

# Getting Started in Homeschooling: The First Ten Steps

By Mary Pride

*Homeschooling has some surprising benefits. Here's how to start enjoying them!*



Are you thinking about homeschooling but:

- Aren't sure it's for you?
- Don't know where to start?

Then you're in the right place!

## "Is Homeschooling the Right Choice for My Child?"

The short answer: yes, it is, as long as you're a committed and involved parent with normal intelligence and no history of serious mental illness!

You don't need an impressive educational background or lots of money to succeed at homeschooling. Research has shown that parents with only a high school education or less can do about as good a job as those with advanced degrees, or education degrees.(1) It has also shown that those who spend less than \$200 per child per year on homeschool curriculum can get as good results as those who spend \$400-\$599 per child per year.(2)

## The Unsung Benefits of Homeschooling

Homeschooling yields positive academic, social, emotional, and spiritual benefits for any family that gives it an honest chance. By now it's no secret that all the research shows homeschooled children outstrip both their public- and private-school peers in every academic area. Less well known are these benefits:

**Safety Benefits.** Years ago, strangers used to ask me, "What about socialization?" Now, when I tell them I homeschool, they say, "I don't blame you. The schools have become so dangerous!"

As a homeschooler, you won't have to worry about who is taking guns and knives to your local school. Your child also won't have to fear school bullies. According to a press release we received early this year:

Six out of ten American teenagers witness bullying in school once a day or even more frequently, reported John A. Calhoun, President and CEO of the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC). The national group . . . released findings from a survey conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide that show that bullying is the terrorist threat that most frightens America's teenagers and interferes with their education. Young people are far less concerned about external terrorist attacks on their schools and communities than they are about the bully terrorizing them and their classmates in the hallways and classrooms of their schools.

**Less Exposure to Alcohol and Drugs.** Most kids don't get their drugs at home. They get them at or near school. According to a study conducted by the National Center for Substance Abuse, and reported in Family Research Council's Washington Update online newsletter, "5 million high schoolers -- 31% -- say they "binge drink" at least once a month. . . . A teenager who starts drinking at 15 is four times more likely to become alcohol dependent than one who waits until the legal age to drink." Add to this the huge numbers of kids abusing inhalants, street drugs, and even their classmates' Ritalin, and it's a problem many of us would just as soon avoid.

**Emotional Benefits.** Emotional bullying-name calling, mockery, and humiliation-can be just as devastating as physical bullying. Smart kids, special-needs kids, and anyone unlucky enough to appear "different" can expect a steady diet of this negative emotional input in a typical school. Since research has shown that kids need to feel safe in order to learn, simply removing a child from the emotional pressure cooker of peer pressure, gangs, and cliques may produce enormous learning gains all by itself.

**Ritalin-Free Kids.** Boys get a double dose of labeling, as schools increasingly label typical male behavior as "ADD" or "ADHD." In fact, any child with low body fat (making it uncomfortable to sit still for long periods in a hard chair) is at risk of being labeled "ADD" or "ADHD," which in turn leads to pressure put on parents to medicate perfectly normal children with psychoactive drugs such as Ritalin, Adderall, or even Prozac. At home, kids can sit on a nice soft couch, lie on the rug, or run around when they need to burn off energy. Homeschool parents also tend to learn child training methods that work, if only for self preservation! Instead of blaming the kids' behavior on invisible "disorders" that are undetectable by any medical test (3), homeschoolers learn to accept a wider range of normal behavior. Kid still misbehaving? Don't pay big bucks to a psychiatrist or open a self-help book. Ask any veteran homeschool mom with a big family. She'll tell you what works!

**Removes Sexual Pressure.** According to a recent survey from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 81 percent of kids aged 12-14 -- including those who have lost their chastity -- believe that kids today are pressured to have sex too early. Younger and younger kids are trying to dress and act sexy as well. Both school culture and sex-ed classes promote the idea that "everyone is doing it" and that this is OK. And don't assume this is not true in your local Christian or Catholic school, unless the administration is making a real effort to keep things simple and sweet. In homeschool, parents can wait until their children are of a reasonable age to learn the facts of life. At home, parents are also free to add morals and Scriptural teaching to the mix.

**Builds Family Bonds.** Homeschooling brings families closer together. Kids thrive under parental attention, and parents get to really know their kids. Homeschooled siblings tend to be more kind and helpful to each other, also.

