

Complete Getting Started Guide

Your First 30 Days of Homeschooling, Step by Step

Homeschool Connects

Free Resource Guide

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www.homeschoolconnects.com

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Welcome to Your Homeschool Journey

Deciding to homeschool is one of the most meaningful choices a family can make. Whether you came to this decision after months of deliberation or a sudden realization that your child needs something different, you are stepping into a tradition that has produced curious, capable, self-directed learners for generations. This guide walks you through your first 30 days so that the process feels manageable instead of overwhelming.

We have organized the month into four weekly phases: Research and Decide, Plan and Prepare, Launch and Learn, and Refine and Thrive. Each phase builds on the one before it. You do not need to have everything figured out before you begin. In fact, most experienced homeschool families will tell you that the plan you start with is rarely the plan you keep, and that is perfectly fine.

Before You Begin

Take a deep breath. You do not need to recreate a traditional classroom in your home. Homeschooling works best when families lean into their own rhythms, interests, and strengths. Give yourself permission to learn alongside your children.

At the end of this guide you will find a supply checklist, a simple budget worksheet, and a quick reference comparing popular homeschool approaches. Tear those pages out, pin them to your fridge, or save them on your phone. They are yours to use however you like.

Week 1: Research and Decide

Your first week is about laying a solid foundation of understanding. Resist the urge to buy curriculum or set up a classroom right away. Instead, spend these seven days answering the fundamental questions that will shape every decision after them.

Understanding Your WHY

Start by writing down every reason homeschooling appeals to you. Perhaps your child is gifted and bored, or struggling and frustrated. Maybe you want to travel more as a family, incorporate your values into daily learning, or give a child with special needs the individualized attention they deserve. Your reasons do not need to impress anyone else. They just need to be honest.

Knowing your WHY matters because it becomes your compass. When you hit a hard week (and you will), your WHY reminds you why you chose this path. When someone questions your decision at a family gathering, your WHY gives you confidence. Write it down somewhere visible and revisit it whenever doubt creeps in.

Journaling Prompt

Finish this sentence: "I want to homeschool because my child deserves ____." Write freely for five minutes without editing yourself. You may be surprised by what surfaces.

Researching Your State Requirements

Homeschool laws vary dramatically from state to state. Some states require only a letter of intent; others ask for standardized testing, portfolio reviews, or instruction in specific subjects. Before you do anything else, look up the requirements for your state.

1. Visit your state department of education website and search for "homeschool" or "home instruction."
2. Look for a notice of intent or declaration form. Note the deadline if one exists.
3. Identify required subjects. Most states require English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies at a minimum.
4. Check whether your state requires standardized testing or portfolio evaluation, and at which grade levels.
5. Find out if there are attendance or instructional hour requirements.
6. Research whether homeschool students in your state can participate in public school extracurriculars or sports teams.

Tip: Connect with Your State Association

Nearly every state has a homeschool association or legal defense organization that maintains an up-to-date summary of requirements. These groups often provide free guides, legal help, and community connections. Search for "[Your State] homeschool association" to find yours.

Choosing a Homeschool Approach

There is no single right way to homeschool. Families succeed with wildly different methods. The approach you choose should reflect your child's learning style, your family's values, and your own comfort level with structure. Here is a brief overview of the most popular approaches. We cover these in more detail at the end of this guide.

- Classical Education: Follows the trivium (grammar, logic, rhetoric). Heavy on reading, writing, and critical thinking.
- Charlotte Mason: Emphasizes living books, nature study, narration, and short lessons. Gentle and literature-rich.
- Montessori at Home: Child-led, hands-on, and organized around prepared environments and sensory materials.
- Unschooling: Interest-led and child-directed. Trusts that children learn naturally when given freedom and access to resources.
- Eclectic: Picks and mixes elements from multiple approaches. The most flexible option.
- Online or Virtual School: Structured, pre-built courses delivered through a digital platform, often with teacher support.

Talking to Your Family

If you have a partner, this conversation needs to happen early. Discuss roles, expectations, and concerns openly. Who will handle most of the teaching? How will you share the load on hard days? What does success look like to each of you?

