

WHY ARE WE HOMESCHOOLING?

Fall 1996

First of all, a better term might be family-based learning or life schooling, rather than homeschooling. We believe that we are all learners, young and old, and that learning happens everywhere, not just in a classroom.

Our reasons for homeschooling can be summed up in six major areas:

- **Academic Excellence** (small group learning, and a choice of *how* various subjects are taught)
- **Positive Socialization** (by adults rather than peers)
- **Time** (to explore, create, initiate)
- **Spirituality** (bringing it into everyday life)
- **Togetherness** (a close family, learning how to get along)
- **Freedom & Flexibility** (opportunities to make choices)

Academic Excellence: We believe that our children will receive a more complete education in a small group setting at home, where we will be following a Waldorf-inspired approach. We are choosing this approach because of its developmental tenets and prayerfulness over the child, always keeping in mind the soul purpose of each child. Writing comes before reading, the letters are introduced through stories, and children learn to read from books of their own creation. Math is taught through rhythmic counting and games; Science begins with the development of a reverence for nature. We will teach, watch, enjoy, and encourage without relying on grades or tests as motivators. We will also have the opportunity to integrate different subjects, and create a curriculum that is influenced by our children's personal interests. We feel they will learn more as a result.

Positive Socialization: We believe that by fostering relationships with caring adults among family, friends, and our community, and within small groups of children, that our children will thrive and develop positive socialization skills.

Time: Children need time to move their bodies, act things out, let their imagination flow, act on ideas as they come up, create, make mistakes, figure out how to organize their time, to get to know themselves and to explore and discover their own personal learning styles.

Spirituality: We want our children to see themselves as spiritual beings and be given an opportunity to express this daily. We also want the opportunity to integrate Jewish values and learning into our daily lives and lessons.

Togetherness: We have a desire to slow down, simplify our lives and really be together. We want to learn and practice listening to each other and learn to work together as a family unit rather than relating in competitive ways. Goals for our children (and ourselves) include the development of self-awareness and the abilities to self-education, self-motivate, and self-evaluate.

Freedom & Flexibility: We will have the freedom and our children will have the freedom to make choices and to change things, try something new. We will also have a flexibility of schedule that will allow us to change plans or be spontaneous, while at other times, we will be teaching and learning the importance of schedules and commitments. We believe people need both. In addition, we both strongly believe that because boys develop later than girls in many ways, they, in particular, need to be in an environment where the expectations and time frame for learning specific subjects, especially learning to read, are more flexible than most schools offer.

We consider our jobs as homeschooling parents to include:

- Creating an environment rich in learning tools and experiences
- Exposing our children to a variety of ideas and approaches
- Being available to serve as resource people (like librarians) and fellow explorers, showing our children where and how to get the information they want and need
- Fostering a love of learning
- Trying not to interrupt, trying not to meddle

We have both discovered that when the environment fits our learning style, learning comes quickly and effortlessly. When it doesn't, we become easily frustrated. Our goal is to create an environment that is right for our children. We believe that children need years of hands-on dabbling to master academic subjects and themselves, even if this may look random from the outside world.

American writer Harold Taylor's description of the education benefits of life experience:

"If you want to ride a horse, dance a jig, climb a mountain, build a boat, write a novel, study history, think intelligently, become educated, a certain amount of instruction in a class in the subject will be useful – perhaps for two or three sessions. After that you will need to get a horse, start dancing, climbing, building, writing, thinking and educating on your own. Otherwise you will not have learned what you need to know, that is, how in fact to do the thing you have set out to learn to do. To learn to do something. It is necessary to practice it."

Jean & Brian Miller
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