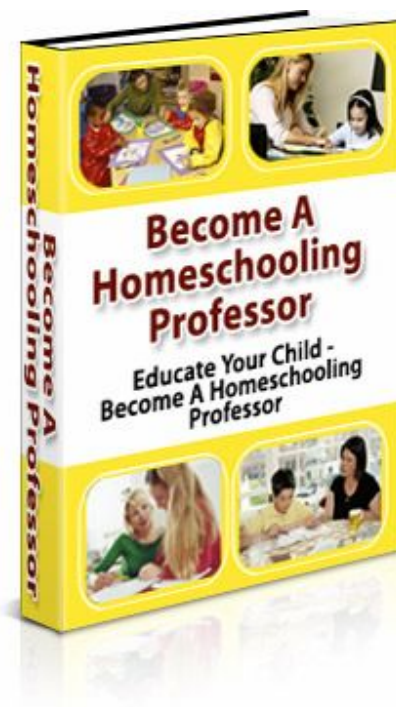


# BECOMING A HOME SCHOOLING PROFESSOR



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# INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth has been accepted to four different universities and is having problems choosing which one she prefers. The decision is made even more difficult because Elizabeth is just 15 years old.

Michael took his SAT test last Saturday. He scored 1560 out of 1600 including a perfect 800 in math. He's looking forward to finishing his schooling as he will be attending Harvard in the fall.

George has been invited to his local college to compete for five scholarships they are awarding amounting to full tuition for four years – about \$100,000 each. The scholarships are awarded based on academic ability and the competition is stiff every year. He's expected to finish first and have his schooling paid for.

What do all of these children have in common? All have been home schooled.

At one time, home schooling was associated only with religious and political choices in an attempt to stand up to the government-regulated public school system. Today, however, more and more children are being home schooled for a variety of reasons.

It's difficult to obtain accurate statistics on this phenomenon, but advocates estimate that as many as 1.5 million children are receiving their education at home with their parents as their teachers. The Federal Education Department estimated the total 10 years ago in the 750,000 range and will be revising their numbers to better reflect this new wave in schooling.

Why do people home school? There are a variety of reasons. Many choose to do so for religious reasons. Others are frustrated with the quality of their child's education and feel they can do much better. The rise in school violence is also a reason some home schooling parents give for wanting their children educated at home.

Whatever the reason, studies show that home schooled children are, in general, getting a better education as is reflected in test scores throughout the country.

Home schooling is also a controversial subject. Opponents feel like children who are schooled at home lack the social skills of peers their age. They feel these kids are missing out on an important aspect of education that leaves them ill-prepared for the real world when they are put back into the educational system in college.

In this book, we'll look at home schooling from a professional standpoint as a valid option for providing your child with the best education you can. Home schooling is more than just giving your kid a book and telling them to read it.

There are tried and true techniques as well as materials that will insure you are doing the right things when you decide to educate your child at home. We've gathered some of the best information we can find for you and given you some excellent sources and suggestions for ways to make your child's experience exciting and beneficial.

Welcome to Professor Home School!

# HOMESCHOOLING BY THE NUMBERS

While many people are bored by statistics, the home school phenomenon gives us a better idea of whether or not the choice is right for you. We think you'll be amazed at what the numbers can tell us.

First and foremost, let's look at test scores. There is no blanket federal regulation for children who are home schooled with regards to standardized testing. The laws vary from state to state, so judging effectiveness in younger grades is difficult.

However, since almost all colleges require test scores from either the SAT or the ACT, we can gauge how effective home schooling is from this type of test score. How do these kids measure up? The answer is amazingly superior.

With the ACT test, a perfect score is 36. The publicly educated student will average a score of 21. Home schooled children average a 23. On the SAT, a perfect score is 1,600. Home schoolers average a score of 1,083 as compared to their traditional peers' score of 1,016.

Some people don't think the difference is enough to justify home schooling their child, but advocates say that when it comes to education, the more advantages you can give your kid, the better off they'll be. Even if it's only a few points, those few points could make a huge difference in what school they'll be attending.

Eighteen percent of home schooling families have an annual household income of less than \$25,000. Forty-four percent average an annual income of between \$25,000 and

\$49,000. These statistics alone de-bunk the myth of a correlation between high family income and high test scores.

Statistics also indicate that home schoolers are no longer rural white fundamentalists. While 75% of families do attend regular religious services, the face of the home schooled child is much different than the typical stereotype. Almost 4% are African-American and another 4% are Hispanic.

Home schooled students also have parents who are much more educated than the national norm. This could contribute to the quality of education they receive when instructed by their parents.

Some opponents feel that any numbers on home schooling don't effectively cover all students. While the high test scores may show the top-tier of performance, they may not accurately reflect the bottom tier. They say that these numbers don't take into account those students who are not getting a good education at home.

While this may be true, once in college, the home schooled child consistently maintains a higher GPA than their publicly educated peers. Something is happening here that simply can't be denied: home schooling works when it's done right.

The decision to home school is a very personal one that must be examined carefully before undertaking. This decision must be made by all family members including the children themselves.

# MAKING THE DECISION TO HOME SCHOOL

For many families, home schooling just isn't a possibility. With more and more parents working to support the family along with single-parent households who don't have the luxury of staying home to school their kids, even if you do feel home schooling is best for your child, it's just out of the realm of reality.

However, when you do find yourself in the position to be able to make the choice, there are many things you need to know about before deciding to accept responsibility for your child's education.

First and foremost, you need to know that home schooling tends to take up a lot of time in your day. It is more than just sitting down with books for a couple of hours. There are experiments and projects to be done, lessons to prepare, papers to grade, field trips, park days, music lessons, and the list goes on.

It can be much like a full-time job, but this is your child's education, so making that kind of commitment needs to be fully understood in order for them to actually benefit. Having a set schedule helps manage the time you do have, and we'll cover possible schedules for you to consider in a later chapter.

Home schooling does require a certain amount of personal sacrifice for the parent. The home school parent has little personal time or time alone. If care is not taken to set aside time for yourself, it is easy to never have time alone. Parent and child are together nearly all the time. That can be extremely stressful, so make sure you'll be able to schedule time for yourself.

There is a bit of financial strain on the family unit as well. Home schooling can be accomplished very inexpensively; however, it usually requires that the teaching parent will not be working out of the home. Some sacrifices will need to be made if the family is used to two incomes.

Because school will be at home, your child will not have as many opportunities to make friends and develop socially. More attention will need to be given to getting your children together with others. The beauty of home schooling is being able to have more control of the social contacts your child makes. This is where the home school support group can become a lifeline.

Life requires a certain amount of mundane work in order to maintain an orderly household. Housework and laundry still have to be done, but it probably won't get done first thing in the morning. If you are a stickler for a spotless house, you might be in for a surprise. Not only does housework need to be let go at times, but home schooling creates messes and clutter in itself. Relax your expectations and make school the first priority and housework a later one.

All family members should be included in the decision to home school. Some authoritarian parents may disagree with this concept, but when you have everyone in the household's support, your job as teacher will be much easier.

It is important that both parents agree to try home schooling. It is very difficult to home school if one parent is against it. If your spouse is against it at this time, try doing more research and talking to more people so that you will be armed with as much information as possible to bring your spouse around to your thinking.



A willing student is also always helpful. Ask your child how he or she feels about being schooled at home. Ultimately, the decision is the parent's to make, but if your child is dead against it, you might have a hard time being effective.

Most parents take home schooling one year at a time. There's no need to become overwhelmed at a lifelong commitment. Circumstances change, and public school is always going to be there if you find that home schooling is no longer an option for you.

Some parents who truly feel that their child should get their education at home are intimidated, even scared, that they won't be an effective teacher. The truth is that if you can read and write, you can teach your child. The curriculum and teacher materials will help through the planning and teaching. Get help from others if you get stuck or hire tutors for the difficult subjects.

Plus, there are so many resources out there for parents who are teaching their child, you'll be hard pressed to be completely clueless when it comes to certain topics. Of course, we'll have a separate chapter on where to find these resources, but rest assured that the information you need is out there for the taking.

Talk to other people who have experience with home schooling. Listen to the reasons why they made this decision themselves and how they feel it is working out. They can become part of your support system as well, so it's good to make the initial contacts BEFORE you decide rather than after.

I'm a big fan of the pro/con list. Divide a piece of paper in half with a line down the middle of the sheet. Label one column "Pros" and list all of the advantages of home schooling. Label the other column "Cons" and list the

disadvantages. This should give you a better idea of whether or not your mind and heart are in the right place.

