

secrets
of a successful
homeschool
mom



jamie c. martin

Secrets of a Successful Homeschool Mom:

A Manifesto of Freedom and Joy in Home Learning

Jamie C. Martin

SimpleHomeschool.net

*Dedicated to new and old readers of SimpleHomeschool.net—
thanks for reading, sharing, and encouraging!*

© 2012 Simple Living Media. All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review.

Cover design: Design by Insight - designbyinsight.net

A note about links: All Internet links in this ebook are spelled out (instead of hyperlinking the text directly), in case you choose to print out the book. Most of them are shortened—they look like this: lvsm.pl/O3tZCv. Type the shortened URL in your Internet browser, and it will automatically translate to the original URL. Of course, if you're reading this digitally, you may click on the link directly.

Disclosure: This book contains some affiliate links. When you purchase through them, it benefits my family—thank you!

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
1. The evolution of an educational philosophy—My journey of baby steps.....	7
2. Homeschool doesn't have to mean school at home.....	10
3. It's not about the curriculum you buy.....	11
4. It's as much about your education as it is about theirs.....	13
5. Go back to basics and keep school simple.....	15
6. Burnout is inevitable, so plan for it.....	17
7. The most important thing you'll ever do for the success of your homeschool.....	19
8. You <i>are</i> a good enough teacher.....	21
Appendix 1: 10 questions to ask and answer about your family.....	23
Appendix 2: Educational Philosophies Defined.....	25
About Love146.....	30
About the Author.....	31

Introduction

We come from a variety of backgrounds, histories, and perspectives. From all walks of life—encompassing a vast array of beliefs, insights, and ideals. We arrive here for different reasons, yet one thing is the same.

We're here for our children. This we have in common.

Most of us have something else in common as well—the insecurities hidden inside about whether or not we can actually do this homeschooling thing. Often we are our biggest obstacle. We tend to get in our own way, fighting battles in our thoughts when the inevitable doubts come knocking.

It makes sense that we would feel this way, when you think about it. After all, we've been taught that education is complicated. Taught that even when governments throw billions of dollars at it, the problem can't be solved. And we don't have billions of dollars, so what hope do we have? We've been told that education requires experts, and we don't always feel like one.

But what if some of what we've been taught is not true? What if there is another way—a simpler, more natural way to learn? What if there are secrets of a successful homeschool mom—secrets we can tap into and use to order our days and our lives?

I believe there are, and I'm writing this book in the hope that they'll inspire you the way they've inspired me.

When I use the word “secrets,” I don't mean that what follows are earth-shattering ideas you've never heard of before. In many areas of life, often the most profound truths remain the most simple.

I've called them secrets because these principles encompass ideas I wish I would have known at the beginning of my homeschooling journey—ideas I've had to figure out and stumble across along the way. If I would have known these from the beginning, it would have helped me approach homeschooling in a more relaxed, pressure-free way.

The subtitle of this ebook is “a manifesto of freedom and joy in home learning.” According to Dictionary.com, a manifesto is “a public declaration of intentions, opinions, objectives, or motives, as one issued by a government, sovereign, or organization. From the Italian *to manifest*.”

We choose home education as a lifestyle because there are certain goals we hope to manifest in our families, in our children. Lifelong learning and a passion for academics are of course two of those goals, but that's not all. I want more than high test scores and parental bragging rights. I want freedom, I want joy—for my kids and for myself!

That's what I'm seeking to manifest as we open our books day in and day out. If that idea stirs something in your soul, then you're in the right place. Read on and allow false expectations and misbeliefs to fall off like burdens no longer needed. Let's discover together the secrets of a successful homeschool mom.

"It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of education have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty."

- Albert Einstein

1. The evolution of an educational philosophy—My journey of baby steps

I wished I hadn't shown up that day. But God knew better.

The late summer sun spun rainbows through the window of my minivan, as I sat in the parking lot of a church—journal and pen in hand. I had just attended my second homeschooling conference, and was completely freaked out.

Without knowing it, I had registered for a conference on unschooling—a term I had never heard before that day.

I wasn't sure I ever wanted to hear it again.

What do you mean, children don't need to be taught? How will they learn otherwise?!

So before heading home, I took deep breaths and tried to make sense of this new information. Tried to rationalize it away with ink and words on paper.

If only I could go back and tell myself what I know now.

Baby Step #1: Considering Homeschooling

My journey to homeschooling didn't begin with a search for an educational philosophy. I didn't even know there *was* more than one educational philosophy!

I just assumed that homeschooling meant doing "school" at home - worksheets, lessons, tests, recess, and so on. It didn't sound that appealing, to be honest. I felt like I'd already served my time in school, and didn't really want to be sentenced to another term without parole, if you know what I mean.

