

Begin Homeschooling with Confidence

A Simple Guide to Homeschooling in the United States

2018 Updated Resources Edition

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This book is dedicated with (mostly) love to my partner Jason.

Thanks, kiddos.

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Why Should I Consider Homeschooling?

Like most parents you want to be aware of and informed about all the choices available to your family, especially when it comes to educating your child. Unfortunately, many parents today only see two educational possibilities for their child: public school and private school. When you discover the world of home education you break that box way open. You discover that there are so many paths to education available that there is no need to box anyone into just one. Making the switch to homeschooling isn't always an easy decision, but it is a very valid and rewarding choice that deserves a closer look.

Obviously you are taking a look at the homeschool option because you have found this guide. Congratulations! You are taking the first step to a life of discovery and fun. The aim of this guide is to present you with the basic facts about homeschooling and to direct you to resources that can help with the next step on your journey. This guide is written in easy-to-understand language that was meant to be read quickly and stress-free. This guide is not meant to provide legal advice or counsel. Always check with a reputable state or national organization for state laws and become intimately familiar with them. I will show you where to seek legal information later in this guide.

What drives a family to consider homeschooling is unique to each family and child. The motivation for one family may differ completely from yours. Several years ago I undertook the task of asking as many people as I could why they homeschooled their children. I contacted anyone who would listen via email, phone, and message boards and asked for the top three reasons they chose to homeschool. I received responses from about 1200 people in the United States and Canada and analyzed them in a very unscientific manner. This is what they had to say:

Lack of individualized instruction

Many of the parents I interviewed felt that their children were being cheated in the traditional school system and they decided they could provide a more individualized and comprehensive education at home. In most schools individual attention from a teacher is less than six minutes a day, not surprising when you consider attendance-taking, discipline issues, lecturing, paperwork and other school requirements.

Traditional schools cannot afford to tailor an education to each individual; there are not enough hours in the day and days in the year to allow for this. Children are generally lumped into three groups; academic (little need for guidance, in high school they are considered to be college-bound), scholastic (students who need moderate amounts of extra attention and guidance. In high school these students are usually considered to be those who are vocational school-bound or those who will enter into entry-level employment directly after school) and exceptional (those who need a lot of extra instruction, including remedial and special education services.) How many children do you know who neatly fit into one of those three packages?

In today's environment of high-stakes testing and poor Common Core implementation, this problem is not going to improve anytime soon. In an ideal world the schools would allow each child to learn at their own pace while providing guidance along the way, and the focus would be on individual strengths and interests with the goal of graduating a well-rounded adult with a broad education. While schools do not function in this manner, home schools CAN.

Religious instruction

The homeschoolers I interviewed represented the Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish faiths; I also spoke with quite a few agnostics, a handful of atheists, and several people who defined themselves as spiritual but not religious. One common concern among many, many families was religious influence in the classroom. While some families homeschooled specifically to include religious instruction in all topics, quite a few people were worried that their non-religious views would negatively impact their children in school. The argument for separation of church and state, and freedom of (and from) religion, is a very valid reason to homeschool, especially today when the lines are blurrier than they ever have been.

Current academic standards are seen as lax and inferior/Opposition to Common Core Standards

“Teaching to the test” was a concern of parents, as was the use of testing as the base for school funding and grade promotion. Many homeschooling parents oppose mandatory standardized testing, citing that the tests do not allow for individual strengths and offer a false picture of what the child really knows. The problem isn’t exclusive to standardized tests, however. In some areas of the country teaching a child how to take a test is more important than teaching the child how to complete the math problem they’re being asked to solve. The recently-introduced Common Core Standards were touted as the solution to our country’s education and testing woes, unfortunately they seem to be causing more problems than they solve. The jury is still out on Common Core and we will see how well CCS works in time, but many homeschooling parents feel that when it comes to our children’s future, time is a luxury they don’t have.

Nutrition/Food Allergy Concerns

Several families responded that they follow a vegetarian or vegan diet and their children's school district did not make allowances for their beliefs, including religious dietary restrictions. In one instance the children were not permitted to bring lunches of any sort to school for fear of students bringing weapons in lunchboxes.

Food allergies are one of the biggest medical reasons parents told me they keep their kids out of school. Some schools have banned bringing nut products into the school but not every parent can be expected to obey these rules. To the parent of a food allergic child one stray peanut in a brownie is very scary; simply smelling the product can trigger a deadly response in the allergic child. Parents with food-allergic kids constantly worry that their child will not receive medical attention in the short time frame after exposure so some opt to keep them home.

Even among those who don't follow a restrictive diet the nutritional quality of school food, the access to soft drinks and unhealthy snacks, and poorly scheduled lunch periods provided food-related motives to keep their children home. We experienced this concern first hand during my son's brief stint in first grade. My son was allowed a total of 30 minutes to go to the bathroom, wash his hands, wait in line for his lunch, eat, dump his tray, wash his hands again, and return to the classroom. The second time his teacher threw his uneaten lunch out, I pulled him out of school and we haven't looked back.

Medical Concerns

Beyond food allergy concerns, parents are worried about things like toxic building syndrome, the flu, meningitis, and injuries occurring in poorly supervised activities and schoolyard scuffles. While the increased potential for illness and injury in a school setting is seen as a rite of passage for some, it's a major area of concern for lots of homeschoolers. The spread of illness in schools is a familiar concern, you

can read about how poorly schools reacted to the Swine Flu H1N1 epidemic of 2009 in [this report](#) from the U.S. National Library of Medicine. (Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3039590/>)

Many parents stated that their children became homeschooled in response to developing more and more severe illnesses in the school environment. My own daughter had to be moved to a new classroom after suffering recurring strep infections for four months. Some parents of immunocompromised children elect to keep their children out of school from day one.

