

Homeschooling Is a Doable Alternative

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*
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One of the most common excuses given for *not* homeschooling is: “It would be too hard for me to do” or, similarly, “I am no good at teaching, I am too disorganized, and my kids are too undisciplined to be homeschooled”. A second common excuse is “Since both of us work, we do not have time to homeschool” or, similarly, “I am a single parent and have to work, so I have no time to homeschool”. Yet those who make these excuses are most likely mistaken. They do not understand how homeschooling really works. Or maybe they are just rationalizing. Either way, the truth of the matter is that nearly *anyone* may homeschool successfully. There are really very few exceptions. All that is needed is a desire to succeed, prudent planning, and some initiative. I speak as an experienced homeschool father. None of my six kids have ever been enrolled in a traditional school during the last fourteen years. So, in order to dismantle mistaken beliefs about homeschooling, and to help persuade parents that it is a doable option for them, I offer a few facts for consideration.

First, homeschooling usually does not use the same format that traditional classroom schooling does. Rarely does one see the chalkboard-and-lecture method in a homeschool. Testing and grading are not done in a traditional manner—if they are done at all. In general, after a child learns to read he simply begins to complete specially-designed workbooks under the supervision of a parent. Sure, there can be discipline problems, and likely will be. A child might simply refuse to do his work, and parents must be willing to deal with such sins as any other act of disobedience.

But good structure and planning will bring success over the long run. After the kids get set into their routine, and after they realize that it is much easier to just sit down and do their schoolwork quickly so they can move on to playing or other activities, the school day becomes much easier for the parent. After years of working in a homeschool system, the older children can actually be relied on to help the younger ones. Seasoned homeschooled kids are very capable of completing their assignments with little or no parental supervision. Kids learn to become self-teachers and self-learners.

Second, homeschooling can be completed in only a few hours a day. Because of the one-on-one efficiencies of a parent-child environment, and the elimination of the requirement to transport a child to and from a school building, homeschooling can usually be done in less than half the time of normal day at a traditional school. Plus, there is added flexibility and more opportunity for creativity. For example, parents may choose to have the kids double-up on their workload for a week or more. This surplus work creates a “free” block of future time in which other valuable and meaningful activities may be pursued. A child may thus have more time for special learning situations or social interaction in activities like chess club, sports (e.g., little league or soccer), “homeschool PE” programs at the YMCA, church skiing trips, beach trips, trips to museums and historical sites or the baseball hall of fame, pursuing musical interests, learning domestic or job skills, deeper Bible research, calling radio talk shows, attending political conventions, traveling to foreign lands, going on missions trips, and so forth.

Third, there are many methods of homeschooling, and there are many combinations of methods that can be tailored to suit the needs of a particular parent or lifestyle. The amount of homeschooling curricula is vast, and is readily available through catalogs, in online stores, or at local homeschool fairs. Parents have many choices ranging from traditional books to videotaped lectures in DVD format to satellite school tutoring. There are reasonably-priced co-op programs led by competent (usually volunteer) parents that can supplement a homeschool program in many subject areas, including “tough” ones like biology and algebra, or ones that require special equipment and

facilities like music and crafts. Local homeschool co-ops are flourishing. They enhance home teaching by providing instruction on a variety of subjects, as well as augmenting kids' social interaction. No matter how awkward or unusual a parent's work or lifestyle circumstances are, with a little bit of effort and some planning, a workable, comfortable, and successful homeschool program can be implemented. Where does one begin to look for curriculum and ideas? Try a Google search on "homeschooling" or go to the links page at my website <http://www.PolicyOfLiberty.net>.

Fourth, a combination of limited directed (supervised) study can easily be mixed with some self-study (akin to homework) and co-op activities in order to facilitate the schedule of the time-constrained parent. For instance, one parent might have a work schedule that allows him to get the children up at six, starting schoolwork thirty minutes later. Before leaving for work at 7:30, he assists the children in learning and understanding for an hour, as a typical "full-time" homeschool parent does. The children are then left with a housekeeper or relative for two or three hours of self-study (or co-op once a week), or may be left to listen to school-related videos, DVDs, etc. After returning from work, one parent or the other can spend an hour correcting the children's work and preparing them for the next day's activities. Hence, while the total homeschooling day for a child might total four or five hours, the efficient parents can do their part of the work in just two hours. Occasionally, there will be a need to do a standardized test, a sporting event, extra school work, or a field trip on Saturday. But these activities will be infrequent and easily-managed.

Therefore, busy people, families with two earners, and single parents cannot reasonably use lack of time as an excuse. Like anything else in life, making the choice to homeschool will have consequences. It will cost some free time. It will require some sacrifice. A mother may lose the effective "babysitting" services that traditional schools provide that free her up to do many other things that she desires. No one has ever claimed that homeschooling is convenient, although the closeness of homeschool families, and the striking enhancement in character that many homeschool kids display, has been widely noted. But for those who value their children being kept from the public school environment, or who cannot afford to pay for a Christian or private school, the sacrifice will be worthwhile. (Let's also not forget the benefit of having a school bill for five children that is under \$1,000 per year.) Moreover, the educational quality gains will be very pleasing, not to mention the bold step that will be made in training up the next generation to favor liberty and the religious values we cherish.

Let's promote homeschooling as a viable and wonderful system for everyone and every parent—regardless of their worries about personal inadequacies or presumed lack of time. In doing so, we will be helping to promote one of the greatest movements for liberty and family values in American history.