

**The  
New  
Homeschooler  
Playbook**

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## What is homeschooling?

The easiest way to define homeschooling is, schooling or learning that occurs at home. However, the concept of homeschooling encompasses so much more than what is said in this simple explanation. Homeschooling does not have to take place solely in the home, and it almost never looks like “school” in the traditional sense. A more comprehensive, yet simple, definition is that homeschooling is the learning process that occurs primarily in, but is not limited to, the home.

Homeschooling can take place in many different locations. While it is usually at the student’s home, it is not limited to their home. It can be at a friend’s home, a neighbor’s home, a family member’s home, or the home of another student. It doesn’t have to be in a home at all; it can be at a library, a museum, a planetarium, a zoo, an aquarium, a science/discovery center, or a national park. It can be in a car, a minivan, a recreational vehicle (RV)...these are just a few physical locations where homeschooling can occur.

Homeschooling as a learning process does not have to look like school at all. Learning can take place at the grocery store; a student’s learning can be reinforced in a number of ways through the use of a simple grocery shopping trip. Before leaving home, the student can create the meal plan for the next week, make note of the items needed for the meals, check the kitchen, pantry, etc. for these items, and write a grocery shopping list for the items needed. Once at the store, the student can shop for the items on the list, compare prices and sizes of the chosen products, check for any possible savings, and check out at the register. This one outing alone has taught and reinforced skills such as mathematics, home organization, budgeting, planning, decision making, just to name a few. And in no way does this exercise resemble the traditional in-school learning process.

While most homeschooled students are taught by their parents, this is also not a hard and fast rule. Sometimes, one or even both parents are not able to teach the student, and the reasons vary widely. Perhaps the parent’s or parents’ work schedule does not allow them to teach their student. Maybe it’s a single parent household. The parent might be ill or disabled. It could even just be a case of the parent not possessing the necessary skills or knowledge to teach some or all of the lessons (i.e., calculus). Yet the student can still have a holistic, age- and grade-appropriate learning experience.

## Why homeschool?

Why do families decide to homeschool? The reasons for homeschooling are as numerous and as varied as the families who take this path. Sometimes the parent(s) will choose to homeschool for financial, or academic, or religious, or safety reasons. Sometimes the student will ask the parent if they can be homeschooled. The recent COVID-19 pandemic and the homebound learning that occurred as a result of it, meant that homeschooling, very loosely interpreted, became a requirement for everyone—even those that did not choose this method of learning. Here’s a closer look at some of the reasons for homeschooling.

One reason a parent may choose to homeschool is because they cannot afford to give their student the quality education they desire to give them. The family may live in an area with a substandard school district, if they are even considering public schooling at all; or they want the type of education for their student that is only offered at private schools that far exceeds their budget. Homeschooling can offer a parent the opportunity to create a rich learning environment for their student, regardless of their financial situation. Great learning does not require unlimited or vast resources; with enough creativity and research, the student's home learning experience can be just as good as the best private schools in the country.

Another reason a parent may choose to homeschool is for academic reasons. Similar to the discussion of financial reasons for homeschooling, a parent may not have access to quality schools in their area, whether public or private. A parent may even be able to afford to pay the tuition at an expensive private school, but may not have such an option in their local area, and they are not willing to send their student to a boarding school.

A parent may also choose to homeschool for religious reasons. Regardless of the cost, quality or availability of the schools in their area, a parent may desire to educate their student at home to provide the student with a foundation in their faith. All schools, even secular (nonsectarian) schools, frame their curriculum with a particular worldview and agenda, and some parents would prefer their student not learn within the framework of their local schools' worldview. Parents who homeschool for this reason do not face the challenge that those parents face whose students attend traditional schools—namely, that they disagree with the worldview and agenda of the school that their student attends.

Parents sometimes choose to homeschool for safety reasons. Chances are, a school does not exist anywhere where there is not some degree of bullying that is occurring. Most every student will experience some form of bullying during their traditional school experience, and some bullying will be extreme and can have lifelong aftereffects. Also, by all indications, there is an increase in incidences of drugs, weapons, etc. being brought to school by other students. In extreme cases, mass shooting events have occurred. No parent wants to subject their student to dangerous conditions such as these, just to go to school to get an education. Some parents will teach their student at home, for the sake of providing a safe learning environment for them.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique and rather interesting situation. During the stay-at-home mandate, parents were forced to keep their children at home for schooling. While it may be a stretch to consider this true homeschooling—the school district and not the parent directed the student's learning and remained in charge of the student's curriculum—parents did not have the option to send their student to school during this period. So, some parents supervised their students' learning at home; some utilized their own parents (the students' grandparents) or other family members; some collaborated with other parents to create group learning environments, shared between many homes; some parents utilized learning centers; the variations and locations were numerous, often dictated by the parents' work requirements.

