

RECORDKEEPING

for Unschoolers

A Journal to Document Children's Learning Activities

Sara McGrath



With gratitude for
Maia, Ilana, and Kalea.
In Ilana's words, "I'm glad that you exist."



In loving memory of
Trixie, Hannah, Sinopa, Kuruk, Ahote, and Ivan Pi-Chai "Bubba,"
my other kids.

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Recordkeeping and Legal Requirements

(Excerpted from *Unschooling: A Lifestyle of Learning* by Sara McGrath)

Meeting legal requirements relies heavily on record keeping. Unschooling parents may choose to keep records of their children's activities for personal or legal reasons, depending upon local regulatory requirements. This chapter includes sections on

- Measures of learning,
- Meeting legal requirements,
- Recordkeeping methods, and
- Preparing for tests and evaluations.

Some parents enjoy keeping records, some don't, and some do it only in order to meet legal requirements. Records can serve as keepsakes for personal recollection, as well as for reference for future college and job applications. They can take numerous forms, including journals, portfolios, charts, and fill-in forms.

Each record keeping strategy carries strengths and weaknesses and can serve different purposes. Some parents purchase record keeping systems while others choose to create their own. Whatever method you use, I recommend keeping records mostly to yourself, especially with young children, so they don't feel measured.

Taking Measure of Learning

Unschooling parents typically take an active interest in their children's activities. They don't need grades or tests to show them which skills their children have demonstrated. Nonetheless, some parents document their children's learning activities.

Some localities enforce legal requirements for testing and filing of official forms. Some areas allow parents the choice of testing, presenting a portfolio, or writing up reports.

Conventional styles of homeschooling lend themselves more easily to record keeping, whereas unschooling typically requires more creativity in fitting learning experiences into subject categories. However, families of all styles have found ways to satisfy record keeping requirements.

Perhaps the simplest way to record an unschooler's learning

activities involves periodically listing what the child has spent time doing, i.e., reading, making, watching, listening to, visiting, talking about, etc.

My own record keeping practice has changed over the years. My local government requires homeschool registration, record keeping, and annual testing to correspond with the school year when a child turns eight years old and each year thereafter.

During my children's early years, I kept a monthly list of things they had done or talked about. I kept drawings and other art projects in a treasure box (still do.)

I knew very well that Maia, at age 3, felt especially drawn to animals, especially dinosaurs, and that she could name and imitate hundreds of them. I knew that she learned through books, videos, trips to the pet store, zoos, and fairs. I learned, through the practice of recording Maia's activities, that she learned far more than I may have otherwise consciously noticed, which bolstered my confidence in unschooling.

As children grow older and more independent in their activities, they can take some of the responsibility for keeping records of their interests and activities. Some parents ask their older homeschoolers to keep a journal of the books they read, the activities they do, and anything else they wish to record.

Meeting Legal Requirements

Most localities have compulsory schooling laws, so new unschooling families will want to learn how homeschooling, in general, fits within those laws and what specifically the local government requires. Note that homeschoolers and school children may have different academic learning requirements.

I recommend against identifying yourself as unschoolers to regulators. To avoid evoking fear or criticism, you might describe your children as homeschoolers who follow a custom curriculum.

Homeschooling regulations, such as learning requirements and testing, don't resonate with unschooling philosophy, so parents may struggle to reconcile feelings of annoyance or injustice with the acknowledgment that they must meet legal requirements in order to continue homeschooling. Principles and ideals feel wonderful, but we want to seriously consider the consequences for honoring them, such as revocation of our granted-freedom to homeschool.

Seek legal information from a variety of sources, rather than relying on, for example, school officials who may know little about homeschooling or may provide discouraging answers based on the fact that schools rely on student attendance for funding.

Homeschool Legal Defense Association
<http://www.hslda.org>
Information on laws and litigation (Note: Christian organization.)

In some areas, local laws don't explicitly authorize homeschooling, yet people can homeschool by registering a home, church, or other group as a private school, or by some other trick.

A local homeschooling group offers perhaps the most reliable source of information about homeschooling regulations. Experienced homeschoolers can tell you not only what the law says, but also how local government enforces it. For example, my state requires annual testing by a certified teacher, and we must keep record of it, but we need not turn in test results. In addition, several local certified teachers offer an unschooler-friendly "no test" test.

Your local government might require you to do the following.

- Fill out and file forms such as a *Declaration of Intent to Homeschool*;
- Register your home as a private school;
- Submit an education plan or curriculum; or
- Record attendance (school days) and complete a specified number of days per year.

Through creativity, you can fit your child's learning experiences into such forms. Unschooling parent, Carol Narigon, created a sample 'Unschooling Curriculum' to serve as a model.

