

How to Be a Good Unschooler

Editor's Pick. Written by Pam Sorooshian.

1. Give your love generously and criticism sparingly. Be your children's partner. Support them and respect them. Never belittle them or their interests, no matter how superficial, unimportant, or even misguided their interests may seem to you. Be a guide, not a dictator. Shine a light ahead for them, and lend them a hand, but don't drag or push them. You WILL sometimes despair when your vision of what your child ought to be bangs up against the reality that they are their own person. But that same reality can also give you great joy if you learn not to cling to your own preconceived notions and expectations.

2. Homeschooled children who grow up in a stimulating and enriched environment surrounded by family and friends who are generally interested and interesting, will learn all kinds of things and repeatedly surprise you with what they know. If they are supported in following their own passions, they will build strengths upon strengths and excel in their own ways whether that is academic, artistic, athletic, interpersonal, or whichever direction that particular child develops. One thing leads to another. A passion for playing in the dirt at six can become a passion for protecting the natural environment at 16 and a career as a forest ranger as an adult. You just never ever know where those childhood interests will eventually lead. Be careful not to squash them; instead, nurture them.

3. Bring the world to your children and your children to the world. Revel in what brings you together as a family. Watch tv and movies and listen to music and the radio. Laugh together, cry together, be shocked together. Analyze and critique and think together about what you experience. Notice what your child loves and offer more of it, not less. What IS it about particular shows that engage your child—build on that. Don't operate out of fear. Think for yourself and about your own real child. Don't be swayed by pseudostudies done on school children.

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