Ethical Concerns

It's not surprising that a lot of homeschooling parents responded that they do not feel the government should have a say in how a child is reared as long as they are not being abused. These parents feel it is the duty of the parent to provide the best education for their child, not for the government to decide what is best.

Safety Concerns

Safety is at the front of our minds these days. Sadly, it needs to be as the occurrence of schoolyard violence is higher than it's ever been. Almost every single respondent, well over 95%, listed the safety of their child in their top three reasons for homeschooling. Those who chose to elaborate listed the fear of weapons in schools, bullies, and teachers abusing students. I strongly feel that if I repeated this survey in 2018 safety concerns would be even higher on the list of reasons people choose to home educate.

Compulsory Age Disagreement

Many parents believe that there is nothing “magical” about the age of four, five or even six that determine a child’s readiness to attend school. Every child is unique and each has an individual timeline, natural abilities and weaknesses, and each learns in a unique way. Allowing a child to progress on their own schedule and in the way they best learn is the most natural, effective, and valuable means of education.

Competition

Some parents believe that the school environment promotes competition among students and they do not wish to have their children exposed to this at an early age. We’re not only talking about sports programs here, but also the competition for friends, grades, and status. Homeschooling your child allows for better supervision and allows for a gentle introduction into sportsmanlike competition and gives them the time children need to find their own way in the world.

Unnatural Age Association

Homeschooling parents theorize that their children will not enter college or the workforce with people solely their own age, why segregate their peers to those of the same age?

Socialization

From peer pressure to unnatural age association, parents believe homeschooled children obtain better social skills at an earlier age. Parents insist that being exposed to citizens of different culture, age, occupation, social status, and religion in a safe and supervised manor, adds a great deal of real-life socialization to their child’s life. School children, for the most part, are socialized among a large group of peers with very little guidance. One parent put it like this: “Is it really a good idea to have thirty ten year olds deciding what is cool and what isn’t?”



Is Homeschooling Legal?

In all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and all U.S. territories homeschooling is absolutely legal! Laws vary from state-to-state and may refer to homeschooling by a different name, but in some form or another, educating your child at home is legal everywhere in the United States.

Your best defense is to know the law. Know your state law better than your neighbor, your relatives, and the school officials. Familiarize yourself with your state statutes and their practical application. There is nothing quite as worrying as opening your door to a social worker or truancy officer that's been tipped off by a nosy neighbor. I'm not saying this will happen, it rarely does (I've seen it happen

to people just three times in 22 years), but there will always be “those” kinds of neighbors.

Fortunately homeschooling is widely accepted as a valid educational choice these days but knowing the law and being prepared for this rare situation will save you from further action in most cases. It’s important to note that to best protect yourself you MUST educate your children within the boundaries of the law. If you are homeschooling “underground” or not fulfilling all legal requirements you are opening yourself to action being brought against you.

Am I the only person doing this?

Current U.S. Census information* estimates that 1.8 million children in the United States are homeschooled. It’s accepted that this is a conservative estimate and the total is closer to 2.3 million as not all states require homeschoolers to register and because some states consider homeschoolers to be private school students. This number is about double the number of students that were homeschooled just 10 years ago. Although this is a large number it is only about 3% of the school-age population in the United States, but out numbers grow daily. Homeschooling is now considered almost mainstream (almost!)

Over the past four decades the “homeschooling movement” was seen as the answer to the lack of religious instruction in public school and was espoused primarily of conservative Christians. Today, however, the tides have changed. Conservative Christians still make up a large portion of the homeschooling population but you are just as likely to meet an atheist homeschooling family on the street. Homeschooling families today run the gamut of ethnicity, income, and religious beliefs.

Homeschooling is the focus of many television series, though not always in a positive light. Homeschooling is a popular topic of life-swapping television shows and is often featured in the media. I recently watched a television show on a popular kids channel that featured a homeschooling family. Books about homeschooling stuff the shelves in bookstores. Local businesses everywhere are scrambling to create programs and tours for homeschoolers. Cities all over the country are now giving home educated students access to the same resources publicly schooled kids get. All of this is proof that homeschooling is becoming more and more accepted in the world of education.

There will be “haters”. It is important to remember that there will always be critics of homeschooling. Some groups, especially teachers unions and random trolls on social media, are very outspoken in their belief that homeschooling doesn't provide an adequate education. These groups are almost always financially motivated and view homeschooling as a threat to their profession, and the media is always eager for a controversial story. And frankly, some people just don't like it when people choose something different than they did, they see it as a criticism. Take the negative views in stride and use your common sense to make your own decisions.

You may or may not have a teaching degree (if you don't have one, don't worry, you don't need it) but you have something no other teacher does – unconditional love for your child, an intimate knowledge of how your child learns, and the fortune to not have thirty children in every class. No one else has the time to devote to discovering one child's unique talents. No classroom or teacher can come close to providing the ideal environment for your unique child. No one else has the motivation you do to see your child succeed!

*http://www.mlive.com/education/index.ssf/2012/01/homeschooling_by_the_census_nu.html



How Do I Tell People that We Homeschool?

Ok, I'll do it! How do I tell everyone I know? How am I supposed to answer the "Why aren't they in school?" question without driving anyone away or driving myself crazy?

