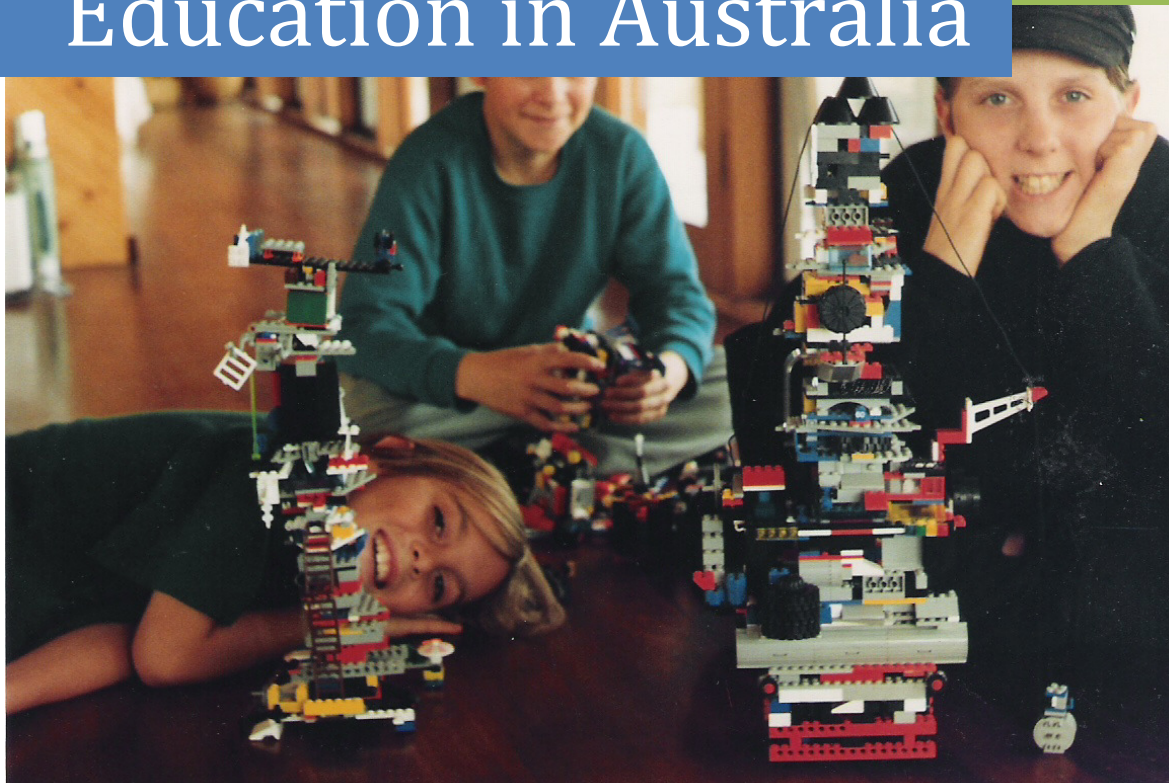


A Quick  
Guide to

# Getting Started with Home Education in Australia



Beverley Paine

Always Learning Books

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# A Quick Guide to Getting Started with Home Education in Australia

by  
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## Introduction

Inspired by homeschooling experiences in the USA and UK from the 1960s onwards, and a corresponding increase in availability of books published on home education, many Australian families have chosen to teach their children from home. Their reasons are as diverse as the individual families. Parents often revise and add to their original reasons for home education as the social, developmental and academic benefits continue to grow over many years in the home learning environment.

Home educating parents are those that want to experience greater control over the direction and content of their children's education. Parents have always taught their children: it is only in recent human history that they have been encouraged or coerced to hand this responsibility over to others. Parents who opt to teach their children at home discover that learning is a natural process that gradually builds multi-faceted layers of knowledge, skills and understanding as their children grow and develop. They discover that helping their children learn is a joyous, although at times challenging, task that brings rewards beyond academic education. Learning together as a family builds a wonderful sense of community: this is the foundation for the development of responsible citizenship and healthy, happy and cooperative societies.

