

Introduction to Homeschooling

by Pam Sorooshian

What is homeschooling? Is it legal? Who does it? Why do they do it? Should I try it? Am I really qualified to teach my children? How will I know what to teach? Where would we get curriculum materials? Is it expensive? What about socialization? What about the prom? What about college? What about my relationship with my child? What about my critical family and friends?

Homeschoolers are as varied as the rest of the U.S. population. They come from all ethnic groups, socioeconomic levels, diverse religions, and they range from one end to the other on the political spectrum. They live in the country, the city, and suburbia. Some are single-parents and some have extended or blended families. Some homeschooling parents are, themselves, professional educators. However, a teaching credential is certainly not necessary for successful homeschooling.

All homeschooling families share a strong sense of responsibility for their children's education. Some homeschooling children have been taken out of school because their needs were not being met. Some have never attended school at all. There are many, many different reasons people choose home education. Many have the desire to nurture their family's values. Others are aiming for superior academic performance. Many simply prefer the homeschooling lifestyle of strong family relationships, a rich texture of life-long learning, and family and community-centered activities.

Each family is different. Each child within the family is different, and what's more, children change as they grow so that the homeschooling experience is fluid, changing over time. It is difficult to describe what homeschooling is like, since, other than not sending their children to school, homeschoolers may have little in common. For example, some use prepackaged formal curriculum, some do unit studies (all learning centered around a common theme), some are "unschoolers" (child-led interest-initiated learning), and some use a combination of different methods.

Starting to homeschool can be scary. It is, for all of us, quite an adventure. It is common for children (and parents) to need some relaxed down time when starting to homeschool, especially if the children have been in school for very long. Homeschoolers refer to this as "deschooling time." It is a time for the parent to observe and learn about their own child's learning styles and their own "teaching" styles. And it is a time for the child to transition to the new rhythm of life as a homeschooler.

Typically, new homeschoolers feel the need for scheduling and formal structure. However, most homeschooling families tend, to a greater or lesser extent, to let go of rigid "school-at-home" methods as they become more confident and relaxed.

The best advice ever given to me, when I, myself, was a new homeschooling parent was: "expect the unexpected." The experienced homeschoolers who gave me that advice were so right. There is no way to accurately predict the twists and turns we'll experience as we begin this homeschooling adventure. Don't let it disturb you when things do not go "according to plan." It is inevitable. Flexibility is one of a homeschooling parent's most useful attributes.

Finally, Jean Reed, author of *The Home School Source Book*, offers this advice: "You and your imagination are your own best resource. Hug your kids. Make it fun for all of you. Keep your sense of humor. Be willing to learn along with your kids. Don't worry about "doing it the right way." Everyone is different so be flexible. Do it the right way for yourself and your kids. Have faith in yourself and your kids."