

Getting Started Guide



Home Education

Over the past few decades home education has become an accepted and valid educational choice for many families and the number of children being educated at home has increased steadily.

Parents who choose to educate their children at home come from a wide variety of social and educational backgrounds. Their reasons are also many and varied, from those who decide before their children are born, to those who would never have considered the option if their children had not experienced insurmountable problems in school.

Home education is not all smooth sailing, and has its share of frustrations and difficulties. There is no perfect solution or single best practice. In fact one of the main attractions of home education is that parents are able to work out, with their children, the kind of learning that suits them best. This requires serious commitment.

For those who withdraw their children from school, the thought of how to go about educating a child at home can be quite daunting. However, as parents gradually gain in confidence, the great majority find the experience worthwhile and enriching not least because they are actively involved in their children's education and have the privilege of watching their progress first hand. Parents also learn a great deal more about education. Education at home leads many parents to view learning and child-rearing in a very different light.

If you have further questions after reading this, feel free to contact us but, first, please check our FAQs. HEN as we are volunteers answering questions inbetween educating our own children.

General enquiries: contact@home-ed.vic.edu.au, or leave a phone message at (03) 9517 7107 and an experienced home educator will phone you back.

Specific enquiries: primary@home-ed.vic.edu.au teens@home-ed.vic.edu.au ASD@home-ed.vic.edu.au Giftedand2E@home-ed.vic.edu.au Special@home-ed.vic.edu.au mentalhealth@home-ed.vic.edu.au

Dear New Home Educator,

Congratulations on your decision to educate your children from home.

You've borrowed a pile of books from the library and scoured the internet for advice; you may have bought some supplies already. Great...except that every 'expert' seems to recommend different things and now you feel overwhelmed by the choices. Right?

Relax, you'll be home educating YOUR children YOUR way and we are here to help you get started.

Some home education books can be scary – they make it sound like you are undertaking a mission to Mars. You don't have to implement a military schedule or have an impeccably clean house – leave the *Home Beautiful* photo shoots to non-home-educators! Your goal is happy children who like learning – the rest of your home education lifestyle can evolve around that.

One thing we'd like you to notice from those books initially is that most were written by home educators. Once upon a time these confident-sounding authors were nervous new home educators just like you. They succeeded in educating THEIR children THEIR way; so will you.

By choosing to educate your children, you've left behind the one-size-fits-all model of education. Home education is far more individual. There is no one true way to home educate just as there is no one true way to parent children – different approaches work for different families because families are different. Your method won't mirror that of any of the home ed books you've read because you are not educating the author's children. Your children have their own individual needs and interests and you'll be tailoring an education for them. With any resource you look at, take what makes sense to you at this point in time, and leave the rest. You can always revisit books later to pick up extra ideas as you settle into home education.

You may be reeling from your home education decision and asking yourself whether you can really do this. Think back... Who was with your children as they learned to walk and talk, dress and feed themselves, understand right from wrong? How much harder can reading and maths be? You've already done the tough stuff, and without a curriculum! Children are natural learners - they like to explore the world. Your ability to facilitate that process doesn't magically switch off when children pass school age. You can do it.

New home educators often jump in with both feet and try to 'do everything'. Try to take your time, begin with the basics and build from there. If you do find yourself overloaded, don't be afraid to back off and reassess. You have 365 days a year in which to home educate, so you don't have to cover everything in the first week – in fact you don't need to be confined by the idea of school hours, school days, school weeks or even school terms. Begin to think of activities outside 'school hours' as part of your home education – sports, hobby groups, trips to the beach or forest, museum visits – learning opportunities are all around you.

Oh ... and one more thing...

Welcome to the world of home education.

Enjoy!



What does home education look like?

Approaches vary widely. Some families purchase a curriculum and do daily lessons. They usually find that grade levels can be maintained in less than standard school hours.

At the other end of the home education spectrum families

follow a natural learning (or unschooling) approach, allowing children to direct their own learning and facilitating that process by providing a learning-rich atmosphere.

