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DESCHOOLING for HOME EDUCATORS

Deschooling Defined

Deschooling specifically refers to that period of adjustment experienced by children removed from school settings. It also can include the process of deschooling parents; that is, the unlearning of concepts and beliefs about the nature and purpose of education we've picked up along the way, mostly from our own schooling experience.

School based methods of instruction and thinking rarely translate directly into the home educating environment, and where they are tried, often parents run into the same kinds of problems faced by teachers in schools – reluctant learners, acting out, anti-social behaviour, etc.

If the children have been at school or preschool for any length of time they and their parents will need time to adjust to the new arrangement. Often this is begun with a 'holiday' at home, a time to observe and record what naturally occurs in the child's life, and where additional resources are needed to introduce additional learning activities considered important and essential.

It can take many months and sometimes even a year for a child to deschool. There's a good chance that the child has had her natural desire to learn, as well as her

creativity and imagination quashed. She will need time to detox, take a vacation, have some down time – or all three!

For the parents they may need to rethink the whole idea and purpose of education. Classroom learning is geared to educate thirty children with one teacher. It's not impossible, but it is difficult and frustrating to try to impose classroom teaching methods and resources directly to the home learning environment.

For most of us the only educational approach we've known is some kind of school or institutionalised learning. We're used to the idea that education is a passive 'they teach and we learn' activity. Educators, even in schools, know this is only a tiny part of what really happens. We need to update our notions about what constitutes an education. The easiest way to do this is to talk to other homeschooling families, hang out with them, and see for ourselves how children learn outside of a school setting.

Some of the myths about education deschooling dispels are:

- It cannot take place without a university trained and qualified educator;
- It has to take place in a classroom or classroom environment, with desks, texts or workbooks;
- It takes place Monday through Friday from 9 am to 3 pm;
- It stops when we graduate from high school;
- Children must learn certain concepts in a predetermined or sequential manner;
- Children must learn certain concepts at a specified age;
- Children cannot learn without a qualified educator to guide them through the learning process;

Books I've read that helped me deschool are:

- [How Children Learn](#) and [How Children Fail](#), read both
- [Challenging Assumptions in Education](#)
- [Children Learning at Home](#)
- [Dumbing us Down](#)
- [Self University](#)
- [Creating Learning Communities](#)
- [Punished by Rewards](#)

Articles from around the web that discuss deschooling:

- [From School to Homeschool: What is Deschooling](#). In this well explained article Jeanne Faulconer says, “To really get the benefits of homeschooling, a child has to decompress and disconnect from “school” being the default and “school ways” being the standard expectation” and explains that it is not unusual for children new to home educating to have a “challenging and confusion time”. She focuses on the child’s experience, and in her article on [Tips for Deschooling](#) offers lots of useful information and advice.
- From [Educated Adventures blog post on deschooling](#) “Many parents have their kids finish out a school year and use summer break to deschool. Summer break is not deschooling...When your child is still operating on a school mindset, you aren’t seeing how they actually learn. When you leave them alone for a period of time, you start to see how they approach new things and take in new information... [deschooling] could make the difference between having a good homeschooling experience and having a horrible experience...”
- Kelly George of Fearless Homeschool defines, describes and list the benefits of deschooling in her article [Deschooling Your Family](#) Pam, creator of the Living Joyfully website... "The day "deschooling ends" and "unschooling begins" won't be lit up in bright lights - there's no "magic moment". Life will just continue with the wonderful rhythm you've found, you'll see all the learning that's happening every day, and eventually you'll look back and realize "hey, I think we're unschooling!" Read her articles on deschooling: [The Road of Trials – the Heart of Deschooling](#), [Deschooling](#), and [Why Deschooling](#)
- [Deschooling For Parents](#) by Sandra Dodd is a humourous and insightful piece about getting rid of our schoolish thoughts. At the bottom there are also more links to deschooling articles.