Consider some of the following when making your list:

### Advantages:

- Parents know their child better than any other teacher could. Because of this, parents can custom-tailor the learning experience. Your children's interests, abilities and learning styles can be accommodated.
- Home schooling gives a family more time-- to be together, to strengthen relationships, and to share values and ideas. Many families find that learning at home takes less time than learning at school.

There are some school activities that take away learning time from children. When you regain that time by schooling at home, this allows your child to learn more and pursue personal interests. Plus, they can move at a quicker pace than in the traditional classroom. Simple but life enriching activities such as reading can be reclaimed and put to educational use.

- Many children who are publicly schooled sometimes find the noisy, crowded environment in a classroom stressful. Recurring stomachaches, headaches, and anxiety may all improve in a happy, peaceful home environment.
- Beyond the traditional subjects taught in school, children can obtain life skills, such as managing money, cooking, and carpentry, by participating in real activities required at home.

- Contrary to what many opponents feel, home schooled children can become better socialized than their peers. They are not confined to the same-age-only relationships of the school setting, so they have more experience in getting along with people of all ages.
- Finally, and the bottom line for many prospective home schoolers is that home offers a degree of safety that no school system can provide. Drugs, alcohol, violence, peer pressure are all absent in the home setting as opposed to the school setting.

### Disadvantages:

- The awesome responsibility for education rests squarely where most home schoolers believe it should: on the family's shoulders. Many people may be unwilling or unable to assume the responsibility, and would prefer that it be left to others.
- The increased "togetherness" is a bitter pill to swallow for some. Fortunately, many find that home schooling is a positive, relationship-healing process. Over time, both the children and parents change, relax, and come to enjoy being together in a way that is not possible for those families who are able to only spend leftover snippets of time together.
- Home schooling takes more effort than sending children to school. In addition to basic subjects, energy is required to stay informed about and engaged in activities and opportunities, legislation, and home schooling methods and ideas.
- Your home will look very different when you home school. Some people find this to be much more difficult

than they expect – especially when they are used to “a place for everything and everything in its place” mentality.

- You could be subject to some intense criticism from family, friends, and society in general. Be prepared for this and arm yourself with information. Remember why you want to home school and remain committed to your decision.

So, you’ve decided to go ahead and dive into home schooling. There’s a lot to take care of now and many people wonder just where should they start?

## HOW TO START

The first thing you should look into is the home schooling laws for your state. Laws vary and you must know what is required of you when you become your child’s educator. We hope you’ve found a local home schooling support group already. Check with them to see what they’ve learned regarding legal issues in your state.

In some places there are requirements that you inform the government of your intent to home school in order to avoid truancy questions. In some areas you may declare your home a private school and thereby be exempt from government interference. In other areas, you must be supervised by a cover school.

There is actually an organization called the Home school Legal Defense Association that can be very beneficial to you as a new home schooler. Check out their website at [www.hslda.org](http://www.hslda.org) to get information on legal issues that face

home schoolers. Specific state requirements can be found here as well.

If your child has been attending public school, you'll want to notify the school – in writing – that your child will be switching to home schooling. Notify them as soon as you've made the decision. By conveying this information in writing, you'll avoid any problem with truancy laws in your state.

If your child has never been enrolled in your school district, no notification, registration, or reporting to anyone is necessary. Hard to believe, but true. If you're uneasy about this, however, feel free to contact your local school district and let them know you are a home schooler.

Once your child has been officially withdrawn from the school system, public education system officials (including the Board of Education, the superintendent, the principal, and teachers) have no jurisdiction over your home schooled child.

School officials have no right, without a court order, to enter your home, or to review your lesson plans, assignments, or curriculum materials. Home schoolers are not required to provide any such materials at any time.

In the event that you haven't already found a support group, we strongly urge you to make this your second step in the process. Most areas will have at least one local group you can turn to and become a member of.

Generally, support groups offer encouragement and help along the way. They can help with choosing curriculum, record keeping, meeting the state laws, and providing opportunities and activities for your child.

The website [about.com](http://about.com) provides a great list of support groups by state. The web address is:

<http://homeschooling.about.com/od/supportgroupsbystate/a/sgusa.htm?terms=homeschool+support%20groups>

This is not a comprehensive list, but it's a great place to start!

There are so many other issues that need to be addressed in getting started home schooling your child. Each of these is important enough to deserve their own chapter in this book, so we'll address each issue individually.

After you've taken care of the legal stuff, you need to focus on your child and helping him or her make the transition from public school to a home school. In home schooling circles, this is referred to as de-schooling.

## DE-SCHOOLING

Home schoolers who have withdrawn a child from school often find a time of "de-schooling" to be beneficial. The term "de-schooling" or "refreshment" has come to mean the process of reawakening the child's natural curiosity and interest in learning, by reducing or entirely removing enforced, coercive, and compulsory learning and formal academics.

This approach can help children "decompress" from any stresses of their previous learning experiences and begin to think about learning in a different way. The time recommended varies, but one recommendation is one month of de-schooling for every year the children have been in school. Parents know their own children best, however, and different families will make different choices about this adjustment time.

If your child has had a bad experience in a public school, they are most likely going to balk at anything that

even resembles schooling. They will be almost overcome with a sense of uneasiness that they are unable to effectively express in words. This can be interpreted as rebellion if you don't understand why they are reacting this way.

This could be one of the most important parts of starting your home school experience. The time spent de-schooling will vary from child to child. Depending on how long they were in public school, the whole process could take anywhere from two minutes to two months. Your child will let you know when they are ready to start learning again.

Take it slow and be understanding of how they feel. Don't try to rush the process just because you're ready to get started. If you do this, you'll be pulling out your hair in frustration trying to figure out why this whole home school thing isn't working.

Remember that this type of reaction is normal and won't last forever. In fact, de-schooling can be just as beneficial for parents as children. It's a way for you to forget what you know about teaching and learning so that you can open up your mind to your child and how he or she best learns. There is no cookie cutter mold for teaching and adaptations need to be made according to your child's specific learning style.

The easy way to approach de-schooling is to just stop. You need to stop thinking in "school terms". Stop acting like a teacher. Stop talking about learning as though it's separate from life. We learn every day whether we realize it or not. When you approach school as just life experience, you and your child will learn much easier.

Remember that you have been your child's teacher from the day they were born. You taught them to eat, you

taught them to talk, you taught them to walk. You've been teaching them sub-consciously and there's no reason for you to stop now.

Even as parents leave school to teach their children at home, there is a longing for the old way. Curriculum, learning through workbooks and directives, checking of learning lists, "keeping up", and making sure that kids learn "everything that's important" are concepts that are deeply rooted in our American psyche. Giving any of these up is like going cold turkey to give up shopping.

If you can't go cold turkey, and you just can't imagine a life without at least a little of the school ways that are a part of our culture, don't give these things up. Don't turn away from what you've always known. Keep all the stuff you like about school in your pocket. Don't go cold turkey (well, unless you know you're the kind of person who does better this way). De-school gently.

In fact, when you start de-schooling, there are a lot of old ways of thinking you must let go of. It's not always easy – in fact, it can be downright difficult. Most of us have had school protocol and procedures pounded into our brains for years.

But you've made the decision to home school. What else should you let go of? The answer is – a lot!

Get away from the mindset that there are certain things that you child should learn. Yes, No Child Left Behind has put a new spotlight on standards and learning objectives, but don't get caught up in them. Those are school directives, not your child's directives.

Your child has his or her own directives. However, it's hard to completely let go of the idea of what a child is supposed to learn. So, keep your directives. But let go of the "when" your child has to learn it. Yes, your child needs to



learn the multiplication tables, but it doesn't have to be done by a certain age like the public schools dictate.

Perhaps they're ready at first grade; maybe they're not ready until fifth grade. Dump the thinking that there are certain times when learning must occur. Let your child tell you when it's time and everyone will be happy.

Most schools use checklists. The thing is that they use these checklists to tick off what they're teaching, not what the kids are learning. Schools have to spend a lot of time making and checking off lists, because kids take their own sweet time learning what they have to teach, and because they have a *lot* of people to report statistics to.

Home schoolers can still make lists and check them off, but instead of focusing on what kids learn or what has been taught, make lists of what you want to do, and what you have done. Then leave it open as to what everyone's going to get out of it intellectually.