Eventually your family, friends, neighbors, and the mailman will catch on to the fact that your children don't leave the house every morning. Eventually they are going to ask you why and you are going to have to spill the beans.

The way I see it you can proceed in a number of ways.

1. Bring the topic up in general conversation. "Gee mom, these are great potatoes! Did I mention we're not sending the kids to school this year?"

This approach works well for the people you maintain casual relationships with or those who you feel may be a bit touchy about the subject.

2. Test the waters first. “So, how do you feel about the current trends in education? I wonder if you’ve ever heard of homeschooling?” This is a wonderful way to introduce homeschooling to people who love a good, polite political debate.
3. Blurt it out. “Mom, dad, we’re homeschooling the kids this year. Before you say anything, let me tell you why...” This no-nonsense approach works best with folks who aren’t prone to becoming defensive or who really trust that you know best.
4. Bring out the humor. “A funny thing happened on the way to kindergarten registration...” If you are afraid your audience will object win them over with humor.

Your audience’s reaction is up to them. Chances are they will be supportive, but what if they aren’t?

In the best of worlds everyone you tell will fall 100% behind your decision. In the real world, however, people are more likely to express worry and concern. You are bucking the only system most people know, and what worked for your parents and likely you. The old “public school was good enough for you!” may come into play. This is not a time to be defensive but to be prepared. Those who aren’t in favor of homeschooling will not be swayed by the recitation of statistics, so have this short sentence memorized: “This is a very personal decision that we did not enter into lightly. We appreciate your support and we are committed to making this work.” is a practical reply that won’t build walls when it’s said sincerely.

Imagine this purely hypothetical situation: Two parents sit down at a stereotypical kitchen table, you know, the place where all homeschooling families spend the entire day (insert tongue in cheek before proceeding.)

Enter Mr. Skeptical, the person who just isn't sure. This person will ask you all sorts of questions looking for a hint of rational thinking in your answers. If you value your relationship with this person you will want to answer their concerns in a firm but polite manner. This is the person who will want to know what you plan to do about socialization, sports, laboratory classes, extracurricular activities, curriculum, grading, and getting into college. Usually this person is satisfied with your well-researched answers and leaves you to do your thing or at least keeps his objections to himself.

Joining the conversation is Mrs. Regulation, her head filled with news stories from the past fifteen years about people who commit horrendous crimes under the guise of home education. This person will demand full accountability of your children. "We must prevent further atrocities from happening to these supposedly homeschooled children!" Unfortunately this is a case of one bad apple ruining the barrel, the vast majority of homeschooling parents are well-adjusted, concerned, educated, and loving parents. There is no arguing with Mrs. Regulation and the argument about bad things happening to publicly schooled kids too just won't work. Try as you might you usually cannot convince Mrs. Regulation that anything but the institution of public education is best for every child. Mrs. Regulation can be very scary but eventually she will give up, usually, though sometimes it takes a lot of protest. [Check out this article](#) about what happened when homeschooling freedom was at risk in California in 2018.

Dear Gramma walks in just moments after you announce your decision. Gramma loves her little darlings more than anything and is convinced that you are good parents, but she is just not sure that you know what you are getting yourselves into. If public school was good enough for you why isn't it good enough for your children? Wait! Does this mean you think she didn't do a good job of raising you? Are you criticizing her parenting skills? Now Gramma is in tears, insisting that

public school is the best place for your children to be. All previous experience dealing with school officials while you were a student have gone out the window. Constant reassurance is all you can do for Dear Gramma, and inviting her to help out from time to time isn't a bad idea either. Don't be surprised if Gramma calls unexpectedly and asks your children to recite the alphabet or count for her. It was helpful for me to remind my children that they didn't need to feel any pressure to answer these quizzes at all, and usually they didn't bother.

If you're lucky Aunt Susie will walk in. Aunt Susie is a public school teacher but she knows something everyone else doesn't. In her 30 year teaching career Aunt Susie has performed many an academic evaluation for the homeschooled student. Aunt Susie knows that homeschooled students do well academically and socially. Aunt Susie sees the "socialization" of school students on a daily basis and believes that homeschooled students are adequately prepared for adult life. Hopefully Aunt Susie will help you field the concerns of everyone else because you know they're going to call her and ask for her opinion.

Finally you have Cousin Can't. There is no way around it; you simply are not going to change this one's mind. All the facts in the world won't sway Cousin Can't from his viewpoint. Cousin Can't is the one who will tell your child that if they go to school they'll have recess on a real playground every day and wouldn't that be fun? (Yes, we have a Cousin Can't who actually said this!) There is no use in arguing with this one as it will always fall on deaf ears. Debating the issue is futile with Cousin Can't, save your breath. A simple nod and "I'll keep that in mind" usually quiets Cousin Can't and eventually she will relent, at least to your face. It's important to ensure Cousin Can't knows the boundaries with your children, never let her badmouth homeschooling in the presence of little ears. We all have a Cousin Can't and while most are harmless you do need to keep an eye and ear on this one when your children are within earshot.

As if dealing with negative family members isn't enough you'll also be approached by strangers, constantly, though I've noticed it's not as common now as it was a decade ago. When confronted with a situation in which a person asks why your children aren't in school, have a short and non-confrontational answer prepared. This person most likely doesn't want to know WHY you homeschool, they only want to know why your children aren't in school, or perhaps they're just trying to be polite (usually this is the case with cashiers. For some reason cashiers tend to ask the most, I don't know why.) Answering with a statement such as "We homeschool our children because the schools here are in despicable condition" is more likely to ignite a flame than squash a spark. Whether you like it or not we are all representatives of the homeschooling community. If we wish to see homeschooling gain acceptance we must act with kindness and understanding, even if this is the fourteenth time you've heard the question in the past hour!