The information in the *Getting Started with Homeschooling* series of eBooks has been compiled as a practical guide to help parents begin educating their children successfully from home. The nature of home education allows for incredible flexibility and diversity: parents are able to teach their children to suit their values and beliefs; use educational resources and materials of their choice to suit individual children; and to explore, experiment with and adopt or reject the many different pedagogical approaches readily available. Families are able to evolve their own educational philosophies to suit their own particular circumstances and needs.

*Getting Started with Homeschooling* begins with the assumption that, having considered your reasons and options carefully, you have decided to take full responsibility for your children's education. One of the desired outcomes as you progress through the *Getting Started with Homeschooling* series is an increased awareness of, and confidence in, your own ability to provide your children with an excellent education, tailored to their unique and individual learning styles.

In addition to providing the necessary confidence and practical information to begin home schooling, this series will reassure you that it can be both easy and enjoyable, as well as a wonderful opportunity to expand your own knowledge and skills. [Always Learning Books](#) concentrates on producing quality advice and information that will help you become a better teacher and home educating parent. Rather than add to the myriad of curriculum resources available for homeschooled children to use, our aim is to help demystify the teaching process and to remind parents of their natural ability to help their children learn.

We are continually adding to our range of e-Books and encourage you to visit [The Educating Parent](#) and [Always Learning Books](#) regularly to see what's new.

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***Please note:*** all information in this document is opinion, supplied by a lay-person, untrained in law, and is offered in good faith: it may not be accurate or up-to-date and you are strongly urged to seek legal advice from a qualified practitioner for your particular situation.

On [The Educating Parent](#) you will find hundreds of articles I have written over the past two decades to encourage and support parents to teach their children at home. This QUICK GUIDE is a brief introduction designed to give you some direction and information to get you started along this path. My book *Getting Started to Home Schooling Practical Considerations for Parents of School Aged Children* is step by step manual guiding you through the stages of creating, planning and implementing your own personalised educational curriculum for your child. It is available from my daughter (herself home educated) at [Always Learning Books](#).

We officially started homeschooling our children in early 1986 when our daughter turned six years of age, using a school-at-home approach, basing it on our daughter's kindergarten experiences and what we remembered from being school students ourselves. Very slowly, influenced by the writing of John Holt and Alfie Kohn, we relaxed into an unschooling natural learning lifestyle. Even though I was not qualified as a teacher, my confidence as an educator is derived from approaching the education of my children as a teacher: I conscientiously planned, recorded and evaluated their educational programs. As a learner I value the tools of observation and reflection and goal setting. These stood me in good stead and I know they will be of immeasurable value to you as you educate your children.

It is easy to go out and purchase a box of books or sign up to an online curriculum and sit your child down and say 'you are now a homeschooler, learn'. It is a different thing to be an effective educator meeting and responding to your child's unique learning styles and needs. As a home educator you need to be there with your child, observing how she learns, what she already knows, what she needs to know next, helping her make sense of and understand the world about her. It doesn't take long to mark your child's progress with tests but if you want educational success you are better off helping her understand the ups and downs of the learning process, how learning happens, and how she can help it happen more effectively.

We can be passive home educators or we can be active learners, learning alongside our children, enjoying every minute of their educational journeys. The Educating Parent website is dedicated to helping you become the latter. I want you to be a 'hands on' parent because doing that has brought me incredibly joy and resulted in the most amazing close friendships with my now adult children.

As parents Robin and I are not exceptional people: we don't have tertiary education qualifications and our work experiences have been limited to clerical and retail. What probably sets us apart is our 'do-it-yourself' attitude to life which helped to develop a vast range of different skills in many areas of life. We're active learners who look forward to what each new day brings. Self-reliance and self-confidence were high on our list of priorities as young parents. Home educating hasn't always been easy but it has always been rewarding. We are richer in many ways because we trod this path.

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When we started out on our home educating journey we were not perfect parents: far from it! How we parented and educated our children looked very different in those early years to how it looked a decade down this path and how we interact with our grandchildren now. We have learned an enormous amount – skills, understanding and knowledge – along the way. Some lessons were learned by observing how our children and other children learn. We listened carefully when people have shared their stories with us and learned from their lessons too. As far as possible we continually adapted what we were doing in the light of new understanding and knowledge. And that is the nature of home education: flexible and adaptable!