**Better Preparation for the Real World.** Modern schools only seem normal to us because we have been brought up from birth to accept them. Actually, they are highly unnatural environments. Where else in your life will you have to spend all day with a group of 15 to 35 people of your same age, doing activities that never yield any usable result? In the real world, you are with people of different ages, working together on real projects. Families are more like this than schools are. And it's easier to give homeschooled kids real-world adventures, such as participating in community theatre, volunteering in a hospital, etc.

### **The Best Environment for Spiritual Training.**

In the New Testament, the followers of Christ are called "disciples," not "students." There's

a reason for that! Disciples observe and model their teacher's behavior. Students merely study; the word implies they receive information, not application. At home, your children can see you apply your beliefs, and hear what you think about life's various experiences, if they have the chance to be around you enough.

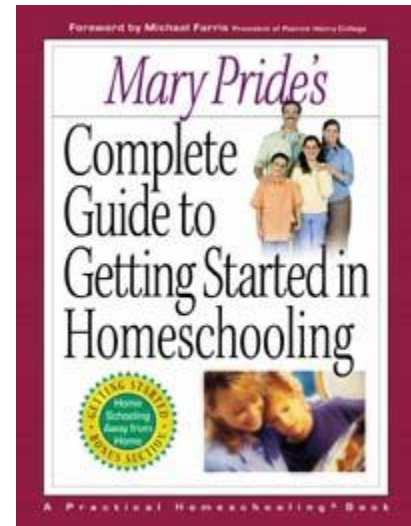
## "So, Where Do I Start?"

In my new book, [\*Mary Pride's Complete Guide to Getting Started in Homeschooling\*](#), I list steps to getting started with a successful homeschool. While the book has lots more information than I can provide here, at least the 10 steps below will clue you in to your best next moves.

1. **Locate your state homeschool group.** Just click on the word "[Groups](#)" on the black menu bar at the top of this page (and at the top of every page on this website!). Then go to your state listing. The group(s) at the top of the page are state groups. Those below are regional and local groups. We have provided phone numbers and addresses as well as web links to as many state groups as possible, so it should be easy for you to contact them.
2. **Locate your local support group.** For most states, you'll find it right on the "Groups" page you were just looking at! If you can't find one listed on our website, just ask your state group. They'll know where your nearest support group is.
3. **Join other homeschoolers online.** I recommend you start with our [Forum](#) area, not just because it's our website, but because we have a boatload of great forums on all sorts of homeschool topics, including a "Getting Started" forum. Post your questions here!

4. **Subscribe to a homeschool magazine.** Naturally, we'd like it to be [Practical Homeschooling](#). Nothing gets you "in the swim" as quickly in a new professional area as reading a magazine on that topic. Homeschooling is no exception. The ads are an education all by themselves. You'll find yourself saying, "I had no idea there was a product that taught that!" Even articles on topics you think you will never need often turn out to be useful later on. There's a lot to be said for mentally preparing for high school while your child's still in preschool!
5. **Read "how to" books about homeschooling.** Carefully read the author's biography (if one is supplied) to see if he or she is a veteran homeschooler who has demonstrated success, or just a professional writer whose publisher assigned the job of creating a book about homeschooling.

Anyone can homeschool one child for a few months, but that does not make them a homeschool expert.



[What's in our latest issue?](#) Find out what's new in [Practical Homeschooling](#).

6. **Locate curriculum providers.** To do so, just go to the "[Mall](#)" area of this website, where you'll find all kinds of resources organized by type (software, online, or print curriculum), school subject, and more.
7. **Request homeschool catalogs.** Here are some to start with: [Beautiful Feet Books](#) (800-889-1978), [Birch Court Books](#) (800-655-1811), [The Book Cellar](#) (603-880-6400), [Christian Book Distributors](#) (800) 247-4784), [Elijah Company](#) (888-2-ELIJAH), [Farm Country General Store](#) (309-367-2844), [Lifetime Books & Gifts](#) (863-676-6311), [Shekinah Curriculum Cellar](#) (903-643-2760), [Sycamore Tree](#) (949-650-4466), and [Timberdoodle](#) (360-426-0672). And don't forget to visit our own [online catalog](#). You'll also find ads from many major curriculum providers in [Practical Homeschooling](#) magazine. They will be happy to send you their catalogs upon request.
8. **Go to your local teacher's store.** They have great workbooks, educational toys and games, and school supplies. To find a local store with a homeschool section, click on the banner on the top of any "Groups" page on this site.
9. **Attend your first curriculum fair.** Plan to buy, not just to browse. Go to the [Events](#) page on this site to find upcoming homeschool conventions and curriculum fairs.
10. **Now that you've picked out your curriculum and have a plan, you're ready to join HSLDA.** That stands for "Home School Legal Defense Association." The cost is \$100 per year for your entire family, and well worth it in protecting your (and everybody else's) right to homeschool.