Often times, the things we think our children will learn are quite different than what they actually assimilate. If we focus on doing stuff, and let our kids learn what they are ready for, then we can make our lists as long as we want.

Another concept you should let go of is the urge to compare your child to others his or her age. Your kids aren't in public school anymore, so there's no way to effectively compare them to anyone else. They are learning at their own pace which is dramatically different from the way their peers are learning.

If you want to compare your kids a year from now, after you've de-schooled a bit, that's OK. But during those first few months of de-schooling (or, adjusting to home schooling), give up the idea of comparing your kids to anyone else.

The comparison between children is one of the biggest deterrents to learning, and can create “educational blindness”, where it becomes hard to see the successes of our children compared to their own previous achievements. Ok, so this is hard to get rid of.

Don’t think of it as “never comparing again.” Think of it as putting the “keeping up” idea on the shelf...just for a few months. Then revisit it again after you’ve had time to get to know your children, read up on educational philosophies, and discover your own definition of success.

During the de-schooling process, it’s hard not to think that our children are learning ‘nothing’. We took them out of school so they could learn MORE, not LESS, right? Ok, take a deep breath... education is a *long-term* process.

We want our children to be happy in their lives, successful and self-confident. These are the important things. Without these things, the quantity of what they know gives them nothing. So, drop the school subjects of learning and focus on the fundamentals that are required before a child can really learn in harmony and work towards his life success.

Focus on self-esteem, confidence, knowing yourself, knowing each other, understanding how the world works, knowing how to access information, how to make decisions and how to be compassionate for the people in the world.

You may have different things for your list of fundamentals, but the concept is the same. Focus on these FIRST. Then, once that is covered, go back to figuring out how to cover all the academic topics. But in doing that, don’t leave behind the fundamentals.

De-schooling is not giving up everything and doing nothing. De-schooling is a focus shift. You can do it “cold

turkey", or do it gently. But definitely do it. Give yourself space. There is no rush in life.

We live in a country where the only limit to education is our own self-defeatist perspective. Any person of any age can gain knowledge. But once a person's self-confidence and introspective compassion is lost, that is extremely hard to regain later.

Slow down, enjoy life and learn to live better everyday. The learning will come, in your own way. If you don't give it at least a little space in the beginning, it will be hard to see the forest through the trees.

You can find learning experiences anywhere. This is especially important during the de-schooling process. Visit a museum, attend a concert, go to the library and browse the books during this time. Play games, read aloud, or just sit and talk with your child. Tell them about your past, have them share their feelings and ask questions.

Above all, to be an effective teacher, you need to listen and react. During de-schooling, listen to your child and gradually introduce school to them in a friendly environment.

Speaking of environment, you will need learning space when you start to home school.

## THE LAYOUT

The general concept of home schooling embraces the fact that there is no one right way to teach or to learn. You need to be flexible to be effective, and the same applies for your learning space. Your home will need to be modified, in a way, so that home schooling can begin.

Organization is an important factor of a successful school year. If your household and school rooms are both organized, you will have a much smoother and more enjoyable time with your home schooling.

Begin by getting rid of the junk that has accumulated over the years. If you haven't used it in awhile, you probably don't need it anymore. Be ruthless. You'll be glad you were in the long run.

Find a specific space to set up for a school area. Ideally, this would be a separate room in your home, but that's not always possible. Many home schoolers work at the kitchen table or in a place equipped with just a desk. The thing you need to remember is that home schooling is meant to be flexible.

Don't be rigid with your space. When you have a place where you only do work, you could be sending the wrong message to your child and instill in them a sense of dread when it comes school time. Remember that learning can occur anywhere at any time.

You may want to have a few brightly colored tubs to hold school supplies that can be brought out when it's time for learning. Set up a card table with folding chairs if you need extra space. With whatever space you have available, establish a school area and set up your supplies to be easily accessible and organized.

Make sure your space has good lighting and that each child has their own school supplies. Try a separate box or bin that can hold pens, pencils, paper, crayons, scissors, a ruler, etc. Give your child something of their own.

Along the same line of thought, give the teacher something as well. You should have a separate box or bin of your own to hold lesson plans, reward stickers, books, etc.

We're willing to bet that when you pull out your own box, your child will be eager to pull out theirs as well.

Once you have your space, you'll need to decide what and how you will be teaching.

## THE ABC'S

There are many different ways you can approach teaching your child. There are many learning styles as well as teaching styles, and you'll need to find which one works best with your child. If one doesn't seem to be getting results, switch to another.

Some educators believe that children learn best through doing. Others think instruction followed by practical application is the way to go. Still others take on an approach that combines all methods. Some children are auditory learners, others are visual. You need to determine how your child learns best and then capitalize on that.

Figure out your child's learning style and rejoice in their learning. Stop comparing them to a preconceived notion of having to learn XYZ by a certain grade or age. You are going to be with them a lot and you will know what they know and what they don't know right away. No need to worry that they will graduate missing something essential.

Once you get your child's learning style, it's much easier to pick how you will teach them as well as what you will teach them.

Here are a few ways for you to consider when organizing your curriculum.

- Traditional method - This approach uses structured subject times focused on working through textbooks and workbooks. This approach is very goal-oriented and extremely organized.
- Unit Study method - This approach integrates several subjects focused on one topic or theme. You can pick a topic that interests both you and your child and create learning opportunities with the same theme throughout all.
- Classical method - This approach teaches through classical languages, critical thinking skills and western civilizations.
- Un-schooling method - This approach surrounds the child with opportunities to learn in an unstructured environment. This can also be thought of as interest-initiated learning. With this method, your child will learn from real life experience. Children are encouraged to pursue their personal interests and glean learning opportunities from that.
- Community method - With this method, the child learns significant real-life lessons by participating in events outside the home. This method can include youth group activities, volunteer work, organized group situations, or church activities.
- Eclectic method - This approach picks and chooses from all the other approaches.

Once you know which teaching method your family will use, you are ready to look for the right curriculum. Remember to ask any veteran home schoolers in your area for advice on materials in your chosen method. However,

there are several websites and catalogs that will direct you to materials that match your needs.

In fact, there are so many home school teaching tools available now, you may be overwhelmed with your choices. Take a deep breath, remember the teaching style that you feel is right for you and use that as a guideline. Do not feel that you have to teach 12 subjects to your child right away.

At first, buy only what you need. It is easy to overbuy. Many home schoolers find the biggest challenge is to limit what you purchase for lessons. There are a lot of wonderful ideas, but do not set yourself up for disappointment by spreading yourself and your child too thin.

You will want to have what you really need on hand to teach each lesson. Just don't present too much information. This will just frustrate you and your child.

What should you have on hand initially? First and foremost, take stock of what you already have on hand. Most home schoolers have a limited income, so going out and buying a lot of school supplies isn't always possible.

Look around you and find resources you already own that you can incorporate into lessons every day. Books, writing materials, videos, and computer games can all be learning tools. What else will you need? Consider the following brief list:

- Markers
- Crayons
- Pencils
- Pens
- Loose Leaf Paper
- Construction Paper
- Scissors
- Rulers

- Glue
- Stapler
- Index Cards
- Hole Punch
- File Folders
- Various Craft Supplies

Once you have your supplies, the rest of the instruction will come from your experience and your imagination. Let your child help you as well. Have them express to you what interests them and plan lessons around their input.

If you have found a curriculum that you are sure will work for you, but it is a little out of your price range; look for used materials. With a little extra searching, you can usually find some very good deals online or at a local home school group's used book sale. If you know what you are looking for, do not be afraid of used merchandise.

Look on e-bay for some great deals. They are out there if you take the time to look!

It is best if you purchase your materials a month or two before you plan to use it for the first time. Prior purchase will give you time to look over the materials and plan your teaching strategy.

Most books are straight forward in presentation, but sometimes there are extra materials that are needed to optimize the learning. You will need the extra time to make sure that you have everything that you need. You will feel much more prepared if you take the time to familiarize yourself with the curriculum.

It is often recommended that new home schooling parents buy a curriculum ready made. This can be a good choice, but it can also be expensive. Start with a small one that is relatively inexpensive. This way, you can get a feel



for what it's like to teach a curriculum at home without wasting your money.

After a few months, you can decide whether you want more or less or even approach it in a different way. In any case, keep your mind open to learning new things - including coming to an understanding of the point of each exercise, whether it works for your child and the many different ways you can cover the same material.