Unschooling Curriculum

<http://www.sandradodd.com/unschoolingcurriculum.html>

An unschooling curriculum lists the subjects you and your child expect to cover. In other words, explain what you and your child will probably do over the course of the school year, using your government's requirements and *WorldBook* as a guide.

World Book encyclopedia prepares a Typical Course of Study,

generalized across North America, for preschool through 12th grade levels. You and your children can use this as a checklist or as a source of ideas for topics and skills to pursue. Oftentimes, consultation of such a list puts unschoolers at ease. What looks like a long list of requirements includes a lot of repetition and common sense.

World Book Typical Course of Study

<http://worldbook.com/wb/Students?curriculum>

Printable Checklists

http://homeschool-curricula.suite101.com/article.cfm/homeschool_curriculum_standards_checklists

If my local government did require me to submit an education plan, I would take the unschooling curriculum a step further and list probable activities under the standard subject headings of

- Social Studies,
- Science,
- Language Arts,
- Health,
- Mathematics, and
- The Arts.

I may list LEGO club under Mathematics, gardening and baking under Science, and Spanish club under both Social Studies and Language Arts. Etc. Use your creativity.

If homeschooling regulations feel unjust, join together with other homeschoolers and work to change the laws. I believe that a day will come when unschooling has proven its merit to a majority of people. The school system has not existed for long in the human timeline. Things can change.

History of Education System

<http://www.quantumshift.tv>

Recordkeeping Methods

Methods for keeping records of your child's learning activities include

- Journaling,
- Blogging,
- Assembling portfolios,
- Creating charts, and
- Filling out forms.

Journals. Historically, a person added to a narrative journal at the end of each day (i.e., a journey takes a day), but you can jot down notes weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Either you or your child, or both, can keep a journal. The journal may contain lists of activities, descriptions of trips taken, specific learning observed, etc. You can later take the information from a journal and transfer it to a portfolio or to forms, as necessary.

Some parents write in their journals at the end of each day, noting every observable activity. Other parents write less frequently, taking note of prominent activities and interests. I made more frequent notes during my children's younger years when they added major abilities every day. Nowadays, their projects span longer periods of time.

Blogs. A blog, short for web log, works like a journal. You can keep it private or post it for the world to see.

My children's home page and blog, *Dragon's Fire*, serves primarily as 'online sprinkling' for them (i.e. a trail to follow if they wish), but also as a method of recordkeeping for me. I date and label each post with an official subject category so I can easily click a category and see what my children had exposure to during specific time periods. In addition, I keep a family blog for sharing our goings on with long-distance family and friends.

Create Your Own Homeschool Learning Blog

<http://homeschool.suite101.com>

Portfolios. You can collect samples of your children's work (i.e., artistic product, calculation scratch paper, journal pages, etc.) and assemble it into a portfolio. A portfolio may take the form of a scrapbook, filing cabinet, box, or some combination that allows you to showcase your child's knowledge of academic requirements, as well as other interests. The portfolio may contain written reports, workbook pages, lists of books read, journal notes about various activities,

artwork, videotapes, photos, or anything else. To prepare your child's portfolio for assessment, choose pieces that show specific learning achievements as referenced in your local homeschool learning requirements.

Charts. You can create a chart, or grid, divided into subject categories with lists of learning activities. The chart may list academic subjects along one axis and days of the week along the other. List activities under as many categories as may apply. For example, building with LEGOs could fall under Mathematics and Art/Social Studies, and learning Spanish could fall under Language Arts and Social Studies. You could call Spanish a unit study that spans many categories.

Forms. Some school districts provide official forms on which to fill in coverage of learning requirements. Some districts may accept common language to describe learning activities, whereas others prefer the use of educational jargon. For example, reading a book for hours may be called 'uninterrupted, silent, sustained reading.'

Child-led, interest-driven activities that cover multiple categories could translate as 'interdisciplinary unit studies using learner-initiated activities,' or as 'project learning,' or 'block learning.'

Years of homeschool records may come in handy for use in preparing a transcript for submission to a school, military, or workplace. As with other

traditional forms, you may have to use creativity to present an unschooler's education in such a manner. Mary Griffith provides an example of an unschooler's transcript in her book, *The Unschooler's Handbook* (Prima, 1998). Alternatively, you can present a portfolio in place of a transcript.

Mary Griffith
<http://marygriffith.net>

Preparing for Tests and Evaluations

Your local government may require

- Standardized testing,
- Portfolio assessment,
- Performance assessment, or
- Progress reports.

Check with a local homeschool group or with your local school district for specific requirements. You may find a summary of your area's legal requirements at the websites of the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) or your local government's department or ministry of education website.