But something seemed unnatural about sending my kids away for seven hours each day. They still seemed so...little. Surely, as their mama, I knew what was best for them. Or did I?

I felt I owed it to them to research *all* the schooling options open to us before sending them on the yellow bus that stops a few doors down. That meant checking out homeschooling, too.

So I read books, talked to homeschooling friends, and spent time online. One day I discovered a radical lady whose educational thoughts began to shape my own.

Baby Step #2: Charlotte Mason

When I first found out about her, Charlotte Mason's insights on learning seemed so out of the box.

Young kids need short lessons, exposure to a wide variety of subjects, plenty of time in nature, living books, and art and music study? Now this sounded more like the education I would have enjoyed as a kid.

I studied books like *A Charlotte Mason Companion* (lvsm.pl/Q0xwNG) and *When Children Love to Learn* (lvsm.pl/Ojou13). Being the Type A parent I was, I planned out decades of ideas for future curriculum (*My kids were still in preschool by the way!*).

Baby Step #3: Leadership Education

Over time, however, I noticed just how much my kids were learning through play and read-alouds. I began to wonder, especially after that nutty conference, if maybe these unschooling folks were on to something?

But no, no, no. I wasn't that confident...or crazy.

Then one night, I read on a forum about a philosophy called Thomas Jefferson Education (also known as Leadership Education - lvsm.pl/OfGQgx). Discovering it felt like coming home.

It was less structured than Charlotte Mason, but more structured than unschooling.

The phases of learning (lvsm.pl/PIBN2d) were exactly what I was looking for.

Baby Step #4: Interest-Led Learning

For a while, that is. Then one day the magic of the blogosphere led me to an unschooler's blog.

Jena's children (yarnsoftheheart.com) were grown and successful, she was a certified teacher, and she had chosen interest-led learning for her kids (*basically a fancy word for, yes, unschooling*).

By this time I had figured out that homeschooling was a lifestyle, and each baby step took me further away from the traditional stereotype I had started with.

Each baby step made me happier and more confident in my homeschooling decision.

Baby Step #5: Discovering Us

Every time I found a new, intriguing educational philosophy, it helped me devise my own.

Few people fit within the confines of one singular type of learning. Through homeschooling, we piece together what we find and love, and create something new. We merge and blend to discover exactly what works for us.

This is a process that we get to be a part of over our entire career in home education. Just like in other parts of life, we find what we need at the exact time when we need it.

If we live with eyes open, that is.

I wish I could go back to my minivan in summer 2008 - wish I could whisper something in the ear of that unsettled Jamie with pen in hand.

"Jamie," I would tell her. "Everything's gonna be okay."

"So lighten up."

To think about: What is your current philosophy of education? Have you seen it evolve over time? What does it look like in your home today?

2. Homeschool doesn't have to mean school at home.

Most new homeschoolers mistakenly believe that they must replicate a traditional school classroom and methodology with their children. Of course they often don't feel equipped to do this, so it can lead to a lot of fear.

I was the same way years ago—I initially imagined having rows of desks, a flag, and having to teach six hours a day.

But what experienced homeschoolers come to realize is that homeschooling is a *lifestyle*, not a regimen. Learning doesn't have to be confined to specific hours—it doesn't have to fit within artificial boundaries.

In order to see it this way, we must step off the conveyor belt of education. For most of us this doesn't come naturally because that is how we were educated ourselves. The conveyor belt means that children are grouped with peers according to age, they proceed along learning what officials have determined need to be learned on a certain timetable, and after thirteen years they come off the factory line with a diploma—an official stamp deeming them educated.

The conveyor belt serves some purposes in society, but there's absolutely no need to set one up in our homes. Yet that is exactly what most homeschoolers do.

Have you heard of Sir Ken Robinson? He's a modern-day educational reformer, and he has a lot to say about the conveyor belt model. Consider this quote from his bestselling book *The Element* ([lvsm.pl/NCKiE2](http://vsm.pl/NCKiE2)):

“The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed — it needs to be transformed.

The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.”

Creating an individualized education is easy for us as homeschoolers—we have the perfect opportunity, providing we can summon the courage to step off the conveyor belt.

The starting point for successfully doing so is recognizing that homeschool doesn't have to mean school at home.

To think about: Does it make you excited or uncomfortable to consider blurring the line between school and home?

3. It's not about the curriculum you buy.

You might be thinking, “Isn’t curriculum just a given? We need to find one, don’t we, or maybe even several for a variety of different subjects.”

Well, I have a secret to tell you: It’s not about the curriculum you buy; it’s about the atmosphere you create.