If your children are old enough, involve them too. Ask what they enjoy learning, what frustrates them about school, and what they would change if they could. Their answers will surprise and inform you. Children who feel included in the decision are far more likely to engage willingly when lessons begin.

Extended family may have questions or concerns. You do not owe anyone a defense of your choice, but a calm, confident explanation often puts worries to rest. Share your research, explain your reasons, and invite them to see what homeschooling looks like in practice once you get started.

Week 2: Plan and Prepare

Now that you understand the landscape, it is time to build the practical framework for your homeschool. This week you will set up a learning space, select resources, draft a schedule, and calibrate your expectations.

Setting Up a Learning Space

You do not need a dedicated school room. Plenty of successful homeschool families work at the kitchen table, on the couch, in the backyard, or at the library. What you do need is a place where materials are accessible and distractions are manageable.

1. Choose a home base. This is the spot where books, supplies, and in-progress work live. A bookshelf, a rolling cart, or even a large bin works fine.
2. Set up a writing and reading area. Good lighting and a flat surface are the only real requirements.
3. Create a "done" box or folder where finished work goes each day. This keeps clutter from building up and gives your child a sense of accomplishment.
4. If space is tight, invest in vertical storage: wall-mounted shelves, over-the-door organizers, or a pegboard for art supplies.
5. Make the space inviting. A plant, a world map poster, or your child's artwork on the wall can transform a corner into a place that feels like learning belongs there.

Small-Space Tip

If you live in an apartment or small home, embrace portability. A sturdy tote bag with the day's books and supplies lets you homeschool at the park, a coffee shop, or grandma's house. Some families find that changing locations throughout the week keeps energy and curiosity high.

Choosing Curriculum and Resources

This is where many new homeschool parents get stuck because the options are genuinely overwhelming. There are thousands of curricula, programs, and resource packages available. Here is a framework to simplify the decision.

1. Start with your state's required subjects. Make sure you have at least a loose plan for each one.
2. Match materials to your child's learning style. Visual learners thrive with colorful workbooks and videos. Kinesthetic learners need hands-on activities. Auditory learners benefit from read-alouds and discussion.
3. Do not buy everything at once. Start with math and language arts, since those require the most daily practice. Add other subjects gradually.

4. Use free resources first. Your public library, Khan Academy, YouTube educational channels, and open-source curricula can cover a surprising amount of ground at no cost.
5. Read reviews from other homeschool families before purchasing anything. What works brilliantly for one child may frustrate another.

Remember that curriculum is a tool, not a contract. If something is not working after a fair trial (give it at least three to four weeks), you have full permission to set it aside and try something different. Flexibility is one of the greatest advantages of homeschooling.

Creating a Flexible Schedule

Rigid schedules tend to collapse under the weight of real life. A flexible routine, on the other hand, gives your days shape without becoming a source of stress. Think in terms of blocks rather than specific times.

- Morning Block: Core academics like math, reading, and writing. Most children concentrate best in the morning.
- Midday Block: Science, history, or project-based learning. These subjects lend themselves to exploration and hands-on activities.
- Afternoon Block: Art, music, physical education, free reading, or nature time. This is where interests and hobbies live.
- Buffer Time: Build in 30 minutes of unscheduled time between blocks. Life happens, lessons run long, and children need breaks.

How Long Should Lessons Take?

Much less time than you think. Homeschooling is one-on-one, which is dramatically more efficient than a classroom of 25 students. Most elementary-age children finish core subjects in two to three hours. Middle and high school students typically need three to four hours of focused work. If your day regularly stretches to six or seven hours, something needs adjusting.

Setting Realistic Expectations

The number one mistake new homeschool families make is trying to replicate traditional school at home. This leads to burnout faster than almost anything else. Here are some expectations worth resetting before Day One.

- Your home will not look like a Pinterest classroom, and it does not need to.
- Some days will be wonderful. Others will be a struggle. Both kinds of days are normal and productive.
- Your child may resist at first, especially if they are transitioning out of traditional school. This is called "deschooling" and it can take several weeks.