You can skip a few of these steps, but for best success, try to do them all. The best homeschool teacher is a prepared parent. Think of it this way: the time and money you spend on your education as a homeschool teacher could save thousands of dollars more in college scholarships some day!

### Footnotes

1. Home educated students' test scores remained between the 89th and 90th percentiles [on nationwide standardized tests] whether their mothers had a college degree or did not complete high school. Home Schooling Achievement, 2001, Home School Legal Defense Association brochure.

2. Ibid.

3. See *Ritalin is Not the Answer* by Dr. David B. Stein or even better, *Talking Back to Ritalin* by Dr. Peter Breggin. You can also find quite a bit to start with online at [Dr. Breggin's website](#). And if you've ever been told or suspect that your child has ADD or ADHD, please first look over this excellent checklist, "[50 Conditions Mimicking ADHD](#)"

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# Effective Home Schooling

by Janice Southerland

We started home schooling with the perception that it would be "school at home." Gradually, over the last several years, we have learned that "school" is not confined to a room and a time. It is a vital, growing aspect of family life.

**True education is learning how to learn;** learning about yourself, your family, the world around you; and, most importantly, getting to know God and His awesome plans for you in His world.

I began home schooling with the idea that I would teach our girls the things I had been taught at their age. God continues to teach me that true education is not merely facts, formulas, dates, and field trips (although those are necessary building blocks). True education is seeing that these things are parts of God's world, created to help us begin to know Him. True education is a lifelong journey, available to anyone willing to learn.

Here are some of the trail markers of effective home schooling we are discovering along the home school journey.

## Trust God in All Things

When we began our home school journey, we were easily overwhelmed by all kinds of advice, curriculum choices, methods, learning styles . . . in fact, the more we read about schooling, the less competent I felt about teaching.

Fortunately, as we began, I heard a speaker explain that parents are qualified and able — even without formal degrees! — to teach their own children. We **can** teach them because God provides all we need for what He requires. How true!

And yet, we must continually go to Him with our questions and be willing to sit and hear His advice. God is the only expert worthy of our full attention because He created the precious children that we have, and He knows best how they will learn.

It is a simple, yet powerful truth to remember: **make time daily to read God's Word and pray.** Many times I have been too busy, and have waited until the day unraveled before stopping to ask

Him to guide us and make our attitudes right. Recognizing that we are all learners helps us realize who the real Teacher is!

## **Glean All You Can**

Resources abound explaining the hows and whys of home schooling. One of the most important is your local support group. Read, observe, and listen to the advice of others with experience.

As you do, remember to not compare your bad days, or areas of weakness, with another family's pinnacle of success: it brings despair and it clouds reality.

Search out other home schooling families, and be open to share with one another. In getting to know the uniqueness of other families through their choices and experiences, your family will be enriched and challenged.

I wish I had known when we began that there is more than just one right curriculum, and more than just one right way to home school. It is OK to change your plan as you and your family grow.

As you begin to gather lots of great ideas, or hear about a fun project to do, remember that it does not **all** have to be done this year. There will be time to work in some things later.

Keep a simple file drawer with notes about those great ideas under general categories: science, math, history, music, etc. Later, when you need something new and different, or when you are planning the next semester, the ideas will be there close at hand.

## **Be Aware of Perspective**

As we began, it was tempting to make choices based on another person's opinion or on someone else's values or perceived expectations for our family. Trying to live up to the expectations of others has not always been wise.

When we pause to consider that other person's perspective, we might realize that our values differ greatly. What is absolutely essential to one person may not be important to another. What do they value? What do you value? Whose standard do you live by? Are you determining your values based on truth in context with the whole counsel of God's Word?

Because it is so easy to be sidetracked by someone's comments or enthusiasm, we frequently need to monitor our own perspective. Our pastor explains perspective with the illustration of a person who picks up a small piece of green glass. If he holds it to his eye, he will declare that all the world is green, because all that he sees is colored by that glass.

True perspective is found by holding the glass at arm's length. Then we realize that, although the piece of glass is green, not everything in the world is. Take time to evaluate what "glass" may be

influencing you. Sifting the influences, and holding them in perspective, will help to keep you on track.

