



HOMESCHOOLING 101

Info for Beginning Homeschooling

afhe.org

Information compiled by Arizona Families for Home Education

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Welcome

You are about to embark on an adventure of a lifetime, and AFHE is here to help guide you through the process with important and reliable information. Every family's journey is unique. Don't be overwhelmed with questions and guesswork. Instead, work through the following "Steps for Starting Smart" for a process that will help you launch with confidence.

If you need more help or additional information, please contact Arizona Families for Home Education at homeschool@afhe.org or visit our website **afhe.org**. It is our mission to inspire and support you along the way.

Steps for Starting Smart

1

Define Your Vision

Take the time to develop and clarify your reasons for homeschooling. Your vision will answer why you chose to homeschool and will help ground you as you plan your year. These are a few key topics to consider:

ACADEMIC REASONS

- Home education allows for a customized education that can provide support for a child's unique needs and freedom to advance where he or she excels.
- A home-based education can focus on mastery of topics and subjects rather than conforming to the pace and priorities of the local school system.
- Home-educated students typically score 15-30% above public school averages on standardized academic achievement tests, regardless of the parent's level of education or the dollars spent on educational expenses.

PERSONAL GROWTH REASONS

- Measures of social, psychological, and emotional development show that home educated students are doing quite well overall.
- Many home educators place a high value on the unparalleled opportunity to develop deep family relationships. Learning together provides countless shared experiences and becomes an integrated aspect of family life.

SPIRITUAL & RELIGIOUS REASONS

- For many home educating families the liberty to integrate their faith into lessons and subjects throughout the day is a top priority.
- Character development and spiritual formation of a child are responsibilities that belong primarily to parents. The homeschool lifestyle provides the ideal environment.

WORLDVIEW REASONS

- No education is neutral. All education is a form of discipleship: training to live according to shared beliefs.
- Parents who choose to educate at home are able to help their children answer foundational questions that define one's worldview: Does God exist? What is the basis of morality? How do I find purpose in life?

What is a worldview?

A worldview is a set of core beliefs that shapes how we see ourselves, others, life, and society. It is a framework for understanding the world.

2

Know Arizona's Homeschool Laws

Homeschool laws and legal status vary widely from state to state. Here are the basic legal features of homeschooling in Arizona according to A.R.S. §15-802:

- Compulsory attendance law applies to children ages 6-16. The parent or person who has custody can select from any of Arizona's legal education categories.
- A homeschool parent or guardian can satisfy the compulsory attendance requirement by filing an Affidavit of Intent to Homeschool with their County School Superintendent. Find the affidavit and complete instructions at afhe.org/az-law-and-affidavit.
- By filing the affidavit, the parent/guardian affirms that the child will receive instruction in the areas of reading, grammar, math, science, and social studies. Arizona's statutory definition of "homeschool" specifies that this is to be nonpublic instruction conducted primarily by the parent or guardian, or nonpublic instruction in the home.
- Homeschool students do not receive public funding. Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) contract students have access to state funding and are governed by A.R.S. § 15-2402 and their contract with the Department of Education.

3

Prepare for the Homeschool Lifestyle

Homeschool does not have to look like traditional schooling, but it does require a framework. Design a plan that works for your family.

- Read books or articles suggested for homeschool beginners.
- Set up a place for your student to keep books, projects, and supplies.
- Decide where you will work together with your child. Consider family needs and household logistics.
- Prepare where you will store your child's completed work (physical and/or digital storage).
- **WHO** will be teaching? Mom, Dad, grandparents, extended family, tutors, online instructors?
- **WHERE** will your child study and work and turn in assignments?
- **WHAT** is your budget? What spending patterns might change as you begin home education?
- **WHEN** will lessons take place? Do you need a high degree of structure or will your homeschool be more casual? Lesson time does not have to fit a standard school-day schedule. Working parents are often able to find creative solutions that make homeschooling possible for their families!

