschool gets off to a good start.**

If you downloaded this little booklet, then you probably feel an imbalance in your homeschool. Maybe, like me, you have had too many days where you look up at 10:00AM (usually from your computer) still in your pajamas, while the kids run amok through the house.

What is the least you need to do to get everyone moving in the right direction and just get started for the day?

Which makes you grumpy. Which in turn makes you grouchy, usually at people who bear no blame for the situation. **You want to change your homeschool mornings.** This handbook is here with inspiration and practical solutions to help you create a morning routine once and for all that will let your homeschool thrive.

In the business world there is a concept called the minimum viable product. To make a minimum viable product means to make the simplest, best product you can and just start selling it. Not the perfect product. Not the product you wish you could put on the market one day. Just a product that you can start selling to put food on the table while you work on perfecting it.

What I am talking to you about here is not the perfect morning routine, **but the minimum viable morning (MVM) routine.** What is the *least* you need to do to get everyone moving in the right direction and just get started for the day?

You have to walk before you can run. Let's get the MVM down and start experiencing some success. Then later (if we want — there's nothing wrong with never having super-productive mornings) when the habits are in place, you can build to the kind of morning routine you want.

So how do we do the MVM? It is all about small, simple habits. In the next few pages I break down these habits into doable steps and helpful tips. You can begin implementing this plan today (yes, I know you are already up today, but as you will see the MVM starts the day before). This means a better morning can be yours as soon as tomorrow. No fancy equipment needed.

Here's to minimum viable mornings,

Pam

A few thoughts about wake time

So what time DO you need to get up to have a successful homeschool day? Honestly that is up to you. There can also be some variation depending on what time you have to be out of the house for activities when your school work is over for the day. If piano lessons start at 2:30, then you want to be done before then.

But let's face it. No matter what time you start school, nobody really likes sitting at the table trying to finish things up at dinner time. By that point almost everyone is beyond ready to move on.

I suggest figuring out the earliest time you need to wake and being consistent with it.

That way if you have days where you don't need to start school as early, you can have a more leisurely morning or even better, you can consistently start school at the same time each day and have some days with more free time in the afternoon.

This works great if you have kids who will all sleep until just before time for you to start school. Your formula then is

**school start time - time to wake kids and get them moving - time you need to yourself =
time you need to wake**

Note that the kids' wake and prep time and mom's wake and prep time do *not* overlap. To have a good homeschool morning mom needs to be fully present (more on that in a bit).

My wake time is not determined so much by my school start time as it is by my kids' wake times. I have two early risers and one later sleeper. Therefore I determine my wake time thus

time early risers consistently wake - time you need to yourself = time you need to wake

The variable you have the most control over here is "time you need to yourself." This can be a super-long time full of exercise, prayer, reading, housework, work-from-home activities, a hot shower — whatever suits your fancy. Or if you are less inclined to morning activity this can be

just long enough to throw on your clothes, slap in your contact lenses, and get the coffee maker started.

I'm going to say it right here

I don't think one way is any more virtuous than the other.

Really! You can pray and do Bible study later in the day. (Sonya Shafer of Simply Charlotte Mason does hers right after lunch.) You can exercise later. God still hears you and you can still get healthy no matter what time of day you do those things. Is it *easier* to do them in the morning? Sometimes I think it is. But sometimes I just want to sleep too.

So choose which battles you want to fight in the morning and which you want to fight later and give yourself enough time to do what you need to. And then own it. **Because in the end you are getting the most important part of your vocation taken care of — being present to homeschool your kids.**

"I get up every morning determined to both change the world and have one hell of a good time. Sometimes this makes planning my day difficult."

E.B. White

Habit 1: The Review (5-10 minutes)

Planning tools:

Calendar, pen, index card or notepad

What: A mental review and to-do list for the following day

Your plan doesn't have to be elaborate. In fact a teeny-tiny plan is probably better. Leave the daily docket for the super moms and use an index card for your plan instead. If you can't fit it on an index card, you probably won't have time for it in a day anyway.