In some cases, a student will ask their parent to homeschool them. The reasons for a student to make such a request are varied, and may overlap some of the reasons why a parent may choose to homeschool. Some students who ask to homeschool have been bullied, threatened, and/or harassed, and simply want to learn in a safer environment. Others may ask to be homeschooled because they are astute or mature enough to recognize that they learn best in a controlled home environment, where the learning can be tailored specifically to their needs. Some of these students know they are easily distracted by peers, and can learn best alone, and can therefore choose when and where they interact with their friends. Other students may have particular educational goals they wish to meet, and they are not able to reach those goals in school as easily (i.e., early high school graduation, early college admittance).

What are the benefits and advantages of homeschooling?

There are many benefits for students who are homeschooled. The student can learn in a safer environment; the learning can be tailored to the student's needs and unique learning style; the schedule and calendar can be adjusted to accommodate the family's lifestyle and obligations; these are just a few of the advantages.

First, a huge benefit of homeschooling is the safety advantage. In a traditional school environment, the student is more likely to encounter situations where there is some threat to their safety. While the vast majority of students attend school in relative safety, and there is no way that a student's entire life can be completely safe, there are enough threats to a student's safety to make it a real consideration. Practically every student will experience some form of bullying during their K-12 years at school. Most, hopefully, will be mild, but some will be severe, prolonged, and may even have long-term, far-reaching effects. Bullying can be verbal, emotional, physical; it can be via social media; it can even involve sexual assault. Most recently, with the COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen that a discussion of safety can even involve health threats.

A second advantage of homeschooling is that it enables the parent to create a curriculum and learning environment that best suits the student. Some students are not auditory learners, and as such, do not fare well in a traditional classroom setting. Some students are kinesthetic learners, and most school environments are not equipped to provide unlimited access to hands-on learning opportunities for their students. Some students wish to focus on a particular topic or field, and a traditional school setting is not able to accommodate such a goal. A homeschooled student can not only learn the same material as their peers, but can go beyond that, and at their own rate, and still accommodate their own unique interests.

Yet another advantage of homeschooling is that the family can adjust the schedule in whatever way they deem appropriate for their needs. A homeschooling family that farms may need to weave their book learning around the various farm chores and animals that need to be taken care of; or a homeschooling family with a sick relative can halt their schooling for a few days while they travel to visit and possibly even care for the family member. Homeschooling families tend to have shorter school days; fewer students means less time is needed for learning, as more focused learning can happen in a

“classroom of one (or a few).” Students who homeschool can focus on their chosen field, such as sports or music or accelerated learning, and go on to earn a college scholarship in their chosen field.

Is homeschooling legal? (Portfolios, laws, etc.)

Homeschooling is now fully legal in the United States. There was a time in the not-too-distant-past when it was illegal for a parent to keep their child out of traditional school and teach them at home. What makes this ironic is the fact that learning in the United States, as the country was being founded and populated, occurred exclusively in the home. Compulsory education, or the requirement for children to attend school for learning, did not come into existence until the 1800s. During this period, some but not all children attended school; children living in poverty or in rural areas were especially prone to not attend school. During the Industrial Revolution, more and more children attended school, as their parents were at work, and they not only needed a place to go, but an environment that was ideal for initiating them into the passive eight-hour-a-day routine they would one day experience when they became factory workers themselves. Granted, this is a bit of an over-generalization, yet it is still accurate for the basic reason as to why school became compulsory.

While all states now recognize the legality of homeschooling, each state’s homeschooling requirements are different. For example, some states require that students be administered a test by a third party at certain intervals. Some states require that students maintain a portfolio of specific artifacts as a demonstration of the learning that has taken place over the course of the past year. Some states require that a log be kept of the days a student engaged in formal learning; or another requirement is that a certain number of books be read, or a certain number of papers be written, of specific lengths. In some states there are requirements that the parent must meet, or that other residents in the home must meet. The states run the gamut in regards to what they require. Some states have few requirements; others, such as New York and Pennsylvania, have many. Make sure you check your state’s laws regarding their homeschooling requirements; this is absolutely crucial. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is an excellent resource for legal matters.

