



Considering Home Education? How to Get Started

By Judy Arnall

It's now Fall and although the school year has begun, you are tinkering with the idea of homeschooling your child this year. Veteran homeschoolers equate the decision with "stepping off the edge of a cliff and hoping your wings will fly." It's a momentous decision that can be very unnerving in the face of uncertainty and lack of familial and societal support, even though home education is growing at a rate of 2.5% a year in Canada. In your heart, you know that this is a viable option for your child, but where do you start and what do you do first?

1) Read books on home education and talk to home education families. Reasons to homeschool vary with each family. The major ones are to instill values and morals, or to spend more time together as a family. Perhaps the child is not doing well in a classroom setting, or the desire is for more flexibility in learning topics and pace, and lastly, there is a desire for socialization free from bullying. There are various homeschooling styles, methods and philosophies and each family develops those over time for their own particular family. You can find families through word of mouth. Or look around at public venues. You will see many parents out with school-aged

children during the day. Ask them if you could email or phone them for further information. Most homeschooling families love to share their information and experiences. There are many myths, stereotypes and inaccuracies regarding home schooling, and educating yourself will provide you with confidence and assurance that you are doing the right thing for your family.

2) Register with a supervising school board. All home schooling families must do this by law. You do not have to get permission, forms or anything from your present school board. A phone call notifying the Principal that you are withdrawing your child from the school is the only obligation you have to fulfill.

The new school board or department that you register with, will secure your child's academic records from the old school board, and provide you with the appropriate Alberta Education forms. Calgary Board of Education, one of the largest school boards in the province, offers a home education program for students, but there are also many non-resident city school boards that have been supporting homeschooling families for decades. Most boards offer similar programs, funding, resources, and support, and according to veteran homeschoolers, the real difference is in how you mesh with your immediate facilitator that is assigned to support your family. That facilitator must support your goals, philosophies, and methods, otherwise, ask for another person to be assigned to you. This is your right!

3) Be sure to register with a school board by September 30th to qualify for Alberta government funding. It's nice to have books, curriculum, games, crafts and passes to the cities amenities reimbursed to you. Remember that if you miss the deadline, you can still pull your child out to register and homeschool any time throughout the school year. You just won't get funding for the 2007/2008 school year.

4) Sign up with a support group and find your community. Many of the supervising school boards have their own parent support group where you can contact other parents to exchange tips, successes, worries, ideas and strategies. Ask your homeschooling family contacts about where they go for support, classes and socializing. Many support groups meet during the evening to accommodate work-outside-the-home parents. Many groups are on-line groups that are very helpful in answering questions.

5) Lastly, take time to de-school and relax. Enjoy the beautiful weather of the Fall months, and what the local parks, social groups and school boards have to offer families in learning and social activities. Don't rush into buying too many curriculums that won't suit your child, or signing up for too many

outside classes. First time homeschoolers tend to go overboard on both accounts! Take the time to observe your child at play and see how they learn best. Find a routine that works for your family.

Homeschooling is a viable option for thousands of Alberta families and the choices today are even greater than before: traditional, blended, on-line, part-time classes, unschooling, Montessori, classical, or a mix of all. As homeschooling becomes even more popular, there are plenty of resources, support, encouragement and help for families in Alberta. You and your child will love those wings and soon will be enjoying the flight!

Books About Homeschooling

- And the Skylark Sings With Me: Adventures in Homeschooling and Community-Based Education, ALBERT, David
- In Their Own Way: Discovering & Encouraging Your Child's Personal Learning Style; The Myth of the A.D.D. Child; 7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying & Developing Your Multiple Intelligences, ARMSTRONG, Thomas
- Homeschooling For Excellence, COLFAX, David & Micki
- The Homeschooling Book of Answers: The Most Important Questions Answered by Homeschooling's Most Respected Voices, DOBSON, Linda
- Dumbing Us Down, GATTO, John Taylor
- The Homeschooling Handbook The Unschooling Handbook: How to Use the Whole World As Your Child's Classroom, GRIFFITH, Mary
- Family Matters: Why Homeschooling Makes Sense, GUTERSON, David
- How Children Fail; How Children Learn; Learning All The Time; Teach Your Own HOLT, John
- Learning At Home: A Mother's Guide to Homeschooling, LAYNE, Marty
- The Teenage Liberation Handbook: How to Quit School & Get a Real Life and Education, LLEWELLYN, Grace School Can Wait; The Successful Homeschool Family Handbook, MOORE, Raymond & Dorothy
- The Complete Home Learning Source Book: The Essential Resource Guide for Homeschoolers, Parents, and Educators Covering Every Subject from Arithmetic to Zoology; Getting Started on Home Learning: How and Why to Teach Your Kids at Home, RUPP, Rebecca Child's Work: taking Children's Choices Seriously, WALLACE, Nancy

Homeschooling Magazines

The Homes-schoolers Guide www.homeschoolersguide.ca
Life learning magazine www.lifelearningmagazine.com

Judy Arnall is a professional international award-winning Parenting Speaker, and Trainer, Mom of five children, and author of the best-selling book,

"Discipline Without Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery" and the new DVD, "Plugged-In Parenting: Connecting with the Digital Generation for Health, Safety and Love" www.professionalparenting.ca (403) 714-6766
jarnall@shaw.ca

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