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# Why Homeschooling is the Best Educational Choice Available Today





### IT'S NO SECRET THAT HOMESCHOOLING IS CHANGING. In an

educational climate where schools are failing, success is tied to school test scores. Budget cuts mean fewer and fewer options for creativity, so more and more parents are choosing to take control of their children's education. Today's homeschooling population is growing exponentially and its homeschoolers are as varied as they come. Gone are the days when you knew a homeschool family by their jumpers, large families and desire to instill religious values into their children (and yes, I was one of them).

But it is those early pioneers who deserve our thanks. It was they who gained the right to homeschool in every state; it was they who gained the attention of publishers and other educational companies so that we have so many options to choose from; and it was their pursuit of excellence that has colleges and universities excited about recruiting homeschoolers.

But with the hundreds of options that we now have in homeschooling, how do we decide what will work for our families? What curriculum is the best? What is the best way to structure the day? How can we be certain that our kids are taking the right courses so that they are accepted and recruited by colleges and universities? And how do we as parents survive?

Homeschooling is incredibly rewarding but just as it is with all parenting, with those rewards comes some difficult days and some tough decisions.

And because we are so passionate about homeschooling, we want to help you make it the best decision you ever made! That is why this guide is designed to give insight on how to set up a homeschool program that both you and your child(ren) can be excited about.

After providing homeschooling services and support to families for 25 years, we've seen it all. We've helped to create wonderful educational experiences for children. We've watched families grow closer together through the bond created when parents take an active role in their child's education.



And we have watched kids pursue their dreams while they are still young. We have also watched as the homeschooling community has grown to include families from all different backgrounds with many different reasons why they have chosen to homeschool.

#### And there is no better time than now for you to take control of your child's education.

As you have likely seen in the media, today's traditional education system is failing our kids. Here in the United States, we have fallen from #1 to #24 in the world for academics in the last 15 years. Large class size, standardized testing, violence in our schools, budget constraints, Common Core standards that take away the ability for teachers to add creativity to their classrooms ... These factors and so much more have undermined the quality of education in our schools.

#### So what can a parent do?

If you are considering homeschooling for the first time, you are likely concerned about what you need to know to get started; you are likely overwhelmed with what to do to ensure that you can succeed; and you are likely worried about whether homeschooling will open the doors to your child's future.

No worries! We have been doing this for 25 years and we have seen students succeed at every level. Whether they started as struggling or advanced students, homeschooling has provided millions of students an education like no other. An education that allows them to realize their potential, discover their gifts and pursue their excellence now rather than later.

# Read on and get ready for the adventure of your life!



### Did you know that homeschooled students:

- Are 10% more likely to go to and stay in college. And they have higher GPA's.
- Have better social skills than their peers because they interact with adults and students of all ages through live programs and community service.
- Are more likely to get a job and be "satisfied" with life after college.

# **10 KEYS to Homeschool Success**

Some parents approach homeschooling with fear and trepidation; others with excitement and enthusiasm. Some may feel backed into a corner with no other options while others look forward to **homeschooling** as a way to invest in their children. Regardless of your perspective, we know you want to do it right and enjoy a successful school year full of rewarding learning experiences and enjoyable time with your child(ren).

### 1. Know the Law

In some states, there are more detailed guidelines and concrete standards; in others, parents don't need to do much to comply. However, knowing where your state stands up front, before you begin to explore your options, will help to define what and where you begin to research the many different homeschooling options. Once you have the law under your belt, the possibilities are endless! For a quick link to the laws in your state, click **State Laws in the**  "My Ten Keys to Homeschool Success come out of long experience as a homeschooling parent, a homeschool evaluator, a homeschool advisor and now as president of Bridgeway Academy."-JESSICA PARNELL

**United States** (www.bridgewayacademy.com/laws) for home schooling families, then select your state.

# 2. Know Yourself

Before you **embark on the incredibly rewarding homeschool journey**, you need to examine yourself. What kind of teaching role do you want to take?