Some parents outside of the United States may choose to homeschool. Some of these families are not American; others are American ex-patriates. It is even more important for families in foreign countries to check their countries’ laws regarding learning at home, because in some countries homeschooling is illegal, and might even be punishable by imprisonment.

What about socialization?

A common question asked by those who are skeptical of or are in opposition to homeschooling, is how students are socialized. If a student learns in isolation, critics argue, it is impossible for the child to be properly socialized. Here’s a closer look at the socialization myth, and how homeschooled students actually have a greater opportunity for socialization than do their school-educated peers.

Socialization is understood to be the process of acclimating a person, beginning in childhood, to the commonly accepted behaviors of society, including interacting with others. Or, within the context of a

traditional school environment, socialization is using an age-segregated culture to teach a child how to interact with others. A traditional school setting is ideal for teaching a student how to get along with others who are the exact same age; also, it is ideal for teaching a student how to sit passively for several hours a day, moving through activities created and structured by others. Homeschooled students, it is erroneously believed, never learn how to socialize, because they lack repeated exposure to this limited learning environment.

It can be argued that socialization in a traditional school setting is lacking. In practically no other setting in a person's life will they find themselves in a large group of people of the same basic age and maturity level. Granted, learning to get along with many other individuals of *any* age can be a broadening experience, but it is limiting if the demographics of the group are so narrowly defined. An arguably better situation for learning socialization is that of being exposed to individuals of all ages and maturity levels, and learning how to interact with anyone and everyone.

Homeschooling very easily fosters this type of environment for a student. Homeschooling, contrary to what critics may say, does not occur in isolation or in a vacuum. In any learning environment, home or traditional, there will be outliers; homeschooling certainly has its outliers of individuals who homeschool their children in isolation. But the vast majority of homeschooled students are exposed to a wide variety of people on a regular basis. Every trip to the grocery store, or church, or athletic groups (i.e., soccer teams, Little League), or fine arts groups (i.e., choir, band, orchestra, art), or homeschooling organizations, or nursing homes, or hospitals, or museums, or sporting events, or field trips...all of these, and more, provide rich opportunities for socialization for homeschooled students. And because they typically have more time in their day for outings, homeschooled students have more opportunities for participating in these mixed settings for socialization.

Also, if an individual graduates from school and goes on to work in a position where they passively engage in tasks dictated to them by someone else, then, again, a traditional school environment is optimal. Yet fewer and fewer jobs structured in this fashion seem to exist. Rather, individuals who are free thinkers, get along with all types of people, and can adjust to all types of situations are in increasing demand in today's workforce. Homeschoolers will have been fielding these types of situations for years by the time they reach adulthood, and are ready to engage in "the real world." Fact: They've been engaging in the real world for years—actually, even more than their traditionally schooled peers.

How much time will homeschooling take each day?

One of the greatest advantages of homeschooling is the fact that it typically results in a shorter school day than for traditionally schooled students. In a classroom of 30, 20, even 10 students, allowances must be made for the fact that there are several different students in the class, all of whom approach learning differently. Teachers must be able to competently manage several different students, with different learning styles, at different levels, with different personalities and attention spans. Such an undertaking takes time; there are no shortcuts.

By contrast, a homeschooled student can learn a concept much more quickly; there are few if any other students to complicate the learning process (depending on the number of siblings being homeschooled), and the learning can be individualized to meet the student's specific needs and learning style. Understandably, a student can move through a lesson much more quickly as an individual, than they can as part of a group. And the larger the group (a classroom of 10, or 20, or 30), the longer the process takes. In addition, because the method of delivery for learning in homeschool is not narrowly defined, the "book" learning part of the day (often described as "seat time") can be separated from more kinesthetic activities, and may therefore take even less time. Giving a specific number of hours that a homeschooler's day may take is an impossibility, obviously; but know that it is a shorter process, yet arguably more effective.