Home education offers parents the opportunity to give their children a high quality education that is responsive to the child, parent, family and community. It is an education option that is truly accountable. You get out of it what you put into it: the more attention, time and energy you invest into planning, recording and evaluating your home educating curriculum the greater the reward and sense of satisfaction.

## Getting Ready to Home Educate

Before you worry about how to legally register as a home educating family there are a few things you need to consider... There are many links (as footnotes) to articles on my website embedded in the text: I suggest that you come back to them and read them after you've finished this short eBook.

### **Do you really want to home educate your children?**

Are you cut out to be a homeschooling parent<sup>1</sup>? Although the benefits<sup>2</sup> are many, commitment<sup>3</sup> is important. Getting approval isn't the hurdle<sup>4</sup> it used to be but it does require some thinking and work. Consider your reasons<sup>5</sup> for home educating your children. Are your children happy with the idea<sup>6</sup>? Spend some time sitting around the table talking about what it will mean for your family, what learning at home will and can look like, think of possible disadvantages<sup>7</sup> and how you can overcome them. There is a lot to consider and your discussions will form the foundation of your home educating philosophy and lifestyle<sup>8</sup>.

### **Homeschool is not school.**

School is classroom oriented, homeschool is family/community oriented. The world is your classroom!<sup>9</sup> Your children know the difference between parenting and teaching. You'll save yourself time, money and energy to spend a few moments thinking about what kind of education<sup>10</sup> you want for your children. It isn't about how many hours of instruction<sup>11</sup> per day -

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<sup>1</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/areyouready.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/benefits.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/page1.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/legalstuff.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/reasons.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/page3.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/disadvantages.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/samplelearningprogram.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/worldisyourclassroom.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/index/methods.html>

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quantity - it is about being able to offer quality individualised learning programs<sup>12</sup> tailored to your children's unique learning needs!

**Preparing the learning environment** doesn't have to mean turning one room into a classroom. Usually families provide each child with a desk although most learning will occur in the main living areas of the home - where you are! There are plenty of ways you can enhance learning though by tweaking the learning environment<sup>13</sup>.

**You will need to design your own curriculum.** Home educators are 'on their own': it is not distance or correspondence school, though there are a few some distance schools that will enroll home educating families and offer some support and resources. Writing your own learning programs<sup>14</sup> isn't difficult once you've determined what the children need to learn<sup>15</sup>. I recommend you begin by developing your own personal philosophy<sup>16</sup> or mission statement about education. You can also incorporate any of the different homeschooling approaches and methods<sup>17</sup>. Finding appropriate resources<sup>18</sup> to help your children learn is the next exciting step!

Home educators use a wide variety of approaches and methods. It will take time to find the 'right' way for you and your family. The first couple of years will include experimenting with different methods and materials - all homeschoolers go through this 'settling in' stage. All methods work to balance children's natural ability to learn with organised learning activities that challenge and promote growth and development. The homeschool curriculum aims to be holistic. It should also be responsive to the learning needs and styles of the individual learner. The information on [The Educating Parent](#) has been accumulated over nearly three decades of experience as well as from my ongoing interest in how children learn and how parents and teachers can continue to aid that process.

**Find a local contact person or support group** for information and help. Homeschooling families work together to form supportive networks, catering to the educational and social needs of their members. Informal and formal networks exist in both metropolitan and country areas. It is advisable to contact a local network and find out about the current requirements in your area before you complete your application. The Home Education Association <http://hea.edu.au> maintains a list of contacts for each state, including state and regional homeschooling organisations, groups and newsletters.

Go to group gatherings and excursions. Talk to people. Ask about their experiences, how they home educate, what they had to do. Everyone experiences these things differently and that is okay. Subscribe to newsletters and online groups. Don't be shy: ask questions. People have 'been there, done that' - they can help. Beverley's friendly on-topic [Homeschool Australia FAQ](#)

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<sup>11</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/howmanyhoursaday.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/writinglearningplans.html>

<sup>13</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/index/learningenvironment.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/writeowncurriculum.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/requiredcurriculum.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/preparingmissionstatement.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/choosinghscurriculum.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://theeducatingparent.com/articles/locatingresources.html>

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[Yahoo Group](#)<sup>19</sup> is a good place to start. Join and post an introduction, or contact one of the following for information about local groups and contacts:

Home Education Association <http://hea.edu.au/> national directory of contacts and groups