Your curriculum is as limitless as your imagination. You can create learning experiences out of anything and find information anywhere to support what you want your child to learn. Don't feel like you have to rush out and break the bank on books that may ultimately prove to be a letdown.

Once you have done all of this, you are ready to begin teaching. However, do not limit yourself to only the books that you have purchased. Remember to utilize your local library and plan activities that might help a lesson become more real for your child.

You will find that learning is an around the clock activity. Use the teachable moments in your child's life and don't let them slip by just because they fall outside of 'school' time.

You are not teaching 20 kids and sticking to a schedule to say you completed something. What you want is to instill a love of learning in your child. When you learn with them, it's a valuable lesson.

At this point, you might be wondering where you can come across the information we've been talking about. You can find teaching materials everywhere!

# FINDING YOUR INFORMATION

With home schooling become a trend in the U.S. and throughout the world, the availability of materials these days is almost endless. There are many, many place where educational materials can be bought or even procured for free! When you look around, you will find all sorts of things you can use.

Start with teacher stores. You don't have to have teaching certification to walk through the door. Go in, look around, and find opportunities galore! These are the places where educators go for information, you should too. Besides carrying many, many books you can teach from, they also provide motivational materials, organizational aids, and so much more.

Your local library is a logical place to turn to as well. Many public libraries have begun to order information tailored specifically to home schoolers. These materials include lesson planning books, workbooks, assessments, and unit plans. All are available to you for free.

The Internet is probably going to be your best resource for information both about curriculum and instruction. You will also be able to find some great home schooling support groups online.

When using the Internet for information, please be sure to check that the website you are taking information from is accurate and up-to-date. While there is a plethora of information right there at your fingertips, there is also a lot of outdated and downright wrong information as well. When you're teaching your child, you certainly want to teach him or her the accurate things and not the wrong things.

There is no one "best curriculum" that is perfect for everyone. Each resource on the market has its advocates--you can usually find someone somewhere who thinks any given item is "the best." Asking other home schoolers *why* they like or dislike a given resource may help you discover whether it would work for your one-of-a-kind family.

In addition to talking with other home schoolers, you may find it helpful to read some of the books describing home schooling materials. They are at your local bookstore and can be invaluable resources to you.

Choosing among the many good resources available can be challenging. To get the most value from materials, families must judge resources for themselves, and base choices on family values, needs, educational philosophies and their children's learning styles.

While some people choose to home school so that their child doesn't have to adhere to a schedule like in the public schools, it is still important for you to have a schedule.

## TIME FOR SCHOOL

There is no typical home school day. What you do and when you do it is entirely up to you and your child. You may find a teachable moment at bedtime; you might find it at 2 a.m.

We're not advocating waking your child in the middle of the night, but the point is that even though there are teachable moments everywhere, you still need to have some sort of schedule to start with if you want to be a good teacher for your child.

Start by setting a starting and ending time for lessons. Schedule in time for lunch, play time, and breaks for both

you and your child. If you are toiling away endlessly at math with no end in sight, it makes for a tedious day.

Plan the most rigorous work when your child is at their freshest. That's not necessarily first thing in the morning, and it's definitely not the last activity of the day. Mid-morning is a good place to start. Just be aware of your child and his or her moods. When they seem to be really paying attention, start the math or English lesson then.

Hands-on projects are good to do in the afternoon. After spending time learning fractions and adverbs, art projects or science experiments are a fun way to help your child relax and de-stress.

Allot time for each individual subject or just generalize time slots. For example, have academics in morning and projects after lunch.

The reality is that kids like schedules. Kids feel safe with schedules. Kids feel more in control with schedules. When your child knows what to expect, he or she can better prepare for what's in store without wondering what comes next.

More than anything be flexible. Don't let the schedule control you. It's supposed to simply be a guideline to help you accomplish daily tasks. You may have to try many different schedules to find one that works the best.

You may wonder just how it is you will get everything done. Not only the school part, but the house part as well. Believe us, it is possible.

# EVERYDAY LIFE

Schoolwork, housework, relationships, grocery shopping - the list of to do's can seem ominous at times. However, you can achieve a happy home and home school at the same time.

The first thing to remember is the people in your family are what make your home. Together you can work to achieve a comfortable level in your daily life.

Set routines as much as possible. Kids like routines and it makes your life easier. Guidelines and chore charts help everyone understand what must be done and what is expected of them. When everyone has a job to do and you work together, you are actually teaching. You are training your children disciplines for life.

Now, realize that there will be days when the house isn't touched. Perhaps you have a big project you want to complete or maybe you just want to spend a little extra time on a specific lesson.

Don't fret and don't stress. Your child is ready for learning, don't let that time pass you by. You will be so glad you are home to witness those moments

On days like that, keep the basic necessities in mind like lunch and dinner. However, there will be days when you choose to let some chores be dismissed. This is OK, but try to stay on top of the chores that will create more work if they are ignored. You may find that some of your plans do not work. Don't get discouraged - keep trying till you find a plan that does.

You will need to organize your household as well as household chores in a way that will be conducive to schooling. The key here is time management. You'll need

time to teach, but you don't want the housework to build up either.

Get rid of the clutter, as we said before. This will make your job much easier when it comes time to maintain your household.

Open mail with a trash can nearby so you can discard junk mail immediately. Have a specific place where you keep bills that need to be paid so you can take care of that during your bill paying time. Set aside time once a week to pay your bills and take advantage of online bill pay services. That alone will save you an amazing amount of time!

Set up a laundry area and teach everyone in the family to sort their own clothes. Have three laundry bins: whites, coloreds, and jeans. When the laundry is pre-sorted, you'll just be able to throw in a load a lot quicker.

Consider getting a cleaning cart. A lightweight cart on wheels with drawers is best. Hang a laundry bag on the side with clothespins or clips. This way, you'll spend less time going back and forth to rooms to put things away.

Have a beginning point and go around the house in a specific motion so you can cover the space you need to.

When you make a plan and a schedule, you'll have a better chance of making it all fit together.

One of the huge benefits of home schooling is that you don't have certain standards you must adhere to for certification or funding like the public schools do. Still, you might be wondering what exactly your child should be learning.

# THE THREE R'S

At one time, the only required subjects in school were religion, reading, and arithmetic. That was later revised to include science, and social studies. Today, the public schools have many different standards they must adhere to as far as curriculum is concerned. This includes physical education, health, and current events.

So what should you be including in this day and age for your child's education? Now that we are firmly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there's a lot more than reading, writing, and arithmetic that should be taught to our children.

Reading still ranks as an important skill – top of the list actually. Teach a child to read and comprehend the selection, and they will be much better prepared for the world. Have them read anything and everything. This includes newspapers, magazines, even cereal boxes. Suggest a minimum of at least 15 minutes a day of reading other than textbooks.

Let your child see you read for pleasure too. Children learn through what they see adults doing. When they see you read, they'll start to learn that there must be something pretty wonderful about it and begin to emulate you.

If your children read widely they'll learn a huge amount anyway. Encourage them to read non-fiction as well as fiction. There are excellent books around that really appeal to young children. There are also plenty of fiction books based in particular historic settings which give a better understanding of history than some text-books.

Even if your children don't like reading, you can still read to them. This is a wonderful way of drawing families closer and introducing your own childhood favorites - even

some teenagers still enjoy family reading time! Don't try to make the reading time 'educational', but choose a variety of classics, historical novels and contemporary fiction as it appeals to you all.

Complex arithmetic is no longer as essential as it was 100 years ago, with inexpensive calculators widely available. Far more important is to give your children an understanding of mathematical concepts which will enable them to use their calculators intelligently. Ability to reason is more important than arithmetic 'facts'.

Of course, you'll need to focus on the basics of math. That includes addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and fractions. Use whatever you can to get these often dry concepts across. When you're cooking, take the opportunity to illustrate fractions. Learning opportunities are everywhere when you look for them.

We are in the age of the Internet. Twenty years ago, computers were a new concept. Today, nearly every home has at least one computer. Learning to use these complex machines is essential for a well-rounded education.

Computer skills are likely to be learned intuitively if your children have access to a computer. There is no need for special child-oriented software unless you and your children particularly like it. Even very young children can use regular word processors to type letters and stories, and will quickly develop keyboard familiarity if you encourage them.

Children who struggle with the manual dexterity of writing with a pencil can become quickly confident in typing. Perhaps your child could type a weekly letter to a grandparent or friend, or write articles or stories to enter in competitions in magazines.