What about socialization?

There is one word every homeschooling parent loathes. The mere mention of the word is enough to send chills through the body and leave you gasping for air. It's so terrifying a word that homeschoolers cannot bear to mutter it, referring to it only as "the S word"...

"What about socialization?"

"Aren't you concerned about their socialization?"

"How will they learn to socialize?"

When a parent first makes the announcement that they will be homeschooling their children it seems the first concern on the mind of everyone is socialization. "How will they learn to get along with others?" Socialization, however, is the

primary reason parents are choosing in larger numbers than ever to homeschool. More and more parents are choosing not to expose their children to the negative influences of modern-day schools. With today's terrifying rate of child drug addiction and alcoholism, school violence, childhood depression, & bullying, can you blame them?

The American Heritage Dictionary (1987 Second College Edition) defines socialize as "to place under public ownership or control". If that is the purpose of school, no thank you! This mindset is not what most parents want for their children, yet our children are being forced to live it in the one place outside of home that is supposed to be safe, their school.

Where is there anything naturally social in forcing thirty eight year olds to sit in neat, alphabetical rows? What about requiring students to raise their hands to speak, and don't forget about asking permission to use the restroom. This is the "real world" homeschoolers are said to be shielding their children from.

Like any other child, homeschooled children need guidance and instruction in all areas, including social skills. You can take the kid out of the school but you can't take the kid out of the kid, meaning, homeschooled kids are still kids and will make mistakes. Homeschooling allows you more of a chance to monitor your child's social development before they make their own way into the world, allowing for proper social supervision in the early years, which means more opportunity for children to learn appropriate social behavior.

Anyone who befriends a homeschooling family will soon realize that home is rarely where you will find the family, at least not for very long. Homeschoolers are at the doctor's office, the post office and talking about the weather with the grocery bagger. We're learning while serving at the nursing home and the food

bank. We're shadowing reporters and butchers. We're programming video games in co-op groups. We're babysitting toddlers, leading tours at the museum, and practicing new piano scales in group lessons. We're interacting with hundreds of different people every day, each with a different view, faith, ethnicity...life.

Can single parents homeschool? What about working parents?

Yes! It will take an extra dose of dedication and determination, but both types of households make excellent homeschooling households. These types of homeschooling families are actually much more common than you may think. Some decide to "afterschool" their children (see glossary in section 3), some use daytime care and teach in the evenings, some parents work from home, some parents work swing shifts; you get the idea. If you have the desire to homeschool you CAN make it work!

In a handful of states the homeschooled child is welcome to participate in classes and extracurricular activities offered by their locally zoned school and this can be a wonderful resource for parents who may need a little help in providing their child's education. Many states allow students to join an "umbrella school", a private school designed specifically for students taught at home. You can find umbrella schools that provide only record keeping, schools that provide a major chunk of your child's instruction, and everything in between.

We now have the option of correspondence schools, tutoring centers, virtual public schools, and even school on video! There are curriculum choices available that call for little parental guidance and there is the unschooling lifestyle as well.

If you are truly committed to homeschooling do not let the fact that you are a single or working parent stop you! You may have to think outside the box but one

of the beauties of homeschooling is having the opportunity to mold it into what you need and want it to be.

A local support group can also help out a parent looking for a bit more support. Local groups often coordinate field trips, mandatory testing (if applicable where you live), group classes, and discounts to community venues. A support group can also be a good place to meet families who may be willing to help out with transportation and daycare.

Will my child be able to attend college?

Yes! Today a homeschooled child is just as able to enter college as any other child, in fact, some universities regularly seek out homeschooled students. Dual enrollment, in which your high school-aged child attends community college while completing high school, is gaining popularity and is an option my own teenagers have used.

When your child reaches high school age you'll need to start creating a transcript for them and they'll likely have to take some kind of placement exam, check the resources section at the end of this guide for website recommendations.



How much does it cost to homeschool?

Answering this question is about as easy as answering “how much water does a glass hold?” Well, it all depends on the glass. Homeschooling can cost as little or as much as you want it to. I can, however, give you a general answer: You will spend as much as you want.

Currently my family spends about \$2000/year to educate 6 children, with the bulk being spent on advanced math dual enrollment college texts for our teens. Most of what we buy we will be able to use again with our younger kids. We used to spend much, much more on boxed curriculum but after a few years we realized

that we were spending money on things that just didn't work for us. Alternately, in leaner years we've spent well under \$600 a year and have even homeschooled for free.

Nothing looks quite as educational as shiny new textbooks and fancy teacher's guides, packaged and shipped (at your cost) to your home each fall. It's new, it's the latest edition, it's what you are persuaded to believe will make you successful and earn your child admission into Harvard. It is, however, very expensive and out-of-reach for many families.

A pre-packaged curriculum is a want, not a necessity. It is a luxury many cannot afford or choose not to purchase, yet most children not afforded this luxury are every bit as educated and some even continue on to Harvard. How do you do it without the aid of a boxed curriculum?

Chances are you are already buying writing utensils, paper, and art supplies. You probably already have a computer and printer, which I consider necessary given the abundance of free and low cost curriculum available on the Internet. Since you are obviously concerned about your child's education you most likely have a decently stocked home library as well as a library card. In all honesty, these are the only things you need to provide a well-rounded education, with a little creativity thrown in for good measure.

