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# Introduction

Check all that apply:

- You have many questions about homeschooling, such as does it really work? Can I do it?
- The resources are endless, and you're not sure where to start.
- The teaching methods are confusing, and you are so afraid you are going to hurt your child by missing something crucial.
- You are excited and can't wait to get started.
- You just don't know where to begin.
- You know you can teach your child, but you are worried about finding opportunities for your child to make friends.
- You wish you had a mentor or a simple guide to get you started.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (Fill in the blank with your own thoughts about homeschooling.)

Whether you approach the possibility of homeschooling with excitement, happiness, dread, or bewilderment, know this: you are not alone. Any and all fears are perfectly normal. Every homeschooling parent had to start somewhere. She or he had to wade through hundreds of resources and worried about what would be right for her\* child.

As I began my journey into homeschooling, I signed up for local online homeschooling forums, and I began reading about homeschooling on blogs and in a few books. I learned that there are homeschoolers who do “school at home,” and these homeschoolers usually buy a boxed curriculum and follow a similar schedule as public school. There are also those who use our state's cyber academy, which is a free online service, but I began to hear that that is not homeschooling at all. It's simply public school at home, and it is a lot of work for the parent as well as the child. Then there was the opposite of all this: unschooling. Unschoolers let a child's interests lead them through their education, and parents act as facilitators and supporters instead of using a pre-determined course of study. I also heard about educational philosophies that homeschoolers may use such as Classical Education, Waldorf, or Montessori, but there didn't seem to be enough time in the day to wrap my head around each

of these. I also read about eclectic or relaxed homeschooling, and I knew that I probably would fall somewhere in that category, but that still didn't help me know where I should start.

Ultimately, I just kept doing what I had always done with my son: reading to him, taking him outside, exploring, cutting up paper and making things. As he got older, we were able to do more things. We signed up for a class at the nature center, and everything kind of blossomed from there. But was I getting it right? Was I missing something? And what if for some reason I had to put him into school, would he be ready to enter the classroom? I have grappled with these questions, and I am here to tell you what I've figured out.

In this guide, I'm going to give you some concrete ways of getting started so that you don't feel like a fish out of water, but I'm also going to encourage you to think about what your family's priorities are and allow a natural way of learning to emerge for your family. I'm going to try to convince you that first grade is the year to establish good habits that will be with you throughout your child's education. And you don't have to set up all these good habits on the first day. You will observe your children, try different things and slowly set a rhythm in motion — the rhythm of your daily life that will naturally offer many opportunities for learning, if you let it.

Also in this guide, I will give you a simple first grade course of study, and I'll offer suggestions for how to schedule your day. I'll also give brief explanations of the different educational philosophies that are popular with homeschoolers. I'm doing this because so many parents (including myself) need some kind of guide when beginning to homeschool. It's useful to have a compass that will point you in the right direction as you start on your journey. But after that, I'm going to tell you what I really think you should do in the first grade, and then I'm going to remind you that ultimately you must do it your own way because a child's parents are in the best position to know what is right for their child. You're the only one that can set that rhythm in motion.

The great thing is that by second grade, you are going to know so much more than you do now, and hopefully you will feel that you have a handle on things. At least a little! You're going to have spent a whole year with your child, getting to know him or her better, exploring



your local community and learning about your options. You're going to have met other homeschoolers, become more familiar with the homeschooling law in your state, what works for your child, and what you want your homeschooling experience to look like. You'll know more about different curriculums and what you want to try. (Best of all, you'll know when the library book sale is going be!) Yes, there will always be challenges and setbacks in homeschooling, but you'll be able to face them with strength and an open mind because *you've already conquered first grade.*

Most importantly, remember that your child still has 14~10 years ahead of him before he graduates. This is just the beginning of his education. He doesn't have to learn everything this year, and you are not going to fail him by not following the same curriculum as your local school. On the contrary, you are going to find the homeschooling style that is just right for your child and your family. The exciting thing is that when you homeschool, the whole family learns together. You will all become life-long learners.

Let's dig in!

\* I know that there are awesome homeschooling dads out there. Sometimes the dad takes on the role of stay-at-home dad, and he does most of the facilitating. Other times, dad takes a big role in helping mom with the homeschooling. However, for the sake of simplicity in writing, I'm going to use female pronouns because moms tend to be the primary teachers in most homeschooling families. But I'm not forgetting about the dads who often play a big role in our children's lives. This book is for you too. Thank you!