## Follow God's Priorities for Each Day

It sounds easy in theory, but this is where I struggle the most. I make "to do" lists, and then find myself asking God to bless what I have decided to do...ouch!

In a study of the book of John, it became apparent that Jesus' example was to always seek His Father first. Jesus had very full, productive days, ordered by His Father. He also had time for rest and relaxation. Jesus avoided stress as we know it because He followed God's priorities for each day. He did not add his own agenda to the work of the day.

I have often crawled along this part of the journey because of my unwillingness to let go of my "to do" lists. Some days lead us in a totally different direction than we had planned: a friend has a pressing need, illness strikes, fatigue overwhelms, a doorbell announces a surprise visit, or we wrestle with a math concept and then with each other!

Whatever the detour, when I remember to trust God to know what to put in and take out of each day, and yield to His guidance, He never fails to bring good out of it all. Trusting God to order each day brings peace and greater satisfaction than any completed list ever will.

What is your destination? When we began the journey of home schooling, our first goal was to get through the year with good grades. We have since realized that academics will come with daily diligence.

Time on the trail has taught us that our life here on earth is simply "boot camp" for eternity. A lifetime of learning is but a brief preparation for life in eternity with God.

Our goal now is to invest our days in building relationships and developing character, which have eternal value, as we master academics. Proverbs 3:5-6 has been described as God's compass for life. It is a practical travel guide for the journey of home schooling as well. It says:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own understanding.  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
and He will make your paths straight. (NAS)

In home schooling, as in life, the compass you use to reach your goals and destination will determine the course of your journey. Make each day count for what you value.

Adapted from Janice Southerland, "The Compass," in Bill and Diana Waring's *Things We Wish We'd Known* (Lynnwood, Wa.: [Emerald Books](#), 1991). Used by permission.

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# Planning Your Home School

## Four simple strategies to help you plan your school days and your school year

by Debra Bell

Here are the strategies that will bring peace to your home school life by bringing order. They are simple and few. Complex systems that require too much time to maintain fail very quickly. These are the ones that have lasted at our house over the years.

### Strategy #1: Long-Range Planning

A peaceful and well-managed home school begins with a commitment to plan. You can't invest too much time at this end of the spectrum. Long-range planning and weekly goal-setting will eliminate unnecessary day-to-day decision-making and give you confidence.

**Summertime Is Planning Time.** I use this time to regroup and do my long-range planning. After soliciting feedback from my kids, I scope out our year. First I focus on areas of weakness. I prioritize these and set goals for improvement. I'm never going to correct all of them in a year's time, but I am determined to keep chipping away at the list.

**Add Faith.** Don't let unmet goals discourage you. You'll get more accomplished in life by setting goals and not meeting all of them than by not setting goals at all.

Bring faith to your planning. Treat your goals as a prayer list. Sometimes I feel as though we aren't getting anywhere, or worse, we're moving backward. But when I look at my goals from previous years, I'm encouraged by the gains that have been made. Often God brings special opportunities our way that allow us to meet our goals in unexpected ways. Just putting the goals on the list makes me more conscious of God's commitment to our success and my awareness of His intercession on our behalf.

**Write Objectives.** After tackling our weaknesses, I then write out objectives for every subject for each child. I use this plan throughout the year as a yardstick for our progress. It is easy to adjust or change as the year progresses. Planning is the strategy that will help you hit those targets you are aiming at. But don't let it enslave you. Always be ready to adapt your program to the needs of your children.

At the end of each school year, I go into my objectives file on the computer and enter a brief paragraph indicating whether or not the objective was *met*, *partially met*, or *not met* and then detail evidence to support my evaluation.

### Strategy #2: Weekly Planning

You aren't done yet. Planning is an ongoing discipline that allows you to maximize your time. Without it, you will waste time daily gathering resources, making decisions, and solving problems you didn't anticipate. So carve two hours out of your schedule regularly to prepare for the coming school week.

Before my older children began managing their own time, I spent an afternoon every week at our local library working on our home school program. I used the time to anticipate problems and prepare for them, to gather books, and to script out my goals and schedule in my plan book.

Remember: Time on task determines mastery of a skill or subject area. Plan so that your children can use their time wisely.

**Your Schedule Will Be Uneven.** When setting up your weekly schedule, don't shoot for even allotments of time across the board as they do in a traditional setting. This strategy does not help children achieve mastery in any area.