- Do you enjoy pulling out all the stops and making a mess while you dig into learning with projects and experiments? **OR** Do you prefer an orderly home with a set schedule where you can plan out any such experiments and ensure that you have just the right materials before you begin?
- Are you a creative individual who loves to find new ways to explore? **OR** Are you an individual who can take someone else's creative ideas and tailor them to your kids?
- Are you an individual who needs structure? **OR** Are you one who prefers to "wing it" and see where the day takes you?

These questions are important to explore before beginning your search for just the right curriculum. Why? Because they help to define the kind of program you need.

If you are super creative, you might want to consider a program that allows room for that creative flair. However, if you are one who has trouble coming up with your own ideas, but can

take an idea and make it better, you may **need a program that is already laid out for you,** providing time for enrichments of your own.

One big struggle among homeschoolers is the comparison game – "Look at what Sue is doing. Her kids are doing so well! I have to try that program!"

#### That Program might not fit you.

And if it doesn't fit you, your enthusiasm can easily begin to dwindle. Before you know it, both you and your kids are ready to throw in the towel.

Know your passions; know your abilities and be willing to accept your strengths and your weaknesses. That is where a successful program begins.



If you are one who has no idea where to begin or what you should include in your program, contact

Bridgeway Academy, where **expert homeschoolers and educators** work with you every step of the way to help you find a program that will work for both you and your child.

### 3. Know your Child

Knowing your child(ren) and finding a homeschool program that both inspires and challenges is another key to homeschool success. But how can you really know what will work for each child?

Ask yourself these questions.

- Does your child love to get dirty and explore the world around him?
- Is she a child who loves to sit down and listen as you read a story?
- Is he an analytical thinker, who tends to question what is happening around him?
- Is she one who can connect events and experiences to lessons in life?
- Does he seem to thrive when able to create with his hands?
- Does she naturally "get it" the first time she hears it?

These kinds of questions can help to define the best kind of learning approach for your child. A hands-on learner will not be content to sit and fill out worksheets or listen to you explain concepts. A student who has strong auditory skills will thrive with a **curriculum** 

that uses interesting stories to teach about history, science or literature. A student who needs to hear or try something several times before she is able to grasp it will need a mastery curriculum with a lot of repetition and review, while a student who seems to "get it" right away should focus on a curriculum that provides ample opportunity for critical thinking.

With the Bridgeway Academy Total Care System, every child has the opportunity to participate in our learning and personality style assessments. These assessments help identify how your child learns best, the kinds of projects that will most excite him/her and the environment that is most conducive for learning. Knowing your child's academic level is also critical to a successful program. Many parents make the mistake of simply purchasing curriculum that is aligned to their child's chronological grade level. However, in many cases, that math course is too difficult because the right foundations have not been laid or that English course is too easy because your child is an accelerated learner.

Imagine how amazing it would be if you could find a curriculum that both appeals to your child's learning and personality style AND fits his/her academic level!

That's the kind of customization that Bridgeway Academy provides. When you combine our Total

Care Assessment with our academic placement testing and then add our in depth parent interview, we have the foundation we need to design the ideal program for you and your child(ren).

### 4. Know your Options

If you are reading this report, you already know that careful research is key to homeschool success. You are looking at a variety of homeschool organizations, publishers and options. And you are likely feeling a bit overwhelmed with the wealth of information available on homeschooling.

#### But with so many options, how can you possible know which one is right for you?

At Bridgeway Academy, we realize that every home school family is different. Some are seeking a program that allows them to be very active in the instruction; others want a more independent study approach. Some families want to use textbooks and workbooks, while others would like to take advantage of a fully online program. Some are home schooling an advanced student; others are home schooling because their child is struggling and the school system just isn't cutting it. And because we recognize those differences, we offer a variety of options with the expertise of an experienced homeschool advisor who can walk you through the many different options and help find the one that works best for you and your child(ren).

# 5. Know your Schedule

In my first year of homeschooling, my children were involved in art classes, gymnastics, classes at the zoo, science center classes, chorus, piano lessons, physical education, and community sports. When there weren't any scheduled events, we would get together with other homeschooling families for field trips, writing classes (which I taught), or just for fun.

We crammed in our studies into the morning, then loaded up the car for the rest of our

daily routine. I can't remember who burned out first, the kids or me, but we burned out quickly. The fun of those creative moments of science experiments, creative writing, and history projects soon became a thing of the past and we were slaves to our schedule.

Our solution? We began to limit ourselves to one or two activities at a time and suddenly we could breathe easier knowing that we had the time to fit it all in and still have plenty of time to stray from our curriculum when we wanted to dig in deeper and learn more.

However, although overscheduling can make you want to pull your hair out, under-scheduling can be just as bad. Kids need variety and opportunities to be with other kids, and as homeschoolers, we are the ones responsible to make that happen.

And in today's homeschooling world, the opportunities are endless! You can find activities that work for your family at nearby museums, art schools, YMCAs, support groups, colleges, churches, and historical sites ... So take advantage of them!

A great idea that worked for us was to get together with several other homeschooling families and plan out a year's worth of field trips—one per month. We assigned one for each parent to organize, picked dates (which we all reserved), and everyone looked forward to the monthly outing. We would also get together at a local playground or state park for another day of fun or learning.

# **6. Set Realistic Expectations**

I have met many homeschoolers who were upset because their three-year old was not yet reading or because their sixth grader was not succeeding in Algebra I. On the other hand, I have seen families who decide to homeschool with no direction or goals in mind.



Knowing the realities of your

schedule can really help you

will let go by.

determine what opportunities

you will grab and which ones you

Children will follow your lead, so take the time to set clear and reasonable expectations. Too few expectations and kids will quickly get bored and fill their time with things that you may not want them to tackle. Too high expectations and burnout can quickly occur.

The individualized instruction that homeschooling provides opens up the door for students to master concepts much more quickly than in a classroom full of distractions. However, it also makes it very easy to coast through the year without really accomplishing anything.

The answer to this struggle is ... planning.

The key to careful planning is to know your child (see Know Your Child above). What are his or her abilities? Struggles? Weaknesses? Passions? Putting a homeschool curriculum plan together that addresses all of these gives you the tools upfront to a successful school year. The Bridgeway Academy Customized package and Total Care System guides you through this planning stage through diagnostic placement testing, learning and personality style assessments, open dialogue and the expertise of certified teachers and trained staff members.

We pinpoint where your child needs to begin in each subject based on skills, struggles and strengths and we match curriculum to the learning style that most appeals to them.

Bridgeway Homeschool Academy can guide you through this planning stage with placement testing, open dialogue, and the expertise of certified teachers, experienced homeschoolers, and a trained staff. We can help identify your child's unique strengths and abilities, then design a learning plan to help you reach your educational goals.

#### 7. Get Organized

Nothing is more frustrating than not being able to find what you need when you need it. This is especially true when you are trying to keep your children current with their schoolwork.

A missing pencil, a lost textbook or workbook, scissors that seem to walk away on their own ... you get the picture. This can be extremely frustrating and make for a very long school day.

#### The key to getting organized?

Set aside a space in your home where most of your home schooling will take place. This could be the dining room, an office, a space in the basement—you name it, it's up to you. Wherever you decide be sure to have a bookshelf, a box for each child, a cupboard, or some other dedicated space to store books and supplies. And know that it is okay if they stray out of that space—mine often ended up outside in the warm weather—but books and supplies should end up there at the end of every day.

Once you have your space established, get your kids in volved in creating the organization. Then, challenge them to be "in charge" of keeping things in order.

Side note: Be sure to store teacher's guides and answer keys in a file drawer so they are always at your fingertips. You can also organize curriculum in a sequence that makes sense so it is quick and easy to find later. The more time you devote to organizing, the less time you will waste during school searching for lost items.

# 8. Plan to Take Breaks Throughout the Day

We all do it! It seems like a wonderful thing to tell our kids: "Hey, if you can get this all done this morning, we will have all afternoon with no school!"



