

Home Schooling-Exploding the Myths

-by Brenda Rishia, OCHEC newsletter editor

Every time I meet someone who doesn't know about home schooling, I usually get asked the same questions: "Is it legal?", "Don't you have to be a certified teacher to do that?", "Don't you have to re-learn all the subjects yourself in order to teach the children?", "What about socialisation?", "Aren't your kids isolated?", "Who tests the children?", "Does the government give you the books you need?", "Do you have to let the school board know that you are home schooling?", "How do you find others who are also home schooling?", "How do you teach music/art/a foreign language that you yourself don't know how to do/speak?", "How do you get your kids to listen to you?",

It's time to tackle some myths about home schooling so that neophytes and veterans alike can benefit by having a ready answer.

Myth #1

Home schooling is not legal.

The truth: In Ontario, according to the Education Act, " 2) A child is excused from attendance at school if, (a) the child is receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere..."

What does this mean? One can argue that even within a public school setting, the child may not be receiving "satisfactory instruction" and you are therefore justified in being able to educate your child(ren) at home. In any case, Ontario parents have a legal right to educate their children at home.

Myth #2

You have to be a certified teacher.

The truth: There are no prerequisite qualifications for a parent to be able to teach. Any parent (or even grandparent!) can do it! There is no organisation, branch of the government, or school board who can "disqualify" you from home schooling on the basis of "lack of teacher-training credentials". You do not even have to be a high school graduate in order to teach your own children.

Myth #3

You have to learn/re-learn all the subjects you teach.

The truth: Because most home school curricula is self-explanatory, the parent only needs to be one lesson ahead of the student in learning or re-learning the subject. Most curricula is self-directed, so the concepts are explained at the beginning of each lesson. Therefore you do not have to be a rocket scientist in order to teach your high school student the principles of thermodynamics, you just need the companion teacher's guide and the answer book to the text book to help the two of you through it. For the faint-at-heart, especially when it comes to teaching high school maths and sciences, other languages, or music, help comes to you in the form of video schools, on-line computer learning, satellite classes, and distance education programs.

Myth #4

The children won't be properly socialised.

The truth: Children can be isolated or active socially whether they attend a public school or stay at home for school. Much depends on the child's personality. The

benefit of home schooling is that children get to interact with other children not only within their home but “outside” in their home school support groups, extra-curricular sports activities, out in the community, without the pressure from “peers”. Home schooled children often interact with differing age levels at the same time, learning to care for younger siblings, or older family members, as opposed to learning from peers whose maturity level and decision-making abilities are not necessarily a good influence on the child. The amount of interaction with other people depends sometimes on how involved outside the home the family wishes to be.

Myth #5

The government tests the children.

The truth: At the present time, the Ontario government is not involved with the testing of home educated children. They are looking into removing “institutional bias”, which may include allowing home schoolers access to the same tests the public schools write at certain grade levels (such as grade 3 and grade 10 literacy tests). Some of the options available to test a student are: purchase the accompanying test and quiz books that are part of the subject, by the curriculum publisher; or, for the elementary grades, pay to have a Canadian Achievement Test administered by an independent administrator; or, for the high school level, go to a local community college and pay to have them administer a Standard Achievement Test. Wise Choice Educational Service is one such testing facility that can test your child for learning disabilities or inefficiencies.

Myth #6

The Board of Education gives you the books you need.

The truth: No, you must purchase all the books, texts, tests, and supplies that you need. However, if you have a good relationship with your local school board, they are sometimes willing to loan you materials such as educational videos, French language learning audio tapes and computer programs free of charge, so long as you return them in good condition. The various home schooling conferences around the province usually have large vendor halls with lots of selections and examples of Christian textbooks and curricula, supplies, “how to home school” books for parents, alternative curricula, audio and video tapes, “creation” subject matter, and lots of helpful, friendly vendors who will proffer valuable information you will need to get started and how to use their materials in your home school.

Myth #7

You must inform the school board of your decision to home school.

The truth: There are two responses to this one, depending on circumstances.

1) If your children are currently registered with a local school board, you must send the board a letter informing them of your decision to home educate your child(ren). Do it with diplomacy, without condemning the school, teachers, system, or circumstances in any way. Your letter only needs to state that you have decided to home educate your children, according to your rights under the Education Act. End of story. We highly recommend you join the Home School Legal Defence Association of Canada (HSLDA), which will defend your rights, should you ever have to go to court. After you have pulled your children out of the school, the board may have a particular policy regarding its handling of home schoolers which may include one or two visits per year to the local public school, to show the principal samples of the student’s work, their books, and to “prove” the children are doing school with some kind of paper trail. Keep examples of their books, notebooks, and so on in a handy box that you can tote off to show the principal. You may be asked to show a course

outline, or scope and sequence (a plan) of the school year.

2) If your children have never attended a public school, there is no need to inform the board of your decision to home school, since the board does not know your children exist. However, it is wise to keep a paper trail of your children's school work, to show officials should a situation arise where you need to actually "prove" you are home schooling, not just letting the children stay at home to let's say, watch television all day. Join the Home School Legal Defence Association. Your membership fee shows you support the cause and can help cover the legal expenses of another family who is in trouble with the authorities.

Record-keeping is of significant importance especially when your student is in high school, so that if they decide to go on to post-secondary studies, such as college or university, there are records to show for the interviews (see article on page 8).

Myth #8

You're the only one in town home schooling

The truth: There are many home school support groups throughout the province. Ask any of our area representatives for the name of a group in your neighbourhood. In addition, there are many families who prefer not to join a group, or wish to remain "underground", but are still willing to have fellowship and interaction with other families. In the remote areas of Ontario, there is the possibility that your family really is the "only one in town" that is home schooling. In that case, try to attend home school conferences, even if only once a year, so you can be encouraged, refreshed, and built up. You will meet others at the conferences who may live far away but are close enough via email and telephone for you to be able to call upon when in need of some support.

Nationally, every province in Canada has families who home school, numbering in the thousands and growing each year, and internationally, millions home school around the world. Home schooling is very convenient for missionaries who wish to educate their children with a Christian world view, and not with the world view or secularistic/religious view of the host country.

Myth #9

Your children won't listen to/obey you.

The truth: With God's help, all things are possible. Pray a lot! Most children will cooperate when they realise you are determined in your call to home school and you do it with love. Home schooling ought to be a positive learning experience, for both the student and the parent. If your children are not "used to" obeying you, the change has to come from inside your heart first. When they witness the change in you, they are affected by it. Only in very rare cases are home schooled children very rebellious and disobedient continually towards the teaching parent, and I suggest very seriously to seek counselling through your pastor, or some spiritually mature person who has your best interests at heart. There are also many excellent Christian books on the market about child rearing, such as "Train Up a Child".

Finally, be encouraged that your choice to home educate your family is a God-given directive straight from Deuteronomy 6:7, "and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."; and from the book of Jeremiah 10:2a, "Thus saith the Lord, 'Learn not the way of the heathen'". As many studies have shown, children educated at home are often better educated than their public school counterparts, better adjusted socially, scoring higher on academic tests, and are rapidly becoming "desirable candidates" for post-secondary studies. May the Lord bless you and your family and give you a special measure of grace as

you seek to do His will in your and your family's lives.

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