Home Education Network Victoria <http://www.home-ed.vic.edu.au/>

Home Based Learners of Western Australia <https://hbln.org.au/>

Tasmanian Home Education Advisory Council <http://www.theac.org.au/>

Home Education Network of Canberra and the Southern Tablelands (Inc)

<http://www.hencast.org.au/>

## Home Education is LEGAL in all states and territories within Australia.

Education, not schooling, is compulsory:

"That every child has a right to an education is recognised in international instruments such as the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) (1990) to which Australia is a signatory. The UDHR provides that '[e]ducation shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages' [and] that 'elementary education shall be compulsory...'; and that 'parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given their children' (Article 26(3)). CROC also provides that 'states parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.'  
(CROC, Article 2(2))."

Source: Glenda Jackson, Sonia Allan,

[\*International Journal of Elementary Education\*](#)<sup>20</sup>, Vol 2, Issue 3 (July 2010)

Not all homeschoolers agree with the way state educational authorities interpret the laws and regulations regarding education and homeschooling. Some people feel that the conditions imposed on them by bureaucracy are fair and reasonable, but others argue they have no basis in law, infringe on basic human and parenting rights, and are discriminatory and inequitable. You will need to think carefully about your own philosophical and moral position, and become clear in your own mind about your role and the role of the educational authority administering the Act and regulations.

For the two decades we home educated our children it was our experience that parents are required (with some exceptions, most notably in Victoria) to:

1. Prepare a learning program for the children based on the curriculum used in schools in that state or territory;

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<sup>19</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HomeschoolAustraliaFAQ/>

<sup>20</sup> [http://theeducatingparent.com/quickguide/www.iejee.com/2\\_3\\_2010/349-364.pdf](http://theeducatingparent.com/quickguide/www.iejee.com/2_3_2010/349-364.pdf)

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2. Provide adequate access for social interaction with peers;
3. Indicates how educational progress will be monitored;
4. Submit to an initial interview to assess suitability of the learning program, family home and parents' ability to educate the children;
5. Submit to a regular review, including interview, in some states on an annual basis, in other every two years.

This process is variously known as 'registration', 'dispensation', and 'obtaining exemption from attending school'.

The type of information sought by educational authorities in the process of approving home education curricula varies considerably, but the focus should always be on the quality of the proposed learning program and learning environment. A comprehensive guide to establishing learning programs can be found in the Australian home educating manual [Getting Started with Homeschooling: Practical Considerations](#).

Be firm and assert that it is the learning program that is under consideration, not the children's current educational abilities and understandings. As the approved home educator it is your, not the interviewing officer's or the office giving permission for you to home educate, responsibility to monitor the educational and developmental progress of your child.

**Legislation and regulations differ considerably from state to state.** Some require exemption from attending school, others require registration. Some authorities ask for detailed learning programs, others ask for much less. Some offer more support than others. Get to know what is required where you live.

You will need to **obtain a copy of the relevant Act** for your state, and then find out about local conditions and regulations or policies that may apply. Homeschooling networks can help you with local information, but check for yourself: although well-meaning, information from these sources may not be accurate or up-to-date. If you need further clarification seek out legal aid or a lawyer. Many homeschoolers have done this and in some situations it has truncated unnecessary interference in their homeschooling provision.

Copies of Australian legislation are updated regularly on Australasian Legal Information Institute<sup>21</sup> <http://www.austlii.edu.au/>: click on your state and then look under E to find the Education Act. Do a search for 'home school' or 'home education' or scroll through the contents of the Acts to find the relevant section.

**If in doubt about your rights and responsibilities seek legal advice. Don't be intimidated into giving up your goal.**

The following is a list of the **state and territory regulatory agencies as of July 2014** (please note, the contact details and urls change frequently). When enquiring about home education please take the time to chat with local home educators first to ascertain local conditions and requirements, it will prove to be invaluable.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.austlii.edu.au/>