Computer games are actually an amazing way for your child to learn as well. Look for those games that can teach



concepts like history, math, and creative thinking. It's amazing how much history, geography and politics can be learned effortlessly from games like 'Sim City', 'Civilization II' and the like.

There are, of course, many specifically educational games for math and other skills, and some excellent reference CD-Roms. But begin with games that the family can enjoy together, and don't worry at first about educational value. As we've said before, learning can come through many venues. Kids can actually learn while they're having fun, so challenge them.

A wonderful way to teach math and technology is through construction toys. You may have a budding mechanical engineer on your hands. What better way to encourage their creativity than through class toys like Lego's, Lincoln Logs, and Tinker Toys.

Have them build a scale model of your house which would involve measuring, accurate drawing, scaling down etc. Show them how to estimate size and shape by using these building blocks. Let them be creative and design their own works of wonder.

Of course, you will need to make sure that your child is proficient in whatever he or she is studying. Let them dictate their lessons and lead you down the educational road. If they express an interest in algebra, by all means, let them study it. If they want to know more about global warming, find a way to enhance that.

A lot depends on your child's interests, what is available locally, and how many children you have. But the first few months of home education can be a wonderful opportunity for getting to know your neighborhood, spending lots of time at the library and any museums or other local places of interest.

Perhaps your children would like to get involved in helping at a local nursery, or old folks' home. Perhaps they'd like to join a group such as a Scouting organization or similar. If they like some sort of structure, try to plan one specific activity for each day to give a focus, or begin each morning with reading aloud, or playing a family board game.

If this isn't sufficient, you could try brainstorming together with your children to come up with a rough timetable that covers the mornings. If they want to continue academic studies immediately after leaving school, try choosing some interesting work books or text books from a local bookshop rather than buying a full curriculum immediately. Then make sure that your timetable is flexible, something to fall back on when nothing else happens rather than a rigid unchangeable plan for the day.

If you wake up some mornings and wonder what to do, feeling as if you should be doing something 'formal' - try widening your scope a bit, rather than thinking directly in terms of academic subjects. For instance my children have enjoyed: web-page design; writing stories/novels without my interference/help except when they ask for it; stamp collecting; programming; graphic design; art of various sorts; music - self-taught and from outside teachers.

Be sure to include some type of instruction in practical subjects as well. These can include manners, good behavior, grooming, and the like. Believe it or not, this is a learning opportunity for your child as well. The key here is to provide back up and reasoning. Don't just tell your child it's important that they brush their teeth. Give them reasons why and show them what can happen if they don't.

If you are concerned about your child learning those skills that are expected by the state, look at your state's Board of Education website. There you will find learning

standards listed that you can reference if you're truly concerned about subject matter.

In all actuality, however, if you approach learning as an all-encompassing activity and let your child guide you, they will learn what they need to and enhance their education on their own. You'd be surprised at what kids want to know about when you let them think creatively and make their own decisions on what they want to know.

In order to assimilate your child with peers, you may want to consider establishing a school identity, even though your school is in your home. This can give your child a sense of security and make them feel more normal in the eyes of society.

## YOUR SCHOOL

Your school identity can be as elaborate or simple as you like. The more you put into your school identity, the more unity and pride your kids will feel. At the very least, coming up with a school name will provide your children an easy answer when faced with the inevitable school question.

Be creative and put some thought into this process. This is not only fun for the kids, but it can be extremely beneficial in helping them establish their own identity as a student – even if it's not in a public school.

Start with a school name. This should probably include your family name or have something to do with family interests. Your school name can have a deep meaning or it can just be a fun way to express your family philosophy.

Design a school mascot and pick school colors. Just because your school isn't a public school doesn't mean you can't wear your school colors with pride. Consider designing

a logo that coincides with your school colors and mascot so you can put both on your school ID cards and stationary.

You are allowed to make up your own school ID cards. These are good to have so you can get discounts at places like movie theaters and other places. Design the cards on your home computer and purchase a home laminating kit. They are just as credible as an ID card from the local public school, so give your child a way to identify with a school – your school!

Have a school notebook too. Purchase a binder with the clear covering so that you can slide in a cover sheet. Print an enlarged logo or design to insert in the binder. Let your kids personalize their notebooks.

Take lots of pictures and memorialize your school year with a memory book. You can even use this as a teaching tool. Have on hand various scraps of construction paper for decoration and encourage your child to journal when describing the pictures on the page. It's a great way to help them be creative.

Make a school letterhead to have available whenever you need to correspond in a more official manner. Design on your computer and print on good quality paper. You can also make matching envelopes.

With all the software available, you can easily design and make your own school t-shirts with your school name, mascot or logo and personalized with the student's name. If your mascot is something readily available, you can simply buy T-shirts with the design already supplied and just add your school name with puff paints or other fabric paint.

Look online for places where you can purchase T-shirts and sweatshirts specifically designed for home schools.

Don't forget the yearbook. This is a great way to incorporate art into your curriculum. Take pictures from your school year and put them together in scrapbook format. Remember to take your child's formal portrait as a class member. This doesn't have to be done professionally either. Just take a great picture and feature it prominently.

Many parents are overwhelmed with the thought of becoming their child's primary educator. They have many doubts within themselves as to their capabilities. Do you feel this way too? It's alright, you're not alone!

## AM I QUALIFIED TO TEACH?

Being a teacher is so much more involved than just taking some classes and receiving a diploma. When you pursue a teaching degree, you are getting education about all sorts of different methods and strategies that apply to a classroom with more than 5 children.

When you undertake home schooling, you don't have to have these types of qualifications. You are a natural teacher for your child, and you should capitalize on that. Remember, we said, you've been a teacher since your child was born, there's no need for you to stop now.

There are no particular requirements needed to home school your children. In fact, most states don't even require you to have a high school diploma. Some places may ask that you take a specific course on how to home school, but in general, there are no special classes you need to continue to be your child's teacher.

The challenges some home schooling families face are incredible, yet still their children learn and thrive. These families have an inordinate amount of love and commitment

that serves to make them more cohesive and more capable than they were before they decided to home school.

Kids don't need geniuses or a team with teaching certificates. They need resourceful parents who will help them find the answers to their questions, who are willing to spend the bulk of each and every day with them, who will drive them to enrichment activities or over to their friends' houses, who don't obsess about test scores. They need parents who believe in them, who are confident enough to let them find their own destiny and help them be all they can be.

It's important for you to know and realize that many parents feel unsure of themselves when they undertake home schooling. Finding resources like books and support groups can help you overcome these issues and make you an effective educator.

There are bound to be times when you have to teach your child something you know very little about. Don't worry, it'll be fine. There are tons of resources to help you out along the way. There is no one in the world who knows about everything. But they muddle through just as you will.

Check with other home schooling families and see if you can team-teach. Contact local resources that can help you with information. Rent videos, find books, brush up yourself on subjects that you don't know much about. Learn along with your child.

Hire a tutor or solicit the help of a friend or family member who might know about the subject. Remember that every subject doesn't have to be mastered completely. You can find the general information and then work with your child to find the rest.

The bottom line is that "YES" you are qualified to teach your child. You know your child better than anyone, so you

are best qualified to teach them as well. Even if you have no idea how to conjugate verbs, have the commitment to learn and help your child learn as well. You have no idea how satisfying it is until you are doing it!

Part of education is keeping records. Those records include grades, lessons taught, and student progress. While you're not required to keep records, it's still a good idea to do so.

## KEEPING TRACK

There is no mandatory reporting system for home schoolers, nor are records or forms of any kind required by law in most states. Some families choose to use them, but attendance forms, grades, report cards, progress reports, curriculum forms, and school incorporation forms are NOT required for legal and successful home schooling.

If you choose to keep records, there are a variety of ways to keep them, ranging from charts with daily lesson plans, time spent on each subject, and grades, to writing daily, weekly, or monthly diary or journal entries.

Some families enjoy keeping a portfolio containing representative samples of their child's work. Another way to track progress is through standardized tests. None of these options are required; they are just examples of some of the many ways records can be kept. Families can determine for themselves what works best for them, and can be very creative in keeping track of accomplishments.

For college-bound students, it is probable that some documentation of educational pursuits will be necessary for college admission.

Some families keep some kind of record of the type of education being provided and each child's progress for at least 180 days of the year, to prove that the minimum requirements of the law are being met. However, it is extremely unlikely that the typical home schooling family would face a legal challenge.