Searching for the right curriculum is exactly what I did when I first began considering this educational path. Not only that, but I felt like I was doing a disservice to my kids and their future if didn’t look at *every option*...so I did. Which left me exhausted before I’d even started.

It’s all too easy to get consumed by the hunt for the “perfect” curriculum. Even if we find a resource that works well, we sometimes wrestle with a gnawing sense of anxiety...wondering if the grass is greener over on someone else’s bookshelf.

We are incredibly blessed to have so many homeschooling resources at our fingertips, but the limitless options can also become a distraction. I believe we’ll feel more relaxed as homeschooling parents when we realize that that the atmosphere we create in our homes is just as important as any curriculum we bring into it.

Of course this leads to the question, “What type of atmosphere do we want?”

The answer?

An atmosphere of inspiration.

Imagine the most inspiring place you’ve ever been. Maybe your memory will take you somewhere in nature, maybe just a cozy armchair where you read an amazing book, maybe a lecture hall where you heard someone speak.

When you were there, what did you want to do?

Inspiration demands a response.

When we surround our kids with inspiration—in art, in books, in resources, in the peace we aim for in our homes—we create the optimal conditions for learning to happen naturally.

Curriculum can of course be one part of that. But if we only progress through page after page of someone else’s resource day after day, soon we’re likely to find that we’ve made another educational conveyer belt in our homes. We may even find that we’ve lost the passion that made us want to homeschool in the first place.

We need to follow the spark of life, the energy, the passion. We need to bring into our homes the resources we're led to. We also need to be willing to let go of the ones that are no longer working for our families.

It's not about the curriculum you buy; it's about the atmosphere you create.

To think about: Have you ever found yourself consumed by the hunt for the perfect curriculum? What is one practical step you could take today to add more inspiration to your home?

4. It's as much about your education as it is about theirs.

Most of us start out all wrong when we begin homeschooling. We rush around looking at curricula; we panic because the kids would rather be playing outside, or building with Legos, than doing that boring worksheet.

But here's what we're missing when we allow those other things to sidetrack our minds:

It all starts with us. It's as much about our education as it is about theirs.

We are mistaken if we believe that our job as a homeschooling parent is to educate our child. On the surface that might sound surprising, but really it's just common sense.

If you step back you realize that actually educating your children is impossible. Here's the truth: You can force a child to sit somewhere, most traditional classrooms do, but you cannot and never will be able to force a child to learn.

Charlotte Mason, an educational pioneer from 19th century England, summed it up well when she said this:

“Self-education is the only possible education; the rest is mere veneer laid on the surface of a child's nature.”

When we're able to let go of this false notion and heavy responsibility, we'll discover a new freedom. We'll also discover what our job actually is: to create an inspiring atmosphere and to educate ourselves. This is where it gets fun—because this is where we get to develop and nurture our own passions.

I am a writer, and because of that I have time carved out in my day for writing. My children know Mommy is a writer—they see me write, they see that I make it a priority in my day. Therefore writing is a given in our home—it has become a natural aspect of life that my children are interested in and want to do.

My two older kids regularly spend time writing and creating books of their own—asking for help with spelling, reading their books back to me, practicing their handwriting—and all from their own motivation as a result of seeing this modeled for them.

You may or may not be a writer, but you are *something*. Something valuable and important! Something that will naturally lead to all sorts of other beautiful learning opportunities for your family, if you only have the courage to let that something out.

You may be a baker, an artist, an athlete, a scientist—whatever you are, *be that!* This is part of the gift you bring as a guide and mentor to the children in your home.

It's as much about your education as it is about theirs.

To think about: How do you plan to continue your education and live out your passions while homeschooling?

5. Go back to basics and keep school simple.

Schooling at home relieves us of many complications that traditional schoolers face: There's no rushing kids to the bus stop, no packing lunches the night before, and no after school pickups required.

But sometimes the complications in homeschooling arise from *within*—from the knowledge of the responsibility we have taken for our children's education. If results don't turn out as planned or hoped, there's no school system or teacher to blame.

Often, in my own life, it can be my fears that complicate matters.

That's why we need reminders of how to keep school at home simple. What is actually needed and required? What is beneficial and a blessing in our family?

Constant tension in a home is not what most of us had in mind when we signed up for this gig. Therefore we need to accomplish what is truly important and let go of unrealistic, unnecessary expectations.

Use these ideas to help you learn to let go.

1. Books and Math

This post, The Bare Minimum (lvsm.pl/RSiQVH), comforted me to no end when I read it years ago.

In it Jena suggests that the bare minimum a homeschooling family should do is to surround your children with literature and to do math at least once a week. The rest of the hours in the day can be spent exploring a child's own educational interests.

Jena has the experience to back up her philosophy—her three children have all graduated from homeschooling and gone on to successful college placements and careers.