Some families do science first semester and history second. We found science once a week, with at least two or more hours devoted to experiments and study, worked well for us. As a rule of thumb: *Skill areas* are mastered through practice. Handwriting, spelling, mathematics, reading, etc., should be on your daily schedule. But *content areas* such as literature, history, science, etc., are better learned through fewer sessions in larger chunks of time. These also require more setup time on your part; so doing that once a week or for one semester is often better time management.

## Strategy #3: Establish Policies and Procedures

In my home, at the office, and at the co-op, I am a manager. I invest my time in developing organizational systems that allow everyone to know what his or her job is and how to do it without my constant oversight or direction. How does this translate into your home?

**Make a Rut to Run In.** Routines may get boring, but they still make things run smoothly. (If you can't take consistency, just cut a new rut periodically.)

During the school year, kids should have a set bedtime and rising time. You should, too. I begin losing control of my day the minute we sleep in. From there, maintain a loose routine for the day and week. Food is a pretty important motivator for my kids. I have minimum standards that must be reached before lunch and then before supper.

**Just Say No!** Remember the anti-drug slogan from a few years back? I used to have it hanging on my phone because I was tempted to say yes to anything anyone asked of me. My goals for the day would quickly go by the wayside as I let the phone calls control my day.

**Get an Answering Machine.** I not only use an answering machine, but I've also turned all the phones in the house off so I don't even know when they ring. If someone wants to reach me, they have to send a fax or e-mail. Minimally, an answering machine will save you loads of time and prevent your day from slipping away from you with phone calls that turn into long conversations.

## Strategy #4: Use Organizers

**Pocket-Size Organizers.** A personal organizer is an essential life-management tool. I've kept an organizer now for nearly twenty years. The essential premise is this: Use an organizer simple enough to take with you everywhere you go. Create a section for every area of your life that you currently need to manage. Include a monthly appointment calendar and a section for frequently used addresses. I've found an eighteen-month academic calendar is the best for my needs.

Every morning I make a list of what I need to do that day and record it in my organizer. I prioritize this and check things off as they are completed. It takes no more than ten minutes because it is an ingrained habit.

**Central Calendar.** We keep a central calendar on the refrigerator and everyone keeps his or her appointments there as well. It helps my kids feel more in control of their lives. I'm a great one for planning things and not telling anyone else. As soon as I put up the new monthly calendar, my children hurry to see what's coming up and then transfer that information to their own daily organizers.

**Teacher's Plan Book.** A teacher's plan book is the only other organizational tool I use regularly. Quite a few that are designed for home schooling are on the market, but my favorite is **The Homeschool Journal**, published by FERG N US Services. It's the simplest, that's why, and the most easily adapted to different families' needs. Recently FERG N US released a plan book for students, and my kids now use this as their own daily logbook where they record their weekly academic goals.

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## Choosing a Home School Curriculum

### Where do you start? How do you keep from being overwhelmed?

by Sheila Seifert

"Home schooling looked like a great option," says Pam, a mother concerned about her youngest girl's high school education. "But when I started looking into curricula, I felt like a guppy thrown into the ocean. There was so much out there to pick from, and it was absolutely overwhelming."

Like Pam, many parents feel out of their depth with the seemingly endless supply of home schooling resources available. But if you're stepping into the home school arena, you don't have to be intimidated. With a little preparation, you can find the curriculum that is a perfect fit for your family.

## Don't forget the obvious

The best curriculum for your children will be the one that aligns with your family's purpose for home schooling. Perhaps your worldview, schedule or school district has played a significant role in your decision. One of the best ways to avoid getting sidetracked from your initial purpose is to write an academic mission statement that you can reference as you're reviewing curricula.

Writing this mission statement is easier than you may think. Briefly explain why you decided to home school and define your desired outcome. Your outcome is characterized by what a successful home school year looks like to you. The goal may be to complete a workbook, score well on a standardized test, meet the state standards or see children integrating their knowledge in day-to-day situations. Your measurement of success is important in your evaluation of curriculum materials.

Then consider your influencing factors, such as the role your faith will play in your children's curriculum and how you intend to achieve your state's educational standards. Some states require home school students to adhere to detailed grade-level requirements. Others do not. Contact your state's board of education. The government has indexed each state's contact information at [ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html](http://ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html). From there, get information about what your child is supposed learn at each grade level. Understanding your state's standards can help you narrow curriculum options.

A final variable in choosing a curriculum is your finances. What's your budget for home school curricula, and how expensive are they? Will you need a computer at home, and can you afford to buy one right now? Are there registration fees in the program, and what do you get for your money? Home school costs can vary depending on your curriculum choices. Figure out how much you intend to spend, and then adjust curricula to fit your budget, perhaps being creative with some subjects, such as using the library for literature books, to make home schooling work for your family.