- [Five Steps to Unschooling](#) by Joyce Fetteroll again is not specifically about deschooling, but is a great article about the transition to unschooling. It details things you can be doing to help you progress through this exciting deschooling phase.
- [Is Deschooling all that Important](#) by Tammy Takahashi, author of *Deschooling Gently: A Step by Step Guide to Fearless Homeschooling*
- [Deschooling](#) by Pattie Donahue-Krueger. Excellent article which originally appeared in F.U.N. News in 1998 and is now on Sandra Dodd's unschooling pages.



Deschooling: Questioning My Motivations

Much of what I learned about educating my children at home came slowly, almost painfully at times, as I learned to let go of what I thought I should do and began to listen to what my children needed, and reflected on how they were naturally learning despite my clumsy attempts at teaching them.

Nowadays I tell people to allow plenty of time to 'let go'. Changing old habits of thinking (de-schooling) takes time.

To be lasting change needs to be slow and considered, and achieved with mindfulness. Change also happens without any effort at all at this speed. All you

really need to do is challenge your motivations regularly, remind yourself of what needs are actually present.

Ask yourself "Why do I want them to learn or do this?" frequently. All too often we focus too much on, and grow anxious or obsessive about, the how and the when our children learn.

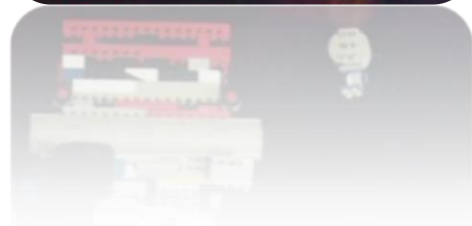
Don't restrict this constant practice of questioning your motivations to the obvious educational activities and lessons in homeschooling or unschooling life. For example, I questioned things like why my children should clean teeth three times a day and why my children should wear shoes...

I continually test my assumptions by wondering if I'd do and think the same thing if I lived in a different era, place, culture, or if I were a different person (man, my best friend, etc). My aim is to develop empathy and widen my perceptions. I accept and celebrate that my beliefs and attitudes are forever being adjusted in the light of my new understandings: this is the essence of learning!

Our home educating life became a lot easier for the whole family when I learned to identify my needs and wants, those that arose from my head and heart. Sometimes my head and my heart were in conflict – this took some deep reflection to work out if the needs or wants were truly mine or things that I thought I should want or need, based upon the expectations of others.

Most of my earlier educational goals were based on assumptions, or what I thought was expected of me, as well as my fears that people would think I wasn't a good enough mother or educator. I pushed myself to try to live up to those expectations (which were guided by the parenting I had as a child, as well as the onslaught of messages from a hyperactive consumerist media!)

In those early days our homeschooling learning plans and activities weren't centered; they weren't grounded in what each of my children needed to learn next in their lives, based on who they were. They were based on what society said they should be, and what I should be... and how what other people thought I should or needed to do to ensure



my children's education would be 'successful'. And success was defined in their terms – another important bridge I had to cross on my deschooling journey was learning to redefine success.

Once I slowed down and stopped rushing to satisfy those unknown others and the nagging critic in my head, I had time to watch and listen to my children as they played and worked, talked to each other and to me, and got on with the business of living and learning.

I was surprised by how much work my children did each day. I used to think that they played all day, but when I stopped trying to organise their time so much, I saw that much of their play taught them the very lessons I'd spend hours meticulously preparing and then documenting! Learning, play and work soon became inseparable.

For children, learning is invisible. School education goes to great lengths to make it visible, turn into a chore, work that needs to be done, accounted for and that's fine if you are running a school and have to justify the funding budget, but it can definitely get in the way of home educating success!

Thoughts on Deschooling: Then and Now

Now, 2018

Here's an easy way to deschool - consider yourself and your child on permanent holiday from school!

Now, what would you do if you could do anything you wanted to within your means today?

What's that burning thing you wanted to do but didn't have time last week, last month, last year?

What was that game you wanted to play?

Where was that place you meant to get around to visiting?

What was that thing you wanted to have a go at making?

Who did you want to catch up with?

Where did you put that book you wanted to read, that movie you wanted to watch, the documentary that you never found time to watch all the way to the end?



I reckon I could name half a dozen answers for each of those questions for myself and I'm sure I could build a much bigger list if I was thinking of answers that included the grandkids.

And that's the key to home educating - it's not all about the children. They are living and learning from life within a home, a community and society. They learn from observing people - and we're (the parents) are people. As we go about living full, busy, constructive and contemplative lives our children are learning. When we include them, engage with them, invite them to help and participate they are learning.

Holidays can be lots of fun...

Then, 1999

The first home educator I met told me the hardest thing about homeschooling was deschooling herself. She had been a teacher before having her children and saw that as the main obstacle to feeling confident and building homeschooling success. Telling myself that I didn't have to act like a teacher became a mantra...

Deschooling can take weeks or months. A friend of mine reported her son took six months, and in that time he reverted back through each age of play he believed he had missed out on by going to school, starting with age five and working his way up to ten years of age. Only then did he get out the books and start doing 'school' work at home! Fascinating...

The worse thing about school education is the way the children learn to be 'entertained' all the time, to have someone organise their time.... if the new homeschooling parent isn't acting in the same way - dishing up activities, book work or supervising the children often appear bored, or complain of boredom, or get into negative or destructive behaviours in the same way school kids do. This can really place a lot of stress on new homeschooling parents and make them think home education isn't working.

I always hung in there (barely) and tried a little of everything on the bad days, but my sure fire way of overcoming this problem was to give my children 100% unconditional attention, doing whatever they wanted - like full on playing with them, which was hard, or listening for many minutes to the story they told me half an hour before, etc. They usually were completely satisfied by this attention and then got on with their own lives, organising their own time, thinking for themselves, etc... And I quickly found that usually I only needed to put an hour or two of this kind of attentive time in a couple of times a week.

I also found that if I sat with the children while they did book work, usually only an hour and a half a day, we avoided many problems associated with motivation. Again, it was my full attention they needed most of all.

And in between – a post from my online group 2003

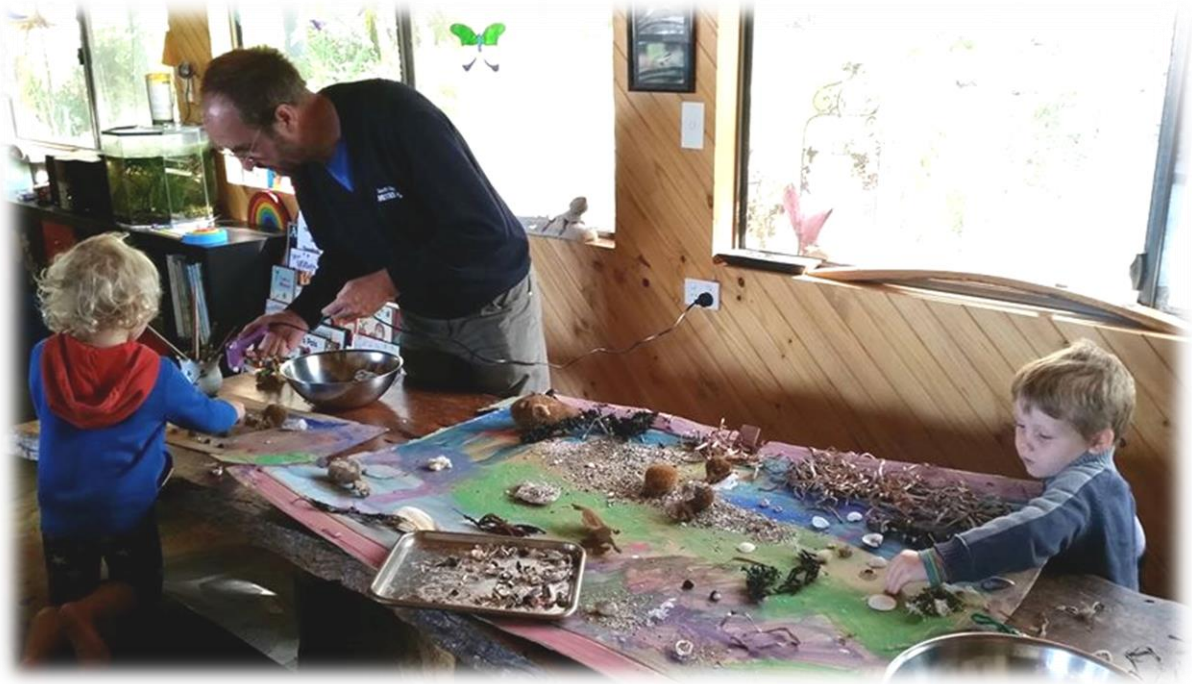
Karen wrote: I pulled my two oldest sons out of school early last year and spent most of the year deschooling and having frequent freak outs by me that they "weren't doing enough" etc.

Deschooling is probably the hardest task we face as unschoolers. Someone once said it takes one month of deschooling for every year your child has been at school, but that doesn't take into account the time we parents spent in school too. If I add up the years Robin and I and our three children spent at school (including university), then the deschooling phase would last years, and it did!

I read through our home education curriculum learning plan every year to help keep us on track. Many unschoolers argue that documenting their family's learning journey isn't necessary, but I've found it to be an excellent way to build confidence in the learning naturally process, especially in those early years.

I didn't ask my children to build up a collection of 'evidence' that they are learning and progressing: I did 99% of the record keeping as I was the one that needed it. I didn't do it primarily to satisfy some authoritative educational bureaucracy. I did it because I needed to prove to myself that home education works for my children. Even though I could see that it working for other children, I still had nagging doubts, especially as an unschooler.

It took me well over ten years to feel confident that unschooling works, and then only because my children were living proof! And I had my records to remind me of the many different ways my children were learning every day. Growing that confidence didn't stop the occasional panic attack where I was convinced that I was harming my children by letting them learn in what appeared to be a very undisciplined manner...



Personally, I loved school and I have had to work hard to get the desire to "play schools" out of me. Home educating my kids didn't seem to make sense some days, knowing that I loved school as a child, plus I was and still am an excellent student, and that, on the surface, school hadn't seemed to do me any harm. I'd find myself asking, why was I fussing so much about the children's education?

Karen wrote: Now I actually feel like we have the opposite problem. We have become SO unstructured that I feel like the boys are becoming really undisciplined and they also seem highly unmotivated to actually learn.

This is a stage the majority of unschoolers go through. It's okay. And to be honest, actually encouraging. But that is hard to see that when we're in the thick of it!

It simply means that YOU have a LOT more deschooling to do... Deschooling yourself, that is. It's perfectly natural to feel insecure at this stage. If you have any books by John Holt, or can borrow some, have a read. I always found his ability to TRUST that children will learn, can learn and want to learn, can't help but learn, very encouraging.

Question your motives for wanting your children to 'learn'. Question exactly what it is you want them to learn. Are you valuing this learning over that learning? Think about skills and processes as well as content and products as you reflect on what your children are doing throughout the day. School tells us it is process oriented but it is still very fixated on the products of learning, on the 'outcomes'.

I believe that the insecurity you're experiencing has its roots in not being clear about what you value – educationally speaking. This is where reading my home education philosophy statement (part of our learning plan) each year helped me. Our goals focused on self-esteem, confidence, and so on as priorities and goals. I hadn't written specific objectives, such as reading by age 6, doing calculus by age 16, etc. I wanted my children to be able to communicate effectively and confidently, and yep, they were actually getting much better at communicating each and every day. I could see that OUR goals were being met within OUR timelines (not the school curriculum guide's framework timelines).

Karen wrote: The main thing they like is anything involving a screen i.e. X-box, computer or TV (they love documentaries & educational programs & retain heaps of knowledge from what they watch).

Ahhh, the tyranny of addiction to the small screen! So-called passive entertainment... I overcame this by translating those games and programs, movies etc, into educational jargon. Once I could see that these gadgets were just another learning tool my children were using my paranoia that they were 'wasting their time' diminished (but never disappeared!) And it helped that my mum frequently chastised me (now a published author) for having my head in a book all the time during my childhood.

It was, however, important to me that the children balanced their time. I knew and understood that developmentally they needed just as much outside play and running around as they did computer or TV time. Maybe more. They also needed to make things – keep busy with their hands – so art and craft projects were a big deal in our home. And then there were chores. Sure, they could play the computer or watch TV but we insisted that these other things were important too.

Home education is nestled within a family context, which means that education is a shared responsibility between child and parent. Our's isn't a 'child-led' home education experience. It is a family led education, within the social context of the wider community. It's based on the fact that there are definitely things we need to learn to survive as individuals and together with others in groups. Sometimes we don't want to learn or do these things or take responsibility for them: learning doesn't have as much to do with 'want' – it is mostly based on 'need'. We



learn because we are naturally driven to learn by these needs. Working out the timing – when to encourage children to step up and embrace this responsibility for those things they don't want to do but need to – is something that we eventually work out as we learn to learn to respect and trust each other more fully and truly get to know each other. Remember, our children's personalities and abilities are only just developing. It's up to us to help them identify and meet their learning and developmental needs.

Karen wrote: I am very disorganised and often find it difficult to actually achieve anything much with the kids.

I suggest you forget about the children for a while and concentrate on your own education. What do you want to learn? Perhaps, like me, you want to establish a routine in your life, so that you feel more organised and in control of your own destiny (rather than have fate and circumstance bounce you around all the time!) This is something I am STILL learning!

I write out lists: what I want to achieve, how I can do it, how I will know I'm actually getting somewhere. Will I reward myself? It never works anyway, but I still con myself that I can actually bribe myself to learn new tricks, routines, etc. I see myself an active learner.

There are lots of ways to organise ourselves. I always start with my environment. That usually means a spate of tidying up: rearranging furniture and the way we use our rooms so that life flows more efficiently. We use space differently at different times in our lives. I usually rearrange once or twice a year... It helps to clear the clutter. That's always the first step. Getting rid of the physical clutter somehow seems to magically eliminate a heap of mental clutter.

Lists: I have dozens of lists. Start with a 'must do' ONE thing each day. If you think of another twenty-three put these on another list out of the way where it isn't going to bug you all day. I try to get the one thing done early in the day and then surprise myself by knocking off three or four more... Don't focus on the kids, or home educating them. You'll be educating them without even realising it simply by getting on with your own busy life.

Make a point of interacting positively with the children. Don't nag them as it only gets under your skin and depresses you. State what you want or need and leave it at that. Ask them if they can help you achieve what you want or need. If they can, say thanks and ask when can they do it? If they give you a time and after that time they haven't done it, and you are disappointed, state that you're disappointed that they haven't met their commitment to you, and ask do they still think they can do it and if

so, when, and if not, can they please tell you earlier next time so that you can organise an alternative?

I like to 'negotiate' with my children. Doesn't always work and I'm disappointed more often than not. But then, again, I model this behaviour to them, as I'm always forgetting to do what I said I'd do! We're all human. I aim for a cooperative existence. As I don't nag too much, and I require their attention and assistance infrequently, they are usually able to meet my wants/needs.

Karen wrote: I have lots of good IDEAS but am really bad at making them happen. That is, I'd love to investigate organic veggie gardening in our (small) yard but just always seem to get stuck at the stage of investigating possibilities. I'm not really good at pulling it all together.

That's where the 'one thing on the list' each day habit comes in useful for me. I aim SMALL. One small achievable thing. It sounds to me like you have a habit of thinking BIG. Don't grow vegies in a garden – grow them in a pot or box. Don't grow ten vegies. Grow ONE. Don't start a compost heap in the corner of the yard. Help the children build a worm farm in a bucket in your kitchen! Grow six carrot stumps in six pots on your window sill (apparently Jacky French recycled the same carrot over and over again!) Grow sprouts. But do ONLY ONE of the above suggestions a day. Keep it simple, keep it small, keep it manageable.



If you can do this in one area of your life you'll find the ability starting to spill into other areas, especially your expectations of yourself and your children regarding home education.

Karen wrote: I think the kids are sick of me saying, "Hey, I've got this great idea" or "Maybe we could do this..." but then it doesn't happen.

So look at WHY you are saying this... what are your motives? Question your beliefs about education. Where do they come from? What do you believe education is? What do you value? Do you really value those things, or have you been taught to value those things?

Were you taught that you had to be jack of all trades? Were you taught that you had to be good at everything you tried? Maybe you don't ever get to the 'doing' stage because you know you're going to fail... you're not going to finish. It's all too much, too hard, too BIG. If this is the case, you have to stop yourself from thinking big (or put all that stuff down on paper and then file it somewhere out of sight for a day or two) and take the first step. Pick one small, easy, simple thing that you can that will builds towards the whole, and then DO it. It usually only takes a few minutes anyway. We tend to spend hours nagging ourselves to do it.

But back step here a bit: you're probably overstating the situation. Make a list - right now - of all the things you do start and finish every day. Don't be shy - write absolutely EVERYTHING you can think of. All those parenting things, housework things, personal care things, things you do for friends, relatives, strangers, keeping life flowing smoothly things. You are a very BUSY person! Don't underestimate just how much your children are learning by simply being in the same vicinity as you! Alan Thomas writes convincingly about the power of the informal children learn by being in the background of our lives in his book *Children Learning at Home*.

Karen wrote: So it is any wonder that THEY seem undisciplined?!

This is where you need to define 'discipline' - thoroughly. Question the values and beliefs that underpin your definition of discipline. How many different definitions of discipline can you come up with? And then ask yourself are you really talking about discipline or motivation?

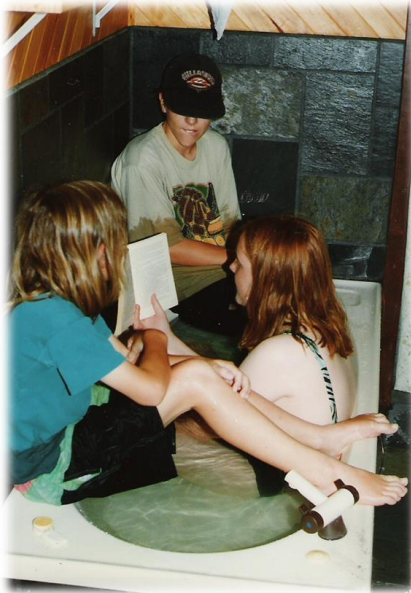


Karen wrote: I still toy with the idea of buying something like Math-U-See or other manipulatives because I like the idea of having lots of resources lying around for them to muck around with etc.

I love those educational toys and aids too. However eventually I realized that what I was going was buying educational reassurance instead of simply getting on with helping my children learn. They're fun. And they do make great toys... You can always make your own of course and it is way more (hands on) educational too.

I liked the structure, the books, the scope and sequence, the instructions. So I bought them and we played school with them, then we simply played with them. And it was ALL good! I didn't kid myself that the children NEEDED this stuff to learn. I accepted that I needed them to reassure ME I was an okay teacher...

Karen wrote: Also wondering how to encourage them to read more. We always get heaps of books from the library but they often just sit there without even being looked at! Should I introduce "reading time"?



You could spend two or three hours a day reading them or a few minutes – simply being with your children is what matters the most. Share a snippet or two about anything you've read at the dining table or in casual conversation. They'll get the idea that books are interesting. I used to leave books lying around open: the pictures would attract my non-readers who would then spend time flipping through and usually end up talking for hours...

Forget fiction unless your children love to read them, or unless you love to read them aloud. Most kids enjoy flipping through non-fiction books if they are about things in which they are naturally interested.

Kids are usually only interested in a few things: how things work, how the world works, how bodies work, etc. Definitely have these books floating around the place all the time. And then select books on specialist topics to coincide with 'hot' topics or current passions to add to the collection from time to time.

Only introduce reading time if you love reading. Or if only one child loves reading, make sure he or she gets time to indulge in that passion.

Karen wrote: "Reading time" sounds so schoolish!

Why? If your family is anything like mine we always make time to watch the telly at night... And we eat at regular times too. Why should scheduled reading together be any different? Believe me, deschooling is never-ever finished!

I've always found that as I write my questions and pour out my doubts and fears the answers begin to appear. Often just asking someone else is enough to illuminate what I really want and need, and paves the way to working out how to achieve them. We're all wise beings - deschooling ourselves helps us learn how to tap into that innate wisdom.

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