- You will second-guess yourself regularly. That means you care, not that you are failing.
- Progress is not always linear. A child may seem stuck for weeks and then leap forward suddenly.
- Comparison is the thief of homeschool joy. Your family's journey will look different from every other family's, and that is the whole point.

Week 3: Launch and Learn

This is the week you actually begin. Take another deep breath. You are more ready than you feel. The goal for this week is not perfection. It is simply to start, observe, and adjust.

Your First Day: A Step-by-Step Plan

First days carry outsized emotional weight, so keep the academic load light and focus on setting a positive tone. Here is a simple plan that works for most families.

1. Start with something your child enjoys. If they love science experiments, open the day with one. If they love reading, begin with a great book. A positive first experience sets the emotional tone.
2. Introduce your routine, not your rules. Walk through what a typical day will look like. Use phrases like "after reading time, we will do math" rather than "at 9:15 you must start math."
3. Do one focused lesson in math and one in language arts. Keep each to 20-30 minutes for younger children, 30-45 minutes for older ones.
4. Include a hands-on activity: a nature walk, an art project, a cooking lesson, or a building challenge. Learning through doing is powerful and memorable.
5. End the day with a family read-aloud or a conversation about what everyone enjoyed. Celebrate that you did it.
6. Write down what went well and what felt off. These notes will be invaluable by the end of the month.

First Day Nerves Are Normal

If the first day does not go as planned, that is completely expected. Many experienced homeschool parents describe their first day as messy and imperfect. What matters is that you showed up and tried. Tomorrow you will try again with a little more insight.

Establishing Routines

Routines are not the same as rigid schedules. A routine is a sequence of activities that your family repeats consistently enough that it becomes automatic. Children (and adults) thrive when they know what to expect.

Focus on anchoring your day around two or three non-negotiable habits. For example: we start the day with morning time (a read-aloud, a poem, or a song), we do math before lunch, and we read independently for 20 minutes in the afternoon. Everything else can flex around those anchors.

Build your routine gradually. Do not try to implement every subject, every enrichment activity, and every household chore on day one. Add one new element every few days until your rhythm feels sustainable.

Dealing with Pushback from Kids

If your children are transitioning from traditional school, expect a period of resistance. They may test boundaries, complain that "this is boring," or refuse to cooperate. This is normal and temporary. Here is how to handle it.

- Acknowledge their feelings without caving in. "I hear you. This feels different and hard right now. Let's try it for 15 minutes and then take a break."
- Give choices within boundaries. "Would you like to start with math or writing today?" Autonomy reduces resistance.
- Make it physical. If a child is restless, move the lesson outdoors, use a whiteboard instead of a worksheet, or let them stand at the counter.
- Shorten the lesson. Ten focused minutes are worth more than 45 minutes of battle. Build up stamina gradually.
- Celebrate small wins loudly and sincerely. Notice effort, not just results.

What a Typical Day Looks Like

There is no single "typical" homeschool day, but here is a realistic example for an elementary-age child. Adjust times and subjects to fit your family.

- 8:30 AM - Morning Time: Read-aloud, calendar, and a short poem or devotional (15-20 min)
- 9:00 AM - Math: Lesson and practice problems (30-40 min)
- 9:45 AM - Break: Snack and free play (15 min)
- 10:00 AM - Language Arts: Reading, writing, grammar, or spelling (30-40 min)
- 10:45 AM - Science or History: Reading, discussion, experiment, or project (30 min)
- 11:15 AM - Done with core subjects. Lunch and outdoor play.
- 1:00 PM - Afternoon enrichment: Art, music, PE, nature study, or free exploration
- 2:00 PM - Independent reading or educational games
- 2:30 PM - Day is complete. Total focused instruction: about 3 hours.

Remember

This is a starting template, not a mandate. Some families start later, some finish earlier, and some spread learning across the whole day in short bursts. Watch your child and follow their energy. The schedule serves your family, not the other way around.

Week 4: Refine and Thrive

You have made it through three weeks. By now you have a growing pile of observations, a few things that are working beautifully, and probably a few things that are not. This week is about honest evaluation and thoughtful adjustment.

Evaluating What Works

Pull out the notes you have been taking (even mental ones count). Ask yourself and your children these questions.