Once you have created a mission statement, consider the educational model that best fits your academic teaching method.

## Choose a teaching method

In addition to the many ways that curriculum is offered — video lectures, computer programs, distance classrooms, books, workbooks and projects — each curriculum rests on the tenets of a single teaching model. To better understand how you want to teach your children, explore these six popular teaching methods:

### [Charlotte Mason](#)

British educator Charlotte Mason saw learning as a lifestyle, not a means for passing tests and doing a set amount of assignments. She thought that part of the process should include a realization of who each child is in the world and before God. Instead of being empty sacks that needed to be filled with knowledge, children are seen as capable of contemplating ideas.

## Classical Education

Based on a patterned concept called Trivium, the classical model sits on pillars of grammar (early elementary study), logic (middle school study) and rhetoric (high school study). This Socratic method has been used for centuries to raise leaders and includes memorization, training in public speaking and critical thinking.

## Eclectic

The eclectic method allows parents to use different teaching models with different subjects. They may prefer one method for English and another for science, mixing and matching the ways subjects are taught to fit a student's unique talents and learning style, often on a set budget.

## The Principle Approach

God's Word is at the center of this educational model. Biblical principles are explored in every subject, and a biblical worldview is taught. Research, purpose and reasoning play key roles, and children capture this individualized training in a notebook.

## Traditional

Lectures, reading, memorization, tests and writing are key to the traditional method. Curricula in this model may be self-directed, probably include workbooks, and inevitably strive to meet state and national education standards. In addition, good citizenship and character values are taught.

## **Unit Studies**

Unit studies are lessons that center on a single theme, subject or time in history. Children of different ages can be taught the same lesson at varying degrees of difficulty. This allows parents to teach multiple age groups as they instill the value of learning in the lives of their children.

For curriculum examples of each teaching method, download [Curricula Categorized by Teaching Methods](#). Once you determine which teaching method best fits your personality and the manner in which your children learn, eliminate the curricula that don't fall into that teaching method.

# **Understand your family**

Curriculum is a tool to help your children gain the knowledge they need to advance to the next grade level. To find one that works for your family, consider these four keys to a home school routine:

1. **How much time will you spend working one-on-one with your children?** Estimate the hours, or download the [Available One-on-One Time](#) worksheet to better understand both your free time *and* your time constraints.
2. **How motivated are you and your children?** In subject areas where you are strong or your children are highly motivated, consider purchasing curricula that allow for more interaction. In areas where you are weak or your children don't like the subjects, consider a fuller program that offers self-teaching or video lectures. If you need help realizing what motivates you and your children, complete the [Motivation Worksheet](#).
3. **How much curriculum will you need to purchase?** Most states require a specific number of instructional days and hours in an academic year; confirm your state's

requirements. Perhaps you will need 36 weeks of curricula if your state requires 180 days per year.

Consider creating a daily schedule, budgeting the amount of time necessary for each subject. Review subject programs that contain the necessary hours (per home school week) to complete state requirements, keeping in mind that you can always combine shorter programs if necessary. If you need help figuring this out, download a [Yearly Planning Sheet](#).

4. **How can you determine what each curriculum is really like?** Reviewing curricula first-hand is important, and many curriculum publishers have online placement tests and Web sample lessons for parental assessment.

Without a doubt, the best place to explore curriculum is still with other home school parents and in online home school communities. These men and women can help you understand what a product will look like after it's been used, detailing what they feel were the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Another excellent resource is a home school fair or convention. When looking at curricula, keep an ongoing record about the information you find. You can do this on your own or use our [Curricula Comparison Worksheet](#).

Once you understand your family's constraints, pinpoint your varied learning styles and personalities and define a compatible teaching method, you will quickly eliminate some curricula and find that you want to explore others. If you have more questions on this topic, go to Focus on the Family's [Online Parenting Community](#) and in the "Education" area, ask about home school materials. Other parents with more home school experience will be happy to offer their opinions on curriculum choices.

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## Home Schooling High School: Just the Next Step

**Home schooling high school is not as scary as it sounds.**

by [Jeanne Gowen Dennis](#)

Many people who home school give up when their children reach ninth grade. However, high school may be the most important time to home school, because the final preparation for adult life happens during the teen years. Even if you have never educated your own children, you can teach your teens at home.

