

Homeschooling High School

Terri Johnson

When it comes to high school, most homeschooling parents approach these years with fear and trepidation. I will admit that I did, as well. But I am so pleased that we decided to take the plunge and continue home schooling our oldest daughter rather than pursuing private or public school for these final four years.

Are the high school years approaching in your home? I encourage you to stop, take a deep breath, and consider the possibility that homeschooling your high schooler might be a tremendous boon for you, your student and your whole family. Here are some reasons why. . .

1. This is when homeschooling really begins to pay off. Your student has become an independent learner and can schedule and manage his own work load. High school level work should not require a great amount of your time (although more of his than he might be used to!).
2. Ideally, your student, who is approaching high school, has become a real helper to you and her younger siblings. This is a wonderful time to have your teens home by your side, learning to cook, garden, manage a home, build a deck, balance a checkbook, etc. Often high schoolers enrolled in public or private school do not have time to learn practical life skills because of the excessive class time and increased home work that their teachers demand.
3. High Schoolers are fun to be around. This is when your children become your friends. Now, don't get me wrong, you still need to be their parent, BUT you are beginning to let go, little by little, letting them make their own mistakes, letting them learn from their own successes and failures. This is a time when kids can really begin to open up and talk - talk about real life issues, debatable topics, philosophical or theological differences, social pressures . . . Wouldn't you like to be the one that he or she turns to? Wouldn't you like to be the one that he asks advice from? Wouldn't you like to continue developing that life-long heart-to-heart friendship? Homeschooling the high school years can foster and grow this relationship because you have time to just "hang out" together.

So these are just a few reasons for you to consider as you decide whether or not you will press on. But how can it practically be done? This is a good question because we all know that high schoolers are learning material that is often above our heads. We often do not remember our Algebra 2 courses or advanced grammar exercises.

Here are some ideas that you can think about that might make homeschooling high school a more do-able scenario for you and your student:

RESEARCH

One of the intimidating factors about homeschooling high school is that it is most likely a 4 year decision. It is a lot easier to pull your student out of public high school than it is to stick him back in. Do your research before you make this big decision. Find out what type of subjects and the number of credits that your state requires. You can probably just do a Google search to find this information. Find out what needs to be recorded on a transcript and begin keeping this information from year 1 - when your student is finishing her freshman year. Find out what kind of programs are offered in your area for high school teens. That brings me to my next point.

OUTSOURCE

I don't know about you, but there are just some subjects I would rather not teach. I have found out that there are many, many classes out there that my teens can take for high school credit, such as science, math, writing, speech/debate, spanish, etc. Most of these classes are taught by private instructors in a traditional style classroom setting (although smaller than a public school classroom - usually 8-10 students). Many classes can be taken from our local junior college for dual credit. Tutors are available to teach one or more subjects that I do not want to teach. And classes can also be found online, taught through virtual conference rooms and corresponding through email. Think outside the box and find out what types of programs are available for your students.

MAKE A PLAN

You do not have to plan everything out in advance, but jot out a rough plan for your high school student's education, knowing that it will change as he specializes in certain subjects as high school progresses. If you know that your son dislikes foreign language, then just plan for 2 years of Spanish, instead of 3 or 4. If your daughter wants to work for NASA, then four years of higher math needs to be planned into the schedule. If you have a student that wants to work in Bible translation, then continue with grammar and even beginning linguistics all the way through the four years. So, make a plan, but stay flexible for changes down the road ahead. Your teen doesn't need to know right now what his career is going to be, but he should be thinking about it.

ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

Help your students to understand that their classes are their responsibility and that you are not going to hand them an "A" or a 4.0 on a silver platter. Good grades must be earned. This is the time to get your teen a planner where she can break down her assignments and write them into her day's schedule. Let her make some decisions about how and when she will study her subjects, as long as she completes her assignments on time (she still reports to you as teacher). You will no longer need to hover over every assignment, but do insist that she turn in her work on time (whether that be once a week or something else that you decide). Tell your student up front what is required to gain an "A" in a particular subject. Then place the responsibility for earning that "A" in her lap. Now, that said, you can decide that a 1 credit course is not quite complete in May and give your teen a month or

two more to finish the requirements. Again, you are the teacher and can make these critical decisions along the way. Or you might choose to give half a credit now and the other half during the following year if those requirements are finished up later.

COLLEGE BOUND

It is so hard to know when your student is entering his freshman year, whether he will attend college or not at the end of four years' time. However, it is important to choose a route at the beginning so that all requirements are finished during the high school years. In other words, unless you are certain that your child will not attend college, it is best to choose a college bound course of action. In this way, all the requirements that he will need to apply for and be accepted into the college or university of his choice will be completed. You may even want to look into the requirements of specific colleges and universities that your son or daughter might be interested in attending so that you can plan to meet them in the next four years.

Often your student can take courses at your local community college and earn dual credit during his junior and senior year. This may be an added benefit for acceptance into his college of choice or may hurt his chances. It's best to find out before he takes dual credit. Your child may also want to take some CLEP (College Level Examination Program) tests along the way in order to test out of some college classes that are general in nature and cover material already learned during the high school years (i.e. general biology).

You may be certain that your son or daughter will not pursue a college degree, but rather apprentice or start his or her own business, or take another path. That is fine and then you can plan for more freedom or focus during the high school years. If carpentry is the career of choice, then by all means, put some of the school books aside and get out there and build things. But remember, carpenters use math every single day! If in doubt about whether your child needs a class, have him take it to be on the safe side!

Do not fear the high school years. They are delightful, focused and rewarding. Consider homeschooling your high schooler. I think you will be pleasantly surprised. I was!

Enjoy those learning moments . . .

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Biographical Information

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Todd and Terri have been married 20 years, home teaching their children for 12 years and operating a publishing business - Knowledge Quest, Inc.

(www.knowledgequestmaps.com) - that specializes in history and geography curricula for the homeschool marketplace for the past 8 years. They are currently teaching an online class – Homeschooling ABCs (www.homeschoolingabcs.com) – providing guidance and instruction for new and/or overwhelmed homeschooling parents. Their high school level course will be available this coming April 2009.