4

Tailor Your Homeschool Instruction to Fit Your Child

As you homeschool you can both capitalize on strengths and address weaknesses as necessary.

- Consider writing a letter to your child's "teacher"—yourself!— to "introduce" him or her. Describe interests, motivators, learning gaps or challenges, and strengths, and include more than just academics. You might ask your child to write one as well!
- Note what type of lessons, presentations, and methods have worked well for each child. Does he or she gravitate toward certain types of learning methods and modes, such as:
 - using pictures and videos, following printed instructions and diagrams, or reading silently for content?
 - using audio recordings, hearing verbal instructions, talking through the steps of a procedure, or listening to someone reading aloud?
 - using physical objects, learning manipulatives, hands-on projects, card games, and live demonstrations?
- Researching "learning styles" or "multiple intelligences" can provide more insights for consideration. Children should have the chance to engage in a variety of learning activities.

5

Research Common Educational Approaches

Learn about the most common educational approaches used in homeschool settings and find what fits your family's educational priorities and your child's learning needs. Some are especially well suited for educating multiple children together in the home. All of them are valid approaches to providing an outstanding education for your child:

- **Traditional Textbooks and Workbooks Approach:** use textbooks and workbooks focused on specific subject areas and utilize the accompanying teacher's guides
- **Nonpublic Online/Remote School or Academy Enrollment:** a variation of the traditional approach; may be accredited or not accredited; the provider offers a complete educational program including recordkeeping and you supervise your student and submit student work
- **Online Instruction:** also a variation of traditional approach; student participates in live online classes or uses pre-recorded/self-paced courses; you select the courses, monitor instruction, supervise student work, and retain recordkeeping responsibility
- **Charlotte Mason or Living Books & Life Experiences Approach:** utilize educational practices such as narration, dictation, discussion, and copywork while providing lots of high-quality literature, handiwork, and real-life learning experiences
- **Unit Study Approach:** design or purchase learning units which integrate multiple subject areas based on a common theme; usually emphasizes living books and project-based learning
- **Classical Approach:** lead your child in a careful study of history via classical literature, while your child progresses through classically recognized learning stages: learning the basics ("grammar"), understanding relationships ("logic"), and expressing relationships ("rhetoric")
- **Relaxed or Unschooling Approach:** start with the assumption that all children are natural learners and then facilitate your child's learning with resources and experiences; doesn't use a predetermined learning program
- **Eclectic Approach:** use a blend of approaches listed above, sometimes determined by subject area or shifting along with your homeschool's progression or your family's circumstances

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Establish Goals

Setting goals will supply motivation, help in selecting curriculum, and make it easier to track progress. Your goals will stem from your vision.

- **Academic:** basic academic goals in specific subject areas or skill acquisition
- **Social/Relational:** social skill goals such as learning to serve others, manage conflict, converse thoughtfully and intelligently, and interact with various age groups and interest groups
- **Practical/Life Skills:** intentional guidance to help your child learn to work cheerfully and independently, manage time and belongings, follow instructions, and carry tasks through to completion
- **Physical:** learning and behavior goals focused on developmental milestones, physical training and exercise, nutrition and eating habits, and managing one's health
- **Spiritual/Moral:** encourage disciplines and practices of your family's faith, identify character traits your child should develop, discuss how to make decisions consistent with your family's worldview and values

With the massive growth in home education and the ever-growing market this has created, deciding on curriculum can be a bewildering task. Remember that you don't have to have every decision made before you can start homeschooling!