## Not as Scary as It Sounds

Home schooling high school is not as scary as it sounds. It is just the next step after eighth grade, which was the next step after seventh grade and so on. If you plan well and partner with your teens, you can design a great high school program that will not only prepare them for adult life, college and/or a career but also give you the joy of relating to your children at an adult level in every area of life and thought.

The main difference between eighth grade and high school is that it counts for college. Don't let that worry you. In my survey of 263 colleges, over 90 percent had accepted home schooled students. Most of them wanted a transcript, which you can make yourself. (I give detailed instructions in my book [Homeschooling High School](#).) Others asked for samples of student work or a portfolio. If you keep up with your record keeping each year, providing the information colleges require will be easy.

## Academics

As for academics, you may feel inadequate to teach all the subjects your teens want or need to take. Don't worry. An enormous number of resources are available for home schoolers of every educational philosophy, learning style and budget.

Even with that, you don't have to do it all. In high school, your main job is to prepare your teens to live and work independently after high school. By their senior year, they should need very little help from you.

In the meantime, alternatives you might consider include:

- online courses
- video or audio courses
- group classes with another home school parent,
- group classes through a home school co-op
- classes at the local high school or college
- self-taught courses
- dual enrollment (to earn simultaneous high school and college credit) at a community college

It is even possible for students to finish high school early and earn a college degree online or by correspondence during their teen years.

Even if your students study independently, try to work through a few subjects with them each year. Consider especially courses in literature, history, cultures or the arts. Interacting with your teens in these areas will be valuable for them because of your adult perspective. You will enjoy strengthening your relationship with your children and revisiting interesting topics armed with the wisdom to comprehend them better than you did in high school.

## What about Socialization?

Often people who do not understand home schooling will ask about socialization. Home schoolers generally are among the best socialized of all youths, because they regularly interact with people of all ages. Most of them actively participate in their churches and communities.

Still, colleges want to see that your teens know how to get along and work with people outside the home. Many colleges I surveyed mentioned that home schooling high schoolers should be involved in activities such as volunteer work, jobs, music, scouting, clubs or sports, but colleges expect this from all their applicants.

In some states, it is possible for home schooled students to participate in high school sports teams, bands and other activities, and some areas offer home school teams, choirs and orchestras.

Well-chosen extracurricular activities serve to enhance the learning process and develop leadership and social skills. Encourage your students to get involved in group projects, jobs and community service, especially in their areas of keen interest. Such experiences also can help students define their goals for the future.

## Is it Legal?

Home schooling is legal in every US state. If you have never home schooled before, you will need to find out what the law requires in your home state. The [Home School Legal Defense Association Web site](#) gives information about state requirements. If you live in another country, you will need to find out the law in your area.

## A Worthwhile Challenge

Home high schooling is a challenge and a tremendous responsibility. Even the best home educators have periodic doubts that their children's education will be strong enough for them to compete with traditional high schoolers.

However, surveys have shown that home schoolers' accomplishments usually equal and often exceed those of their traditionally-educated peers. Experts in the field attribute this success to the many advantages home schoolers enjoy, including:

- more hours of parental involvement
- parents' commitment to their children's education and character development
- the benefits of personal tutoring by a parent
- the strengthening effect home schooling has on family relationships
- the time students have to explore their areas of strength and interest
- the ability to slow down their learning in weak areas
- extra time available for community involvement, travel, volunteer work and church activities

## Your Family's Choice

Is high school at home the right choice for your family? Only you can decide. The teen years can be some of the most enjoyable years you spend with your children, because home high school provides the opportunity for parents and students to relate to one another on a new level. As your teens mature and shoulder more responsibilities, the parent-child relationship matures as well. Home schooling during high school often provides an atmosphere of mutual love and respect that fosters deeper friendship between parents and their children.

If you choose to home school your teens, proceed with your eyes open to the realities — the advantages, disadvantages, possible consequences and, most of all, priceless rewards that await you. For when the going gets rough, as it almost always does, you will need the commitment to press on to the finish line. Just remember that nothing offered in traditional schools can replace the unique benefits home schooling high school has to offer your family.

Adapted from *Homeschooling High School: Planning Ahead for College Admission* by Jeanne Gowen Dennis, published by Emerald Books. Copyright ©2004 by Jeanne Gowen Dennis. All rights reserved.

