

So you've decided to homeschool!

Now what?

Here is some direction for those of you who have decided to home educate, but you don't know where to start.

1. Start with your kids

This is going to be a boring and fruitless endeavor if you don't have any kids to educate.

If you do, take a look at them. Not one of those motherly bruise-inventories or an investigation into what they've been eating by inspecting the corners of their mouths, but a good, quiet observation of them. Think about what they're like, what their gifts and talents are, what they enjoy, what they don't. *Who are they?* (We know you've asked this question of yourself before, like after the deafening crash at the supermarket or after you found the harmonica-shaped hole in the living room wall, but we don't mean it that way now.) *Who is this little person?*

Fact: every child is different, and no single approach is best for all kids.

But that's what's great about homeschooling. Instruction is individualized in a way institutional* classrooms can only dream about, by teachers who love their students in a way no institutional teacher ever can. (*Notice I said "institutional classrooms," and not *traditional* classrooms. Let us not forget that for the vast majority of our nation's history, and world history too, homeschooling *was* the traditional means of educating children.)

OK, so you've taken a good look at your kids, and you still want to do this. So let's do it right.

2. Keep it legal

The good news is, homeschooling is perfectly legal. Despite how your parents reacted when you told them your decision, nobody is going to send you off to jail or shove your screaming children into the back of some social worker's car and drive them off to an institutional school. Not if you do it right, at least. (Relax. You're forming a *home-school*, not an *underground-school*. You're not on the lam. It's perfectly OK if your kids go outside and play for a bit, or even GASP! if you have to take them with you to the supermarket during the hours institutional schools are in session. It's OK. *You are not in trouble for choosing to home school.* Let's keep it that way.)

The even better news is that since Kentucky law does not differentiate between home-schools and any other type of private school, you're living in what's considered a "homeschool-friendly" state. There are certain requirements, but they are relatively simple.

Instead of quoting the state laws to you, allow us to recommend a document forged by the pioneers of homeschooling in Kentucky, back in the days when you *could* get your kids taken away from you for exercising your right to personally direct their education. (Those of us who enjoy the freedom to home-school today owe an inexpressible debt of gratitude to those who were willing to go to jail or

meet officials at the doorstep with shotgun in hand to keep their kids from being taken away. Brothers and sisters, we stand on the shoulders of giants.)

Set the Way-Back Machine to the year 1997. Twelve representatives from Kentucky's two main homeschooling associations, Christian Home Educators of Kentucky (CHEK) and Kentucky Home Education Association (KHEA), meet with an equal number of representatives from the state's Directors of Pupil Personnel Association to convene a task force charged with the creation of a guideline of "Best Practices" for establishing a "bonafide" home school. (The word "bonafide" is from the Latin *bona fides*, which means "in good faith." Nice term.)

Their product, the "[Best Practice Approach to Home School Verification](#)," should be read in its entirety (it's quite short), and is available on the Homeschool Kentucky website (www.homeschoolkentucky.org) under the "[Kentucky Law & Forms](#)" tab.

Here are the highlights:

- A. Each year, you must send a [letter of notification](#) to your local Director of Pupil Personnel of your intent to home-school. This letter should only include your children's names and ages and the address at which your school is held, and be sent within the first two weeks of the start of your local public school. That's it. The great news is, *once you've done this you are "presumed to be in compliance with the law and operating a bonafide school."* Congratulations!
- B. Since you just established for yourself a bonafide school, consider it as such. Do not go around feeling the need to prove your school is valid—it *is*. Take a deep breath and accept that. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the DPP to prove otherwise, should problems arise. Remember, *even if the DPP decides to investigate you, he or she can only determine if your school is bonafide or not.* Period. He or she does not have the authority to "approve" the education provided by your school. So any DPP asking to "review your curriculum" to better "align your program of studies" with any "standards" is merely a DPP that is ignorant of his or her own jurisdictions. If you are ever contacted by such a DPP, please contact Homeschool Kentucky immediately.
- C. You must offer education to your children in the following subjects: Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar, History, Mathematics, Science, and Civics. This does not mean that you need to teach a class on each subject, but that *each subject must be covered in a class you teach*. Obviously, History and Civics could be taught together. Reading, Writing, Spelling, and Grammar could be combined into an English class. (Speaking of English, by state law that's the language you must provide your instruction in.) Note: the cross-curricular approach that homeschool affords is one of its greatest strengths. Home educators can focus on interdisciplinary connections that teachers and students stuck in bell-driven class periods simply cannot afford. Think about it: Literature needs the context of History to be understood. Combine them. Science uses applied Math. Why teach them separately?