The backbone of any good program is literature, and lots of it! When it comes to good literature age-appropriateness and interest level trump reading ability. Children learn more about the workings of the world, past and present, from so-called "living books" than from any level-graded reader. Consider E.B. White's Charlotte's Web. There is no finer way to learn about the intricacies of being a spider and farm life than through this magnificent novel. Your six year old may not

be able to read the book independently but there is no reason they cannot enjoy the experiences as a read aloud or book-on-tape. Literature also has the distinction of being very inexpensive and easy to find second-hand. [The Read Aloud Handbook](#) written by Jim Trelease is a must-have for the family serious about literature.

It is important to mention that an abundance of free and low cost resources can be found on the Internet. For the cost of ink and paper you can create a customized education that sits squarely on the shoulders of fine literature. Check out the resources section for links to some of my favorite websites for free education!

Now, there is nothing wrong with buying boxed curriculum, in fact it works great for a lot of kids. If you want to buy pre-designed curriculum you can buy most programs in pieces rather than as a whole, which may or may not save you money. You can buy most programs used as well, though shipping costs may negate any real savings. In general, expect to pay anywhere from \$400-1200 per student for an entire year's worth of new prepackaged materials from a publisher or supplier. When purchasing subjects a la carte you can expect to pay between \$60 and \$200 per subject, with extra fees for readers, labs, manipulatives, and supplies. It is always important to research your options first because going overboard can mean spending \$300 or more per subject, which would be a shame if two months down the road you realize the program just isn't working for you.

Just because you CAN (or maybe can't) spend that much money, it doesn't mean you MUST. There are homeschooling methods that tend to be less expensive and these days you can homeschool FOR FREE. So, like I said earlier, homeschooling costs as much as you want it to. I talk more about homeschooling frugally in the next section!

How to Buy Curriculum, A Learning Style Primer, and Alternatives to Expensive Curriculum.

Of all the questions I am asked, “What curriculum do you use?” and “What should I use?” are the hardest to answer. Why? For the same reason traditional schools fail so many children, kids aren’t one-size-fits-all! What works for my child won’t necessarily work for your child.

Choosing curriculum is overwhelming, I know. By considering the following four points you should be able to narrow down your choices fairly quickly:

- Does this resource match my worldview?
- Does this resource match my child’s learning style?
- Does this resource match my teaching style?
- Can I realistically afford this resource?

In order to provide a complete, yet concise, answer let’s discuss each of these concerns individually.

Does this resource match my worldview?

This should be pretty straight-forward, you wouldn’t think it would be difficult to find curriculum to reflect your philosophical views. Right?

Well, sometimes.

The truth is, if you are looking for religious curriculum you're not going to have a problem finding it. There is curriculum available that leans toward any religion you can imagine. There is such a large selection that likely you won't have a problem finding something that fits your budget, learning style, and teaching style (more on those in a minute!)

If you're looking for secular curriculum, or curriculum without a religious skew, you will have a much harder time. First, there just isn't a lot of secular homeschool curriculum out there. Second, sometimes publishers who say they offer secular-friendly materials still throw in content that isn't secular at all. It can be overwhelming, but it's not impossible! Most secular homeschooling parents resort to modifying curriculum (some curricula lends itself to modifying more than others) and others stick to resources typically used in public school. The good news is that each and every day new secular resources are available, the key is to search outside of homeschooling-specific circles.

Does this curriculum match my child's learning style and my teaching style?

A learning style is the method in which an individual learns best. Fortunately there has been a lot of research conducted on learning styles in the last decade. Unfortunately so many learning style combinations have been discovered that it's almost overwhelming to even think out. There are hundreds of books and websites out there that focus on explaining and determining learning styles. For the sake of this guide we're going to deal with the 3 "mother" styles, the 3 styles in which all other styles fit:

Visual – learn by seeing

Auditory – learn by hearing

Kinesthetic – learn by doing

Do you have a preferred way of learning? I am much more receptive to visual learning than other types. I'd venture to say I am hopelessly lost when it comes to auditory learning.

Just as you have a preferred style, or combination of styles, so does your child. You may be surprised to learn that your child's learning style may not match your learning style, and if you have multiple kids you probably have multiple learning styles between kids.

This is all quite natural and homeschooling allows us the advantage of teaching to our child's learning style. **We have to be careful, however, not to focus on our teaching style over their learning style.**

Our teaching styles are largely based on our learning style. Auditory learners tend to teach with more of a lecture & answer style. Visual learners probably lean more toward using videos, textbooks, and other written media. Kinesthetic learners are often project-based teachers who like to keep little hands busy. None of this is wrong, the key is to recognize your unique styles and compromise when necessary.

Let's look at examples in my life: I have a son who is the very definition of a kinesthetic learner. This child constantly has to be using his hands to make something, he enjoys nothing more than creating. He does not enjoy writing, workbooks, or reading, however. He's often loud and will act out when he is bored, and anything that doesn't involve using his hands is boring to him. If you expect him to learn from a screen you're going to be in for a bad time. He is a much stronger hands-on learner than I am and I found that when it was time to "do school" he would complain. A lot. So we talked and made some compromises.

I combine his writing, reading, and spelling into one subject and give him three short assignments a week.

I allow him to play with small toys or draw while I'm reading aloud.

I put away **my** favorite math curriculum in favor of one that I find dull but works for him.

I ensure he has plenty of time for exercise during the day.