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- **Australian Capital Territory**  
[http://www.det.act.gov.au/school\\_education/home\\_education](http://www.det.act.gov.au/school_education/home_education)
- **New South Wales**  
<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/home-schooling/index.html>
- **Northern Territory**  
<http://www.education.nt.gov.au/parents-community/schooling/home-education>
- **Queensland**  
<http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/home-education/>
- **South Australia**  
<http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/speced2/pages/default/homeeducation/?reFlag=1>, or  
<https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/education-skills-and-learning/schools/alternative-schooling/home-education>
- **Tasmania**  
<http://www.theac.org.au>
- **Victoria**  
<http://www.vrqa.vic.gov.au/registration/Pages/homeschooldefault.aspx>
- **Western Australia**  
<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/homeeducation/detcms/portal/>

At all times **read all paper work very carefully**, and never sign anything with which you are not entirely happy. Where possible state your case in your own writing, using your own words, rather than simply signing forms presented to you. Be careful not to sign away present or future rights to resources, assistance or help for your children as homeschooling students.

**Keep records of any communication** with authority officials, including tape recordings or transcripts of telephone conversations [please note: if you intend to do this it is your legal obligation to inform the person on the other end of the phone that you are recording the conversation for your records before you begin]. This professional and responsible approach offers you confidence in further dealings. In addition, insist of written clarification of telephone communications at the conclusion of the call – ask for a letter confirming the details discussed or requests for further information needed.

It is also a sensible idea to ask before the interview for an outline of what will be discussed and dealt with during the interview to be sent to you at least a week before to enable you to adequately prepare.

Many families have found it useful to gain access to the reports written about them by the Education Department. To do this you can apply through the Freedom of Information Act<sup>22</sup>. Once you have located your state office, phone and ask for a request for access under the Freedom for Information Act. They will send you the application.

And remember it is prudent to keep all records until the child is past compulsory schooling age.

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Freedom\\_of\\_Information](http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Freedom_of_Information)

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One family obtained the following advice from their lawyer regarding the interview process: it's worth considering, but if in doubt seek your own legal advice from a qualified practitioner:

*"Our legal advice has been that if they have seen your home once they have no need to do it again and that all future interviews should be done at a convenient place outside the home and a third person should be present because if you invite someone into your home a lot of your legal protection disappears because of the "consent" implied in saying "come in..." You need to ensure that the third person is not a physical third person, such as a mother, husband or direct relative, etc, but a person who is not affected by any decision making on either side and who can take notes to support memory at a later date. You will need to inform the authorities a third person is present to take notes and help you remember the important points of the meeting."*

This family was also advised to keep an attendance record of their children's homeschooling:

*"The attendance diary should just be a very small week at a glance diary (my children's is about 10cm by 4 cm). Sign it each morning or at the end of the homeschool day. It is a legal record that on that day you did school work. If there are doctor's appointments for the individual child include a note about that, or if they were ill and didn't work say why. It's also a good idea to note when the children participate in social activities. This is the only record you need to show that the children have worked for a minimum of 200 days per year. It's good because if you need to present that diary to the department or a court you are only providing information relevant to the home education program and not your personal or family life."*

It will help if you **start recording** your child's learning journey today. Regardless of whether you 'register' or seek 'exemption', most of us feel more confident as home educators when we write our own curriculum or learning plan and begin recording our children's educational progress by keeping a social diary, album or scrapbook. Date all entries, and mark on a calendar the days your children are being home educated: this is the equivalent of a school roll book. Some families will tell you it isn't necessary to keep home educating records, or that it's too much bother, but as a newcomer it is the quickest way to build confidence in your home learning experience. Dated records are also legal evidence that your children are being appropriately educated. Don't wait until you are 'approved', start now.

**Act like a professional educator:** officers processing your application will feel less inclined to treat you as just another (or worse, precocious) parent. This includes keeping dated written records of all communication, including phone calls. Ask for information given to you over the phone to be sent by letter too. Insist. Or insist on written communication only, emails or letters rather than phone calls. A 'paper trail' encourages everyone to remain accountable and respectful.

**Prepare a basic learning plan** for the year ahead, using dot points under the required subject areas: these might be English, Maths, Science, Society & Environment (Geography, History), Technology, The Arts (visual, performance, drama, craft), LOTE (language and culture other than English), Health & Physical Education. Although Australia now has a national curriculum which some states are implementing as is, others are incorporating it into their existing state

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syllabi. We home educators should be able to simply use the Australia Curriculum which, although not finished is already slated for extensive review. However, as the states and territory governments are responsible for education, we are at the mercy of state and territory legislation and regulation.