HSLDA

<http://hsllda.org>

U.S. Dept. of Education

<http://www.ed.gov>

Standardized Testing. If your locality requires standardized testing, you can ask for a copy of a previous edition of the test so that you and your children can go over it and practice it. You can attempt to negotiate a new test or type of assessment if you feel that the test shows a bias against your educational philosophy.

Your local government may require testing as often as annually or less often. Some governments require testing only near the end of specific school years such as grade levels 3,5,8, and 10. School districts typically supply, administer, and pay for testing, however, parents might have the option to hire an independent tester who provides a more unschooler-friendly test. Ask local homeschool groups and associations to refer unschooler-friendly testers. You may find a mail-in test that you and your child can do together at home.

Homeschoolers typically outperform publicly schooled children on standardized tests. At the time of this publishing, homeschoolers in my country outperformed their public school

Homeschool students typically test at or above the 85th percentile.

peers by 37 percent [Dr. Brian Ray. *Progress Report 2009: Homeschool Academic Achievement and Demographics*. National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), 2009].

Portfolio Assessment. As an alternative to standardized testing, some local governments accept submission of a portfolio. In this case, you and your child would assemble a selection of work samples or other presentation that showcases your child's learning achievements. Portfolio items might include written reports by people who have worked with your child, video or audio tapes, photographs, relevant newspaper clippings, brochures from places visited, lists of books read, etc.

Performance Assessment. In this case, your child might submit to an interview or perform tasks that show mastery of required subjects. These tasks might include presentations on activities or projects such as theatrical performances, written reports, or science projects.

Progress Reports. In lieu of testing, your locality may require you to file periodic progress reports, consisting of descriptions of your children's learning activities over a specified period of time, such as a quarter, semester, or school year. Information from a journal helps you to easily create this type of report.

Sample Recordkeeping for Unschoolers

Maia, December - February

Doing: Pop Bottle Science experiments, Faunasphere.com, Poptropica.com missions, JumpStart Virtual World tasks, ballet class, Spanish club, gymnastics

Making: 3D wooden puzzle of T-rex, simple machine constructions with physics kit, *LEGO Crazy Action Contraptions* (Klutz, 2008), LEGO robotics, hand-made paper dolls, drawings

Reading: *Wright on Time*, *Magic Tree House #29*, *Avalon* book 2, *Harry Potter* series, *Eragon*; jokes and riddles, *Alice in Wonderland*

Writing: Story about a princess, poems, songs; cursive script, keyboarding, Kanji

Watching: Dr. Who, Primeval, Christmas movies, Johnny Test, Animated Hero Classics, Magic School Bus

Listening: Audiobook fairytales, pop music, reggae, Christmas music; French instruction CD

Talking: Megalodon, shark-men mythology, dolphins, Barbie animal trainer, makeup, punk style clothing, hairstyles, California and Arizona

Planning: Overnight train trip, upcoming lunar eclipse, telescope, Galileo video

Visiting: Marine theme park to see dolphins

Sample Unschooler Curriculum

3rd Grade Level

Social Studies: We plan to explore holidays, folk customs, and cultures around the world, Native American and U.S. history, The Story of Stuff (<http://storyofstuff.org>), local and world geography, maps, and orienteering.

Science: We plan to study animal and plant wildlife, prehistoric life, life cycles, habitats, conservation, climate change, electricity and magnetism, outer space and spacecrafts, solar and lunar cycles, machines, and the scientific method.

Language Arts: We plan to read fiction and nonfiction, prose and poetry, use the dictionary, note alphabetization and spelling, compose written works, and use print, cursive script, keyboarding, and punctuation.

Health: We plan to practice good hygiene and online safety, eat healthful foods, study anatomical systems, engage in physical activity, dress for the weather, and apply first aid when necessary.

Math: We plan to build, measure, experiment, bake, sew, divide, add and subtract, estimate, figure math puzzles, make charts and graphs, discuss the concept of negative numbers, compare measurement and numeric systems, and keep track of time.

Arts: We plan to attend dance and art classes, make arts and crafts at home, compose written works, act out plays, and take photos.

A Sample Course of Study on Australia

The following course of events illustrates how my children and I found ourselves surrounded by all things Australia. Neither did I plan to study Australia, nor had I previously had any but mild curiosity about the continent down under. Nonetheless, I began to see Australia at every turn.

