

*Learning Outside the Box: An Introduction to Homeschooling*

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Whether it is inspired by an urge to spend more time with their children, a desire to have hand-on involvement in a child's education, or family obligations that make traditional schooling impossible, parents are increasingly choosing to transition their children into homeschooling. As this trend continues to grow, it is important to know the ins and outs of homeschooling to decide whether this major life decision is right for you and your family.

### **Why Homeschool?**

There are many reasons families decide to homeschool. Some parents cite moral concerns, fearing that their religious beliefs are not being supported in a public school setting, or that their children might be taught behaviors or beliefs in direct opposition to those taught at home. A homeschooled child never needs a parent's note to attend church services, and can express their beliefs without fear of being bullied or negatively influenced.

Another benefit of homeschooling is the non-traditional scheduling. Homeschooling incorporates a child's specific needs; late sleepers can study in the afternoon when they are most alert, and kids into sports or music can schedule school around their lessons. Homeschooling parents who travel often value the ability to take their children on the road without disrupting their education.

Perhaps most importantly, homeschooling eliminates the 1:30 teacher-to-student ratio that exists in many classrooms in favor of an intimate, 1-on-1 situation that gives

children their own tailored curriculum, often resulting in homeschooled students that learn at a markedly accelerated rate. Instead of waiting for the class to "catch up" to their level or, by contrast, not learning a concept because the class moved on too quickly, children have time to absorb each and every lesson at their own pace.

### **How to Homeschool**

Before you toss the backpacks and start lining the family room with desks, several things need to be considered. First, consider the financial implications. You are now responsible for all the supplies your child requires; this may only amount to a few dollars for art supplies, pencils, and paper when your child is young, but as they grow these costs swell to include a computer, software, and field trips to museums and exhibits. A well-rounded education is not cheap.

You will need to contact your local government, as most communities have their own set of regulations regarding homeschooling. You may be required to file notice before you withdraw your kids from school, submit an approved curriculum, file regular updates, and/or keep a portfolio of your child's work.

Next, create a curriculum. There are numerous online resources and local support groups with a wealth of material to help ensure that your child is exposed to an optimal balance of subjects. One of the advantages of homeschooling is the absence of a confining classroom; make use of your local park to study nature, take a trip to the planetarium to study astronomy, and visit the library for literature lessons.

### **Avoid the Pitfalls of Homeschooling**

The very things that make homeschooling such a positive potential experience for your child can prove detrimental if the process is not properly planned out and constantly

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recalibrated. Your investment is not only financial, you must commit a lot of time to making sure all of your child's needs are met.

The populous environment of traditional schools provides a sense of camaraderie that must be recreated in a homeschool environment. No matter how smart a child is, they will not be well adjusted or successful adults if they are not taught the value of teamwork and simple social skills, as well as the ability to play in groups. Check with the local community center for a schedule of art classes or find a pen pal in another country to practice letter writing and foreign language skills.

Without recess and gym time, organized sporting events can provide a much needed outlet as well as a chance to reinforce the social skills your child is already learning. Enroll your child in softball or dance lessons, or grab them a spot on the swim team. Even a hike in the woods or trip to the lake is an afternoon well spent.

While the benefits of homeschooling are vast, raising a smart, well-rounded child depends on the energy, time, and planning you are willing to invest.