

# The Old Schoolhouse

The Magazine for Homeschool Families

## SIMPLE RECIPES FOR SUCCESSFUL HOMESCHOOLING



### A QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION ON THE BASICS OF GETTING STARTED AND CONTINUING SUCCESS

*"I got your number off the homeschool information line—can you please tell me how to homeschool?"*

By Lorrie Flem and Nancy Baetz

**A**ny support group leader could testify to receiving dozens of these kinds of calls. No two are exactly alike, because each family is different and each circumstance surrounding the question is unique. One of the first things to be said in the conversation is that there are no cookie cutter homeschools! Homeschooling means different things to different people. For some, homeschooling is duplicating public school at home with textbooks and report cards. For others, homeschooling is just the way they live—children and adults living and learning together so that an outsider looking in wouldn't be able to see what was "home" and what was "school." We don't all use or need the same recipe, the same "molds," or the same ingredients, yet we all are striving for a certain outcome that will serve our needs and purposes!

#### ***"Okay, so how do I get started?"***

Let's start with the ABCs of beginning homeschooling:

#### ***A foundation.***

Before you decide on a recipe, you have a reason for doing your baking. You and your family are hungry, and you want to meet that need. Hopefully you've planned to provide the components of a balanced, healthy diet. Before you set out to provide your children's intellectual diet—their education—you will want to consider

why you are doing it and what you are seeking to provide for your family.

For many homeschoolers, the most valuable benefit of homeschooling is that it strengthens their family. Homeschooling families spend a lot of time working, learning, and playing together, and strong relationships are built.

Many families like the flexibility homeschooling allows. Children can learn about things they are naturally interested in when they want to. A strict schedule does not have to be followed. Children can get an education tailored to their learning styles at a fraction of the cost of private or public school.

Maybe you've already decided why you want to do this. Maybe you have read and been convinced by some of the good books about homeschooling, such as *Homeschooling: The Right Choice*, by Chris Klicka, or *Dumbing Us Down*, by John Taylor Gatto.

You might want a more "healthy" lifestyle for your children, whether you want to live closer to nature or are concerned mostly about spiritual reasons. The reasons you are going to homeschool are unique to you. The important thing is that you identify them before you prepare to homeschool.

#### ***Be willing to establish a minimum time commitment.***

Not only do you need to have your reasons established, but you should also decide what your commitment to homeschooling is before you start. Some people start strong but fall fast when

they encounter their first difficulty. Be aware that just as a new recipe will need occasional adjustments to suit your own personal tastes, your homeschooling will encounter rocky times and require some fine-tuning.

Decide on a minimum length of time you are going to homeschool. Make a commitment to give it a go for a certain time period and then re-evaluate! Don't throw out the whole lump of dough—just change the recipe! There are so many different ways to go about teaching at home, so try something new. Different methods and ideas are worth trying so you won't burn out. Give it some time and then make adjustments, but don't give up!

#### ***Check out the laws.***

There is one more thing that comes before you begin planning lessons or purchasing schoolbooks. You need to know what the law requires. For information about legal requirements for homeschooling, see the sidebar on the next page.

#### ***"I don't have a teaching degree. I'm just a mom. How can I possibly do this?"***

That's perfect. Motherhood and homeschooling go hand in hand, and neither one comes with directions! Although many good sources of help are available, some people don't know where to look for them. Just as many newlyweds learn to bake and cook with a lovingly handed-down book

# Is Homeschooling Legal?

By Scott Somerville

Homeschooling is legal in all 50 states and in most countries around the world, but you may need to fill out a few forms to get started. Fortunately, tens of thousands of families have joined together as the “Home School Legal Defense Association” to make sure that process is as easy as possible. About one out of every ten homeschooling families is a member of HSLDA, and their united efforts help keep homeschooling safe and legal.

You can look up your state’s laws and find support groups in your area by going to the HSLDA website at [www.hslda.org](http://www.hslda.org). Click on the map to find your state if you live in the US, or scroll to the bottom of the page to see if your country is listed in the international section. While you are there, be sure to sign up for HSLDA’s free “e-lets” to get up-to-the-minute information about legal matters that affect your state, plus their weekly email of homeschool news of interest.