I could go on & on about my children and our learning styles vs. teaching style discoveries but in the end, the point I am trying to drive home is this:

It is our responsibility as homeschooling parents to relinquish our ideas of what education is in favor of what works best for our child. The most beautiful thing about homeschooling is that we can do that.

One more point to consider with teaching style is: how much time am I willing to commit to preparation, teaching, grading, and follow-up? Let's face it, some of us thrive on that stuff and some of us prefer to give our kids a book and watch them go. It's important to buy a curriculum that fits into your preferred method of teaching. I'm much more of a "coordinator of studies", meaning I like to hand my kids the resources and watch what they can do, helping as necessary. If I was to buy a curriculum that required an hour of teaching every day, well, we'd all be miserable!

Can I realistically afford this resource?

This one is tough, I know. Every year I look at a shiny boxed science curriculum for my kids. It is so pretty, and it includes EVERYTHING for an entire year of science lessons. It meets all of the above requirements but sadly it doesn't meet my budget. As the curriculum is consumable there is no buying used option, and no saving for the younger kids, and this makes me sad.

So what do I do? Well, I do what millions of other cheap, er frugal, homeschooling parents do. I make my own using the expensive curriculum as a guide. I buy a less expensive science text in eBook version and buy supplies used, sometimes I even ask friends if they have the equipment we need for borrowing.

If you can use and afford the expensive stuff, go for it! There is no shame in being able to afford what you want, that is awesome! In fact, there are instances where I will buy something I can't really afford but I will sacrifice in another area, some resources are just worth that! If that's not you though, don't get discouraged. There is almost always a less expensive alternative to those expensive classes. Consider the following options:

-Grammar, writing, and spelling curriculum can often be replaced with a few guides, some writing prompts found on the internet for free, and a writing journal.

-Curriculum is often available used, especially subjects like math! Math happens to be something I always outsource, and I have one favorite curriculum. New the program costs about \$250 but I usually buy an older version (because algebra doesn't change!) and pay about \$60.

-Many publishers offer ebooks now! eBooks are cheaper to produce and have less operating costs making them a very affordable option. Instead of printing the eBooks, which can cost arm & a leg, I often allow my children to read the content on the computer or their Kindles (you can send any PDF materials to a Kindle!) and ask them to do any writing activities in a notebook.

-Pick & Choose! A publisher may offer all subjects but that doesn't mean you have to buy all of them together. Buying a bit here and a bit there can save you a lot over time.

-Streaming media is a great way to enhance your child's education for a few dollars a month. Netflix is a popular option for streaming educational movies, but Amazon Prime is our favorite streaming service as it offers streaming movies and

music. Hulu.com, TopDocumentaryFilms.com, and YouTube are other places to stream media at no, or very little, cost.

A Quick Word about Common Core Materials

I am not an expert on the Common Core Standards (CCS), just like I wasn't an expert in No Child Left Behind a few years ago, and I won't be an expert in whatever else comes down the line. I am a consumer of educational goods though, and CCS has become a dirty phrase in the homeschooling community, so I felt it necessary to examine the CCS from a lay person's point-of-view.

I'm not going to hash out the ethics of what CCS is and isn't, you can find links for more information in the resources section. All I want to say is this: don't let CCS-alignment dissuade you from purchasing something that will work for your family.

Wait! Don't put this guide down. Hear me out.

Quite frankly, most homeschool curriculum already meets or exceeds CCS because the standards aren't very high. What I see happening in the homeschooling community is the vilification of companies who say that their product is CCS-aligned. Here's the thing about being CCS-aligned though: there are different types of alignment.

The first type of alignment is **intentional alignment**. Intentional alignment is when publishers intentionally change their product specifically to meet CCS guidelines. This could be good or bad, depending on the educational value of the original and

which kids will be using the new materials. Some companies make very slight changes to the language used or simply added more reading selections while some companies opted to create totally new, or severely altered, versions of their materials.

The second type of alignment is **coincidental alignment**. These are the companies who offer existing products that meet (or exceed) CCS but no alterations were made to do so. I've found that the people who offer these products are the small businesses who are trying to compete in a world overrun with mega-corporations and huge publishing houses with massive marketing budgets.

There are vigilante groups made up of homeschoolers who assemble lists of publishers that are CCS-aligned and those that aren't. These groups have aggressively pursued publishers with threatening letters demanding they define themselves and take a stand on the standards, and then they vilify anyone who doesn't agree with their view and acquiesce. These groups use scary language that makes it sound as if your homeschooling freedom is at stake if you buy something from an aligned publisher. These lists, groups, and their alarmist messages won't hurt the major publishing houses one bit but they do hurt the small businesses who offer excellent materials that were created long before CCS was even a thing.

Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. If you are seriously opposed to CCS I encourage you to buy from small companies and those who don't benefit from government school dollars. Buying used is another great way to buy what you want without supporting CCS. Get involved in local politics so your voice can be heard but don't blacklist reputable companies and materials that work for your family because of a list made by a group of non-experts.

Section 2 : Beyond the Basics: the Dirty Details



Where can I find legal information?

The first place to look for legal information is the internet. I know, it sounds unbelievable, but it's true! Be discerning, however. Always seek information from reputable sources that can cite their information. Beware of websites that insist that your homeschooling freedom is at risk or organizations that put religious liberties before the law. If you speak to someone about laws and regulations always fact check that the information with the STATE department of education. Never rely on the information from your local school district because in my experience they often ask for information that isn't legally required, or worse yet, they give out false information.

Check the resource section for applicable links to home education laws.