1. Which subjects or activities does my child look forward to? Those are working. Protect them.
2. Which parts of the day consistently feel like a fight? Those need changing, not more willpower.
3. Is the schedule realistic, or am I cramming too much into each day?
4. Am I trying to teach in a way that suits my child, or in a way that feels familiar to me?
5. Is there enough variety in our week, or has it already become monotonous?
6. Am I taking care of my own energy and well-being, or am I running on fumes?

Be brutally honest with yourself. A curriculum that looked perfect on paper may not click with your child in practice. A schedule that seemed reasonable may be too packed. Permission to change course is not failure; it is responsiveness.

Adjusting Your Approach

Based on your evaluation, make small, deliberate changes. Resist the temptation to overhaul everything at once. Change one thing at a time so you can see what makes a difference.

- If a curriculum is not working, try supplementing with a different format (videos, games, hands-on projects) before replacing it entirely.
- If mornings are chaotic, push your start time back by 30 minutes and see if that helps.
- If your child finishes quickly and seems bored, add depth rather than more worksheets. Ask open-ended questions, assign a creative project, or explore a rabbit trail together.
- If you are exhausted, cut one thing from your daily plan. You can always add it back later.
- If a particular subject causes consistent tears, set it aside for two weeks and come back with a completely different approach.

The 6-Week Rule

Many veteran homeschoolers recommend giving any new curriculum or routine at least six weeks before making a judgment. The first two weeks are adjustment. Weeks three and four reveal early patterns. By week six, you have a reliable sense of whether something is truly working. The exception: if something is causing daily distress for you or your child, act sooner.

Connecting with Other Families

Homeschooling does not mean isolating. Community is one of the most important ingredients for long-term success, for both you and your children. Here are practical ways to build it.

- Search for local homeschool co-ops. These groups meet weekly or biweekly for group classes, field trips, and social time.
- Join online communities. Facebook groups, Reddit forums, and platforms like Homeschool Connects let you ask questions, share wins, and vent frustrations.
- Attend homeschool meetups at parks or libraries. Many areas have informal gatherings where families show up and kids play while parents talk.
- Look into homeschool sports leagues, theater groups, and 4-H clubs. These provide structured social experiences and skill development.
- Consider starting your own small group. Even two or three families meeting once a week for group science experiments or book clubs creates meaningful connection.

Planning Ahead

As you close out your first month, take time to sketch a loose plan for the next three months. You do not need a day-by-day itinerary. Instead, note the subjects you want to cover, the field trips you want to take, and the skills you want to develop.

1. Set three to five goals for the next quarter. Keep them specific and achievable: "Read 10 chapter books together" or "Complete multiplication facts through 12."
2. Identify upcoming events you want to attend: science fairs, museum exhibits, homeschool days at local attractions, holiday unit studies.
3. Schedule a monthly check-in with yourself (or your partner). Review what is working, what needs changing, and how everyone is feeling.
4. Research any reporting deadlines for your state. Mark them on a calendar with a reminder two weeks before they are due.
5. Build a portfolio or simple record-keeping system now, before it becomes overwhelming. Take photos of projects, save writing samples, and log books read.

You Are Doing This

If you have reached the end of your first month, you have already done the hardest part: starting. Every week gets a little smoother. Every month you understand your child a little better. You are building something remarkable, even on the days when it does not feel that way.

Supply Checklist

You do not need to buy everything at once. Start with the basics and add supplies as specific projects or curricula require them. Check off items as you gather them.

Basic Supplies

- Pencils (a good supply of #2 pencils and a quality sharpener)
- Erasers (both pencil-top and block style)
- Lined paper or composition notebooks (one per subject works well)
- Colored pencils or crayons (a 24-pack is plenty to start)
- Scissors (child-safe for younger children, standard for older)
- Glue sticks and white glue
- Ruler (with both inches and centimeters)
- A sturdy pencil case or desk organizer
- Construction paper (assorted colors)
- Markers (washable for younger children)