### How to make homeschooling affordable

Homeschooling is incredibly flexible in regards to how much it can cost. It can be adjusted to accommodate any budget. Some parents may have a large budget to allot to homeschooling; as such, they may choose to purchase all of the elements, both essential and optional, of one of the more expensive curricula. They may choose to take the more expensive field trips and outings; they may involve their students in several very costly co-curricular activities.

Yet homeschooling families on the other end of the spectrum can have just as rich of a learning experience; a lot of money is not necessary for providing a student with a rich learning experience. Granted, the less money a parent has to spend on their student's learning, the more creative and resourceful they will need to become, in order to ensure their student's schooling is complete. There are many different price points for homeschooling; here are a few.

The easiest but most expensive option is to simply choose a predetermined curriculum for your student, selecting all of the essential components and even some or all of the optional components. Many companies write curriculum specifically for homeschooled students, and their accompanying price tags vary; yet an all-inclusive, comprehensive curriculum is, imaginably, about the most expensive option there is. A homeschool curriculum is often comprised of what the manufacturer considers to be the essential elements—the elements that must be purchased—and the non-essential or optional elements—the elements that are not necessary, but can still add to the student's learning experience. The cost increases for well known, well-established companies and curricula. You can make this option less expensive by not purchasing all of the essential elements; perhaps you will select a core guided manual, and selectively choose the essential elements as you decide. The longer you homeschool, the more you will discover that not all essential elements are essential. Your comfort level as the teacher will increase each year, and you will rely less on the guidance offered in the curriculum; you will also find out that your student tends not to use all of the essential elements, as well.

An inexpensive but labor-intensive option is to design the curriculum yourself as the homeschooling parent. While this approach might not be an option in the very beginning of your journey, the longer you homeschool, the more you will be able to determine what you want your student to accomplish, and how you will approach the learning. You could conceivably craft an entire curriculum from free online



sources, but great care is needed to ensure that the sources are credible. But, again, this takes time, as you can well imagine. The less you can spend, the less ready-made materials you can purchase, and the more time it will take to create those necessary elements yourself.

Homeschooling parents who can't (or won't) pay anything can opt to use a virtual charter school (VCS). While a VCS is not homeschooling in the truest sense—the school retains oversight, and mandates the curriculum and directs the content being taught—some parents see this as a viable option for learning at home for their students. The VCS provides everything that the student needs, free of charge—just like an on-ground charter school, as they are both public schools. So, a parent on a limited budget that selects a VCS does not have to purchase a computer, or books, or supplies, or anything; it is all sent to the home, free of charge. The trade-off, as mentioned previously, is that the learning path is not determined by the parent. Instead, the school considers you to be their student, and you must follow their curriculum, even the elements you may not approve of. You can of course supplement the curriculum with anything you feel it may be lacking, and you can even present troublesome topics in the way you may deem fit, but the material must still be taught, with evidence of the teaching displayed through artifacts and/or tests.

Different kinds of homeschooling (classical, religious, etc.)

There are virtually as many kinds of homeschooling as there are homeschoolers. Every family comes to homeschooling for their own unique set of reasons, so it only makes sense that they would each have their own approach to homeschooling. Here are a few.

Many families come to homeschooling for religious reasons. Whether they are Christian, Catholic, Muslim, etc., some parents make the decision that their faith, and the incorporation of it into their student's curriculum, is of the utmost importance. Granted, these families could simply choose to find a school with the same religious position. Yet there is not always a school available with which they resonate religiously. Or, if there is, they may not be able to afford it. Or they may simply want the homeschooling experience for their student. Indeed, in some faith systems, it is viewed as the parent's responsibility to educate the student.

Some parents approach homeschooling from a classical perspective. This approach is designed to resemble the type of learning that occurred in Ancient Greece and Rome—a more Eastern approach to education—that was continued into Puritan and Colonial American education. The classical approach focuses on the Trivium, which is the first three parts of the seven liberal arts; namely, grammar, logic, and rhetoric. Grammar is the foundational phase of the Trivium, and as such, teaches the basics, or mechanics. Students learn how to read, compute basic math, etc. During the second phase, logic, students begin to learn how to process what they've learned, and reason through fallacies—how to logically think. The third part, rhetoric, utilizes the basics learned in the grammar stage, and the understanding gained in the logic stage, to demonstrate and communicate the wisdom acquired as a result of the process. Students of the classical method often learn Latin and even Greek. A classically trained student learns *how* to think and *how* to learn, as opposed to simply learning topics.