A better way to prepare a learning plan is to think about what your child will be developmentally and educationally ready to learn in each of these general curriculum areas over the coming year and create some activities or unit studies around that – based on his or her level, ability and learning styles and needs. You might like to add a few well chosen student work-books, text-books or online learning programs and / or list resources (people, places, things). Can you build some activities around personal or family interests? Most can be easily related to one or more curriculum subjects. Add them in too!

**Keep it simple, keep it basic!** There is no need to write reams: most of us go way overboard when we write our first home education learning program. We worry if we are covering everything our child needs to learn. But it is like most things in life: as we travel along the path the detail becomes visible, we fill in the gaps, switch direction to focus on something in more detail. That's okay, it works, and (if this is relevant to your application for home education) the person interviewing you and assessing the suitability of your program knows that. Create a personalised simple plan that includes learning objectives in all required subjects that you can confidently talk about. There are sample learning plans on [The Educating Parent](#), [Home Education Association](#) and many online support groups offer samples too.

Don't forget to ask for advice and pointers during any interviews on where to find appropriate resources: remember that the officer interviewing you during the registration process has teaching experience and will have lots of ideas. Even if they don't view their job as such, see them as someone there to help you build an excellent education for your child, not as someone there to judge you, your child or your home.

And remember that **your home education program is only a plan**: it isn't set in concrete and is likely to have changed quite a bit by the end of your first month! The authorities understand this too. Your end of year report doesn't have to look anything like your initial plan. And that's true for families who have been home educating for years as well as beginners: life happens and we all take advantage of whatever educational opportunity or resources come our way throughout the year.

Keeping records of your children's learning and their progress should only take a few minutes several times a day. Try different approaches to keeping records until you find one that you are happy to use on a regular basis. Our confidence grows exponentially when we record our home education journeys. And it will mean a lot less work when we prepare our review!

During the registration process **make it obvious you have support** from other home educators: leave homeschooling magazines and books on display and talk about your local and

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online support groups.

And most of all, don't stress too much. If your plan isn't instantly approved, ask why. Ask them to tell you what is missing so you can include activities and resources in those areas. Don't accept 'no' as an answer. Negotiate: they usually give up before you do. Appeals processes are written into legislation in some states. If you feel intimidated or unsure join a homeschooling group. Other families have experienced and overcome problems and will be able to offer useful advice.

In most states and territories home educating families are subjected to annual reviews where you will be required to demonstrate educational progress of the children. This necessitates some degree of record keeping, an essential element of a sound educational program. See the chapter on Recording in [Getting Started with Homeschooling - Practical Considerations](#) for ideas you can use.

Never give away original documents or children's work. If samples are required photocopy and forward them later.

In most cases a simple annual report prepared by you should suffice. When working through the review simply write brief summaries of what the children have done during the year, and then a brief outline of the next year's program. If you are feeling less than confident get help: many experienced homeschoolers are happy to assist or be present at interviews as observers. Having a third party present, if only to help keep the children occupied with activities while the interview takes place, will help to boost your confidence.

Focus is always placed on socialisation and adequate provision for contact with peers. It is a myth that home educated children are less socialised than school children. In most situations, home education broadens the children's social sphere by removing them from school. Social activities include regular interaction with people from all age groups. Families list cultural, religious, sport and personal interest social activities, as well as participation in home education group activities and camps. A photo album showing incidences of group interaction may help.

## Withdrawing your child from school

Although the process is different in each state it makes sense for parents to give plenty of notice when withdrawing your child from school. Private schools usually require payment of fees in advance and withdrawing may incur a financial penalty. Read the information on the school's website or the enrollment contract you originally signed. It is possible to withdraw a child from a public school at anytime. It is advisable to notify the principle about your intentions to hopefully forestall potential contact with truancy officers.

Plan ahead if you can. Get your home education curriculum and learning materials and resources ready, prepare your home and set up any necessary record keeping regime. Many families typically chose the school holidays as a time to do this.

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If you have the time, don't rush through this preparation stage. Do the planning and setting up before telling the school anything. Stress to everyone that is aware of the plan to withdraw the children from school that you wish to announce your decision publicly and to the school and teachers in your own time.