Twenty years ago, many states tried to ban homeschooling altogether. Those days ended in 1993: homeschooling is now a recognized legal alternative in all 50 states, with differing degrees of regulation. HSLDA color-codes the states by their degree of homeschool regulation. A handful of “red” states (MA, NY, PA, RI, VT) still have laws requiring individualized approval in advance by school officials, detailed documentation of curriculum plans, multiple forms of reporting, or the like. A much larger majority of states recognize a clear right to teach a child at home, so that parents only need to give school authorities a notice of their intent to educate a child at home in the fall. Some of these states also require an end-of-the-year assessment (such as a standardized test or certified teacher’s review of the child’s portfolio), while others do not. HSLDA categorizes the states that require a notice plus assessment as “orange” states, while those that require only notification are “gold” states. The remaining “green” states do not require any notification or assessment.

HSLDA provides legal defense in US courts, so membership is limited to residents of the United States or members of the US military serving overseas, but similar legal defense organizations have been established in Canada, South Africa, Germany, and Japan. No laws interfere with homeschooling in England, where “home edders” are increasingly common. Germany (like every other country in Europe) has signed the “European Convention for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”—an international human rights treaty that guarantees parental rights in education—but continues to prosecute homeschoolers despite this. (HSLDA is appealing this violation to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.) Other European nations are more careful to honor their obligations under this treaty, and permit home education in some form or other.

By working together, HSLDA members help advance homeschooling around the world and here at home. HSLDA provides support for single parents, children with special needs, and other high-risk homeschoolers who face unusual legal difficulties. For just \$10 a month, you can have all the confidence that comes with membership plus the satisfaction of knowing that you are helping homeschoolers across the country and around the world.

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of favorite recipes, anyone with an interest in a subject can learn on their own!

Kids don’t need parents who are rocket scientists or even ones with teaching certificates. They do need unselfish parents who love them, are willing to guide them, and want to spend time with them every day. Children need parents who believe in them and will help them become all that God created them to be.

Who loves your kids more than you? Mom and Dad, be confident in your ability to teach, and learn right along with your children as you begin this creative journey.

## ***“What difficulties might I face?”***

The challenges homeschoolers face are unique and different. If you asked a dozen homeschoolers what things have been hard for them, you would hear a dozen different answers! Yet, in spite of the difficulties, their children still thrive, learn, and grow.

Many children acquire negative labels, are misunderstood, or are misdiagnosed in an institutional setting where the teacher-child ratio is far off balance. Little children need to run, move, and play! They aren’t necessarily in need of medication just because they can’t sit still or because they “act out” in a group. Research shows and results prove that learning happens in different ways and on individual time frames. Don’t be discouraged if little Johnny can’t read yet and he is 10! It will come. Be patient, and don’t be quick to say everything is a learning disability.

Being in a safe, loving, and nurturing environment can change those so-called hyperactive, ADD, bullying, withdrawn, or surly kids. They respond very well to loving relationships and guidance. As homeschoolers, they’ve been found to lose many of the characteristics that caused them to earn the labels in the first place.

## ***“My in-laws are totally against this idea.”***

Go back to your firm foundation, and remember that your kids are your responsibility. There will always be well-meaning concern from relatives, friends, or even strangers. Just remember to be kind and courteous in your responses, and trust your instincts. Your life will turn the naysayers around, eventually. The proof is in the pudding!

## ***“I don’t have the patience to homeschool.”***

Feeling that you’re not the “patient homeschooling type” doesn’t mean you aren’t! Before you had a child, were you blessed with the patience required to raise her? Or before you were married, did you already possess the patience to be a submissive wife?

God doesn’t go around doling out patience in certain amounts to designated people. Rather, He blesses us with it as we need it. Ask any mother if she has enough patience to have another child and she will probably say no. We

are blessed with patience as we need it, not in advance. Homeschooling is the same way. If you decide that this is what God is calling you to through circumstances or conviction, then rest assured He won’t leave you!

## ***“Is homeschooling expensive?”***

Homeschooling can be expensive or inexpensive, elaborate or simple. Your choice of books and resources, where you acquire them, and the number of children you have will determine the expense.

It would be easy to spend a bundle on all the scrumptious learning materials and books available. On the other hand, a superior education doesn’t have to mean an expensive one. With the Internet, there are so many valuable resources available that you could probably homeschool your children K-12 and barely spend a penny.

You probably already have many things you can use. Books can be read again and toys can be taken apart and put back together. Go through what you have, looking at each item through the eyes of a homeschooler.