When: The afternoon or evening of the day before

Start the day before! If you don't like getting up in the morning, chances are you don't like thinking too much before your first (four) cups of coffee. Stop torturing yourself and do the thinking the day before. As an added bonus, planning when you are tired helps you be more realistic about what you might actually get done in a day.

Where: Standing at the kitchen counter

This is a sprint, not a marathon planning session. Do it while waiting for water to boil for dinner or right after cleaning the kitchen. Your supplies can be kept close by. It will be easy to eyeball the food situation. You are less likely to get sucked into *The Big Bang Theory* and put it off.

How to do it

1. Look at your calendar and note any appointments or activities for the following day. Make a mental note of the latest time school must be started, or better yet, write it at the top of your card.
2. Decide what you will cook for dinner the next day and go put it in the fridge to thaw, especially if it needs to go in the crock pot the next morning. If it does, add crock pot to your to-do list. Make a mental note about breakfast too. Do you have what you need for quick meals or do you need time to be creative?

3. List three to five things you need to get done the next day. What do you need to get out of your head and down on paper so you will do it? Bonus tip: put a star beside your frog — the biggest thing you need to get done, the thing you want to do least, or the thing you are most likely to procrastinate. Do that first so it will stop eating at you.

Helpful Links

- [Review Required: Morning](#)
- [Simple Systems: Daily Index Card](#)
- [Eat That Frog: How Five Business Bestsellers Can Help a Homeschool Mom](#)

"Lose an hour in the morning, and you will spend all day looking for it."

Richard Whately

Habit 2: Homeschool Prep (5 minutes per child)

Planning tools

Spiral notebooks and/or clipboards, pen, homeschool materials

What: A simple homeschool plan for the following day

Plan out what your kids will be doing the next day to eliminate decision fatigue the next morning when it is time to start. Use a spiral notebook, use a checklist, use a binder, use a clipboard or mix and match. I give you links to each method below.

When: Right after the previous school day is done

I have actually started doing these as each child finishes with his or her school day. I can be at the table cracking the whip on the older two while I am planning for the youngest. Then I plan for the next child's tomorrow when he has finished his daily work. Then I only have the oldest child to plan for once everyone is gone.

Where: Where the school materials are located

Be in easy arms' reach of everything. As with The Review, I don't sit down and get too comfy when doing this. If I can't do it in five minutes, I am going to put it off.

How to do it:

1. Look at what your kids accomplished today. Ask yourself if they need more review and evaluate if they are ready to move on.
2. If you don't have a pre-made checklist, make a list of what they need to do the next day.
3. Pull all the loose papers they need (math worksheets, copywork paper, etc.) and put them on the clipboard, binder, or paper clip in a stack.

Helpful Links

- [How I'm Using Spiral Notebooks to Simplify Homeschooling](#)
- [Organize Your Student's Day with Clipboard and Checklist](#)
- [Binders and Routines for Kids](#)

"Fern was up at daylight, trying to rid the world of injustice. As a result, she now has a pig. A small one to be sure, but nevertheless a pig. It just shows what can happen if a person gets out of bed promptly."

E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

Habit 3: The bedtime warning

Tools:

[sleepyti.me](#), alarm clock or phone alarm

What: Set an alarm to remind yourself to go to bed

Half the battle of getting out of bed on time is going to bed at a decent hour. So many times I get sucked into what I am doing, and I lose track of time. When midnight is staring me in the face I am ready to give up on the next morning before it even begins. This is why setting an alarm to remind me of my bedtime is an invaluable tool for me.

How to do it:

1. Use the [Sleepy Time Bedtime Calculator](#) to figure out when you need to go to bed. Simply enter the time you want to wake into the website, and it will tell you what time to head to bed based on the idea that you should wake *between* sleep cycles instead of during one. I have used this for over a year and am pretty confident that it works — I really do wake easier if I wake at the times it indicates.
2. The bedtime calculator keeps in mind that it will take you about 15 minutes to fall asleep but you also need about 15-20 minutes to prepare for bed and settle in, so set your alarm for about 30 minutes before you actually want to be sleeping.
3. GO TO BED
4. Yeah if you have nursing babies or little kids you are pretty much just going to have to suck it up here. I am not sure the calculator works well if you are waking all through the night. It's a season. Do go to bed at a decent time — the alarm is still helpful.