Many home educators undertake an eclectic mix of methods. They might choose to do daily lessons in maths and reading with afternoons spent exploring the wonders of life through books and walks in the park. Whatever approach is taken, children invariably learn.

The law

Home Education is legal throughout Australia but registration requirements vary. For full details, including excerpts from the state Education Acts see our [Legal section](#).



Where to start

The first step is to decide on your home education style. This is a very individual decision - see [A Matter of Style](#) for assistance. Don't agonise over this, choose the method that makes most sense at the moment – you can adjust your style,

resources and philosophy as you go along, and most of us do.

As far as resources, you can start with your own shelves plus your local library, the internet and community resources. You may wish to continue with some or all of the books your children have had from school. You may purchase a curriculum from a supplier or supplies from a variety of suppliers – e.g. Maths from one and English from another. This approach allows you to tailor your home education to meet the needs and abilities of your child. You can choose a higher or lower grade level for individual subjects if you wish and choose books with a style which appeals. You may wish to follow a particular philosophy – Montessori, Steiner, Charlotte Mason etc, or an eclectic mixture of lots of philosophies. You can also use a [Tutor](#) or a distance education course for one or more subjects if you wish. If you are unsure where to start but want some structure, try choosing resources for Maths and English and then build on those. See also [Beginning Home Education](#).

Socialisation

Socialisation is one of home-education's great advantages.

Home-educating students have the time, freedom and energy to get to know people of many ages and backgrounds. They get together in support groups, go on excursions and attend camps. Many participate in community and after-school activities such as sporting clubs, drama groups, music classes or scouts. See [Research](#), [FAQ](#) and [Socialisation](#).

How Do Home Educating Families Operate?

Home education is often portrayed as Dad going to work and Mum at home teaching the children during school hours. Some home educating families operate that way. However, dads also home educate, so do single parents, so do grandparents. Some parents each work and home educate part-time. Some parents work from home. Some families who home educate one child also have children who attend school. Some children attend school part-time. Others combine periods of school with periods of home education. The fact that home education need not be confined to school hours gives many families the flexibility to design an education to suit their own circumstances.

Many families are home educating multiple children so cross-age learning, both planned and incidental, is common.



Curriculum

Not all home educators use a curriculum but if you wish to, the [Australian Curriculum](#) and the [Victorian Curriculum](#) each detail what is taught at school year by year including samples of the work expected.

Even if you don't plan to follow them, they can provide a useful guide - especially if you need to prepare paperwork to meet your state registration requirements. Alternatively, you can purchase a packaged curriculum or put together a combination of materials to form one tailored to your children's needs.

Is it expensive?

The cost can be as little as a library card. An expensive curriculum is not necessary but internet access is very beneficial (especially for home educating teenagers). See [Resources](#) and [Home Education on a Budget](#).

Resources

There are many thousands of resources available - many of them free. The [VRQA](#) support materials include suggestions as does our [resources](#) page and Google is your new best friend. *Otherways* magazine also carries resource reviews.

Knowledge is out there waiting to be found – in books, on the internet, on television, in museums, theatres and workshops, and from friends and family who have particular skills or experiences to share. If a time comes when all of these are no longer enough, there are colleges, courses and tutors.

Are Parents Qualified?

Yes, absolutely. The best teachers for children are people who love them and respect their particular way of learning. You are already your child's teacher; you've been there to answer questions, offer help and share their learning pleasure. This involvement is at the heart of home education.



Adjusting to Home Education

As you settle into your chosen routine, remember that anything that requires tears (on anyone's part) isn't worth the effort. Learning is supposed to be a lifelong enjoyable process. Try and figure out why it isn't working and either

experiment with a different way or give it a rest. Kids are not ready to learn something just because a book says they are. Three hours of tears and cajoling to accomplish one workbook page of nouns does not teach nouns. It teaches "I hate nouns."

It may take time for your child to adjust to home education. A lot has been written about the transition from school to home education. This information can be found under 'de-schooling' or 'decompression' in the books listed at the end of this guide, our website or elsewhere on the Internet.