Another approach to homeschooling is the unit study approach. In a unit study, the parent chooses a topic of interest, and builds the curriculum around it. So, for example, the parent knows that the student has an affinity for horses, so the parent capitalizes on that interest to teach the lesson. The nature and science aspect of the unit study are obvious. Mathematics could be incorporated by calculating how fast a horse runs, given an amount of time and distance covered. English or language arts could be included by having the student read a classic such as *The Black Stallion* and write a book report. Geography could also be a part of the lesson, by investigating where horses roam freely. Art could also be an element, by having the student either draw a horse, or color an existing sketch of one. This is a simplified example of how the unit study approach is used.

Another homeschooling approach is the Charlotte Mason approach. Charlotte Mason was an instructor in the late 1800s who advocated the use of “living” books and real-life experiences as the ideal approach to education. Living books, as opposed to textbooks, are works of both fiction and non-fiction that engage children in learning. The book mentioned in the previous approach, *The Black Stallion*, is a good example of a living book. The Charlotte Mason approach incorporates such concepts as narration, copywork, dictation, and memory work as important components to the learning process. While this method is not necessarily curriculum-driven or curriculum-dependent, homeschoolers new to this approach might elect to begin with a Charlotte Mason curriculum, and then branch out from there, once they become more confident.

In the school-at-home approach, parents approach homeschooling as if it were a micro-classroom; namely, they simply replicate the classroom in the home. This approach is especially appealing to parents who are teachers who have been trained and educated as classroom teachers, and are not comfortable with anything but traditional classroom techniques. It is also appealing to parents who choose a curriculum that has the school-at-home structure, and there are many such curricula. These curricula tend to be comprehensive, yet cumbersome; many new homeschooling families start with the school-at-home approach, but abandon it in subsequent years for something less unwieldy and more flexible.

The unschooling approach is very appealing to the more free-spirited homeschoolers. Some parents who are not interested in a structured curriculum or approach of any sort, but would rather allow the student to experience learning as it naturally occurs, might find this method appealing. While it certainly has its merits as a way of naturally incorporating learning into a student’s life, it is important to ensure that basic, essential concepts are being taught, and especially where the state’s homeschooling laws are concerned.

An exhaustive list of the different approaches to homeschooling would make this discussion considerably longer; instead, this discussion is meant to merely introduce you to some of the more popular approaches to homeschooling. Not only are there many more approaches not mentioned here, but lots of homeschooling families often incorporate more than one approach into their daily learning—and this is considered an approach, as well, and it is known as eclectic homeschooling.

## How to find the right curriculum?

While the advantage to homeschooling is being able to tailor the learning to suit the student's needs, interests, and learning style, it can also be a disadvantage, specifically in regards to selecting a curriculum. There are many different curricula from which to choose; the number of different ones available is staggering. So, how can a parent possibly find the right one for their student?

The first step in choosing a curriculum is to determine why you have made the decision to homeschool your student. Give yourself time to really think about your reasons why, and to write them down. Include in your list the way or ways in which your student learns best, and also include your budgetary considerations. This list will guide your search for a curriculum that will be ideal for you and your student. This list actually is very helpful for keeping you grounded throughout your entire homeschooling journey; when those times come when you feel like throwing in the towel—and they *will* come—your list of your reasons why you homeschool will prove invaluable.

As you consider your list of reasons why you want to homeschool, you can begin to match them up to different approaches and different curricula. For instance, if you want to approach learning holistically, then the unit study approach might be ideal for you, because you can take a single concept, and explore all facets of it, and how all the subjects interconnect with one another. Are you interested in raising a critical thinker? Then the classical approach might be the right approach for you, and you can then find a curriculum which follows this approach.

If you have access to a homeschooling convention or fair or expo, this is a great way to acclimate yourself to the different types of curricula available. You will have the benefit of a hands-on opportunity to view and browse the materials, and to see what appeals to you. If you are not able to attend an in-person event, you can browse the internet to find examples of the different types of curricula available, but remain mindful of the fact that searches such as “best homeschool curriculum” or “top homeschool curriculum” will not yield authentic results. Instead, go directly to the company to look at their products and offerings. Try to find unbiased reviews by other homeschooling parents on the various curricula.