Curriculum and Learning Materials

- Math curriculum or workbook for your child's level
- Language arts curriculum (reading, writing, grammar, spelling)
- A quality library card (your most powerful free resource)
- A world map or globe
- A children's dictionary and thesaurus (physical or digital)
- A science kit or basic experiment supplies (baking soda, vinegar, magnifying glass, magnets)
- A timeline or history spine book for your chosen historical period
- A read-aloud book list appropriate for your child's age and interests
- Access to an online math program (Khan Academy, IXL, or similar)
- A journal or sketchbook for nature study, creative writing, or reflection

Organization Tools

- A daily planner or wall calendar for scheduling
- Binders or folders (one per subject for organizing completed work)
- A bookshelf, rolling cart, or large bin for storing materials
- A whiteboard or chalkboard for working through problems together
- Dry-erase markers or chalk

- A timer or clock (for timed lessons and structured breaks)
- A printer (for worksheets, coloring pages, and resources - optional but helpful)
- Plastic bins or ziplock bags for art supplies and manipulatives
- A portfolio folder or binder for keeping samples and records for your state
- A simple attendance log or spreadsheet (check your state requirements)

Budget Worksheet

Homeschooling costs vary wildly depending on your approach. Some families spend under \$200 per year using the library and free online resources. Others spend \$2,000 or more on comprehensive curricula and enrichment activities. Use this worksheet to estimate your monthly spending and identify areas where you can save.

Monthly Budget Categories

- Curriculum and Textbooks: \$____ / month (Estimate \$0-150 depending on approach. Many quality options are free.)
- Books and Library Fees: \$____ / month (Estimate \$0-30. Library cards are free; budget for books you want to own.)
- Art and Science Supplies: \$____ / month (Estimate \$10-40. Dollar stores are your friend.)
- Online Subscriptions and Apps: \$____ / month (Estimate \$0-30. Khan Academy is free; others range from \$5-20.)
- Field Trips and Enrichment: \$____ / month (Estimate \$20-80. Museum memberships often pay for themselves quickly.)
- Co-op Fees and Group Classes: \$____ / month (Estimate \$0-100. Many co-ops are free or low-cost.)
- Office and Printing Supplies: \$____ / month (Estimate \$5-20. Ink is the hidden cost here.)
- Extracurricular Activities: \$____ / month (Estimate \$0-150. Sports, music lessons, art classes, etc.)
- Testing and Evaluation Fees: \$____ / year (Estimate \$0-75. Only if your state requires it.)
- Miscellaneous and Unexpected Needs: \$____ / month (Estimate \$10-25. There is always something.)

Ways to Reduce Costs

Borrow before you buy. Use the library, join curriculum swap groups, and check for used materials online. Many homeschool families sell their gently used curricula at steep discounts once their children finish a level. Also look into free resources like Ambleside Online, Easy Peasy All-in-One, and Khan Academy before purchasing paid alternatives.

Annual Budget Summary

Use these ranges to estimate your annual homeschool budget. Adjust based on the number of children you are teaching and the approach you choose.

- Minimal Budget (library-based, free online resources): \$100-400 per child per year
- Moderate Budget (mix of purchased and free curriculum): \$400-1,200 per child per year
- Full Curriculum Budget (boxed or all-in-one programs): \$800-2,000 per child per year

- Premium Budget (online academy, private tutors, extensive enrichment): \$2,000-5,000+ per child per year

Remember that money spent on field trips, museum memberships, and real-world experiences is often the highest-value investment in your homeschool budget. A \$15 trip to a nature center may teach more than a \$150 workbook set.

Quick Reference: Homeschool Approaches

Choosing a homeschool approach can feel high-stakes, but it is really just a starting point. Most families evolve over time, borrowing from multiple philosophies. Here is a concise guide to six widely used approaches.

1. Classical Education

Classical education is built on the trivium, a three-stage model of learning. In the Grammar stage (roughly ages 5-11), children absorb facts and build a knowledge base through memorization, songs, and chanting. In the Logic stage (ages 12-14), they learn to think critically and identify relationships between ideas. In the Rhetoric stage (ages 14-18), they learn to express ideas persuasively and originally. Classical homeschools emphasize the great books, Latin, formal logic, and excellent writing. This approach is rigorous and structured, best suited for families who value academic depth and a systematic progression through subjects.