- *Top Secret Adventures, Case #12455, Dilemma Down Under* (Highlights.com) sits on my desk.
- I just finished reading *Steve and Me* (Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2008) by Terri Irwin, widow of "The Crocodile Hunter." My sister put that book in my hands, because Terri Irwin came from our hometown.
- While I read *Steve and Me*, I never had to consult the Australian dictionary, because I had already learned the common Strine words from the *Top Secret Adventures Guide to Australia*. I took frequent breaks from my reading to share anecdotes with my kids using words like *swag*, *billibong*, and *drongo*.
- After reading Terri Irwin's memoirs, I rented all the Crocodile Hunter documentaries (Netflix.com).
- The kids and I checked out a map of Australia and I pointed out the equator. We talked about how the earth turns in relation to the sun and how the seasons are different in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. We discovered that the middle of the Australian continent consists of a big desert and most folks live on the coasts.
- My daughters have watched an Australian television series about mermaids. The title of the show, *H2O: Just Add Water* (Jonathan M. Schiff, Film Finance, 2006), inspired an interest in chemical formulas.

- I downloaded two free trial games (BigFishGames.com), *The Wild Thornberrys Australian Wildlife Rescue* and *Australia Zoo Quest*.
- Now we really want to take a family vacation to Australia. My grandmother has visited Australia and has friends who live there. One of them called during our Christmas Eve party in the U.S. and their Christmas morning in Australia, prompting a discussion about the international date line.
- When I put *Steve and Me* back in my sister's hands, she gave me *Mutant Message Down Under* (Harper, 2004) by Marlo Morgan. I enjoyed it so much I located the next book, *Mutant Message From Forever*. Both books shared lots of aboriginal wisdom that I in turn shared with my children.

An on it goes. . . .

From a series of unschooling courses of study
National Unschooling Examiner
<http://www.examiner.com>

A Sample Learning Topic Narrative

My daughter, Maia, feels especially drawn to marine life and the water world. She wants to study, help protect, train, and otherwise work with marine mammals. We have made numerous trips to the local aquarium where she plans to apply for the teen volunteer apprenticeship program. In the meantime, she can attend aquarium classes and camps for younger children, as well as seek out other opportunities toward her goal.

We spend time along the shores. Maia gently touches sea stars, urchins, and anemones. ♡ She holds crabs and snails in her hands and once stood in awe over the washed up remains of a shark. We visit aquariums and marine parks when we travel.

Maia's interest in marine life has led her to watch documentaries about biologists, divers, film-makers, aquariums around the world, whales and dolphins, ancient ocean life, the plight of coral reefs, etc. She studies marine life in encyclopedias and collects figures of marine mammals and amphibians.

Her interest, which began with marine mammals, has grown to include ocean habitats, plant life, fish and sharks, shore birds, animal training, diving, tide pools, islands, weather, magnetism, and on and on.

Along this course, my daughters have watched a television series about mermaids in which the antagonist marine biologist's scientific curiosity has caused her to lose sight of the natural rights of ocean life. Even the title of the show, *H2O: Just Add Water* (Jonathan M. Shiff, Film Finance, 2006), inspired my daughters' interest in chemical formulas, which led to numerous pop-bottle science experiments.

Journal Pages

The following pages provide space for regular journal entries in the form of lists and brief notes about your child's activities, which you can easily translate and transfer to curriculum plans and other forms as necessary.

You will also find brief excerpts from *Unschooling: A Lifestyle of Learning*, my handbook and overview of unschooling.

Reference

Standard Academic Subjects

- Social Studies
- Science
- Mathematics
- Language Arts
- Health and Safety
- Arts

World Book Typical Course of Study Standard Curriculum

<http://worldbook.com/wb/Students?curriculum>

Printable Curriculum Standards Checklists

http://homeschool-curricula.suite101.com/article.cfm/homeschool_curriculum_standards_checklists

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In the absence of school, what do children do? They play. They do what brings them joy. They do what calls to them. They do what they need to do to get from point A to point B, learning useful skills along the way.

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People tend to associate schooling with learning or education. However, let's make clear that *unschooling* does not imply *unlearning* or *uneducating*. *Unschooling* simply describes living and learning without the limitations of school. Let's imagine a life of *unlimited* possibilities.

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As unschoolers, we *own* our interests—our passions, dreams, and goals—and also the *responsibility* for pursuing and attaining them. We respond to our desires and go after our dreams with enthusiasm.

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The multitude of ways unschooling parents might help children learn things includes: Introducing new topics; Sharing with and helping children to seek knowledge; Initiating and participating in learning activities; and Providing guidance and instruction.

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By outside observation, the activities of an unschooling family may appear similar to those of a more conventional homeschooling family, or they may not. Nonetheless, they will most likely *feel* different. *Unschooling* life feels joyful. A self-motivated, passion-driven life feels intrinsically right.

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The unschooling lifestyle prompts us to question the true, heartfelt best interests of our children and ourselves, and to embrace our true joy-seeking natures.

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“Living is learning and when kids are living fully and energetically and happily they are learning a lot, even if we don’t always know what it is.”
– John Holt, *A Life Worth Living* (1971)

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In an unschooling family, everyone unschools. Everyone, including the parents, pursues their own interests. Each family member has special interests that express the unique and common aspects of their personalities and influences the dynamic of the family group.

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Mohandas Gandhi once said something to the effect of “*One should not confuse the habitual with the natural.*” We can easily apply this sentiment the way we help children learn.

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Unschooling provides a varied and flexible approach to experiencing and learning new things which predates the establishment of conventional schooling methodology. It often puts conventional methods to friendlier uses and embraces new technologies.

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By whatever name we call unschooling, it describes an approach to living with children in which a family lives and learns together in respectful partnership. Many unschooling families come from a natural, responsive, ‘attachment parenting’ style of living with children.

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In general, the ‘attachment parenting’ approach to raising children includes practices that demonstrate awareness of and responsiveness to a young child’s needs. This awareness and responsiveness relies on a strong, foundational bond between mother and baby, followed by other close relationships.

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Some people refer to unschooling as natural learning. The natural practices may include trial, observation, invention, asking for instruction, or any other activity that occurs naturally to the learner as a way to accomplish personal goals.

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You can feel the joyous and abundant energy present in the state of play. Play creates an altered state in which the mind opens to new possibilities. Children instinctually jump and move their bodies, touch and manipulate things, engage others in silliness and friendly competition, make noise, and imagine stories.

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Children engaged in self-motivated activities learn a multitude of concepts in a natural, informal, and enjoyable way.

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Young children learn to walk and talk, count and identify symbols, differentiate between light, dark, and various colors, observe the natural world and social relationships, and feel the effects of motion, gravity, etc., with little or no explicit instruction.

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Unschooling parents take play seriously.

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You may have heard that learning and fun don't go together or that learning is not all fun and games, but unschoolers challenge this precept. We assert that Play provides a perfectly valid mode of learning; and Effective learning need not cause difficulty or unpleasantness.

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Some people fear that unschooling will promote anarchy, by which they mean ‘chaos, lawlessness, and disorder.’ However, like the ‘un’ in unschooling, the ‘an’ in anarchy, simply means ‘without a ruler.’ As with unschooling, people often misunderstand the concept of anarchy.

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A true leader has natural authority. Unschooling parents use their natural authority as experienced elders to help their children achieve personal goals, but also remain willing to follow the child's lead when it makes sense to do so. In this way, children and parents live cooperatively in partnership.

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My responsiveness to my children, the reliable and loving meeting of their needs, creates the foundation from which they mature into cooperative, free-thinking people, unbound by unmet needs. We learn respectful cooperation by experiencing it.

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Anarchist philosophy views education as inseparable from life itself, and discipline as the development of self-regulation which can only come from a life free of inhibition, threat, and coercion. Unschooling parents guide their children by acting in a thoughtful, responsible, and courteous manner.

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If one of my children acts in a way that endangers her or someone else, I respond by protecting whomever needs protection. I may offer empathy and engage the children in conversation, but I will not attempt to add pain (where pain already exists) through arbitrary punishment.

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Unschoolers typically avoid the word *teach* to avoid its association with coercive teaching methods and because many don't believe that the phenomenon of teaching exists. Some languages don't have a word for it.

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I sometimes use the word *teach*—translation: help learn—with a noncoercive slant to the meaning. You can boycott the word *teach*, or you can reclaim it for your own uses, as you desire. I have chosen to remake the word in my own image.

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Unschooling parents respect and celebrate the variety of ways children learn naturally. We trust that children want to learn. They have no need of coercion masquerading as encouragement, incentive, or any other external motivation.

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As social creatures, we never require coercion (i.e., threats, pressure, material incentives) to inspire us to want to fit in. We naturally want to contribute and play an important role in community.

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We naturally want to learn useful skills (i.e., reading, writing, math, scientific observation and measurement, etc.), because we need those tools to navigate the world.

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Unschooling parents don't necessarily wait for their children to specifically request information or guidance regarding a particular skill. A parent might offer help or new information at any time.

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New unschooling parents sometimes hesitate to initiate conversations or activities which resemble teaching. However, unschooling philosophy fully supports any interaction with interested and receptive children, i.e., demonstration, instruction, etc.

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If we remain available to our children, spend a lot of time with them, and have fun together, they will feel safe and confident enough to step out into the world to learn even more.

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Young children crave and need direct interaction with the physical world. That means generous amounts of freedom to touch, taste, smell, listen, and watch. Free play introduces the child to scientific observation (a.k.a. curiosity and exploration).

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From a desire to give children an early advantage, parents may make the mistake of focusing on abstract academic subjects before a young child has had sufficient experience exploring the concrete, physical world, and absorbing concepts through immersion.

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In a literate society, a child cannot fail to notice letters and numbers. Children want to understand them.

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Children learn numbers, letters, word recognition, and counting at increasingly young ages. This does not, however, imply that a child will actually comprehend written language and mathematical concepts any earlier than a child who didn't learn the ABCs and 123s at as young of an age.

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Rather than having one general level of intelligence, for better or worse, researcher and professor, Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (Basic Books, 1983), suggested that everyone has a unique ratio of intelligences (a.k.a. ways they perceive and learn).

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The unschooling lifestyle gives children the freedom and flexibility to intuitively learn in the easiest and most enjoyable ways for them.

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Unschooling parents maintain awareness of their children’s strengths, abilities, and interests in order to open doors to activities that best meet each child’s needs.

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Just as we each have our own optimal style of learning, we also have personal approaches to getting started and proceeding through projects, problem solving, and other learning endeavors.

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Whereas the term *unschooling* refers to learning, *radical unschooling* refers to living. Radical unschoolers, or *whole life learners*, apply unschooling ideals such as freedom and mutual respect to their whole lives.

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The word *radical* means both ‘root’ and ‘revolution.’ Radical unschooling refers both to the root way of life, necessarily lacking arbitrary separation of the various life activities, and to revolution as a marked diversion from the conventional way of life in institutional culture.

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The unschooling frame of mind provides a way of seeing and living in the world. The unschooling lifestyle prompts us to maintain a level of awareness sufficient to honor and respect our children’s and our own true needs.

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When we support our children in taking responsibility for their own learning, *to own their learning*, we give them more than we could ever give them by directing their education. We give them trust, control in their lives, freedom, and boundless possibilities for personal success and enjoyment in life.

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We all have unique interests and goals (passions, callings, dreams) for the present and the future. Our communities require a wide variety of skill sets. No common body of knowledge, no standard education, can meet the diverse needs of a community.

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“What did you learn today?” My kids don’t perceive their daily experiences in terms of academic subjects. They simply live each day as it comes, purposely going after topics of interest, spontaneously making discoveries, figuring out how to do new things, and honing other skills.

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A child with an interest in computer programming will, by necessity, follow that interest to advanced math skills. An interest in fashion design or architecture will lead to concepts in geometry. These tools exist in the real world. Otherwise, why would we need them?

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Ask yourself, do you use square roots? If not, who does, and why? What for?

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Unschoolers develop adept skills for finding ways to learn what they need to pursue their dreams. When unschooling parents don't already have the knowledge their children require, they help the children find it through a multitude of resources.

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Natural, self-directed, interest-driven learning follows the learner's own agenda. The learner proceeds naturally, interest by interest, along a lifelong journey in pursuit of knowledge and experiences that each serve a meaningful purpose in the learner's life.

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Unschooling parents set the scene for learning by providing children with a rich environment and access to resources.

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A lot of processing happens during rest days. We need inwardly-focused days and rest days. Likewise, days full of play and imagination can provide a child with the opportunity to explore new ideas and develop new interests that will lead to focused learning in the future.

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My family does not typically follow a schedule, but over time we have created a comfortable routine. We adapt our routine to the seasons, to my children's interests, and to my work schedule. We approach our lifestyle as a creative project.

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According to my state's official learning goals, an educated child should be able to Read, write, and communicate effectively; Think creatively and logically to solve problems; and Set and work toward goals. From this broader perspective, I see that my children continue progressing beautifully.

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Subject divisions that apply in the school setting don't necessarily apply in life. We purposefully look for people who live my children's interests. In this way, categories overlap, blend, and move toward indistinguishability.

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Can you define science? Biology, botany, chemistry, physics. In reality, these topics and tools of study both diverge and interrelate, depending on the circumstances of use.

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Unschoolers experience learning as the satisfaction of natural curiosity and the acquisition of useful tools.

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I rediscovered joy in learning. I proceeded to learn, through a combination of ways, whatever I wanted to learn. I took art and writing classes and workshops. I read books. I did these things, no longer for the purpose of getting a job and proving myself to others, but for my own self enrichment.

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Unschooling children feel comfortable in their world. Their parents act as real-world role models and welcome the children to participate in ‘adult’ activities. Unschooling children develop a level of confidence and self-awareness we rarely see in schooled people.

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Unschoolers have the freedom to value and respect the expertise of adults who can provide learning experiences and opportunities. My children spontaneously express gratitude to me, their dad, and their various community teachers.

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You need not defend your choices or prove yourself or your children. You need not engage in arguments simply because someone challenges your choices. If you like, you can return challenging questions with questions of your own. Ask why.

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Fears arise from things we don't understand, things we have little or no knowledge of or experience with. The majority of people in Western culture attended school and many believe children need school to grow into competent adults. They cannot imagine another way.

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Show your children your own curiosity about the world. Answer their questions and help them find answers to the ones you don't know.

A Multitude of Resources

(Excerpted from *Unschooling: A Lifestyle of Learning* by Sara McGrath)

Homeschooling resources exist in abundance and continue to grow with the rapidly increasing population of homeschoolers. This final section includes a listing of

- Unschooling websites,
- Homeschooling websites,
- Educational websites for children,
- Open-source learning websites,
- Sources of free stuff,
- Educational supplies and services,
- Homeschool associations and groups,
- Unschooling conferences, and
- Sources of legal information.

Unschooling-Specific Websites

The following includes unschooling-specific websites and online publications.

Unschooling Lifestyle

<http://unschoolinglifestyle.com>

A hub for articles, news, videos, and other resources.

Unschooling America

<http://unschoolingamerica.com>

‘Freedom to learn with liberty and justice for all.’

Théâtre du Monde

<http://danielleconger.organiclearning.org/unschooling.html>

‘. . . where living in the world is learning!’

Connections ezine

<http://connections.organiclearning.org>

Ezine of unschooling and mindful parenting.

Sandra Dodd
<http://www.sandradodd.com>
Always learning.

Joyfully Rejoycing
<http://joyfullyrejoycing.com>
Unschooling, peaceful parenting, and living joyful family lives.

Do Life Right
<http://www.doliferight.com>
Unschooling, healthy living, mindful parenting.

John Holt and Growing Without Schooling
<http://www.holtgws.com>
Continuing the work of John Holt.

Growing Without Schooling
<http://www.unschooling.com/gws>
Archives of John Holt's magazine.

The Natural Child Project
<http://www.naturalchild.org/articles/learning.html>
Articles on learning and living with children.

Life Without School
<http://lifewithoutschool.typepad.com>
An online publication and blogging community.

Life Learning Magazine
<http://www.lifelearningmagazine.com>
'Personalized, non-coercive, interest-led learning from life.'

Homeschooling Websites

The following includes some of my favorite general homeschooling websites.

Learn in Freedom
<http://learninfreedom.org>
'Taking responsibility for your own learning.'

Home Education Magazine

<http://www.homeedmag.com>

Articles and resources with a focus on unschooling.

Homeschool.com

<http://www.homeschool.com>

Many articles and resources.

A to Z Home's Cool

<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com>

Lesson ideas, resources, and articles.

Best Homeschooling

<http://www.besthomeschooling.org>

'The best advice of seasoned homeschoolers and other educators.'

National Home Education Research Institute

<http://www.nheri.org>

Research and information.

Fun Educational Websites for Children

The following include a few of mine and my children's favorite, mostly free, kids' websites.

Starfall

<http://www.starfall.com>

'Learn to read.'

PBS Island

<http://pbskids.org/read>

'Raising readers.'

Cyberchase

<http://pbskids.org/cyberchase>

Math games and activities.

The League of Scientists

<http://www.theleagueofscientists.com>

Science games.

Poptropica
<http://www.poptropica.com>
Task completing adventure game.

Poisson Rouge
<http://www.poissonrouge.com>
Preschool games.

PBS Kids Sprout
<http://www.sproutonline.com>
Preschool games and activities.

Sesame Street
<http://www.sesamestreet.org>
Preschool and early education games and videos.

CBeebies
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies>
BBC children's games, stories, and activities.

PBS Kids Go!
<http://pbskids.org/go>
Online games.

Totlol
<http://www.totlol.com>
An inexpensive subscription to a kid-safe, community-moderated YouTube video interface.

. . . and many, many more. Check out our learning blog for more favorite kids' websites.

Dragon's Fire Learning
<http://dragonsfirelearning.blogspot.com>
My children's blog of interests and links. ♡

Open-Source Learning Communities

The following websites host free online courses.

Wikispaces for Educators

<http://www.wikispaces.com>

Create your own wikis or work collaboratively with other students and homeschoolers.

Connexions

<http://cnx.org>

Share expertise and experience in the form of online courses.

Wikiversity

<http://en.wikiversity.org>

Set learning free, preschool to university.

MIT Open Courseware

<http://ocw.mit.edu/OcwWeb/web>

Free courses, lecture notes, exams, and videos from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Homeschool Launch

<http://www.hslaunch.com>

Share homeschooling resources.

Homeschool Share

<http://www.homeschoolshare.com>

Share lapbook templates, unit studies, lesson plans, etc.

Homeschool Helper

<http://www.homeschoolhelperonline.com>

Share unit studies ideas and plans, lapbooks, worksheets, coloring pages, etc.

Free Stuff

Unschoolers, especially, specialize in taking advantage of free resources. Why buy what you can get for free and meet people in the process?

When I participated regularly in Freecycle, I met people with interests similar to mine. When my family prepared to move from one house to another, Freecyclers came and gratefully took away unwanted big, heavy desks and couches. Need something? Post a Wanted.

Freecycle

<http://www.freecycle.org>

Offer and request items of all kinds for no charge among local community members.

Paperback Swap

<http://www.paperbackswap.com>

Trade paperback books via mail for the cost of shipping.

Couch Surfing

<http://www.couchsurfing.org>

For the adventurous, host your couch to travelers and stay on other people's couches when you travel.

Educational Supplies and Services

The following include a few of my favorite homeschooling services and supply companies.

FUN Books

<http://fun-books.com>

Unschooling-oriented books, games, and other materials.

Homeschool Buyer's Co-op

<http://www.homeschoolbuyersco-op.org/?source=21877>

Participate in group buys and save money.

Edify at Home

<http://www.edifyathome.com>

Online auctions for homeschooling families.

eBay

<http://www.edifyathome.com>

Buy and sell online auctions.

Useborne

<http://www.usbornebooksandmore.com>

Children's books of all kinds.

Timberdoodle

<http://www.timberdoodle.com>

Family-owned homeschool supply company.

Brainwaves Toys

<http://www.brainwavestoy.com>

Educational toys and kits.

Budget Art Kids

<http://budgetartkids.com>

'Jump into art, jump into fun!'

Discount Dance Supply

<http://discountdance.com>

'Great dance clothes at great prices.'

Remo Percussion

<http://www.remo.com>

Professional-quality children's instruments.

LEGO Education

<http://legoeducation.us>

Hands-on math, science, and technology.

Homeschool Associations and Groups

A homeschooling group, particularly one that emphasizes unschooling, can provide a valuable source of support, especially to a family that does not otherwise know any homeschoolers or whose family does not support them. If your local group does not meet your needs, consider starting your own.

Support groups may organize field trips, activities, clubs, and discussion groups for homeschooling children as well as their parents. National, regional, and local groups exist to provide different services. Some groups operate only online while others get together to form local homeschooling communities. Larger homeschool associations

often list directories of regional groups.

Family Unschoolers Network

<http://www.unschooling.org>

Support for unschooling, homeschooling, and self-directed learning.

American Homeschool Association

<http://www.americanhomeschoolassociation.org>

Advocacy, support, information, and networking.

Home School Legal Defense Association

<http://www.hslda.org>

Advocacy, legal information, and news about legislation and legal cases.

The Canadian Homeschool Resource Page

<http://www.flora.org/homeschool-ca>

Information, resources, support, projects and events, laws and regulations.

Unschooling Conferences

Conferences typically provide speakers, workshops, and fun activities for the whole family.

Rethinking Education

<http://www.rethinkingeducation.net>

‘Rethink everything. Grow. Share. Love. Revolutionize your life.’

LIFE is Good

<http://www.lifeisgoodconference.com>

‘Learning In Freedom Everyday.’

Good Vibrations

<http://goodvibrationsconference.com>

‘Inspire, discuss, play, and spread lots of bubbly energy . . .’

The UnConvention

<http://unconvention.info>

‘Challenge, educate, and enrich people’s lives.’

Enjoy Life

<http://enjoylifeunschooling.com>

Presentations, funshops, chats and community events.

Great Big Happy Life

<http://www.greatbighappylife.com>

‘Connect with like-minded families, expand your notion of what it means to live with children, and participate in the unschooling movement as it changes the world.’

Unschoolers Winter Waterpark Gathering

<http://www.ugo.unschoolgathering.com>

Discussions, funshops, presentations, etc., at America’s largest indoor waterpark.

Unschooling Adventure Cruises

<http://www.unschoolingadventurecruise.blogspot.com>

‘A conference on the seas for unschooling families.’

Not Back to School Camp

<http://nbtsc.org>

A gathering for unschooled teenagers.

Laws and Regulations

Most governments allow homeschooling. Homeschool associations typically provide the most reliable sources of information about local homeschooling laws. To locate government sources, search for ‘Department of Education’ in the U.S. or ‘Ministry of Education’ in Canada.

Home School Legal Defense Association

<http://www.hslda.org>

International, national, and regional advocacy, legal information, and news about legislation and legal cases.

U.S. Department of Education

<http://www.ed.gov>

About the Author

Sara McGrath lives in a small town outside of Seattle. She spends time exploring the area and caring for three unschooling daughters, two felines, a husband, and a small garden, as well as writing for various online and print publications. Her first unschooling book, *Unschooling: A Lifestyle of Learning*, provides a practical handbook and overview of unschooling.

Unschooling Lifestyle
<http://unschoolinglifestyle.com>