## Options for doing the teaching

One of the reasons a parent who may be interested in homeschooling is hesitant to move forward, is because they are anxious about teaching. They may not feel confident in their own ability to direct their student's learning experience, and do not want to hinder or even damage their student's schooling. Or, if they are not feeling incompetent, perhaps they do not have the time or flexibility in their work schedule to teach and supervise their student, especially if they work outside of the home. Are there any solutions for a parent in these situations?

The good news is that parents do have options when it comes to teaching their student at home. One stumbling block some parents have is feeling inadequate. Be reassured; a homeschooling parent does not need to possess the same educational background, skillset, and classroom experience as does a traditional teacher. A teacher trains for years to direct a classroom full of different students every year.

By comparison, a homeschooling parent only needs to know their own student(s). While you as the parent may not have a precise knowledge of your student's academic knowledge when you start, you likely know what interests them, or how they learn. This type of knowledge will be more helpful for you in your homeschooling environment than all the traditional teacher training in the world; your classroom consists of the same student(s), year after year. You do not need training to guide your student's learning.

Another reason a parent may search for assistance with teaching, is if their work schedule does not permit it. Whether you are a single parent working outside of the home, or you and your spouse both work outside of the home, or you are ill or in some way unable to be your student's teacher, you may need assistance with the supervision of your student's home learning. There may be options available to you that you have never considered, or ones you are unaware of. For example, you may have a family member who is able and willing to be your student's teacher, or at the very least, supervise their schooling. Or maybe you know a homeschooling parent who would be willing to work with your student in addition to their own student(s). Another option you may have in your area is a learning center, where there are teachers that oversee a number of different student's learning processes. Do not expect that any of these options will be free; even if your family member is able to help and does not ask for compensation, you should offer it. This is no small undertaking. For all options, it is probably best to work with the person who will be supervising your student's learning in the curriculum selection process.

The best option is for you to homeschool your student yourself; no one is going to care as much or be as invested in your student's education as you are. Perhaps the other options can be viewed as temporary, while you build your confidence or while you make adjustments to your work situation to accommodate your student. You made the decision to homeschool your student; it is your responsibility to see it through.

How will my child learn advanced subjects like calculus?

Your student's homeschooling experience is progressing well, and your student is getting older and moving into higher grades—and more difficult subjects. You felt comfortable in the early years with the foundational subjects; reading, simple mathematics, basic science, etc. were manageable. The intermediate level of learning was a bit more intimidating, but you were able to successfully oversee your student's studies. Now that your student is in the advanced topics, and you are well aware you are not equipped to teach these subjects, what can you do?

Fortunately, you have lots of options. One of the best options is to find a video version of the course you are unable to teach. Numerous homeschoolers, as part of their curriculum selection, include a video teaching version of the topic in question. Video courses on topics such as calculus, physics, Latin, Greek, college writing, etc. are widely available and easily obtained. Not only can you purchase a static, non-interactive video course on DVD or as a download or streamed, you can also find an actual online live course; maybe once a week your student has a live session with the instructor, and does the assigned work on their own time offline.

Homeschool co-ops sometimes offer instruction on some subjects. Each co-op has its own set of goals and benefits, so it is impossible to speak comprehensively here about all of them. Check with your local homeschool co-op to see if the subject in question is taught within the co-op; even if it isn't, undoubtedly one of the homeschool parents in the co-op will be able to direct you to a resource.

It is also possible to find a local community college where your student can attend an on-ground course with other students. Many community colleges have programs in which they accept homeschooled students, and in turn they are able to earn college course credit.

What if my child is advanced?

Similar to the concern of how to teach your student advanced subjects is the question of how to teach your advanced student. For instance, how do you teach a six-year old who is already reading, performing fourth-grade level math, and is moving through science at an accelerated rate?

One of the greatest benefits of homeschooling is that there is no pre-determined or preset pace at which you will guide your student through the curriculum. Your student is a class of one (or two or a few); they have no one to hold them back. So, if your first grader completes their first grade math book by December, get the second grade book and keep going! There is no reason to make your child wait; let them move as quickly as they wish.

As was mentioned earlier, if you come to a point as the parent where you are unable to keep up with them, then find resources so they can keep sailing along. If your student is college bound, their accelerated learning path will serve them well; you can look into how your student can earn college credit while in high school. Or, if your student has a career goal, they can graduate early and begin training and/or certification in their chosen field. Your advanced student could conceivably be an accountant, or a nurse, or any number of jobs, before their 20<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, even 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. As long as your student is meeting your family's personal goals, as well as the state's requirements, the sky is the limit.