BASE YOUR CURRICULUM DECISIONS ON THESE "STEPS FOR STARTING SMART"

- Your knowledge about your child
- The educational approach you plan to use
- Goals you have set for—and maybe with—your child
- Outside-the-box thinking and a new mindset about education

INSIDE TIPS FOR CHOOSING CURRICULA

- Ask for recommendations from people you know. Their choices might not become your choices, but learning from another's personal experience can be very helpful.
- Place a high priority on covering the basics: reading, math, and language arts.
- Add extras later as you become acclimated to the homeschool lifestyle.
- Every home educator makes mistakes when buying curricula. Evaluate what you like and don't like, learn from the mistake, and move on.
- Pay attention to how much preparation is needed for the lessons and how "hands-on" you will need to be in the process. More effort on your part doesn't mean you shouldn't select that curriculum, but this is an important consideration.
- If you don't like the material or the mechanics of a certain curriculum, you probably won't use it regularly or effectively, no matter how highly it's recommended or how much it costs.
- Ask yourself if you need a formal curriculum for this subject/topic or whether you can approach it more informally, using learning activities, free reading, a mentor, or community resources and clubs.
- There is no "perfect" curriculum.

WHERE DO I FIND MATERIALS?

- Curriculum fairs
- AFHE's annual statewide homeschool convention
- Bookstores and local educational supply stores
- Catalogs
- Audiobook services
- Public libraries and library-based services, and some church libraries
- Internet searches ("homeschool curriculum reviews" is one place to start)
- Used curriculum sales and local resource centers
- Support group curriculum swaps and private sales of used materials

BEFORE YOU BUY, ASK YOURSELF:

- How much time do I have?
- How much money do I have?
- Have I checked the library?
- How much structure do we want or need for this topic?
- Does this material support our values?
- Does this help us achieve the goals we've set for this year?
- Is this resource or course a good "fit" for our homeschool and this child?

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Think Outside the School “Box”

Homeschooling will seldom look like traditional schooling. Be willing to adjust your expectations and develop a new mindset.

- You can be more flexible with allocating time in your homeschool. You can spend more time helping a child understand a difficult concept—or simply dive deep and choose to continue an activity. And often homeschooling takes much less time than a normal school day.
- Reconsider the utility of tests and quizzes. Use them if you want to, or don't. As a home educator you will have frequent ongoing opportunities to assess your child's understanding and progress. Conversation is one of the best methods of assessment.
- Have your child teach you what they learned—it's a remarkably effective way to reinforce learning.
- Games and puzzles, narrating or reenacting, time spent in nature, and free play are all effective, low-prep, low cost “teachers” you can use often.
- You don't have to follow the typical school-year calendar. Schedule weeks for lessons and breaks according to what your family needs.

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Keep Good Records

When you are homeschooling in accordance with A.R.S. §15.802, neither the state Department of Education nor the local school district requires you to keep records of attendance, grade reports, test scores, health records, or transcripts. There is no standardized testing required for homeschool students in Arizona. However, please keep in mind:

- If you later enroll your elementary or middle grade child at a public school, the school will conduct assessments to determine grade level placement.
- If you later enroll your high school-age child at a public secondary school, the school will likely not grant transcript credits to your student for any work completed or material learned during homeschooling. Acquiring credits toward graduation will begin upon enrollment.
- Laws regarding homeschooling vary from state to state. Some other states require significant documentation.
- For a student who is homeschooled through high school, the parent or guardian should create a diploma as well as a transcript that shows the student's course of work and grades earned. The transcript and diploma should be filed in the student's permanent records to be accessible for future educational and professional verification.
- Parents who utilize an Empowerment Scholarship Account to educate a child at home should review their contract for any requirements.

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Get Connected

Support and community are essential for your homeschool efforts.

- Locate and join a local homeschool support group or community.
- Subscribe to a local or statewide email list to learn about events and opportunities to connect with other homeschool parents and kids.
- “Like” AFHE on Facebook and follow @afheconnect on Instagram.
- Attend the annual statewide convention with AFHE to gather with thousands of homeschoolers for a weekend of encouragement, training, and motivation.