- D. You must hold school for at least as many instructional hours as the public school district in which you reside. Frankly, the wording on the Best Practice document is a little confusing here, as it mentions KRS 158.070 mandating minimum school terms of 185 days, “including no less than the equivalent of 175 six-hour instructional days.” Huh? But then it goes on to state specifically that 175 times 6 equals 1050 hours. So *make sure you have documented at least 1050 instructional hours per school year*. Keeping lesson plans in a notebook works fine. Note: homeschooling frees you from the rigid 6-hour instructional day of the institutional school. The law does NOT say that you must be in session the same time the public schoolers are in session. Some kids are morning people. Some are not. Some kids want to tackle subject after subject all day and be done with it. Others need frequent breaks. You know your kids. Do what works. Just keep track of what you did.
- E. Since we’re on the subject of documentation, *you’ll need to also keep records of attendance and grades*. Attendance had better be easy. If not, there’s a problem. (If you have an AWOL kid, check behind the hanging clothes in the closet. That’s a great place.) Anyway, the lesson plan notebook mentioned above is a great place to keep attendance too. Now, grades must be done at the same interval as the public school district in which you live. (I’ve always kind of wondered about this one, but oh well.) So if your district is on quarterly grade reports, you are too. Trimesters? You too. Get it? Assign grades each grading period for every subject you teach. Note: Think about how you’re going to grade. Philosophies of assessment (how you grade) are all over the place. Nobody agrees about anything, except that effective grading informs both the teacher and the student about progress and achievement, and that ineffective grading can simply crush kids and the teachers who care about them. Use grades effectively. *Because homeschooling is individualized, home school educators can teach to mastery far more effectively than institutional teachers*. Unlike teachers in public school who have classrooms packed with students of widely disparate ability levels teaching according to “pacing guides” that relentlessly push content forward whether all the kids have learned it or not, home educators can teach, formatively assess (that means quiz), reteach differently, and formatively assess over and over, repeating the process using different strategies until the kid GETS IT and can teach it back to you (that’s called *mastery*). Then summatively assess (that means test), grade, celebrate, and move on. Nobody gets hurt.
- F. The last thing is that all private schools (including homeschools) must be open to inspection by DPPs or Department of Education personnel. If this is ever requested, don’t panic. Email [Homeschool Kentucky](#) for assistance, make sure all the above records are in order, and schedule a meeting at a neutral site, like the local library. *Keep in mind that they are asking to inspect your school, not your home*, as they’d need a warrant to do that. Nobody’s going to come in with a clipboard in hand and give your house the white-glove treatment. They can really only ask to see your attendance records, your grade reports, and perhaps your class list to make sure you have all the required subjects covered. Remember, their only jurisdiction is to determine if your school is bonafide or not, and since you followed these guidelines, it will be.

3. Here’s where the fun begins

Picking out which curriculum to use is exciting and fun! There are tons of sources to be found online, but having so many choices can seem overwhelming. Ask around to see what other homeschoolers you may know recommend. They may even have some curriculum they're willing to sell you or let you borrow.

But before you begin looking, it's important to remember that God's answer for your child's education can be found quite easily—in the mirror. *You* are the key factor here, not what curriculum you choose. **GOD'S WORD SHOULD BE OUR CURRICULUM WHAT ARE WE RAISING ANYWAY?** Be encouraged! The Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that through scripture you are “fully equipped for every good work,” and educating your child is a very good work.

If you start your search on the internet, as most do, you'll quickly realize that curriculums vary as widely as the kids they're purchased for. As you consider your choices, play to your children's strengths. Some kids can read for hours on end. Others are more hands-on. Some kids like time alone to work quietly. Others like learning in a group (siblings count). Most kids like a variety, and some kids seem to change day-to-day. Whew!

The good news is there's probably a perfect curriculum out there for your student; the bad news is they may be graduated and raising kids of their own before you ever find it. And it's not the end of the world if you never do. *The relationship you build daily with your child is your strongest and most precious tool*, not some slickly-packaged dream curriculum that costs an arm and a leg.

Speaking of costs, there will be some. Now that you've decided to educate your children at home, don't expect your local district to supply you with instructors or curriculum. Even if they offer a virtual school-at-home program, be very wary of using it. Such things come with pretty heavy strings attached, and one of those will be your immediate loss of curricular choice.