Some schools are considerate and understanding, some offer resources and help, but most react with varying degrees of hostility. Being prepared for any outcome is useful. Talking to other home educating families about their experiences, especially those who live in your general area, may be very helpful.

If you are advising the school in person, some families find it less intimidating for both parents to front up, or have a third party present. Always follow up any verbal conversation with a written record. Inform the principal that your children won't be coming back and ask for their names to be removed from the school roll, if this is applicable in the state in which you live.

Make a clean break: choose a date and make that your target. On the day collect any books and materials that belong to your child from his or her locker and classroom. Return all school property, library books, class sets, sport gear and so on. This is not the time to get into protracted conversations with teachers, staff and other parents about your decision.

Record in your homeschooling diary that you have commenced homeschooling on the day that your children are withdrawn from school. Continue recording each day's homeschooling as per the legal requirements of your state.

Withdrawal from a public school may be followed by contact from the Education Department. If you receive a phone call, express your agreement with the importance of the matter, but nothing else, and ask the person to set their concerns out in a letter.

If you receive a visit, once again express agreement of importance of the matter and ask for their concerns in writing. You are not required to let them enter your home unless they have a warrant. Ask them to contact you by letter to make an appointment to visit. They already have your address.

The information and advice on this page may seem onerous and, in places, overbearing and unnecessary, but by following it closely you may avoid some of the hassles that a few home educating families in the past have endured. Diligence and preparation will pay dividends as you prepare to home educate. This approach will also bolster your confidence at this crucial time.

## How Will You Know Your Children Are Learning?

A major component of education is evaluation. This is more frequently known as assessing and monitoring progress. There are two main elements to evaluation: **observation** and **reflection**.

**Observation** of your children's actions and reactions, their temperaments and developing personalities, allows you to build relationships with them to ensure successful learning in all areas of their lives.

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Evaluation requires the conscious **reflection** on the usefulness, the appropriateness, and the outcomes (products and results) of their activities. Goals and objectives need to be measurable: by being able to compare 'then' with 'now' and having a clear plan of where you want your child to be in the future, you will build a confident overview of her educational progress.

The process of evaluation can include assessment, but involves much more than simply tests and exams. You need to think about what you are hoping to achieve, whether your methods are appropriate, and how things may have been done differently.

Being organised with keeping records, jotting down your observations and evaluative comments throughout the day will help you to plan their education to suit their emerging learning needs. It also plays an important part in building your confidence in your role as a home educating parent.

Tests and exams can be tailored to suit the individual child's learning needs, or adapted from commercial tests. Some text books and online learning programs include tests and answers. There are also 'test' books for each year level in each subject available.

### **How to evaluate - some questions to guide you:**

- Was the learning activity, or method, effective?
- Have the objectives of the learning activity been met?
- What does your child know now he didn't before?
- What can your child do now she couldn't before?
- Was the learning activity easy or hard, and why?
- What do you know now about how your child learns you didn't know before?
- Did your child find the learning activity challenging?
- Was she enthusiastic and motivated? If not, what contributed to this?
- Were the resources and activities appropriate?

There are dozens of articles on [The Educating Parent](#) about record keeping and evaluation and assessment. Use the search function or look under 'Record Keeping' or 'Evaluation' on the site map. [Getting Started with Homeschooling](#) has a whole chapter on this subject, with many examples drawn from our own homeschooling life.

Many home education parents wonder why they need to keep homeschooling or unschooling records and some see them as simply an imposition. There are many **valid reasons** for keeping track of your children's educational progress, including:

- an aide to memory,
- a celebration of learning,
- can provide a springboard for further explorations,
- linking outcomes of knowledge and skills to the 'big picture' of your child's education,

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- forming the basis of a reference source, comparison against self, can be reassuring to look back on,
- involving your children improves their literacy and mathematical skills, and encourages a sense of responsibility,
- potential for revealing insights about what they understand or can do after the activity is completed,
- acting as a 'proof' of learning to reassure important others.

### **What to record**

- Preferably not everything your children do! Children enjoy some privacy.
- Selected samples should easily be able to demonstrate progress. Don't forget to date them.
- Include samples of your children's work as well as anecdotes that describe new abilities or developmental milestones.
- Write down some of your children's questions and insights.
- Collect photos of art, craft, technology projects, excursions, etc.
- A log of what they are reading or the resources they access (text-books, computer programs, people/classes, etc).
- Encourage your children to record their reflections in a regular diary or journal.
- Your reflections on how you are travelling as a home educator, what worked, what didn't, etc.

