

When we started homeschooling, I felt as though I had tucked a child under each arm and jumped off a cliff. Imagine my surprise to discover we have wings. ~Maura Seger, Homeschooling Mom

1-2-3 Go

Homeschooling Quick Start Guide

1. Get Legal

2. Learn About Learning

3. Choose Your Educational Method or Style

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Get Legal

Compulsory Education

Children who are 6 (by September 1st of that school year) to 18 years old must be enrolled in public school, charter school, private school, or tutoring.

Five Ways to Homeschool Legally in California

It seems confusing at first because there are so many options.

Once you've chosen an option, it will be simple.

1. Establish your own private school. This is MUCH easier than you might think. (PSA)

Decide to establish your own school. Choose a name for your school. Keep the following records on file: statement of your qualifications to teach, a course of study for each child, health records, an attendance register. File a Private School Affidavit each year between October 1 and October 15. No reporting requirements about your child's academics. No testing requirements. No permission required. You are entirely responsible for your own child's education.

2. Enroll in a Private School Satellite Program (PSP)

Private PSPs vary widely in offerings, philosophy, and structure. Some offer complete curricula and home study assignments; others serve only as administrative record keepers for independent homeschooling. They may offer group activities or field trips. The prices also vary widely.

3. Enroll in a Public School Independent Study Program (Public ISP)

These programs are offered by many school districts or county departments of education. They provide curricular materials that are state-approved and typically require approximately the same course of study as the public schools while allowing for more flexibility. Teachers are state credentialed and meet with parents and students (usually about once a month or more often if needed). Work samples and standardized testing are required.

4. Enroll in a Charter School Independent Study Program (Charter ISP)

There are many charter school programs that cater only to homeschoolers. They offer funding for learning resources which are chosen by parents and are not limited to state-approved curricular materials. These may include payment for learning activities including dance classes, martial arts, photography, etc. A credentialed teacher meets with the parent and child approximately once a month. Learning samples and standardized testing are required.

5. Tutoring

Parents with a valid teaching credential can act as tutors for their children or they can hire tutors with a valid teaching credential. Parent-tutors or hired tutors must fulfill some very specific requirements: tutoring must take place for 3 hours per day, 175 days per year, between 8 am and 4 pm, and must be in English. No reporting required.

LEARN ABOUT LEARNING

Get Started: Answer the Right Question!

You've made the big decision to homeschool but there seem to be so many questions that need answered. What style will work best for us? Do we use a curriculum? What about assessments? What do we do if our child doesn't want to do what we think is best? How do we decide what is best? It goes on and on, and each answer just seems to bring on its own set of new questions.

Before you begin to answer any of those "how to" questions, sit down in a quiet place and ask yourself one simple question: "What do I believe it means to learn?" Take some time to really reflect on what learning means to you. You may believe that it is a set of facts to be memorized and then recited back and tested. Or maybe it is a joyous exploration where the journey toward mastery is its own reward. Most likely, if you are like most of us, it is something in between.

Think about a time you learned something you were really motivated to tackle: how you went about it, what motivated you, what resources you used, what kind of environment you worked in, what level of expertise you had before you began. You chose the subject, you chose the resources (maybe with some help), you figured out what level of help you needed and you worked on it until you were satisfied that you had mastered it satisfactorily.

We all learn in much the same way. Something motivates us to want to learn a particular thing. We choose materials we can understand but that aren't too hard or too simple. We use resources that make learning easiest for us - books, videos, tapes or perhaps an expert. We work until we have mastered the activity, and we know at the end whether or not we've learned it well enough.

Motivation, resources and assessment. These are all tied together to make up a successful learning experience. Our children use exactly the same process for learning as we do. Although each child begins with a knowledge bank that is his or her own and may have a unique learning style and ability levels, creating a creative and supportive environment for that learning to take place in couldn't be simpler.

Become An Observant "Watcher"

Creating this environment starts with knowing how your child learns, her ability levels, and what motivates her. These are the essential pieces to the "beginning to homeschool" puzzle. With this in mind, it is probably becoming clear that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to learning isn't going to help to build that environment very effectively. That kind of learning environment was created for ease of teaching, not for optimal learning.

The only way to determine who your child is as a learner is to become a patient and observant "watcher." Watch and listen. Carefully collect pieces of your child that can be stored in your mind and in your heart. Learn to know yourself and to know your child. It's really as simple, and as complicated, as that. If you don't spend the time to know how you each learn, how you approach life, how you react to stress, even how you each prefer to wake up in the morning, you'll struggle much more than you have to in order to homeschool

successfully. Because, at each stage, it will be you and your child, working together, that will make this adventure successful.

First, you'll need some basic information about your child's learning style. Is she active and talkative? Does she learn best from interacting with another person or from watching videos? Is he shy and inwardly directed with a need to touch everything he works with? Active or more still? Vocal or quiet? A toucher? A picture-drawer? There are many excellent books that outline learning styles in a variety of ways. Buy one or two, check them out from the library, or do an online search. Learn as much as you can about learning styles because this will be the basis for the activities and resources you help provide.