If one arose, the burden of proof would rest with the state, which means that the state would have to *prove* that the law was not being met. The home schooling family would not have to prove compliance, although records might bring the case to a swifter conclusion. If truancy investigations, custody conflicts or other legal proceedings are a concern for your family, record-keeping may be a good idea.

It is neither necessary nor advisable to offer curriculum information, lesson plans, or other records to school districts or state officials. Seek an attorney's advice before giving records to anyone. As in similar legal situations, a search warrant is necessary for law enforcement agencies to enter your home or obtain your home schooling records.

Your records can be as simple as a daily journal or as elaborate as a purchased computer program or notebook system. If you are part of a support group or ISP, you probably will have set requirements and forms provided, but you will need to decide on how to keep track of your daily work to make reporting easier and more efficient.

Here are some of the most common types of records kept by home schooling parents.

- Journal - This can be done by the teacher or by the student. Basically, it's keeping a log of what was done and what was learned. It is also a good place to record the memorable events that happen throughout your home schooling years that would be forgotten



otherwise. This is a great resource for reminiscing later on.

- Daily planner – Lay out your assignments for the week in a teachers planning book. Then check them off as they are completed. You can also jot down other educational things you did, such as field trips, videos, projects, etc. in the planner. Quarterly, make a summary of what was completed and an overview of what was covered in each subject.
- Portfolios - Portfolios are a good system for child-led learning and unit studies. A portfolio is a collection of varied materials that show what the student has learned, experienced, and accomplished.
- Purchased Record Keeping Systems – Some of these are good and well worth their money. Try the Harris Home school Planner, but be prepared for a lot of copying.

The “Keepers At Home” organizer is also a good choice. It gives you freedom to personalize it by adding and taking away elements as you need to. The best part of this system is that you have all your paperwork in one spot and easily accessible.

There are certainly other systems out there if you do your research. You can even create your own record keeping system with something as simple as Microsoft Excel. Do what’s right for you.

Once you've made your choice on your record keeping method and obtained the necessary materials, be diligent in keeping it up. It is easier to record as you go than to play catch-up and try to remember what was done.

One of the most controversial aspects of home schooling involves the social development of the child. Your child doesn't have to exist in a vacuum. There are many opportunities for socialization when you go looking for them.

## MAKING FRIENDS

Known among home schoolers as "the S word," socialization concerns many home schoolers and their extended families. Most people think that children who are home schooled aren't given the social opportunities that their peers are thus making them almost "freaks". Nothing could be further from the truth.

This is where home schooling support groups come into play. These groups contain families who are just like you – and children who are like yours.

Many home schooling groups get together for group outings, picnics, parties, etc. These are all socializing activities. They give parents the opportunity to talk with other home schoolers and they give the kids a chance to be around others who are just like them.

You are not going to lock your child in the house and keep them from civilization as we know it. At least we hope you don't!

The socializing aspects of public school are more likely to be harmful to your child rather than helpful. For the most part, people tend to behave worse in large groups such as is found at school. There they learn something completely different: popularity, conformity, bullying, teasing.

The reality is that home schoolers can make friends in after-school activities, during vacations, at church, and just

in the neighborhood. Children learn to get along with others through relationships with people of all ages.

Many home schoolers develop these relationships through volunteering, participating in support groups or co-ops, or exploring shared interests with others.

Opponents of home schooling are concerned that these children are also missing out on important school activities – especially in the secondary years. These activities include organized sports, homecoming, prom, and organizations like speech team, debate, student council, etc.

While some schools do allow home schooled children to participate in their activities, still others do not. There is no legal requirement for public schools to offer classes "a la carte," nor is there an incentive for them to do so, since home schooled students cannot be counted for funding purposes.

However, some schools will allow home schooled students to participate in selected academic or extracurricular classes; whether *your child* will be embraced or rejected will be based solely on the whims of school administrators.

Even if school administrators in your area are receptive to home school part-timers, your child may still not be eligible to play or perform in competitions. Most public schools, and some private schools, voluntarily join a private rule-making organization which prohibits home schooler participation in state sanctioned events and competitions.

These rules generally apply to seventh through twelfth grade students in member schools. When schools opt (and pay) to join the organization, they accept the rules and governance of such organization, and in so doing, gain the right to compete against other member schools, and to compete (subject to rules) in district, region and state

contests, play-offs and championships for sports, vocal music, band, orchestra, speech, drama and cheerleading.

Under organization rules, home schoolers are prohibited from competitive events because they do not attend member schools 90 percent of the time. Generally, home schools are ineligible to *become* member schools under the constitution of the organizations thus exempting home schooled students to partake of these events.

Really, it is up to the individual school districts. When it comes to organized sports, your home schooled child will probably not get to participate. When it comes to school dances, you have a better chance.

Contact your local school board or school superintendent and ask if your child can participate in school events. But be prepared for the answer to be "No". There are worse things that can happen!

So what about graduation? When it comes to home schooling, you will decide when your child has graduated. Since home schoolers must be provided an education "equivalent to that afforded by the state," parents may find it helpful to look at their state's Board of Education requirements for public school students to determine your child's readiness.

There are no tests to undergo, no forms to complete, and no home school agencies to report to. Home schooling is a choice just as graduation is for your home schooled child.

When you decide your child is ready to graduate or move to a new phase of life, if you would like to mark the occasion, you have several options. Some home school support groups offer graduation ceremonies for seniors, and you're always free to hold your own special family ceremony or party, or join with others in your area to create a group

graduation ceremony. Some dispense with graduation ceremonies altogether.

There are several ways that people can seamlessly move into the next phase of their lives. Some ideas for those approaching nest-leaving time are: taking college classes part-time, or while still completing high school work; working part-time or full-time; volunteering; or serving as an apprentice.

How do home schoolers get a high school diploma? Diplomas can be divided into two categories: those offered by accredited schools, and those offered by unaccredited schools.

Sometimes the phrases "accredited diploma" and "unaccredited diploma" are used as shortcuts, but the accreditation actually refers to the school issuing the diploma. Schools offering accredited diplomas have paid an accrediting organization to review and rate school practices and curriculum. Homemade diplomas, and some private school diplomas, are unaccredited.

Some institutions, such as the US military, have traditionally regarded unaccredited diplomas as second-rate. Other institutions, including some of the Ivy League colleges, do not require a diploma of any type.

Determining if an accredited diploma will be important to your child takes both communication and research. First, determine which opportunities your child might like to pursue after home schooling. Next, make contact with prospective colleges, universities, apprenticeship programs or other places of interest, and ask if an accredited diploma is required.

If you find that an accredited diploma is important to your child, there are some distance learning schools that can offer your child an accredited diploma. Look into these

options only if absolutely necessary. If a diploma from an accredited school isn't needed, you can create a homemade diploma for your child.

Ironically, most colleges do not require a high school diploma. Some do require a diploma or transcript from an accredited institution. Still others require ACT or SAT testing and a transcript.

If your child is college-bound, it is a good idea to check for requirements at the particular institutions your child is interested in. Once you know the requirements, you can take steps to meet the requirements, attempt to negotiate the requirements, or seek colleges whose requirements are attainable by your child.

Like prom and homecoming, graduation can be an important part of the schooling process. If this is something you and your child feel you need to have, contact your local school and ask if your child can walk the stage with others their age. Many will agree to it since it's simply a ceremony anyway.

Another option for your home schooled child is to get a GED. The GED, General Educational Development program, (not general equivalency diploma, as is commonly believed) is available to adults. Sixteen and seventeen year olds who want to take a GED test should contact their State Department of Education.

Adults who pass the GED test are awarded a Certificate of High School Equivalency. The GED Certificate may be helpful in gaining admission to postsecondary education, and job training or placement, although the value it offers home schoolers varies, based on future plans of the individual.

Many home schoolers do take the GED to fulfill college entrance requirements, but increasingly, home schoolers are steering clear of the GED because of the "drop-out" stigma

attached. There have been reports of home schoolers with GED certificates being held to a higher standard than home schoolers with diplomas from accredited *or* non-accredited institutions.

Obtaining a GED isn't always in everyone's best interest; check with places of interest, such as candidate colleges, workplaces, or the military to be sure that having a GED will help, rather than hurt your child.

The issue of whether or not to obtain a GED is one that must be carefully studied, especially if a military career is planned. During a trial period, the US government is conducting a pilot program that grants home schoolers higher status than GED recipients.

Military recruits are categorized into tiers, with the Tier II pool of candidates traditionally containing GED recipients, correspondence school graduates and home schoolers. Few Tier II candidates are recruited, and even fewer receive the special considerations offered to Tier I candidates.