In addition to recording for your own purposes you may find that in order to meet the home education regulatory requirements of your state or territory you'll need to reference your child's learning to the state or national curriculum outcomes or statements. I found it useful to read through the curriculum and acquaint myself with the contents, using them as springboards for ideas we could use in our homeschooling environment. I found that reading the preamble and browsing the overarching statements and outcomes gave me greater confidence, although deciphering the jargon is always challenging (see my booklet on *Translating Educational Jargon*).

It may be useful to collect 'paired samples' of your children's work – examples which illustrate progress and growth in one or more areas. For example, your child might draw a rough mud map as part of a pirate game at the beginning of the year and this could be compared with a map he copied for a camping trip which includes additional features such as legend, scale, plus improvement in spelling and grammar.

### **Different Ways to Record**

You can document your children's educational progress using:

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- Daily diary, for the parent plus child's personal daily journal. A great habit to develop anyway with lots of additional educational benefits.
- Photographs, videos: especially useful as a record of social interaction, activities, etc. Helps to overcome the 'socialisation' objection to homeschooling!
- Learning contracts or check/tick lists: these can be in subject areas or for set periods.
- Calendar pages: use a calendar for keeping track of field trips, events, etc.
- Tests: you can create your own, find them in books, or your child can enter national competitions in different subject areas. Collect certificates of merit. Tests and exams aren't required by educational authorities. It is possible to arrange to participate in National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) if you desire.
- Keep 'samples' of your children's work in a folder, portfolio, exercise books or scrapbooks, on your computer, on a family or personal blog or website. Record the date and any comments on all 'samples' kept.
- Outlines of learning plans and programs, unit studies, etc.
- Each year review and update your homeschool curriculum (overall learning program).
- Record your responses in your diary, or on dated samples or your children's work. Use your evaluation to tailor the learning program to your child's immediate learning needs.
- As a home educator I developed a couple of different diary formats: the [weekly homeschooling diary](#) is very similar to the familiar school diary and the [learning naturally diary](#)<sup>23</sup> has been designed to help parents understand that when children are engaged in play, chores or following their interests they are also learning. Another recording approach I developed when my children were high school age, is the [Home Education Report / Portfolio](#)<sup>24</sup>. Similar to an end-of-year school report, this document records major assignments or learning tasks undertaken throughout the year. It also contains broad objectives for students in each subject area. It was my aim in creating these resources to help ease parents into home education and to take the worry out of recording their child's progress.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://alwayslearningbooks.com.au/diaries.html>

<sup>24</sup> <http://alwayslearningbooks.com.au/homeedreports.html>

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There are thousands of useful tips within the hundreds of articles on [The Educating Parent](#) that will encourage and reassure you as you undertake this exciting and challenging education adventure with your children. There is also a range of eBooks, booklets and books published by [Always Learning Books](#) available.

*"Thank you... The information you supply is real and generous, fantastic reading. Your honesty is rare. Most books do not really explain 'how' as well as you do." Tracy*

*"A fabulous source of information and inspiration... providing wonderful, detailed information and resources." Faye*

*"Every time I read your writing it feels like a pat on the shoulder, and that feels really good...Thanks!" Maaïke*

*"I just wanted to thank Beverley all the awesome work she has done for us over the many years. If it wasn't for her website I would have been completely lost at the beginning." Yeshe*

*"You are a constant inspiration on this journey that we are taking with our children." Debbie*

*"Whenever I read your writing I always come away with increased confidence in my ability to provide and share a wonderful learning journey with my family! Thank you!" Davina*

*"I appreciate that your book Getting Started is very balanced in its approach to homeschooling methods and also that it covers so many of the areas and questions that I desperately needed to deal with." Joanne*

*"Your website and publications have been a fabulous source of information and inspiration and I am very pleased to have some of your titles on my bookshelf. So thank you very much for providing me with wonderful, detailed information and resources. I am really looking forward to teaching my son at home and your publications have impressed and further convinced me that home ed really is the way to go." Faye*

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