2. Charlotte Mason

Charlotte Mason was a British educator who believed that children are born persons, full of curiosity and capable of engaging with rich ideas. Her method relies on living books (well-written, narrative-driven texts rather than dry textbooks), short lessons (15-20 minutes for young children), narration (having the child retell what they learned in their own words), nature study, handicrafts, and habit training. Charlotte Mason homeschools feel gentle and literature-rich. This approach works especially well for families who love reading aloud, spending time outdoors, and nurturing a child's natural sense of wonder.

3. Montessori at Home

Maria Montessori designed an educational philosophy around the belief that children learn best through self-directed activity and hands-on exploration. In a Montessori home, you prepare the environment with carefully chosen materials and then step back to let the child lead. Activities are designed to be self-correcting so children can work independently and learn from their mistakes. Montessori emphasizes practical life skills (cooking, cleaning, organizing), sensorial materials, and allowing children to work at their own pace. This approach is ideal for families with younger children or parents who are comfortable with a less teacher-directed style.

4. Unschooling

Unschooling is based on the philosophy that children are natural learners who do not need a formal curriculum to acquire knowledge and skills. Instead of following a lesson plan, unschooling families provide a rich environment full of books, experiences, conversations, and opportunities, and then follow the child's interests wherever they lead. A child fascinated by dinosaurs might study

paleontology, geology, geography, and illustration all through that single passion. Unschooling requires a high level of trust in your child's ability to learn and a willingness to let go of conventional academic timelines. It is not the same as doing nothing; it requires active facilitation, observation, and resource-gathering by the parent.

5. Eclectic Homeschooling

Eclectic homeschooling is the most common approach in practice, even among families who do not call it that. It means picking the best elements from multiple philosophies and combining them in a way that fits your family. You might use a structured math curriculum, Charlotte Mason methods for literature and history, Montessori-style practical life skills, and unschooling principles for science exploration. The advantage of eclectic homeschooling is total flexibility. The challenge is that you must be willing to make more decisions since you do not have a single system telling you what to do each day. This approach works well for families with multiple children who have different learning styles.

6. Online and Virtual School

Online homeschooling uses digital platforms to deliver a structured curriculum with video lessons, interactive assignments, and often live or recorded instruction from certified teachers. Programs range from fully accredited virtual academies (some of which are publicly funded) to individual course providers. This approach offers the most structure and the least parent preparation time, since lessons are pre-built and often graded automatically. It works well for older students who can work independently at a computer, families who need accredited transcripts, or parents who are not comfortable designing their own curriculum. The tradeoff is less flexibility in pacing and content compared to other approaches.

Choosing Your Approach

You do not need to pick one approach and commit to it forever. Start with the style that feels most natural to you and adjust as you learn what works for your child. Many families shift approaches as their children grow. A Charlotte Mason style may be perfect for elementary years, then transition into a more classical or eclectic approach for middle school. Trust your instincts and stay flexible.

Final Encouragement

You have now spent 30 days researching, planning, launching, and refining your homeschool. That is a tremendous accomplishment. Whether this first month felt exhilarating, exhausting, or somewhere in between, you have taken the hardest step: beginning.

Here are a few final truths to carry with you as you move forward.

- You know your child better than any teacher, textbook, or test ever will. Trust that knowledge.
- Bad days do not erase good days. One rough morning does not mean homeschooling is failing.
- Consistency matters more than perfection. Showing up imperfectly every day builds something remarkable over time.
- Your child is learning even when it does not look like learning. Conversations at dinner, trips to the grocery store, hours spent building with blocks - it all counts.
- Asking for help is a strength. Lean on your community, your partner, and the families who have walked this road before you.
- Joy is a valid educational goal. If your child is curious, engaged, and growing, you are succeeding.

Your Next Step

Visit www.homeschoolconnects.com to find local co-ops and homeschool groups in your area, browse our curriculum comparison guides, and join a community of families just like yours. You do not have to do this alone, and you were never meant to.

Welcome to homeschooling. You have got this.

About Homeschool Connects

Homeschool Connects is a free platform helping families navigate their homeschool journey with confidence. We provide tools, resources, and community to make homeschooling accessible to everyone.

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