Ask relatives and friends for dusty treasures like books, microscopes, or telescopes. Ask other homeschoolers for things they’re done with that you could purchase or borrow. Check out eBay, thrift stores, garage sales, and used book sales. Be sure to pick up a book on simple carpentry. You’ll need bookcases soon! Build your own and cover some geometry too!

Once you start homeschooling, you’ll look at things differently. When you ask, “What can my children learn from this?” it’s amazing how you’ll begin to look at everything in a new way.

## ***“Where can I find materials and resources?”***

The Internet is a one-stop shopping place. Look through catalogs and websites. Find a homeschool convention and go! Look, learn, and browse. Talk to the vendors, who have a wealth of information to share. Don’t forget to pay the laborer his dues and buy from those you learn from.

## ***“How can I teach several ages at once?”***

Few homeschoolers have children all in one grade! Instead of giving them all books for their own grades, teach them all together whenever you can. Teach history by reading a novel aloud and then giving each child grade-appropriate assignments. Multi-level teaching is simple, and it works. Give your children their own books for the three Rs and teach everything else together like “the old one-room schoolhouse” teacher did!

Multi-level teaching takes less time and is less expensive than using classroom curriculum. Be sure to look at unit studies when teaching different levels at the same time. We recommend [www.KONOS.com](http://www.KONOS.com) and Steward Ship ([www.UnitStudies.com](http://www.UnitStudies.com)).

## ***“What about socialization?”***

One of the most common and silliest questions homeschoolers are asked is whether their children will get the socialization they need. Think about it: aren't there a lot of public-schooled children who can't relate to adults or other children? Go to any local public school, walk the halls, and watch for behaviors that you want your children to imitate.

You don't have to be with other people of the same age group in order to socialize or “be socialized.” As adults, we would consider time spent visiting with our sister, mother, or grandmother to be legitimate socialization. This is true of children also. Whether they are spending time with their peers, parents, grandparents, or siblings, they are socializing. And aren't they good at it?

## ***“Elementary age seems pretty easy, but what about high school?”***

Sure, the early years can be a lot of fun, but just thinking about upper level math and science can seem daunting to some parents. It isn't necessary to send them back to an institution! You can learn right along with your kids in those grades. In a lot of cases, kids are self-teachers by that time. Diana Johnson, homeschooling mother of 22 years, wrote, “There is something very comfortable about homeschooling elementary age children ... then high school looms and our confidence often evaporates ... Fortunately, we can dilute this fear by carefully planning the high school years.”<sup>1</sup>

You have heard the saying “If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” This is true in almost any situation, but other factors are also involved. Once you instill in your children a love of learning and ground them in the basics, they will “finish the race.” And, if you still need help, you can find tutors (in person or online) on just about any subject.

## ***“I hate math and even flunked in school. How am I supposed to teach that?”***

Children have the most astonishing ability to want to learn about the one thing we know absolutely nothing about! But for homeschoolers, this challenge is easily overcome.

You can find classes taught by experts or people who have a passion for a certain subject. You'll find classes available as correspondence courses via snail mail, Internet courses, and video courses. Support groups, community centers, and colleges will also offer classes.

You'll find that many children are capable of teaching themselves. Think about this: when you decide to buy a computer, you do research about different brands, features, styles, service, and prices. Just as you “homeschool” yourself when you need to buy a new computer, your children can too.

When you're searching for teachers, don't overlook friends, acquaintances, and business people—most people are delighted to have a young person around who has an honest interest in what they do and know.

Parents don't have to be experts in every area their child learns about. That's one of the most wonderful things about homeschooling. Parents and children learn together!

## ***“Won't they miss out on things like class field trips and activities?”***

What about field trips and other activities that school students get to participate in? Many homeschool moms spend a lot of time exploring local museums and attractions with their children, and they are always educational! Whether you do it alone or with a group, exploring historic sites and museums can be incorporated into your children's course of study or just be a way to enjoy your area while getting an education. Museums have trained, highly knowledgeable docents, and conversing with them is a great way for kids to learn new things and to sharpen their communication skills.

Support groups almost always have a field trip coordinator, or you can organize one yourself! Just get plugged in to your local group's email network and start exploring your world with other families. You and your kids can also volunteer at museums, libraries, or living history museums.

## ***“Which method should I use to homeschool?”***

There are so many different methods of homeschooling that you'll definitely be able to find one—the trick is finding the right ones. What is right for one person won't be for another. In fact, what is right for one person this year may not be right next year. Before you try to choose a teaching method, think about what learning means to you.

School curricula and methods have evolved so that one adult can teach a classroom of 25 or 30 children. Curriculum has been developed for this setting but not necessarily for sparking the interest of an individual child.

Homeschoolers can use these materials and adjust them to fit. Some families like the security of having a packaged curriculum. Some want to pick and choose from what's available and use a little of everything.

Let's briefly go over some of the most common homeschooling methods:

**Traditional**—this is probably how you learned if you went to public school. The traditional method usually starts with a curriculum with graded textbooks in each subject that follow a scope and sequence covering each subject in daily increments for a 12-year, 180-days-a-year academic program.

**Classical**—children under age 18 are taught tools of learning in a sequence known as the trivium. The modern proponent of the classical approach was British writer and medieval scholar Dorothy Sayers. As the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s, Sayers warned that schools were teaching children everything except how to think.

**Unit Studies**—this is often the method of choice for multi-level homeschooling. Integrating language arts, science, math, and so on, all learning is focused on a particular topic with each child learning at his or her own level of understanding.

**Living Books**—Charlotte Mason was a turn-of-the-century British educator who disliked several things in modern education. She believed in respecting children as persons, involving them in real-life situations, and allowing them to read really good books.

**Unschooling**—this term came about because of a 20th-century American, John Holt. He taught that learning comes from real-life experiences. Children pursue their own interests with support from their parents.

**Principle Approach**—Principle Approach homeschooling is an effort to restore to American Christians three vital concepts: knowledge of Christian history, an understanding of our role in the spread of Christianity, and the ability to live according to the Biblical principles upon which our country was founded.

**Eclectic**—this is any combination of the above! Pick and choose your own options.

A brand new resource is out. *Homeschooling Methods: Seasoned Advice on Learning Styles* (Broadman & Holman), by the publishers of *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine*, details many tried-and-true homeschooling methods and models. Dr. Ruth Beechick, Diana Waring, Clay and Sally Clarkson, and Christine Field are just a few of the contributors represented.

## ***“Do I have to have my children tested?”***

Like so many things in life, educational choices are a personal decision. Of course, some states have laws governing this. In that case, always obey the law.

Some questions to consider are which tests will be used and why, how testing might affect the student, what will be done with the results, and whether there are less intrusive alternatives? Assessments are another way to evaluate learning. Just like when your children were babies, you can discover what they have learned by spending time with them. Standardized tests try to give a measurement of the amount of learning that has taken place up to a specific point. Assessments don't have any standard of what a child “should” be able to do; instead, they look at the child as a whole, focusing on what the child does know instead of what he doesn't.

## ***“My children don't behave well. How can I teach them at home if they won't listen to me?”***

While it is true that your children need to be obedient before they can learn from you, childrearing is also a process that is a natural outgrowth of homeschooling. But we all need some help and training in that area. One wonderful resource is [www.NoGreaterJoy.org](http://www.NoGreaterJoy.org), a ministry of Michael and Debi Pearl, who homeschooled all five of their children. Parenting doesn't come naturally but is a skill to be learned, and homeschooling can give parents a better opportunity to nurture and train their children than they would otherwise have had.

## ***“But I want my kids to go to college! Can they ‘get in’ if we teach them at home?”***

Colleges, universities, and vocational schools all over the US seek out responsible homeschooled students. They recognize the value of capability, motivation, and courtesy and consider these in addition to formal transcripts, diplomas, or GEDs. Most libraries and bookstores carry books, directories, and guides that will help older homeschoolers get information and prepare for this next step. College is not the only, or even the best, route for every high school graduate. Sending kids to college who don't know exactly what their goals are is expensive and often undermines or destroys the value system you just invested your time and effort to give them. On the other hand, many homeschoolers choose an apprenticeship over formal schooling as a faster, simpler, and less expensive option. By immersing themselves in the skill they are trying to learn, they get the “whole picture.”

Remember, your kids don't have to go to college immediately after graduation. They can even decide they don't want to go and later change their mind and decide to go after all. In fact, most educational institutions prefer older students; they are usually excited about being there and want to learn.

## ***“What if my child has special needs?”***

An excellent resource for special needs homeschooling is NATHHAN, the National Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network.<sup>2</sup> But remember, there are always unique needs present in every family! Some people have a special diet to adhere to—hence, no sugar or wheat is included in the recipe. And as with a special diet, there are special considerations in every family situation. You may truly be raising one or more children with a disability; or you, the parent, may have an illness or condition. See these things as challenges, not obstacles. An upcoming move or new baby in the family is just one more opportunity to learn! (And parents, YOU choose how to guide the learning.) Homeschooling in these situations is really no different from everyday life with them, and you are already familiar with that.

## ***“Isn't there more to it than books, though?”***

Did you know that learning life skills is homeschooling too? How many high school grads do you know who don't have the necessary skills to manage a home? Lots. With homeschooling, you can be sure to teach your kids routine home maintenance, cooking, gardening, how to balance a checkbook, and so on! These things are part of life, but sometimes they get pushed to the “back burner” at an institutional school. Homeschooling provides guidance and direction in all areas of life, not just academics.

## ***“What things are vital to my success?”***

We started with the ABCs of beginning homeschooling. Let's end with the 1-2-3 of things to do so you can't help but be successful!

1. Anything new in life has the potential to be trying—and can end in defeat if you haven't built your foundation AND shored up your supports. It is imperative that you and your husband are “reading the same recipe.” Be sure to pray together before you start, converse frequently along the way, and spend time reading uplifting and encouraging homeschool material.
2. You will want to find like-minded families. Start asking around, search the Internet, and don't forget to look at your state or country's Homeschool Nation page on *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine* website at [www.TheHomeschoolMagazine.com](http://www.TheHomeschoolMagazine.com)! Hook up with a support group. Once you begin to go to meetings, on field trips, and on other activities, you will find friends that you “click” with. Since relationships are key to success, cultivate these. You can become a part of the homeschooling community online at [www.HomeschoolBlogger.com](http://www.HomeschoolBlogger.com).
3. Mentors abound! One thing that veteran homeschoolers like to do is talk about homeschooling! Find those in your area who can guide you with some tried-and-true wisdom. Read homeschooling books and magazines at your local library, go to your state convention, and try different support group meetings. Sometimes a play group will turn out to be a great sharing time between the moms there. If you can't go to conventions, get some speaker presentations on tape! You can have well known speakers on audio right at home!

The journey of homeschooling is much more than a recipe for a nurturing dish or award-winning treats—but we hope these tips will help you find high quality ingredients and the tools you need. Our prayer is that your homeschooling endeavor will be both profitable and enjoyable and that these ideas on how to develop your own personal family recipe will bless you for years to come. We wish you many batches of healthy, happy homeschooling adventures!

*Lorrie Flem and her husband have 8 children. She is an author, speaker, and the publisher of TEACH Magazine. [www.TEACHmagazine.com](http://www.TEACHmagazine.com). Sign up for our free e-zine! Be the best mommy, wife, or homemaker you can possibly be. You'll love TEACH Magazine! Feel renewed, refreshed, energized, and ready to start each day with a spring in your step, a smile on your face, and joy in your heart!*

*Nancy Baetz is happily married to Kenneth and thankful for the challenge of mothering four lovely, active, and growing children all homeschooled since birth. Nancy does photo and fine art acquisitions for **The Old Schoolhouse Magazine**, along with freelance writing and photography. I am enjoying the discovery of my own gifts and talents along with those of my children. It is a joy to see who God created each one to become! Nancy hosts new homeschooler receptions every month for her local support group.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Planning the High School Years.” *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine*, Summer 2004: p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> NATHHAN: National Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network. Christian Families Homeschooling Special Needs Children, PO Box 39, Porthill, ID 83853. (208) 267-6246 Email: [nathanews@aol.com](mailto:nathanews@aol.com), Website: [www.nathhan.com](http://www.nathhan.com).

## **For Your Encouragement**

Since the face of homeschooling is constantly changing, we recommend you subscribe to a few magazines. They will help you keep current with issues pertaining to homeschooling and, most importantly, supply you with regular doses of encouragement. Here are the ones we most highly recommend:

**The Old Schoolhouse Magazine**  
[www.TheHomeschoolMagazine.com](http://www.TheHomeschoolMagazine.com)  
*(Be sure to request a free sample!)*

**Court Report**  
[www.HSLDA.org/courtreport/](http://www.HSLDA.org/courtreport/)

**TEACH Magazine**  
[www.TEACHmagazine.com](http://www.TEACHmagazine.com)  
*(Be sure to request a free sample!)*

**Homeschooling Today**  
[www.HomeschoolingToday.com](http://www.HomeschoolingToday.com)