Helpful Links

- [Sleepy Time Calculator](#)

"Good morning is a contradiction of terms."

Jim Davis, *Garfield* creator

Habit 4: Get dressed first

Why

This one is SO important. If your house is anything like mine it can go quickly off the rails in the morning whenever Mom leaves the room. Breakfast gets forgotten. Chores get avoided.

Lessons are ignored. World War III ensues.

I find I can eliminate most of these issues by simply *being present with my kids in the morning*. It took me a while to come to this realization, but once I did and started showering and dressing before I tried to begin school, it made all the difference in how our days began.

A few tips

- Consider laying out your clothes the night before. If you have done The Review, then you know what you are up against tomorrow, and you can make decisions accordingly. If this is helpful to you, then make it a habit.
- Shower the night before if possible. If you are going to work out first thing leave yourself enough time to shower after finishing.
- Get dressed just enough to get school done. I don't try to do makeup or fix my hair first thing. I just slap on good-enough clothes to answer the door, or heaven forbid make a trip to the emergency room, a bit of moisturizer, and that is all. Then I can take a few minutes when school is done to get ready to leave for afternoon activities.

Helpful Links

- [SAHM Capsule Wardrobe](#)
- [Fly Lady on Getting Dressed](#)

"Daybreak is a never-ending glory; getting out of bed is a never ending nuisance."

G.K. Chesterton, *Apostle and the Wild Ducks and Other Essays*

Habit 5: Reward yourself

Why

Here's my big secret for getting out of bed a little bit before the kids. I allow myself to start the day with something I love. And you should too. If you are trying to start your day by doing something you hate to do, then you will never want to get up in the morning.

I love to start my day with coffee and quiet reading time (social media and Kindle books). For you it might be a run with the dog, working on the great American novel, knitting a sweater, or catching up on the *Gilmore Girls*. **Allow yourself a few minutes to do whatever makes you happy first.** No guilt. It will make it easier to get out of bed.

A few tips

- You only get as much time to do this as you gave yourself in the wake time formula. Once the kids are up you have to stop and get on with your day. Don't get so sucked in that you can't get back out, right?
- Make it easy. Set up the coffee maker the night before, gather your book or sneakers or crafting supplies, and put them where you want to be in the morning. The easier it is to slide into your enjoyable activity, the harder it is to keep hitting snooze.

"As well has been said, 'Sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.' "

Charlotte Mason, (Vol. 2, p. 124)

What happens next

Work on these five habits. Do them all starting today. Or if you need a slower pace, work on each one for a week before adding the next. Do whatever you need to do to **put them into action**. They will start to make a difference in your homeschool day.

It is possible that once you have these in place you will find yourself waking early and liking it. There are even days now where I don't mind working out first thing when I know it will be difficult to squeeze in later. I also enjoy an early-morning prayer and reading routine that I do before my other reading. And then there are times that I let things slide a little (usually during a school break) and have to spend time being intentional about these habits again.

It is also possible that you continue getting up just before the kids for years and only because you allow yourself that little morning reward. That's okay too. **Right now your most important task is to educate these little humans.** Setting the example of getting up early and getting the day off to a good start is an important way to do this.

Most importantly don't give up, ok? Email questions and comments to pam@edsnapshots.com. I would love to hear how you are doing.

About Pam

Pam Barnhill is the host of two popular podcasts -- *The Homeschool Snapshots Podcast* and *Your Morning Basket*. She lives in the Deep South with her husband and three kids, where she is the go-to lady for great curriculum recommendations or a just a pep talk on a rough day. She puts her penchant for finding awesome resources and her gift for breaking big tasks into small manageable steps to work at [Ed Snapshots](#), a helpful blog for homeschooling moms.