Homeschool Glossary

When one begins the search for information on homeschooling they are more-likely-than-not bombarded with unfamiliar terminology that can cause overwhelming confusion. School-at-home, unschooling, eclectic, cyber schooling, deschooling...what does it all mean? Isn't school-at-home the same as homeschooling? Unit study or pre-packaged? Inclusive or exclusive

See what I mean about the confusion?

Following are some words that may be unfamiliar or must be redefined for many who are just beginning the homeschool journey.

Home Education - also referred to as homeschool, home school, home-school, etc. This is the act of a child's parents taking full and complete responsibility for their education & direction by removing them from public and private school settings. This includes bearing the brunt of all problems that may occur as well as

accepting all accomplishments. When you home educate there is no “system” to blame when something goes wrong.

School-at-Home - The act of bringing the traditional classroom into the home. Many, but not all, school-at-home households include extensive or sole use of a pre-packaged curriculum as well as highly structured lesson plans and schedules. Many people also consider full-time virtual school to be school-at-home.

Pre-Packaged Curriculum - Similar to public and private schools, pre-packaged curriculum consists of texts and resources covering one or multiple subjects. The curricula provide lesson plans, supplementary activities, record keeping and assignments. Parents can buy pre-packaged curricula to cover only one subject, or to cover an entire grade level. These are not customized to each child as they are made to fit an entire grade level. Many companies, however, do publish packages for children with special needs, such as excelled programs and programs suited to children with more active learning styles.

Unschooling - often referred to as child or interest-led instruction. In the unschooling family the child bears the responsibility for his or her education with guidance from their parents. Unschoolers typically consider the world to be their classroom and see the student being on an eternal quest for knowledge. Texts and pre-packaged curricula are rarely used, except as reference manuals, and only then if the student chooses to use them. Radical Unschooling is a term you may also hear, it refers to the adoption of unschooling principles in all matters of life.

Eclectic Homeschooling - Some consider eclectic homeschooling to be the gray area between school-at-home and unschooling. Eclectic homeschooling is generally accepted as a mix of many different styles and educational theories. Eclectic homeschoolers embrace the parts of each homeschooling style that fit them and leave the rest at the door. While some eclectics may use pieces of pre-packaged curricula, it is usually not the sole method of education.

Relaxed Homeschooling - Also considered to be in the gray area but a bit closer to the unschooling end. Relaxed homeschoolers are often families who subscribe to unschooling philosophies but reside in a state with subject and logged time

requirements, or who want a little more structure. These families are more “go with the flow” than structured.

Deschooling – often erroneously confused with the term unschooling, deschooling refers to the period of time a student takes off from studies after leaving a traditional school setting. This period can range from a few weeks to an entire year, depending upon the student’s needs. The purpose of deschooling is to allow the child time to adjust to the homeschooling lifestyle and to provide time to heal if the child left their school due to a negative situation. Deschooling gives parents and children time to adjust to their new environment.

Afterschooling – The act of providing supplemental education to a child who attends traditional school.

Burnout - The feelings parents and children experience after long periods of study or during an exceptionally difficult period of time. Burnout most often happens when the material is not correct for the student’s current level, when the style of teaching doesn’t match the student’s learning style, when study vacations are too infrequent, and throughout the holidays. Many experienced homeschoolers state that February is a very common month to experience burnout. Most families can overcome burnout by taking a few weeks to decompress (see deschooling) while reflecting on their current teaching methods and curricula choice.

Cyber School/Virtual School - An at-home extension of traditional public school, administered as a correspondence school by the local school board or state Department of Education. Cyber schools are often excellent choices for publicly schooled children who are at risk of dropping out. Many homeschooling advocates do not consider virtual schools to be homeschooling since the school maintains responsibility, but this viewpoint is changing quickly with the advent of independent online programs.

Charter School - Charter School means different things in different parts of the country. In many parts of the country a charter school is a public school run by an organization other than the public school district, but it’s still subject to local district and state oversight. In some states, California for instance, charter schools are public schools that are a school in name only. These charter schools exist to

provide oversight and regulate funding to families who wish to utilize public funds to provide their child's education.

Umbrella School - Umbrella schools are organizations that use flexible private school laws to "cover" home educating families. These schools must follow private school law and in some states that allows for parents to teach the subjects instead of the school. Umbrella schools vary in what they offer, from simple record keeping to in-person classes and diplomas, based on local law and policy.

Unit Study - The term for incorporating all school subjects around one main theme. This is an excellent method for teaching multiple children in one household or for using as a cooperative class with other homeschooled children. There are pre-packaged curriculums available that are in unit study format. Unit studies often require moderate to heavy library use. For those willing to spend large amounts of time researching, unit studies can be created by the parents at very minimal cost. Unit studies are one of the most cost-effective methods of homeschooling, and one of the most flexible as they can be created to fit unique learning needs.

Classical Education - Classical education is a rigorous method of instruction based on the Trivium and is gaining in popularity, due in part to the book [The Well Trained Mind](#) (Jessie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer.) The Trivium divides education into three stages; grammar (early elementary), logic (middle school), and rhetoric (high school). Classical literature, the classic languages, and world history are considered very important in the Classical curriculum. Classical households generally require extremely structured schedules and lesson plans.