Tier I recruits, who have a diploma from an accredited high school, have been the most sought after group. Tier I recruits are considered to be less likely to drop out of the service, and are eligible for specialized training, enlistment bonuses and educational incentives.

A pilot program is currently underway to accept home schoolers with diplomas and transcripts (from unaccredited institutions--like home) as Tier I candidates. Ending prior to 2004, the pilot program will evaluate the effectiveness of this practice, and will decide whether Tier I status should be granted to home schoolers on a continuing basis.

It's a very personal decision you've made to home school your child. However, you also need to consider what type of stigma will be attached to them in terms of their

peers. If they stick to friends from your home schooling group, they will have allies in kids who are just like them.

Once they get to a certain age, it might be much more difficult for them to accept that they aren't like others. Listen to what they have to say about how they feel when this situation arises. It might be better for you to allow them back into the public school system. If, for nothing else, it will make it easier for them to feel like a normal part of society.

Just like public school, there are difficulties that arise in every child's educational process. Because it's you and your child, these difficulties might seem overwhelming.

## WHEN PROBLEMS OCCUR

You have started home schooling your children, but things are not going exactly as you dreamed. In your dreams, your children had been hanging on your every word loving every minute of learning with big smiles on their faces.

In reality, there are days you wonder if they heard one word you said because of the blank stares that return your gaze. Honestly, some areas of learning seem to be going great, while others don't seem to be working at all. Your house looks as if a study on explosives got out of hand. And your biggest question is - Is all of this my children's fault or mine?

Take heart! You are not alone. These same situations occur in public schools as well. All teachers have bad days. These days make you wonder whether or not anything that you've said was even heard or if your lessons are falling on deaf ears.



Try not to be discouraged on these days. All time spent with your children is teaching time even if it's not all textbook time. Many people feel discouraged at one point or another. Just take a moment and remember why you wanted to home school in the first place. Allow yourself this difficult time and wait for the next "AHA" moment!

If you think that every day is a difficult day, it's time to evaluate your processes in schooling your children. Is this trouble occurring in just one subject or in every subject? Does it happen every day or only certain days? Is it during one time of the day or just at random times? All of these questions are important because the answers can help pinpoint where the problem lies.

If a certain subject is causing your home school to seem like prison, maybe your child is weak in this area. It might help to slow the pace in this subject temporarily or permanently. Try slowing the pace at your house and see if that helps the learning process go more smoothly.

Watch and adjust to your child in this subject. Pushing ahead when your child has no understanding only frustrates you both. Remember that home schooling is flexible for your child's learning needs. Take advantage of this benefit and help yourself and your child have less stress each day.

If after slowing the pace, you still feel your child is struggling in the subject; maybe you should try a different book or program. Know that not everything you purchase will work out for your family and that it is okay.

Sometimes a different book will approach the subject in a different way which is easier for your child to understand. Don't feel like you have failed if you have to change books, just realize that you now know a little bit more about how your child learns.

If all of your subjects are going poorly, however, then you need to dig a little deeper.

Are you allowing too many interruptions in the school day? If the phone rings during school, do you answer it? Is the TV on during school? Are you trying to get other things done while you are home schooling?

It is extremely difficult to do other things while school is in session and have success. Sure, it is hard not to pick up the phone when it rings. But whoever is calling will either leave a message or call back if it's truly important.

Consider having a no phone, no TV, and no visitors rule during school time. This will not only increase your child's concentration, but yours as well. Of course, there are times when emergencies occur and the day has to be a little mixed up.

On normal days, however, keep the priority on school. This will actually help school move more quickly and effectively, giving you time later for the other things.

If things aren't going as you planned, you should also critically evaluate whether or not you are fully prepared for the school day. Do you know what school work is being done this week? If your children are studying a subject in science, have you read a little about it?

Now you do not have to be prepared for every question that comes from their lips. However, you should be prepared for most of the questions. If all you can do is read ahead a chapter in the book your child is reading, then that little bit will help.

If your child finds that you know very few answers to the questions, then he or she might stop asking. Admit your ignorance when you don't know, but don't stop there! Help your child find the answer. You will be learning together! It can be a lot of fun!

At regular intervals, evaluate the learning process that goes on in your home. You may need to re-do your schedule and cut out bad habits that arise by surprise. Children change and so do their needs. Let the curriculum and the schedule reflect your child's unique and individual needs and abilities.

As home school parents, you should be learning alongside your children. If you don't learn and adjust, your children may be just as stubborn with their learning. Remember the relationships of home schooling matter a great deal.

You are privileged to teach your children subjects such as math, reading, history and science; yet you teach them much more about life by your attitudes, actions and responses. Keep this foremost in your mind – especially when you are having difficulties. It can make the most difference of all!

When you are faced with difficult times in your home schooling experience, consider the following points:

1. Remind yourself of the reasons your family chose to home school in the first place. In most cases it is to have more time together.
2. When home schooling isn't working, hold family meetings to find out where the problems lie and how to fix them. The solutions to these problems are within the family not within a neighborhood school.
3. Establish family traditions so that your children can count on them as a regular event in their lives. Practice daily reading aloud as the most important component of your family traditions; it's the best method for teaching any subject.

4. Celebrate unusual holidays and incorporate the history into your home school. For example: February 7th is Laura Ingalls Wilder's birthday; March 15th is National Buzzard Day; and April 23rd is the birthday and day of death for William Shakespeare. Weaving events and celebrations into your study will bring interest and creativity.
5. Always ask your children what they want to study. So often the conflict in home schooling is created by children being coerced into assignments they have no interest in doing. Trust yourself to help them find the way and trust your children to learn through their own passions.
6. Give yourself permission to free the children of a curriculum or program if it isn't working. A plan that has everyone stressed out, crying, and fighting is not a good plan at all.
7. Accept chaos as normal! If you wait to home school until life is neat and tidy, it will never happen. The most teachable moments are usually in the middle of bedlam.
8. Determine your child's learning style so that you are sure you are teaching the weakest subjects using their strongest style of learning.
9. Comparing our children to those who are schooled traditionally only creates defeat and poor self-esteem in your child and in you. Home schoolers learn differently; our freedom to learn in our own way is our key to success.
10. Have faith in your family and faith in your conviction to home school. Stay in touch with your

support group for enrichment and good ideas.

11. Take a break! If home schooling isn't working, drop what you are doing and go to the park and play. Breathing in fresh air can lend itself to a fresh perspective on everyone's attitude.
12. Parents must fill up their pitchers before they can fill up their children's cups. Do something for yourself. Go to the library alone for a change. Try having dinner with your best friend, go see a play, or take a dance class just for you. If we are running on empty, we have nothing to give our families.

As we've said countless times, the decision to home school is a very personal one. There will still be people who feel they need to give you their opinions anyway.

## I KNOW IT'S NONE OF MY BUSINESS, BUT....

Several years ago, home schooling wasn't generally thought of as an option for the typical American family. The time was when the only children who were home schooled had parents who were members of extremist religions or political groups. As the trend became more and more publicized, scrutiny was bound to come.

Now, the home schooling lifestyle is centered firmly in the public eye. Now everyone has an opinion. And everyone expects home schoolers to have a response to the question of why they made the choice they did.

Each situation, and each family, has its own perspective. Criticism often comes from different directions,

and each instance requires a different strategy to turn that criticism into support. The best responses include the a combination of confidence, humility, information, and alliances.

You may be surprised to know that much of the worst criticism will come from your own family members. There are very few home schooling families who have not been questioned by their own relatives about this very personal decision.

Unfortunately, this is quite logical and happens over larger and similar life choice issues. Families tend to be close and therefore more emotionally involved than friends and neighbors.

Mothers can often take the choice hard. This could be because you are choosing to do something different than she did and can be perceived as a criticism of her choices. The more different the situation, the greater the threat is.

Your parents may fear that this new lifestyle will change their relationship with their grandchildren. They may also fear that you are entering into a fringe lifestyle that they cannot understand or join into.

What you must do is reassure them that the important things in the grandchildren's lives will not change. Time to observe how this new way of doing things actually affects the children is also helpful. And, involving the grandparents in the actual teaching, even by email or letters, is also a great way of building bridges within the family and getting support.

Siblings, like friends, sometimes feel put on the spot by the choice to home school. In the first flush of your decision, it's easy to alienate those around you who cannot or would not make the same choice. In your newfound

enthusiasm, you can often make stronger rejections of your former life - and therefore that of your siblings - than you later will stand by.

