

# Homeschooling Isn't What I Expected It To Be

I've heard it said, "I was a great parent before I had kids." The same can be said of being a homeschooling parent.

Homeschooling circles are full of idealistic moms and dads who often have very high standards for themselves and their children. Certainly, having strong ideals can work as a guide and benchmark for navigating what can be a very challenging endeavor. However, these high standards can also backfire and leave even the best of us feeling like failures.

Before I started actually homeschooling, I envisioned myself teaching my children Latin and French, taking multiple field trips each week, and seeing each of my kids be cooperative and grateful for receiving such an amazing education. High ideals indeed!

Reality, of course, is a bit more nuanced, and the chasm between reality and our expectations can be best closed by the day-to-day experience of actual homeschooling.

## Homeschooling Is Not Classroom Schooling

My first dose of reality came when I recognized that homeschooling was *not* the same as classroom schooling. For a while I was very burdened by a set of expectations that my children should be seated quietly at a table or little desks calmly doing worksheets for the majority of the day. If we didn't spend some amount of our time each day doing this, I felt anxious. It wasn't until I voiced this concern to a veteran homeschooler that I came to realize my error.

Homeschooling and classroom schooling are not the same thing.

There may be some time, on some days, where my children are seated quietly doing [memorization work](#) that is best reinforced by the pencil, but for the majority of the day, we are engaged in what I like to call “meeting of the minds.” This might look like reading aloud and then discussing what we’ve talked about. Subjects like history, literature, and grammar are very nicely accomplished this way. Reinforcing grammar happens throughout the day as I correct my children’s speech, and reading practice is a nightly activity right before bed. Math is practiced in worksheet form—but also reinforced while cooking, using money, and measuring as we build stuff around [our farm](#).

Learning is a part of our daily life rhythm. As my children advanced into the upper grades, their capacity to sit and focus for longer amounts of time also increased. By the time they reached high school, they were able to spend much of the day learning from books without feeling burned-out.

## **Where Are the Wallflowers I Was Promised?**

My husband jokingly asked the above question one day after observing our children’s rambunctious behavior. He had this idea that homeschooled children would be quiet, obedient, thoughtful, and intellectually engaged. Our kids certainly are all of those things, but they are also loud, opinionated, talkative, confident, and love to hike and get dirty.

They are real kids, not poster children for an imaginary homeschooling movement. They are [whole persons](#), and homeschooling, I believe, has enabled the development of their personhood in deep and wide ways.

I often have to explain to other adults that my children are not “classroom trained.” Their socialization has not been limited to the kinds of behavior expected, and required, for

success in a classroom. My kids often sit upside down on the couch while listening to history. They participate in the management of the home by cleaning, mowing, and helping with other [chores](#). They know how to talk to adults as well as other children of all ages. They have a sense of autonomy as well as a feeling of being a part of our family.

## **Homeschooling Is 80 Percent Character Development and 20 Percent Education**

Before I began homeschooling, I hadn't considered the aspects of it that pertain to character development. Part of this was naïveté on my part. How did I think I was going to get those quiet, obedient children mentioned above without teaching them to *be* quiet and obedient. Patience, kindness, honesty, wisdom, and fortitude are very important character traits that are essential for living a good life. These have been important for my children to learn—but also important for me to model.

The single most voiced objection to becoming a homeschooler is not the lack of money, or time, or ability, or education; rather, it's the lack of patience. "I don't have the patience to homeschool." I have heard this more times than I can count. But I have a confession to make: I didn't have the patience either before I started homeschooling.

Learning and teaching both take patience and fortitude. The learner must sit with the discomfort of learning something new, and the teacher must sit with the discomfort of teaching a student who is learning for the first time. Both activities can be difficult and frustrating. But patience isn't learned by avoiding situations that require it.

Each day, as a homeschooling parent, I am presented with opportunities to learn and model good character. I am called

upon to display humility as well. When I'm wrong, I need to admit it, ask for forgiveness, and thereby teach my children how to do this as well.

If I'm honest, I have found that being a homeschooling parent has been an incredible life teacher for me. It has been the most challenging thing I have ever done. I'm so grateful this experience hasn't been exactly what I envisioned. I would've missed out on so many opportunities to develop as a person.

To those parents who are feeling discouraged right now because the day-to-day experience of homeschooling isn't meeting expectations, I say, take a deep breath. It's all part of the learning process. You are learning right alongside your children, and that's a good thing. Here are some other suggestions to help you stay grounded on this journey:

1. Get support from your local homeschool groups.
2. Have a homeschool buddy—such as another parent you can bounce ideas off of—and provide mutual encouragement.
3. Take breaks! If you're having unusually nice weather, skip the book work and get outside! Go to a playground, take a hike, or do some other physical activity.

You can do this! Homeschooling is a way of life, and it's a good life!

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