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## Home Schooling and Single Parents

**Given up on the idea of home education? It might be time to reconsider.**

by Crystal Kupper

When her marriage ended and she became a single parent, Mary Jo Tate, a home-schooling mother from Tupelo, Miss., faced an unusual dilemma. Could she continue educating her four sons at home as a single mom? Most would answer no, but the freelance editor and book coach immediately said yes.

"I never considered stopping," Tate says. "I trusted that God would provide the way to continue educating my children at home."

Seem impossible? While the words *single parent* and *home schooling* seem incompatible, a small but growing segment of the U.S. home-schooling population finds itself in this situation. Brian D. Ray, president of the National Home Education Research Institute, estimates there could be as many as 185,000 single-parent home-school families in America today.

**Is it doable?**

Single parents home school with the same motives as their two-parent counterparts, Ray says. "In home-based education, parents may offer better academic options, stronger parent-child relationships and customized individual education plans [to their children]. These reasons apply to single-parent families, too."

There may be additional benefits to keeping children at home following a divorce or parental death, Ray says. Some parents find that home schooling provides continuity that other educational options often cannot. Andrea La-Rosa, a Web developer from Miami and creator of [singleparenthomeschool.com](http://singleparenthomeschool.com), agrees that the need for continuity after major life changes is a prime reason for single-parent home schooling.

"A single parent who home schools can be there for [her] children in a way that most single parents can't be," she says. "It's a way to keep families more intact, minimize the damage of a broken home and reclaim the positions of primary caregiver and guide in children's lives — things many single parents often count as losses."

But what about working single parents? Some, like Tate and La-Rosa, work from home. Others receive sufficient alimony, child support or life insurance payments, but most spouseless moms and dads work full-time, outside-the-home jobs to make ends meet. Can a single parent with a 9-to-5 job still teach her child at home?

Don't rule it out, La-Rosa says. Many single home-schooling parents enlist friends or family with child care and academic assistance. Others swap tutoring services within their home-schooling community or leave homework assignments to be completed during the workday and hold classes in the evenings.

"It's important to remember that your home school doesn't have to look like anyone else's," she says. "Get out of the mind-set of what should work. What *does* work for you and your children is what counts."

## **Is it right for you?**

Most single parents withstand inner doubts about their parenting abilities already, and single-parent home schooling might only compound these worries. But Brian D. Ray offers reassurance to anyone doubting the validity of this educational path.

"When a child is home-educated, regardless of having a single parent or two, the child does as well academically, socially, emotionally and psychologically as other students," Ray says. "Study after study shows that home schoolers outperform those in public school and [do] at least as well as private school students. This fact remains the same for single-parent and two-parent families."

However, if a single parent tries home schooling and finds it too taxing, there are options beyond giving up entirely. La-Rosa urges home-schooling single parents to avoid self-imposed isolation.

"Knowing when and how to ask for necessary help is crucial for the success of single-parent home schooling," she says. "If you no longer want to home school, by all means put your kids back in school. But if you want to continue yet feel as though it's too challenging, reach out to your family, neighbors, fellow home-schooling families and church."

Tate and La-Rosa are confident that acceptance for single-parent home schooling will grow over time, but cultural approval isn't what motivates them. Rather, it is the knowledge of eternally impacting their children by making the best choice for their families.

Though many have found great success as single-parent educators, the choice to teach children at home remains difficult. Single-parent home schooling isn't for everybody, but single mothers and fathers should not rule out home education simply because of their marital status. They can always look to the greatest Teacher for guidance on shaping their children's education and future.

This article first appeared in the July, 2008 issue of *Focus on the Family* magazine. Copyright © 2008 Crystal Kupper. All rights reserved.

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## Next Steps and Related Information

### Additional resources on home schooling

#### Popular questions on this topic:

- [What home schooling information is on your site?](#)
- [What are the pros and cons of different schooling options?](#)
- [How should finances play a role in deciding between home-schooling and private school?](#)
- [Is it a good idea to home school my special needs child?](#)
- [We can't afford preschool, and I'm not sure about home schooling. How can we capitalize on our child's curiosity about the world without breaking our budget?](#)

#### Related Resources

- [The Home Schooling Father](#)
- [Help! I'm Married to a Homeschooling Mom](#)
- [The Ultimate Guide to Homeschooling](#)
- [Help for the Harried Homeschooler](#)
- [When Homeschooling Gets Tough: Practical Advice to Stay on Course](#)
- [Homeschooling High School](#)
- [Things We Wish We'd Known](#)

#### Related Articles

- [Help Your Child Succeed in Public School](#)
- [Equip Kids for Lifelong Learning](#)

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