Reassurance, again, can help in this relationship. Letting siblings know that you are confident in your decision, and that it is a very personal decision, may keep feathers unruffled.

Your own children, especially those in the family that are not home schooled, often present a challenge as well. Older siblings, and those with shared custody, will have concerns about your previous choices and about their place in the family.

A change as significant as home schooling will alter all the relationships in the family. To expect to make such a change without concurrent shifts is unrealistic. Siblings need to feel comfortable with the family's decisions.

For the unsure home educated child, peers who are positive about home schooling can be wonderful allies in getting support. Getting the non-home educated kids involved in the educational activities of the family can also turn doubters into allies.

Our children know our weak spots, often better than we do. Home schooling gives them abundant opportunity to access your buttons. It is easy to get locked into battles and to lose perspective. The parent working outside the home is an important ally during stressful times like this. Keeping that line of communication open and well-oiled is essential. Getting time alone every once in a while is not a luxury, it is a necessity.

Your children will not necessarily always be supportive of home schooling. They get curious about the other way and can become seduced by media images of school life that

are neither accurate nor balanced, but they don't know that.

Two things that can help in this regard include surrounding your child with as many confident home schooling families as possible and spending less time being excessively fair about the home school versus school issue.

Your child needs to feel normal, and may feel confused if you have a reluctance to act proud of your family's new lifestyle. You don't have to go out of your way to brag, but become an advocate of you, your child, and your choice.

Another common family concern is the reaction of former spouses and their extended families. Home schooling is an intimate lifestyle, and can threaten fragile truces between former family members.

As an atypical educational choice it may also invite scorn from relatives that are inclined to find fault. Negotiating with ex's and their partisans is difficult over any issue. Home schooling has often been the loser in custody battles. Only a focus on the benefits to the child should sway parents with best interests in mind.

The dangers in family criticism of the decision to home school are complex. More than one family has become permanently estranged over the issue. The greatest danger is not just over agreement with it, but also in the increased need for extended family support.

There are financial and logistical vulnerabilities inherent on relying on reduced income and giving up the hours of care children are given at school. You are taking on more than just the education of your children: you are becoming full-time caregivers.

Emotional support from extended family is not necessary to home schoolers, but it is a great asset. The



inevitable doubts and outside criticisms are easier to overcome when your closest relatives are in your corner.

Either parent may initiate the idea to home school, but often the enthusiasm is not equally shared over time. Support inside the marriage is essential not only in theory but also in practice.

Full time parenting is exhausting work and often thankless. Clear communication and frequent reinforcement can go a long way toward keeping the primary home schooling parent sane and the support parent with the program.

Home schooling is just common enough for everyone to have heard of it, but not common enough that every new family has a friend to show them the ropes.

Existing friends can present a challenge in terms of criticizing you for home schooling and even sabotage your efforts. Their reactions can range from condescension to being intimidated. Friends are also a great potential allies and public relations spokespeople.

Making new friends in the home schooling community is not as easy as it may sound. Home schooling families come in as many varieties as flowers and, by the very nature of their unconventional lifestyle, can appear judgmental.

Often you will have less in common with each other than you do with your friends who have kids in school. Finding, or forming, a strong support group is a good protection for both your perspective and your self-esteem.

Peer support can mean the difference between success and failure in that first fragile year. Surrounding yourself with supportive faces early on can give you the confidence to take the inevitable criticism that well-meaning friends will

hand you

The educational establishment, in general, has an investment in distrusting home schooling. The majority of home schooling families share the enmity. Luckily, home schooling is legal in all fifty states and so is public education.

Beyond the theoretical issues, though, there is a certain amount of oversight that educational authorities have over home education. This should also be seen as mutual.

Home schooling families can still participate in the community, and usually do. Performing public service improves your children's lives and makes for excellent public relations. Criticism of home schooling is reduced when you actively engage. After all, you have nothing to be embarrassed or shy about.

As for criticism of individual home schooling families by the educational authorities, no family is alone. Aside from the universal legality of home schooling, there are support networks and even a legal defense fund (HSDLA) to protect the rights of legitimate home schooling families. It also behooves the home schooling parent to keep up with local laws and support any family that is being harassed.

The public loves "man bites dog" stories and home schooling has often fit that bill: "kid learns without school." Generally, home schooling has received a pass in the media because of skewed demographics and high-profile super-children.

That will change in time, many believe. But even while we bask in the good press we must be vigilant about the subtle criticisms: the "socialization" tag line, and the ubiquitous 'expert' that balances the article with her "concerns."

Strangers present an interesting challenge, especially in public places. An important thing to keep in mind is that few of these strangers mean to criticize. Our own defensiveness can turn a "why aren't you in school today, honey?" into a challenge when it was really just an attempt at conversation.

At other times the proclamations of people on the street can be a gift - an opportunity to brag. "Don't you miss other children, dear? And "What about socialization!" can be a perfect opportunity to educate an entire grocery line by letting your child list the fifteen projects and sports they participate in. As with many prejudices, most citizens' opinions are not deeply held, and one positive encounter may turn the tide

When you are trying to counter criticism, remember: confidence, humility, information, and alliances.

Confidence in your choice to educate your own children is your greatest asset in getting support from family, friends, and public opinion. Projecting your confidence eases the concerns of those that care for you and stops short those that feel threatened by you. When you phrase your choice as a positive, rather than a rejection of institutionalized education, you elicit support and defuse criticism.

Another part of confidence is letting it go when others are critical of your lifestyle. It isn't about converting other people: it is about what is best for your own family.

Confidence also sends our children the message that what they are doing is positive and admirable. When the inevitable peer magnetism makes them wonder about their lifestyle, your ongoing conviction can secure their support as well.

Humility is necessary, too, in a society in where home schoolers are a minority and largely an unknown. The best

parents are humble about their successes and not judgmental about others. Righteousness wins few converts. Results do.

A good statistic goes a long way as well. Stating facts with confidence and humility can turn a skeptic in one conversation into an admirer in the next. Information, rather than emotional advocacy, also short circuits uninformed critics.

Making alliances - with family, friends, and in the community - is a good idea for you and for home schooling in general. Asking for help may seem to make you vulnerable but it can, in measured doses, draw reluctant family into the process and give them a sense of ownership in the children's education.

Offering help, through volunteering and being there for relatives, creates connections as well. A home-based lifestyle gives us a flexibility that other families do not have. Using that flexibility to forge relationships is a wise investment.

## CONCLUSION

Home schooling can be a great benefit and help to your family and your child. It can also be a source of great criticism and ridicule. You need to first make your decision wisely and then be strong in that decision knowing that you are making this choice for the good of your children and your family.

Home schooling isn't really about society breaking down...it's more about the enormous benefits and pleasures of being a strong family and having time together. It is a way of choosing to live. It is about freedom. It isn't about

wanting to correct society, but more about a willingness to take responsibility.

When you choose to home school, you should not do so to avoid the negativity of public school, but to choose the positive aspects of being your child's teacher.

Do it so you can slow your lives down and have more time together as a family. Don't relegate yourself to the rat race of being busy every night with activities, not having time to cook a real dinner, and spending most of your home time sleeping.

Choose to celebrate your family. Choose to spend what time you have together in a constructive way instead of survival mode. You will no longer have to worry about the confinements of homework and dealing with the requirements of your public schools.

Choose home schooling as an effort to take back your lives and have time for the things you want to do. Those things don't have to be the big things either. Often, it's the small parts of life that seem the most important when you are pressed for time.

Little things like wanting more time to bake, more time to garden, not having laundry on the weekend, not being too tired to do an evening activity that you want to do. Sit back, take stock of what's important to you, and put those things first in your life.

You won't be able to do this without some sacrifice. But we're relatively sure that you will find that the rewards you get from home schooling and watching your child grow intellectually will be far greater than that high paying job you had to leave to get to where you are.

Home schooling isn't for everyone, but if you are willing to make the commitment, it can be a very satisfying way of

life that will help your child become way more than you ever thought they could be. What's even more important is that they will become even more than they themselves ever thought they could be.

Don't you owe that to them? If so, go for it! Happy home schooling!

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The following websites were referenced in researching this book:

[www.about.com](http://www.about.com)

[www.homeschool.com](http://www.homeschool.com)

[www.homeschoolresources.com](http://www.homeschoolresources.com)