Transition from School to Homeschool

Recognize that the longer your child has been in a traditional school, the stronger your expectations and theirs will be of what “school” looks like. It takes time to shake these false expectations and reimagine what EDUCATION looks like. Here are some tips for starting homeschooling when you’re making the switch from a school setting:

- Relax and start slowly. The temptation to recreate school at home will be strong. Better to take your time than to launch without a plan and get frustrated.
- Realize that at first you will have more homework than your student. Learning about educational approaches, curriculum choices, scheduling and managing a homeschool household will require time and effort on your part.
- Focus on family relationships. Roles within the family will be changing and it will be important to listen, communicate, and be gracious as you adjust to spending more time together every day.
- Broaden your perspective on what quality educational materials look like. As a homeschool, you aren't limited to choices offered by the textbook industry.
- Write a mission statement for your homeschool. Having your reasons for homeschooling posted somewhere visible in your home will be a valuable reminder (for all of you!) on difficult days.
- Stay flexible. It's one of the great strengths of homeschooling! When life or homeschooling don't go as planned you can adjust.
- Keep extracurricular activities to a minimum. Don't load your family calendar with outside activities in an effort to keep up with someone else's standard or battle an anonymous stereotype.
- Don't rely on outside affirmation or approval. Leaving behind the traditional school model also means making a shift in how we evaluate success. Learn to focus on your family's goals and dispense with comparisons.

Bonus tip: Home education is a marathon, not a sprint. Your first year or two will undoubtedly contain mistakes and rough days, so don't give up! Seek support, give yourself grace, and focus on your reasons for homeschooling. Before long you'll wonder why you didn't start sooner!

These tips are adapted from AFHE's blog post "Successful Transitions in the Middle." Read more at afhe.org/blog.



Homeschool Special Needs

Is it truly possible to homeschool my special needs learner? Yes, it is! Yes, you can! Through homeschooling, the special needs learner receives one-on-one instruction that provides for his or her specific physical, social, psychological, and spiritual needs. Instruction can be customized for any special considerations, pacing, scheduling, and goals. The parent educator can integrate therapies, instructional aids, and targeted programs as desired. Homeschooling a special needs child allows you to set your own standards for progress and mastery rather than being bound to state guidelines which may or may not be appropriate for your child.

Additionally, in the security and comfort of the home environment your child can be safe from bullying and social pressures—able to relax and develop confidence free from comparisons. There are many social opportunities available to your kids where they can play, exercise, pursue an interest, or volunteer, giving them avenues to learn social confidence in lower-pressure situations.

Resources for educating special needs learners at home are multiplying rapidly. You do not need to have a special education degree to become an expert on your unique child and his or her needs. Whether you have a child with a medical diagnosis, developmental issues, learning disabilities, who is gifted or twice-exceptional, or on the autism spectrum, as your child's parent you have irreplaceable insight that you can combine with knowledge or training to become your child's best educator ever.

Arizona Families for Home Education (AFHE) is the statewide organization that has been serving the needs and protecting the rights of Arizona's homeschooling families since 1983. AFHE is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational, religious, and charitable corporation run by a Christian board of directors.



Become an AFHE Member and Enjoy These Benefits!

- Join thousands of other families who support homeschool freedom in Arizona.
- Receive *Homeschool Arizona* magazine.
- Get updates regarding legislative developments that affect homeschooling in Arizona.
- Qualify for a membership discount with the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA).
- Use your AFHE membership card to qualify for educator discounts at a wide variety of retailers and venues.
- Be eligible to volunteer for AFHE events and initiatives.
- Enable your homeschool graduate to participate in AFHE's graduation ceremony and apply for an AFHE scholarship for college or other post-secondary education.

With the support of families like yours, AFHE is able to provide:

- an informative website
- advocacy for homeschool freedom
- promotional materials and publications
- events supporting the homeschool community
- statewide graduation ceremony
- annual convention with nationally known speakers and Arizona's largest home education shopping experience
- lobbying and legislative monitoring
- bi-annual Homeschool Day at the Capitol
- involvement with national homeschool research
- affiliation with national networks
- support for homeschool groups and their leaders

That's a powerful membership!

VISIT

afhe.org/get-started

FOR MUCH MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES.