

The H family Sonlighters
from Bridgeport, WV



Homeschooling 101

By Jill Evely, Kelly Lutman, and Judy Whuk - *Experienced homeschooling mothers*



TRY HOMESCHOOLING
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The R family
Sonlighters, from
Harrisburg, IL

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The W family Sonlighters
from Bourbonnais, IL

You Can Homeschool

Before your first child arrived, you had never been a parent. Even if you had years of babysitting experience, or remember helping out with younger siblings, you knew that those hours of caretaking wouldn't compare with the responsibility of having a child of your own.

What did you do to prepare to become a parent? Probably you read some books or articles, listened to podcasts, talked to friends and relatives, maybe paid more attention to families around you.

And at just the right time, that child entered your life. You still didn't have the confidence that you knew what you were doing . . . but you were a parent.

Fast forward a few years. You've raised that child. Maybe you have a few more children. Your children know how to eat and walk and talk. They might know their colors, and recognize some symbols.

As a new parent, you probably felt uncertain. But you managed.

And now you're considering homeschooling.

Whether your children are just now reaching school age, or whether the classroom experience they've had thus far is not going as well as you might wish, you're maybe again uncertain.

But math, reading, and writing don't need to be much different from what you've already taught your children. You taught your children to use a fork. You can teach them to write letters. It's just the next thing.

Before you became a parent, you researched and learned and then welcomed the child maybe before you were ready . . . and that's pretty much what it's like to homeschool. You research and learn and then just do it.

You can homeschool.

What Is Homeschooling?

When you think about homeschooling, what do you picture? A row of desks in a brightly painted room? Maps on the wall to reference during history? A puppy pile of children on the playroom floor, laughing over a book? A child up a tree, reading alone?

To all of these mental images: yes and no. Some families have these experiences. Some do not.

Your homeschool is what you decide to make it. No two families are exactly alike.

And homeschooling can happen at all different times. Morning, evening, weekend.

Single parent working during the day? Homeschooling happens in the evenings and weekends. One parent has an irregular schedule? Homeschooling happens during work hours, to maximize family time when the parent is off.

Even the school year itself varies. Some families go year-round with shorter breaks as needed. Some follow the traditional school year with a long

summer vacation. Some try to make sure they cover a year's materials in a year. Some go faster or slower, depending on their children, and start the next thing when the children are ready, whether that time is in March or in August or in October.

Some subjects follow a standard progression, like math. You order a program, follow the progression, and end up with a child educated in math.

Other subjects allow more flexibility. There are different ways to study history, science, and literature. With Sonlight, you read books for those subjects, and then find that what you learn during your school hours spills over into the rest of life.

With Sonlight, homeschooling is something you do, wherever you are. Homeschooling may be based in your home, but your classroom is the world. You are learning in the places you go, in the discussions you have.

**It's not something
you do, but rather
how you live.**

What Does Homeschooling Look Like?

You started teaching your children the day they entered your life. You interpreted their first words, wiped up their spills as they learned to drink, cheered at their first steps.

You didn't try to force walking before your children could hold their heads up; you didn't demand full sentences at six months of age. You paid attention to your children's development and abilities, and encouraged and guided them as they grew.

All of this is homeschooling. You're already doing it.

In the early years, what does homeschooling look like?

In your home, that ideal environment for learning, you read aloud to your children from classic books, and you teach them to read. When you go to the grocery store, you talk through what you see. Maybe you play "I Spy" with colors, or look for foods that begin with the letter B—bread, butter, biscuits, bananas. You demonstrate good social interactions and coach your children as they interact with others.

You add subjects like math, reading, history, and science. But you don't have to come up with the lesson plans—Sonlight has done that for you. You know exactly what to do each day.

And you don't have to worry about classroom management. Your homeschool is custom-made for your children.

And that's awesome! Can you imagine taking twenty 12-month-olds, and trying to get them all to take their first step at the same time?

You can feel how ridiculous that is. That's a classroom school.

Your homeschool is not that.

Your children take their first step when they're ready, and every step after that follows.

But How Will I Homeschool High School?

When you think about homeschooling, you might wonder about high school. And though homeschooling a 5-year-old might seem at least a little possible, homeschooling high school feels a lot more intimidating.

Here's a story that relates. Every year, Jill Evely would head off to her first day of school, smiling and excit-

ed. And every year, she would return home that afternoon, in tears. "It's too hard! I can't do this work!"

And her mom would ask, "Did you look at the back of the book again?"

"Yes! And it's too hard! I can't do it!"

And her mom would say, with all the love for her daughter, "Don't look at the back of the book. Don't worry about it. Start at the front. You can do that. And when you get to the back, you can do that, too."

If high school concerns you, and your children are not yet high school age, don't let that steal your joy. When the time comes, you will figure out what to do. Between specially developed homeschool curriculum, co-ops, and community colleges, your family has options.

Homeschooling works. You can do it. Just take that first step.

The N family Sonlighters
from Siloam Springs, AR



What Does It Cost?

Great question! We'll get to the financial side of this question in a bit, but homeschooling has costs beyond the financial price tag. Consider:

Time and Energy

You have 168 hours in your week. Homeschooling will take at least ten of those hours, possibly twenty.

If you homeschool, you've taken on a part-time job.

Also consider: if children and adults are away at school and work, the house stays clean during all those hours. When you and your children are at home, your house will be more messy. It's been lived in more!

To add teaching to your schedule, you may find that you need to organize your home, divide the chores, delegate, and plan ahead.

If you are a person who naturally tends towards organization, this might not be a big deal. But if organization does not

come to you naturally, do consider this as one of the costs of homeschooling. It is possible that, while your children are learning math, science, and reading, your greatest learning opportunity will be learning how to use your time and energy.

That's a great thing to learn. But you might need to learn it.

(And many homeschoolers admit that house maintenance becomes a lower priority. That is a legitimate choice. But recognize that you will need to make that choice.)

Social Pressure

Well-meaning family and friends may have varying ideas and attitudes about your decision to educate your children at home.

How do you carry on in the face of disapproval?

It helps if you are convinced (maybe even convicted) that homeschooling is the right thing for your family this year. ▶▶

For Jill Evelyn, it took seven years before her parents accepted her decision to homeschool. (Her story immediately follows this article.)

Your family may never understand. In that case, you will need to live your life day-by-day, faithful to the calling you have received.

Of course, the social pressure may be subtler than outright disapproval. It may look more like not having time to go out for coffee, or fewer chances to go to the gym. You might need to get off of social media for a time, as your life may look different than your friends'.

There is a real cost to homeschooling.

Financial

The financial investment of home education varies widely. Usually you spend what you have, and creativity supplies the rest.▶▶



The D family Sonlighters
from Adnerson, TX

When Family Disapproves . . .

By Jill Evelyn

When I talk to homeschoolers, one of the top three problems people mention to me is this one: "My family disapproves."

It may be parents, or in-laws; a sister, or pastor, or even a next door neighbor, but chances are, if you homeschool, you have close family members or friends who disapprove of it. You can provide them with statistics, and show them studies, but they still think you are ruining your children.

We had this problem too, and since I am done with homeschooling, I thought I would give you a glimpse into how this played out in my family. Perhaps it will encourage you.

I come from a family of teachers. In fact, I have a teaching degree, but chose to stay home and have a large family (five children) instead of working outside the home. My parents were opposed to homeschooling from the start. They felt the kids needed a classroom setting in order to be able to go on to college, be successful, etc.

I was raised with the premise that education is your salvation. It is how my dad pulled himself out of poverty, so it is no wonder they were skeptical. In their eyes, if we ruined our kids' education, we were destroying their chance of having any type of fulfilling life.

Although Christians, they did not understand any of our convictions for educating our five children at home, and they didn't want to see us spoil our kids' chances for happiness and success.

So we treated homeschooling as the proverbial "elephant in the room." We didn't talk about it.

After SEVEN YEARS of homeschooling, my dad came and sat at the table where I was checking over some math papers and said, "You know we never approved of you homeschooling the kids. (long pause) But I see what great kids you have, and the closeness they have, how well they are doing, and want to tell you your sacrifice was worth it. You have done a great job and you made the right decision."

Sometimes you just have to live it out. You can't talk it out, or prove it with statistics. You have to live it out, just like your faith, day by day. My dad died a few years later, and what a sweet memory that kitchen table conversation is for me.

How glad I am that we stuck to it, that we lived it out, and that we were kind and gentle with scoffers.

Hopefully you will be able to tell your own stories of acceptance in the years to come.

As a note: We did not ruin our kids! They have all graduated from college, are self supporting, live in the same area we do, and, best of all, they like each other and us!

Homeschooling is an investment, but educating your children—preparing them for life—is a good investment.

And compared with the price of a private school, homeschooling is quite affordable. (And of course, even the price of back-to-school supplies for “free” public school can be significant.)

Many homeschool families make “homeschooling” an item in the budget, setting aside some money each month.

If you want a ballpark figure, most families average somewhere around \$500-\$1000 for the first child, with additional children often costing significantly less.

But the far larger cost is giving up a full double income. Many homeschooling families have the homeschooling parent work part time, but few families have two full-time incomes.

In Conclusion

Homeschooling has some associated costs. For many families, the rewards are worth the costs, but do count the cost going in.



The H family Sonlighters from Orange City, FL



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