What if my child falls behind?

A valid concern for any homeschooler is for their student who may fall behind for whatever reason. Sometimes a student becomes ill, and is unable to keep up with their coursework, and is not able to catch up by the end of the school year. Or maybe a student is simply struggling with the material, and is unable to understand it well enough to remain on track. Or perhaps it's been a difficult homeschooling year for other reasons, and the student is just behind schedule, plain and simple. What happens in these situations?

A student who falls behind for reasons other than being developmentally delayed, or possessing a learning disability, will often eventually catch up. It may not happen in a month, or a semester; it may not even happen the same school year. But allowing your student to progress through a difficult concept at their own pace can potentially give them a measure of confidence to push through the challenge. Your only real challenge may be in regards to meeting your state's homeschooling requirements. Most every state makes allowances for students who show challenges with the learning. As a reminder, you

will seek out resources for your student if they are struggling. Have they fallen behind in math? Perhaps a different curriculum is in order. Are they struggling with writing? Maybe an adjustment in the writing assignment will help.

For a student who may have a learning disability or is developmentally delayed, you will need to investigate how to best handle this situation. Your state's homeschooling laws may have a specific section addressing this issue; your local school district may also be able to provide some suggestions. But you as the parent can and will remain in control of your student's learning experience.

Are virtual charter schools homeschooling?

While virtual charter schools (VCS) are considered by some to fall under the umbrella of homeschooling, they are technically not really homeschooling. A virtual charter school, also known as a cyber charter school, is essentially public school at home, and as such, remains firmly under the authority and supervision of the administration of the school. The school determines the curriculum and all aspects of it; the school requires specific days and hours of learning; some schools even require attendance at certain online sessions. It is clear, given these parameters, that virtual charter schools are not homeschooling.

Yet many parents who consider themselves homeschoolers opt for using virtual charter schools. After all, everything is free—the computer, the books, the supplies; the field trips are paid for and pre-scheduled. And it's somewhat easier; the parent literally just opens the boxes, sets up the computer and plugs it in, and supervises their student as the student views the lessons and completes the work. The online teacher is available to answer any questions the student may have that the parent is unable to answer.

But there is a trade-off. For all of the free materials and supplies, and a teacher who is available to answer all of your questions, you as the parent have very limited oversight. You do not have the option to choose the curriculum, and tailor it to adjust to your student's needs and interests, and to your goals. Granted, you can do very minor customization; you can add in concepts you want your student to learn, and you can perhaps present a topic a bit differently, if it enables it to be more easily understood by your student. But you are not allowed to remove anything from the curriculum and what is required of your student. If you do not like all of the writing assignments, you are out of luck, because your student is still required to complete them. All of the required days and hours must be accounted for and meticulously recorded, and within a specified time frame. Failure to comply can result in penalties and consequences you may not wish to experience. In considering a virtual charter school for your student, make sure to read all of the details and requirements before you select this option.

## Can my child participate in sports and special activities?

Sometimes the factor that keeps a parent from choosing to homeschool is the belief that their student cannot participate in organized sports and special activities. The truth is that your student actually can participate in these activities. Your local school district should accommodate your request for your student to participate in their activities and on their teams; you will of course need to check with your local school district for details, as well as your state's homeschooling laws.

If the activities or teams your student wants to join are not affiliated with the school district, it will be even easier for your student to participate. Activities outside of a school rarely make a distinction between homeschooled and traditionally schooled children. Instead, the focus is on the participation of the student and their skill level and collaboration skills. If you are concerned that your student will not have peer-segregated socialization opportunities, here is your chance to involve them in these activities.

## Will colleges accept homeschooling as valid?

As a growing number of families are turning to homeschooling for their students' education, more and more colleges are seeing applications from these homeschooled students. Where once homeschooling was viewed as fringe and questionable, colleges and universities are no longer skeptical of admitting homeschooled students, namely because of their performance once being admitted.

Homeschooled students have shown themselves to be as capable of attending and completing their college studies as their traditionally schooled peers, if not more so. In fact, the research indicates that a greater percentage of homeschooled students graduate from college than do their peers from traditional public schools. The research has also shown that homeschooled students tend to have higher GPAs than their traditionally schooled peers.