Charlotte Mason Education - Miss Mason was a 19th century educator with very progressive ideas about education, she's even considered progressive in the 21st century! Charlotte believed that education should be peaceful and thorough, grounded in great literature and the arts, and allow plenty of free play time. She believed children learn best by observing and narration. The Mason theories require extensive use of journals for sketching and narrating purposes. Education in this style begins at age 6 and lasts throughout the student's life. Children are encouraged to silently observe and recreate, rather than de-create by taking apart. The goal of Mason education is to provide the child with a lifelong quest for

knowledge, and the skills to succeed in that quest. The majority of resources defining themselves as Charlotte Mason-style are religious, however there are a small secular market as well.

Inclusive - Often used to describe a support group that includes everyone, regardless of faith, parenting practices, family make-up and homeschooling styles. Always be sure to read the group's mission statement and rules before applying for membership as some inclusive groups aren't always completely inclusive.

Exclusive - A term used to describe support groups that only include a certain faction of the homeschooling public, often a particular religion or a very specific geographical region.

Portfolio – Samples of your child's work that were assembled throughout the year. Portfolios generally include a reading list, a resource list, and samples of work from the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.

Evaluation - the practice of employing a neutral third party to review your child's homeschool year. Evaluations normally consist of a portfolio review by a certified teacher however in some states standardized testing is required. Your state law will tell you what type of, if any, evaluation is needed.

Section 3 : Books, Websites, & Other Resources I Love



Free online curriculum:

Discovery K12 - <http://discoveryk12.com/dk12/>

Alison - <http://alison.com/>

Coursera - <https://www.coursera.org/>

Open Culture - <https://www.coursera.org/>

Teach Your Monster to Read - <http://teachyourmonstertoread.com/>

Khan Academy - <https://www.khanacademy.org/>

Big History Project - <https://www.bighistoryproject.com/>

Free Science Curriculum -

<https://homeschoolgameschool.com/giant-list-of-free-secular-homeschool-science-curriculum>

Finding Used/Inexpensive Curriculum:

eBay – <http://www.eBay.com>

Paperback Swap – <http://www.paperbackswap.com>

Hip Homeschool Moms Classifieds -

<http://www.hiphomeschoolmoms.com/the-hip-list/>

VegSource Homeschool - <http://www.vegsource.com/homeschool/>

Homeschool Buyers Co-op - <http://www.homeschoolbuyersco-op.org/>

Rainbow Resource Center - <https://www.rainbowresource.com/>

Homeschool Group Buys - <https://homeschoolgroupbuys.com>

eBook Curriculum Suppliers:

CurrClick – <http://www.currclick.com>

EduCents – <http://www.educents.com>

Amazon (tons of free classic lit! If you don't have a Kindle you can download a Kindle app or read from your computer for free!)- <http://www.Amazon.com>

Overdrive (An eBook-borrowing service that's run through your library) - <https://www.overdrive.com/>

Project Gutenberg (45,000 free eBooks!)- <http://www.gutenberg.org/>

Streaming Media Sources

Amazon Prime – <http://www.Amazon.com/prime>

Netflix – <http://www.NetFlix.com>

Hulu – <http://www.hulu.com>

Hoopla – <http://www.Hoopladigital.com> (free!)

PBS - <http://video.pbs.org/> (free!)

Top Documentary Films - <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/>

Can I Stream It? – <http://www.canistream.it>

Some of our favorite curriculum choices from the past 15 years:

Real Science Odyssey – <http://www.pandiapress.com/>

Writing Strands - <http://www.writing-strands.com/>

Reading Eggs – <http://www.readingeggs.com/>

Teaching Textbooks – <http://www.teachingtextbooks.com/>

A+ Tutor Soft – <http://www.aplustutorsoft.com/>

History Odyssey – <http://www.pandiapress.com/>

Story of the World - <http://peacehillpress.com/story-of-the-world/>

Teaching Textbooks - <http://www.teachingtextbooks.com>

Information on Common Core Standards:

Core Standards - <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/>

Common Core - <http://www.commoncore.com/>

General homeschooling info:

Savvy Homeschool Moms – <http://www.savvyhomeschoolmoms.com/>

Homeschool Gameschool – <http://www.homeschoolgameschool.com>

Hip Homeschool Moms – <http://www.hiphomeschoolmoms.com>

A to Z Home's Cool - <http://a2zhomeschooling.com/>

Secular, Eclectic, Academic Homeschoolers - <https://seahomeschoolers.com>

College Admissions help:

Setting the Records Straight, a book by Lee Binz

Let's Homeschool High School - <http://www.letshomeschoolhighschool.com>

Five Js (free record keeping documents) - <http://www.fivejs.com/>

College Board (CLEP, AP, and SAT exams) - <https://www.collegeboard.org/>

ACT Student - <http://www.actstudent.org/>

Legal Information:

United States Department of Education state contact information -

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html>

State Homeschool Laws -

https://a2zhomeschooling.com/laws/homeschool_laws_legalities_overview/

Local Support Group Directories:

Homeschool World - <http://www.home-school.com/groups/>

Home Ed Directory - <http://www.homeeddirectory.com/>

Secular Support Group Directory -

<http://www.secularhomeschool.com/content/203-secular-homeschool-support-groups-country-state/>

About the Author



Meg Grooms, long-time homeschooling mother of 6 (and grandmother of 2!), is a blogger and writer currently based out of Southern California. Living what she calls “the slow travel lifestyle”, Meg & her family set out in 2015 on an adventure to travel the world a few years at a time, setting up home bases along the way. Meg is a well-known homeschool writer and speaker and has been featured in publications all over the world. You can learn more about Meg at HomeschoolGameschool.com. Meg & her partner Jason are the creators & publishers of the kid science & social science guides [Wild at the Zoo](#), [Bugging Around](#), and [Our World Neighbors](#).