Next, figure out when your child's peak learning times are. You may have a child who is a real night-owl and whose most alert and creative periods are between 11PM and 2AM. It might not always be possible that she can work at that time, but that's what she/he prefers and when she/he does their best work. Consequently, she/he will often be a late riser so plan accordingly.

Finally, you will need to discover what attracts and motivates your child. What are her interests? What kinds of learning experiences draw her in? Children learn because there is something that attracts them, that draws them into the learning experience, and then motivates them to become involved.

Plan For Success

Once you have collected enough information about how your child learns best you can begin to create a learning environment that will make learning a joy.

First, help your child learn things he is interested in. You will have a more interested and involved learner once you recognize that, regardless of what you want, your child is the one who ultimately decides what he is going to learn. Most skills we think of as "basic" can be learned through a variety of learning experiences. Math can be learned through construction or sewing projects and in the kitchen. Reading can be learned by being read to, by reading computer game hints and through tackling serial thrillers. Writing can be learned by having online penpals, by writing book or software reviews, or by writing a family newsletter. Skills will develop when the content of the learning reaches out and grabs a child with such intensity that they must learn these skills in order to continue learning about the subject at hand.

Second, have resources available that are at, or just slightly above, your child's current ability level. Forget about grade-level. It is an outdated and unhelpful notion for homeschooling. If you know what your child already knows you will be able to help her find resources and experiences that will allow her to succeed as she continues to gain knowledge and skills. She will build on all the things she already knows and, if you help her out, she will be able to work above her current ability level and stretch to new heights.

Third, consider keeping a journal as an assessment tool. Write regularly about what your child is doing and learning. At some point you will probably panic because you will be sure he isn't learning anything because you don't have test scores or numbers on papers. We all do it at one point or another. Your journal will help you chart his progress in ways that make sense to you. Take pictures or videos. Make a memory book. Create a portfolio or a wall that he can fill with all his favorite work. Look at it often and notice his progress. True assessment compares progress between one point in time and another.

Finally, be an integral part of your child's learning life. Learn to listen carefully and to work and learn together with her. Be a model of active learning for her. Continue to be that careful observer and watch her as she

works, because what worked last year or last month or even yesterday may not work tomorrow. Children grow and mature and their needs often change as that happens.

Put It All Together

If you make your child your focus right from the beginning, creating a learning environment filled with resources that honor your child's learning styles, abilities and level of understanding will come naturally. If you encourage learning that is motivated from a sincere interest, and help your child build on what she already knows, you will be amazed at the depth of learning that takes place. And if you include your child in the decision-making part of your learning lives you will become partners who work and learn together - and that is the real answer to all the questions about how to get started homeschooling.

(Written by Christine Webb and slightly edited by Pam Sorooshian)

Choose Your Educational Method or Style

Remember, you can always change your mind if it isn't working.

The beauty of homeschooling is the ability to tailor our approach to fit the specific needs of our own children. Many new homeschoolers choose one of the following approaches, and then, with time, most do not follow one method exactly, but pick and choose the parts that work well for their children and are flexible enough to change as the children change over time.

Some of the most common options are:

School-at-Home

A full curriculum is purchased. It may include teacher services or might be entirely online. It covers all subjects and often includes a teaching manual for the parent. There are secular and religious curriculum materials. As homeschoolers are a large market, there are many companies selling homeschooling curriculum.

Unit Studies

These can be purchased or designed by parents. A topic is selected and all of the children's lessons revolve around that topic. The topic might be something like "Oceans" or "Animals" or "The Revolutionary War." A unit study may last a week or many weeks.

Classical Homeschooling

This is also called the "Trivium" approach and it focuses on reason, record, research, relate, and rhetoric. *A Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home* by Jesie Wise and Susan Wise Bauer is a popular book on this approach.

Charlotte Mason

This method uses real-life, play, creating, and conversation as primary learning methods. There are nature studies, "living books," and narration and discussion used rather than textbooks and testing. A popular book on this method is *A Charlotte Mason Education* by Katherine Levison.

Montessori

Under the age of 6, sensorial experiences are emphasized and children work at their own pace while choosing from a variety of special materials. After age 6, children work independently on research and engage in music, science, art, and reading activities. There are no textbooks or adult-directed lessons. For more information on Montessori homeschooling see the Michael Olaf website at <http://michaelolaf.net/>.

Waldorf

This is based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner which is an anthroposophical point of view that sees humans as composed of body, soul, and spirit. There is a stress on the artistic and appreciation of beauty in the lower grades and on observing, reflecting, and experimenting in the upper grades. For more information, see www.waldorfhomeschoolers.com.

Unschooling

Also sometimes referred to as natural learning, unschooling is dropping the conventions of schooling, eliminating such things as required subjects, reading and writing assignments, and tests, and entirely replacing those with the creation of a stimulating, enriched environment and lots of parental support for children in pursuing their particular interests and passions. A good introduction to unschooling is *The Unschooling Handbook* by Mary Griffith.

Eclectic Homeschooling

Probably the most common form of homeschooling, parents choose to use various resources and approaches for different subjects. They might choose a math workbook from one company and a reading program from somewhere else. They may be very relaxed about some subjects while carefully and thoroughly covering others.