

Exploring Options

by Cindie Edmunds

As a homeschooling mother of a teenager I find myself facing a new, but exciting set of challenges. Certainly I am rewarded every day with the sheer joy of watching my son, Jake, grow into a man. It's a bittersweet feeling to hug him and suddenly realize he's taller than me, to find that the tiny hand that used to fit so snugly into my own is now big enough to encircle mine. He's beginning to think more about his future, too - his interests are becoming more focussed and he's starting to think about college, to sense the awesome possibilities that lay stretched before him. I am so grateful to be able to share this time with him, yet I am also aware that my responsibility for his education is shifting.

We have always had what I consider an eclectic approach to homeschooling: a combination of independent, interest driven learning and a more structured framework in certain subjects. As Jake has begun thinking about college, however, we're discovering we have to find new ways to balance what HE wants to learn with the expectations most colleges have of what incoming students "should" know. As I've talked with other homeschooling families, I've found they're meeting these needs in a variety of ways.

Some families are choosing to use one of the many distance learning programs that provide a high school diploma upon completion of their required subjects. Others are putting together their own "high school" program based on general college entrance & high school graduation requirements. Some choose to continue learning the same way they always have and others have decided to combine elements from each of these different options. The one common thread I've found in each family, though, is that the final decision almost always rests with the teenager. As parents, we need to provide them with as much information as possible and there should be many opportunities to discuss the pros and cons of each option. Learning styles, interests, goals and aspirations should be weighed against the merits of each approach so that our teens can make choices that are appropriate for them.

Regardless of which choice your family makes, one of the most important things you should begin doing is keeping records. As time goes on and Jake begins to assume more and more responsibility for his learning, I will hand these record keeping tasks over to him, but for now, I've decided to do this myself. While he's still in the process of learning about himself and how he sees his future, I want him to be free to explore the many paths that lay before him, without having to worry about where this or that "fits in". Besides, it gives me a chance to reflect on our day together. The time seems to pass so quickly, it seems that just the other day I was meticulously recording his first words, first steps, first hair cut. Now, I find myself utterly fascinated by the man he is becoming. One minute, he'll be completely engrossed in his latest Lego creation and the next, I'll find him reading something by Steven Hawking or the Dalai Lama. It's in these moments that I'm most thankful that we chose homeschooling for our family.

This article first appeared in *Chart & Compass*.