Guess what? Across the board, homeschooling kids are saying, "We'd rather have a break!"

I am ashamed to say, I fell into this one my first year of homeschooling. At the beginning of the school year, I was really good about taking breaks. I would announce, "RECESS TIME!" and we would head outside for a good 20 minutes of fun. It never ceased to amaze me how easy it was to get back to a difficult task after a quick breather.

But, as the year went on, I became more and more involved with other things. (Remember my comment on overscheduling?) Suddenly, it was essential for my kids to finish up their work in the morning so we could have the afternoon free. Breaks became a thing of the past.

I did not realize just how frustrating this was for my kids until one of Bridgeway's recent homeschool graduates put it on her top ten list of homeschool frustrations. Sure enough, my kids hated it too! The tradeoff was not worth it. A "free" afternoon after a grueling morning was not of value to them.

So we went back to where we started. Frequent breaks whether we felt like we needed them or not. And I made the commitment to play with the kids during at least one of those breaks! And guess what? We found that a more relaxed longer day was much better than a frantic short day. And I found out that even as an adult with a long list of to-dos, I can still play hard!

### 9. Be Willing to Explore What Interests **Your Child**

When you invest in a homeschool program or a homeschool curriculum, you will naturally want to maximize that investment. You may plan out your entire school year or you may follow the plan that comes with your curriculum. And staying on course will give you a sense of accomplishment.

But sometimes you will hit a topic that really fascinates your child(ren). What can you do? If you veer off course to dig into that topic, you will fall behind on your plan. Sometimes it may work to simply add it to your day but what do you do if you start to fall behind in other subjects? How do you make that up? What will happen at the end of the school year if you have not completed all of expectations outlined for you?

It is easy to fall into the mode of staying on track no matter what. But isn't that exactly what happens in school?

If your child is struggling in school, the teacher can't stop everything to accommodate him. And if your child is fas - cinated by a topic the teacher has to keep going in order to ensure that all of the standards outlined for the year are met.

But as homeschoolers you have the freedom to veer off course!

> For us it was the medieval period in history. Both of my girls were so fascinated by chivalry, the courts, knights and peasants that we just stopped everything in our study of history and spent an entire month just digging into the medieval period.

> By the end of the month, they had studied dungeons,



written stories from the perspective of a knight, a peasant, a prisoner and a member of court, they had crafted their own family shield and they had studied a bit about fencing.

It was wonderful! And they still talk about it today (nine years later).

What did we do about our history book? We contacted our advisor and let her know that we were skipping a few units to get back on course and that we were sending in some projects

for her to see from our study of the medieval period. It was as easy as that!

And we learned to take the same approach when my kids were struggling to learn a concept. We simply slowed down, used the suggestions in the Bridgeway Academy instructor guides to teach things a different way, to visit the websites they recommended and to really master what they were studying.

That flexibility is one of the biggest benefits of homeshooling. Don't give it up for the sake of finishing a textbook!

# **10. Give Yourself Some Room for** Mistakes

Probably the most difficult part of homeschooling for me was accepting that my

home would no longer be clean and orderly. It was realizing that my meals would not always be healthy, my errands would not always be run, my bills might be late (ouch), and my bathrooms might not always sparkle.

As a new homeschooler, this may be the biggest challenge for you as a mom. But take a deep breath and remember:

- You live in your house all day.
- Your kids are in your house all day.
- Your kids' school in your house.
- Your walls will be covered with charts, projects, lessons, maps, and more.
- Unless you have a library and laboratory, school materials will take over your home.
- Your desk is needed for more than paying bills or using the computer.
- You are investing time into your children that is much more important than a clean house!

So forgive yourself and learn to be realistic. Find the one thing that you cannot live with and take care of that every day. Then, help your kids develop pride in themselves and in their home by assigning chores they can complete every day and then (part of being realistic) let the other things go.

Homeschooling is an incredibly rich and rewarding experience for both students and parents. Yes, there will be tough days; however, in the end you WILL look back and be so glad you did it!





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