2. The 7th Grade Reminder

I once heard speaker and writer Joyce Herzog (lvsm.pl/OfLfAe) give several messages at a homeschooling convention I attended. She has decades of experience in the traditional school system and now consults for homeschooling families.

Joyce said that 90% of what a child learns before they enter 7th grade (Age 12/13) will be forgotten. This tells me that before that age, our main focus as parents should be creating an educational environment in our homes, rather than focusing on specific skills or

information. Of the utmost importance is to help our children retain their love of learning, so that after 7th grade they'll be self-motivated to continue it.

3. Leadership Education Goals

A year ago I printed out the following three goals, described in the book *Leadership Education* ([lvsm.pl/OfGQgx](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000APGQGX)), and included it on my daily routine. This list inspires me immensely—especially when overwhelming days arise.

The three jobs of a leadership education parent are to:

1. Develop, nurture, and heal family relationships.
2. Create an inspiring environment.
3. Respond effectively to your children's inspiration.

Sound easy? It is! I know I can accomplish those goals, and if I can—so can you.

When those homeschooling fears rear their ugly heads, tell them to head back where they belong. Remember that the investment you're making into the lives of your family will reap an awesome return in the near future.

To think about: How can you go back to basics and keep school simple? Are there unrealistic expectations that are keeping you from enjoying this lifestyle more?

6. Burnout is inevitable, so plan for it.

I know I may shock some of you by mentioning this, but not every homeschool day looks like Little House on the Prairie.

Some days look more like Nightmare on Elm Street.

Instead of hardworking kids listening to Mom, it could be that you reach a season where your days consist more of policing sibling squabbles and just trying to have everyone make it through until bedtime. I speak from personal experience!

I do not believe that homeschooling is the right choice for every family in every season. But it does make me feel saddened when I see a family stop purely because of burnout. Equally sad is when families continue on, but without any of the joy they once had.

Over time, as I've traveled this path myself and have met many homeschooling parents, I've noticed certain qualities that can lead a mama to lose her spark.

Here are ten ways to burn yourself out as a homeschooling mother:

1. Structure your home just like a school building—complete with a flag and desks.
2. Plan your homeschooling day's schedule to look exactly as it would at the school down the street.
3. Whatever the cost, trudge through that curriculum you bought cover to cover, in spite of the fact that both you and your children became bored three months ago.
4. Stay home at all times and never meet up with your friends.
5. Begin when your child is in Kindergarten to plan his entire homeschooling career until high school, including how you plan to teach algebra.
6. Never attend any homeschooling conferences or groups in your area.
7. Don't read any homeschooling books, blogs, or forums online.
8. Spend *too much* time reading homeschooling books, blogs, or forums online—and be sure to compare yourself to what everyone else is doing.
9. Give up all your outside interests in order to serve your family and children—who needs free time anyway?
10. Don't pay any attention to your cues or your children's cues when they tell you it's time for a change or a break.

I remember when I first considered homeschooling it was the 24/7ness of the prospect that I found most daunting. Years later I still feel that way. I find that my kids' educations don't worry me nearly as much as the burnout that can result from this lifestyle.

I felt validated and encouraged on this topic when I came across the book *A Mother's Rule of Life* (ivsm.pl/Pq5ehB). It's written by a Canadian homeschooling mother of five, Holly Pierlot.

In this passage Holly explains why she developed a "Mother's Sabbath:"

"So many times over my years as a mother, I had felt tired, overwhelmed, and worn out. So often I felt I couldn't get any personal space to think, what with the continual onslaught of "Mummy! Mummy!" coming from the children, or the work that I hadn't finished staring me in the face.

I needed quiet time alone."

Moms need time away from our children in the same way that office workers need time away from the office. It's not about not loving our families enough; it's about the ability to maintain perspective and joy in all we're doing.

We won't get that time if we don't plan for it.

At the very least, plan a quiet rest period in your day no matter how old your kids are—even when they outgrow naptime. I also have a sitter that comes once a week for five hours. You may need a mother's helper—maybe you live close to family or just have another mom friend you can switch with. Another idea is taking off every other Saturday while your husband is home—this is what Holly Pierlot did for her Mother's Sabbath.

If we recognize that burnout will sometimes creep up on us, we'll be prepared. If we never expect it, it can totally throw us and lead to unhappiness, depression, and putting kids in school when that isn't really our heart's desire.

We all go through seasons of ups and downs. One of the advantages of the homeschooling lifestyle is that, more or less, we get to manage our days the way we choose. But sometimes through our choices we neglect ourselves.

Homeschooling should bring life and joy to *everyone* in the family. If that's not what you're experiencing, take the time to consider where you burned out along the way, and what you can do to light your spark again.

To think about: Have you experienced burnout as a homeschool mom? How can you plan to alleviate this in the future?

7. The most important thing you'll ever do for the success of your homeschool.

Wouldn't it be great if we could see our role as homeschooling parents boiled down to one main goal—one idea that would ensure the development of a successful homeschooling foundation?

Knowing this one tip would mean that when everything starts to crumble around us, we'd know exactly what to do to get back on track.

Well, there is such a tip! It's magical, it's natural, and above all it's simple.

The most important thing you'll ever do for the success of your homeschool is this:

Nurture relationships.

That's it! Today and every day when you wake in the morning, your job as a homeschool parent is to nurture and build relationships.

And here's the reason why: Education thrives when relationships are nurtured.

You'll see this if you think back to your own school career and history. Many of us who were educated traditionally had at least one or more teachers who took a special interest in us, teachers with whom we had a shared connection.

Often that was the class in which we learned the most and the class we *enjoyed* the most—the relationship mattered.

In my case I remember my 7th grade English teacher, Mrs. Sarvis. That was the year I decided that I wanted to be an author. I spent much of my free time writing, at both home and school. My mind can still see that purple spiral notebook as if it was yesterday. One afternoon Mrs. Sarvis offered to take my scribbles home with her to read in the evening.

Looking back I'm certain that my stories weren't all that remarkable, but her response was. She took the time to encourage me, and her encouragement fanned the flame of my dream.

As both teachers *and* parents, we have even more power to nurture the relationships of those we love most in ways that will help their learning explode and take off.

A few months ago a comment came in on one of my posts from a seasoned homeschooling mom. I was so moved by Debra's words and experiences that I asked her if I could share them with you:

“I have been homeschooling my eight children (currently ages 8 to 29) for over twenty- three years and there have been many hard times when I wanted to quit. However, I haven’t because this road has been the best one for my family despite the trials.

Homeschooling has continued through marriage and church problems, health and emotional problems, elder parent issues and deaths, three miscarriages, and one bout of cancer.

And as I continue on I have come to know that the journey was never about how competent I am in any school subject, but is about my relationship with my children, my husband, and my God. Period.

If those are a priority everything else will work out.

My oldest son is one of my favorite examples of how it never was about how good a teacher I could be. Despite my personal trials during his high school years, and in spite of never doing any kind of formal science (because of having so many younger children), my son found his passion for biology in college. He studied hard; he networked with teachers. He was offered full graduate school scholarships to MIT and Harvard. He found his way.

I know this is not a checklist of how to do it, but I hope there is some encouragement in knowing that it can all work out if our priorities are firmly set before our eyes.”

We will have many times when we feel unqualified and in over our heads on this journey, but when everything else falls apart we can go back to basics. We can nurture relationships. That’s what mothers are brilliant at and always have been.

So when doubt or fear try to overtake us, we must make that the priority—it will set the course for the future success of both our homeschool and our entire family.

To think about: Have you seen the power of relationships open doors to learning in your family? What do you need to do today to nurture and cultivate your family’s relationships more deeply?

8. You *are* a good enough teacher.

When you begin homeschooling, you may experience a variety of emotions. Sometimes it's the excitement of anticipation—as curriculum boxes and supplies arrive at your home via the FedEx truck. You're looking forward to developing your routine of homeschooling life.

Other times, however, might not feel quite so uplifting. Maybe you're wondering if you really have what it takes. Or maybe the bickering level has been so high in your home recently that you question if it's even worth it.

Maybe you're just struggling to make it through the day.

Feelings of insecurity can certainly add up in the heart of a homeschooling mom or dad. We want the best for our children, of course. But some days we question if the best is us.

How can you know if you are a good enough teacher? Ask yourself the following questions.

1. Are you qualified?

Back when I didn't know anything about homeschooling or educational philosophies, I couldn't have ever envisioned myself as a homeschooling parent. I'm not a certified teacher, after all! Our Western lives are full of experts and we're conditioned by our society to look for a piece of framed paper on a wall to signify that we have what it takes.

But consider this study (lvsm.pl/OxIsIa), which looked at homeschooled versus public schooled students at a variety of grade levels. It found that children of homeschooling parents who were certified teachers scored in the 82nd percentile on standardized tests (on average), compared to the national average score for public schooled students, which was in the 50th percentile.

Pretty good, right?

But wait! Children of homeschooling parents who had a college degree, but were *not* necessarily certified teachers, scored in the **87th** percentile. Those whose parents only had a high school diploma scored in the 81st percentile. And those whose parents did not even have a high school diploma? They also had an average score in the 81st percentile.

Hmmm, maybe "being qualified" isn't the most important factor after all. Which leads to my second point.

2. Are you committed?

How could the above test results be accurate? I believe the study shows that homeschooling parents above all else are committed. The commitment to our children, above any type of qualification, is what makes the difference.

Traditional schools are filled with hardworking teachers, most of whom earnestly love children and hope to help them learn. But no teacher, not even the best, could ever be as committed to my child's success as I am. That means that even in situations when my expertise fails me, I will work with all my might to locate the resources my child needs to thrive.

Consider the story of Kerry Anderson (lvsm.pl/RSpICv), who was homeschooled with her brother in the back of her truck driver mother's big rig while driving cross-country. Doesn't exactly sound like the typical school environment, does it? Recruiters from Harvard disagreed, pursuing Kerry at her community college with an offer and a scholarship to encourage her to transfer.

Increasingly high profile universities are actively recruiting homeschooling graduates because they recognize traits they believe will make successful college students--highly motivated, self-starters, determined, and with a strong, supportive family backing.

3. Are you out of your comfort zone?

If you answer yes, then you are in good company! I don't know any homeschooling parents who don't question themselves from time to time.

Living out of our comfort zones is one of the best places to be. Isn't that one of the things we hope to teach our children—to dare to be different, to follow their dreams, to go beyond societal expectations?

Writer Joyce Maynard said, "It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children will do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself."

When we make the choice to home educate, we dare to reach for the sun—in spite of our own inadequacies. Our passion for our children, our commitment, and our courage add a depth to our family that a framed piece of paper on a wall never could. As teachers, we are so much more than merely good enough. We are the best.

To think about: What are your reasons and motivations for homeschooling? Consider writing these down along with any inspiring quotes or Scriptures to reread when challenges and insecurities come along.

Appendix 1: 10 questions to ask and answer about your family

Homeschooling families recognize, at least in theory, that one of the beauties of the lifestyle we live is the freedom it gives us.

I definitely feel this way. In spite of the messes and challenges, loads of laundry and to-do lists, each day I marvel that my family gets to craft this life and all its details according to what best meets our needs and goals.

This became especially clear on a recent trip overseas, during which we spent a month in England and my husband and I traveled to Italy. The fact that we had the flexibility to arrange this trip in the middle of the “school year” was just the first of many benefits we noticed.

Before leaving a few friends asked if we planned to “do school” while away. My honest answer was, “Does it matter?” I knew we’d be learning all the time—no matter what activities we chose.

Sure enough, though we rarely opened the books or curricula I took along, our trip had quite a few lessons in store:

- flexibility
- understanding a new culture
- developing relationships with extended family
- playing with and entertaining babies and younger children
- making friends in new places
- giving us all (kids and parents alike) a bigger vision for our future

While coming back through customs upon re-entry in the United States, I watched from behind as Steve led the way and the kids followed. Steve rapidly wheeled his carry-on through the lines like a pro (He travels a lot with his work for Love146.org) while Trishna, Jonathan, and Elijah, laden with their backpacks, ran and skipped, trying to catch up.

We finally reached the customs agent, who asked Steve and me, “Are you all in one family?”

“Yep,” we answered—then smiled knowingly at his kind, but raised eyebrows response. We get that question a lot (lvsm.pl/Q0I3J0).

In that moment, I had an overwhelming feeling of confirmation—yes, we certainly are one family! And this crazy, traveling, learning, unique, global life we lead is exactly who we are meant to be. It’s part of what defines us, part of our mission.

Who are you?

That's who our family is created to be, but it isn't necessarily what is best or ideal for you and yours.

Each family has a different heartbeat, a different focus, a different calling.

Use these ten questions to help discover yours:

1. What cause gets our family excited?
2. What activities bond and unite us?
3. What do we want to pass on to our children?
4. What contribution are we called to make as a family unit?
5. What do we want our legacy to be?
6. How would we spend a free day? (How families spend spare time is often a good clue to how you bond and learn together.)
7. What time-wasters do we need to eliminate from our lives to be able to devote more time to these goals?
8. How can I best inspire my children to embrace this activity or vision?
9. What basics do we need to study and learn about in order to be prepared to fulfill our family's mission?
10. What can I do *today* to take one small step in the right direction?

A homeschooling lifestyle is much, much more than a schedule of duties and assignments to cover. If you are plodding through days merely checking off boxes, you are missing out! We literally have the world at our doorstep, begging to be discovered.

Find out who you are as a family, and you'll discover what brings life and energy to your home, equipping you to continue homeschooling for the long haul, and more importantly—to actually enjoy it.

Appendix 2: Educational Philosophies Defined

When I first started to research homeschooling, I didn't even realize there was more than one way to "do" education. Growing up in the traditional system, like most of us, I assumed that homeschooling meant duplicating the system at home.

Imagine my surprise (& joy) as I discovered the plethora of educational methods and philosophies out there. That's when I realized how amazing a home education could be—so many possibilities and options existed that could be tailored for each child!

The downside of having so many choices is wading your way through them all. If you've ever felt overwhelmed by all that's out there, this information is just what you need.

Here's an overview of educational philosophies to get you started.

1. The Traditional Method

This is what it sounds like—taking the classroom model and translating it into your home. Typically this method revolves around textbooks, worksheets, and tests to determine if your child is mastering the material.

Some children love plowing through a workbook and thrive on it. For those who don't, you can always use these sparingly or on a child's own terms. We have a shelf of workbooks that our elementary-aged children can work in if and when the mood strikes them.

Some families may use the traditional method in one subject, like math, while using different methods for other subjects. Larger families may find it helpful to use some textbooks if it provides an easier way to follow up with several children.

Further Reading (traditional curriculum publishers):

A Beka Book - abeka.com

Rod and Staff - lvsm.pl/N1eUmG

Houghton Mifflin – eduplace.com

2. The Unit Study Method

The unit study method seeks to combine several subjects under one unifying theme. If your son loves trains, you would use that subject to look for books about trains (literature), write about trains (English/handwriting), study the history of trains (history), develop word problems about the speed of trains (math), and so on.

A homeschooling mom or dad can compile a unit study on any subject that interests a child, but some publishers take the hard work out of unit studies by putting packages together on a variety of topics.

Unit studies often incorporate multi-sensory approaches to a subject, making it ideal for kinesthetic learners. The downside is that these lessons may require extra preparation time on behalf of the parent.

Further Reading:

Creating a Unit Study Homeschool Curriculum - lvsm.pl/NqBm8u

KONOS - konos.com

Five in a Row - lvsm.pl/TFTwII

3. The Charlotte Mason Method

Charlotte Mason pioneered amazing educational changes in Great Britain. Living in the late 1800's, she revolutionized the educational system at that time—aiming to prove that children of any class had the capabilities to learn and enjoy it.

Her methods have seen a resurgence within homeschoolers of our generation—a wonderful thing as her teachings offer much to families and children. Key aspects of her philosophy include nature study, shorter lessons, narration, real “living” books as opposed to textbooks, and the development of good habits.

Further Reading:

When Children Love to Learn by Elaine Cooper - lvsm.pl/Ojou13

Ambleside Online – amblesideonline.org

A Charlotte Mason Companion by Karen Andreola - lvsm.pl/Q0xwNG

A Charlotte Mason Education by Catherine Levison - lvsm.pl/Q0P2lb

4. The Unschooling Method

The word “unschooling” may sound frightening, especially if you are new to the idea of homeschooling. Terms with essentially the same definition, but that may be less intimidating include delight-directed education, relaxed homeschooling, or interest-led learning.

Unschooling advocates believe that children are born with a natural curiosity and love of learning, and that this desire to learn will continue to grow and develop if it isn't stifled.

This method of education isn't about neglect and isn't just for hippies. Many households pursue an intentional type of unschooling lifestyle and find that it brings joy to both them

and their families. Even if you believe you must cover the “basics” in certain subjects, you can still implement part of this philosophy by allowing your children as much freedom as possible in other educational areas.

As a mom who went from thinking unschooling was the most outrageous, scary concept I’d ever heard of—to a mom who now loves relaxed homeschooling and seeks to implement it as much as possible, I encourage you to check out the following links.

Further Reading:

A Little Way of Homeschooling: 13 Families Discover Catholic Unschooling by Suzie Andres - lvsm.pl/Sp6qC3

How Children Learn by John Holt - lvsm.pl/OxVWUh

Teach Your Own by John Holt - lvsm.pl/MzowU7

Free-Range Learning: How Homeschooling Changes Everything by Laura Grace Weldon - lvsm.pl/OxWZ6R

5. The Classical Method

Classical education has its roots in the classic civilizations—much of it is based on ideas with a Roman and Greek foundation.

This type of educational mindset doesn’t necessarily focus on getting the child ready for any particular vocation. Instead its goal is to form and shape the whole inner person, with the belief that doing so prepares a child for any number of jobs in which they can be successful.

The classical method focuses on the Trivium—three distinct stages children work through as they develop. Young children begin with the grammar stage, proceed through the logic/dialectic stage, and graduate to the rhetoric stage close to adulthood.

Key aspects of this philosophy include the importance of reading and discussing classic, living books and the study of classical languages like Latin or Greek.

Further Reading:

Classical Conversations - classicalconversations.com

The Well-Trained Mind: A Guide to Classical Education at Home by Susan Wise Bauer and Jessie Wise - lvsm.pl/Q0SwE3

The Well-Educated Mind: A Guide to the Classical Education You Never Had by Susan Wise Bauer - lvsm.pl/RXKiCV

The Core: Teaching Your Child the Foundations of Classical Education by Leigh A. Bortins - lvsm.pl/MLojNJ

6. The Literature-Based Method

Literature-based homeschooling families use high-quality literature as the backbone of their homeschooling curriculum.

Many of the philosophies we've covered address the importance of using living books as a vital part of the educational experience. Serious literature-based schooling advocates take it a step further and try to accomplish as many of their subjects as possible within the outline of a good story, believing this helps a child's mind assimilate information.

Many companies publish reading lists by grade and age level. Other literature-based publishers organize the entire curriculum for you—making it easy to purchase and have delivered to your door an entire school year's worth of learning and reading.

Further Reading:

Sonlight Curriculum – sonlight.com

WinterPromise Curriculum – winterpromise.com

Educating the WholeHearted Child by Clay and Sally Clarkson - lvsm.pl/OWYlba

7. The Workbox Method

The workbox method contains less of philosophy and more of practicality. It has gained popularity in recent years and many families seem to be finding success with it.

The method uses organization to help children become more independent, make the school day fun, and enable Mom or Dad to manage a house of students.

Each child has their own set of drawers, file folders, or containers. The homeschooling parent fills these with the child's work for the day—each assignment in a separate drawer.

At the beginning of the school day, the child starts with drawer or container number 1 and completes the assignment. He or she then moves to the container marked #2. Some drawers may be filled with a fun task—like a coloring page or a playtime. If a child has a question, they attach a question symbol to the drawer and continue on to the next until Mom's help is available.

Many families find that they have fewer interruptions and distractions to their day after beginning this method—resulting in less conflict and more free time after work is completed.

Further Reading:

Sue Patrick's Workbox System: A User's Guide - lvsm.pl/NE3Cof

Benefits of the Workbox System - lvsm.pl/PBsLw5

Thinking Inside the Box: Using the Workbox System - lvsm.pl/NZt04f

8. The Leadership Education Method

Leadership Education has recently become more popular as a homeschooling philosophy. Also called Thomas Jefferson Education, it centers around the idea that children learn differently at different stages of life.

Drawing on the work of Jean Piaget and other educational philosophers, three main phases of childhood learning are discussed and implemented: Core, Love of Learning, and Scholar.

Because this is more of a philosophy than an actual method, it's easy to adapt many of the Leadership Education principles into any curriculum you may use. Our family has benefited greatly since discovering these ideas—they've brought great peace to our home.

Further Reading:

Introduction to a Thomas Jefferson Education - lvsm.pl/S18Nu3

A Thomas Jefferson Education: Teaching a Generation of Leaders for the Twenty-First Century by Oliver DeMille - lvsm.pl/NZtqHW

Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning by Oliver and Rachel DeMille - lvsm.pl/Pv5MW3

9. The Eclectic Method

Few homeschooling families fit within the constraints of one method or philosophy—indeed that is one of the strengths of home education. My family has gathered inspiration from Charlotte Mason, Literature-Based, Leadership Education, and Interest-Led Learning.

The beauty truly unfolds as you find and discover what works for you and your children. Don't be afraid to pick and choose.

About Love146



I like to end my books by sharing a part of my life's mission with you. It's the cause my family moved cross-country for, the cause my husband gets up each morning to work for, the cause my children know a bit (but not too much) about.

Child trafficking and exploitation.

We live in a time when many think slavery has been abolished, not realizing that there are actually more slaves around the world today than ever before in history, many of them children.

As mothers, we look at our kids, we try to imagine, and it's unimaginable. I believe mothers hold a key to the abolition of child slavery—as we stand up and say that the child of one is the child of us all.

Perhaps, for some of you, the cause of our lives will become the cause of yours. Find out how you can give and get involved by visiting love146.org.

About the Author

Jamie lives an extraordinary life in a beautiful New England farmhouse. She falls asleep each night counting her blessings after days spent homeschooling her three children, making granola while watching deer in the backyard, and enjoying British comedies with her equally British husband.

Jamie writes about intentional motherhood at SteadyMom.com and about home education at SimpleHomeschool.net. She is also the author of *Steady Days: A Journey Toward Intentional, Professional Motherhood* (lvsm.pl/O2gAqN) and *Mindset for Moms: From Mundane to Marvelous Thinking in Just 30 Days* (lvsm.pl/O3tZCv).



Blogs:

SteadyMom.com

SimpleHomeschool.net

Twitter:

twitter.com/steadymom

twitter.com/simpleschool

Facebook:

facebook.com/simplehomeschool

Pinterest:

pinterest.com/steadymom