Be kind to yourself during this stage and factor in trips to the playground, picnics, movie days - whatever will provide positive time together.



Opposition

All of a sudden everyone from your mother to the check-out operator will have an opinion on your child's education. Some will vehemently oppose your decision. Of these, some just need to see the progress, others

will always think you are crazy. Keep in mind that much of the opposition stems from genuine but misguided concern about your children. There is a lot of misinformation about home education and, if you feel like it, you can address that, but you aren't obliged to. Some days and with some people, you'll feel up to it - a lot depends on your relationship with them, how they raise their objections, and how much you care about what they think. The trick is not to lose your focus on the children and their education. The article [Grandparents](#) may be useful in addressing the concerns of relatives and friends who have their doubts about home education. Given time, relatives often make good mentors, so don't be afraid to ask them to share their skills with the kids.

There are various ways to ensure you are on track with the state curriculum if you wish. You can use the samples of work provided with the Australian or state curriculum or you can use tests or competitions. Many home educators find that testing is unnecessary

because the daily one-to-one contact with their children means the parent is well aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Others find testing a useful tool to reassure themselves and concerned relatives that they are "on track".

Staying 'on track'

Challenges

You will have bad days. That's normal. Even if you weren't home educating you'd have bad days too - just different bad days. Recognise that not much is accomplished some days and don't force things. There may be problems

that go beyond a bad day. See [Concerns](#) for more details on the challenges home education can bring.

How successful is it?

Both overseas and Australian research indicate that home education is hugely successful with positive academic and social outcomes. See [Research](#).



Groups & Events

Attending groups is useful but not mandatory. You may be lucky enough to have one that meets close by and where your family fits right in. Great! If not, don't despair, some home educators have to travel to groups, some attend several

different groups, others find attending camps the best entry to the home education community.

If you can't find a group, consider starting one. If there are other home educators in your area, your librarian is likely to know them and may be able to put you in touch or allow you to put up a notice in the library. If you are trying to get a group started, feel free to use the weekly HEN eNews (which goes out to members weekly) to advertise it.

Take a look at online groups as well as physical ones. HEN has a private member facebook group and there are many other online groups available.

Before diving into the home education social scene, consider whether your children are ready. If they are recovering from traumatic school experiences, they may need more time at home initially. There is no rush.

See our [Groups](#) section. [Events](#) are advertised through our magazine *Otherways* and also on the website.

NAPLAN

preparation or informal testing if you wish.

NAPLAN is not compulsory for home educators but is available in many states. Victorian home educators can access NAPLAN through their local school if they wish. NAPLAN preparation packs are available in newsagents etc. and may be used for

Can teenagers be home educated?

Yes, absolutely. Teenagers enjoy the independence of home learning and the time to discover what they really love to do. Some home educate all the way through to university or work and others enter high school at some point.

What about VCE and university?

go early, some go 'on time', and some as mature-age students. See [Older Students](#).

VCE options include entering school for senior secondary years or doing VCE/VCAL via TAFE, RMIT, the AYCE programme or Distance Education. There are many ways into university with and without VCE. Some home ed kids

Why Join HEN?

HEN as your 'school' and access pathways advice for older students. Join through our [website](#).

Be 'in the loop' about news, activities, events and resources; have access to a friendly world of home educators; receive *Otherways* magazine quarterly, weekly email news, [discounts](#) on various educational programmes, access to competitions with

Can teenagers be home educated?

Freerange Education, Terri Dowty (ed.)

Learning All The Time, John Holt

Teach Your Own, John Holt

The Unschooling Handbook & The Homeschooling Handbook, Mary Griffith

Family Matters, David Guterson

The Teenage Liberation Handbook, Grace Llewelyn

See also [Recommended Reading](#), [FAQs](#), [Links & Blogs](#) and you may like to look up these educational writers: Ivan Illich, John Taylor Gatto, Everett Reimer, Raymond and Dorothy Moore, Linda Dobson, Thomas Armstrong, Cafi Cohen, Anne Lahrson-Fisher, Alan Thomas.