

HOME SCHOOLING Q&A

This information is not intended as legal advice. Rather, it attempts to explain the Biblical worldview that forms the basis of our home education, to address questions frequently raised by home educators, and to answer those questions based on the collective experience and wisdom of many Christian home educators in New Jersey. The questions and answers here are to help equip the Christian home educator respond to family, neighbors, friends, and public officials concerning their choice to home educate their children.

This is a synthesis of responses by ENOCH Board members and Christian support group leaders in New Jersey. As such, it represents the view of those who believe in the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ and the obligation we have to proper civil authority as long as that civil authority does not overstep its legal bounds and does not offer itself as superior to God's authority.

*The following Q&A section was originally reviewed by
the following NJ home education leaders:*

Richard & Star Chipman

Dave & Sue Ellis

Steve Felts

Greg & Kathy Finnegan

Judy Harrison

Randy & Connie King

Donna Michaluk

Cathy Miller

Rob & Lori Rechten

Mike & Mary Roukas

Jane Risdon

Nick & Kathy Salardino

Mark & Eve Silver

Ray & Janeen Stoeber

Dave & Debbie Swanson

INTRODUCTION

We are Christians and we are parents. In both these capacities, we believe that we are in the best position to guide the education of our children. As Christians we accept guidance from Scripture that admonishes us to educate our children. In Deuteronomy Chapter 6 the Bible states:

"And These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

The culture around us defines morality in completely relative terms. Living for self and the moment is no longer an idle theory presented in college classrooms and promote forms of the media. Moral relativism has flooded the high school, junior high, and elementary school level and forms the philosophical basis for the secular curriculum. The wisdom of Proverbs 6:20-23 states eloquently:

"My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother; bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life."

In addition, we live in a culture which speaks of the "right's" of children while the incidence of child abuse has risen dramatically in this generation. Through home education we can better protect our children's innocence while directing them to a life that honors God. Psalm 78:7 states:

"...that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments."

Home education is more than choosing an education alternative to public and private school education. Home education is a structured way to raise our families. It is the Lord's way, based on His word. In the sheltered and nurturing environment of our homes, free of many of the pressures and distractions of the world, we aim to equip our children to serve as salt and light in this life.

"Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

1. “SHOULDN’T OUR CHILDREN BE “SALT AND LIGHT” TO CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SCHOOL?”

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, he chose men, not boys. He disciplined them until they were ready. This required walking with them, living with them, praying with them, disciplining them. There was no formal classroom. In order to minister properly, they had to learn through daily living experience.

There is a parallel time of equipping and discipling our children that is required before they are sent out to be ambassadors for Christ. Without this period of training, many would fall to humanistic teachings by the adults they come into contact with and from the pressure of the world's standards exerted by non-Christian peers.

2. “SHOULDN’T WE SUPPORT CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS BY HAVING OUR CHILDREN ATTEND THEM?”

Christian schools tend to have many of the problems (peer pressure, poor behavior models, large classrooms, age segregation) that exist in the public schools. Parents should not have a false sense of security in turning their children over to anyone. Although parents choose the mode of education - public, private (Christian), private (non-Christian), home-based - it is clear from Scripture that God intends for parents to teach their children. The first priority is to follow that commission. Parents who send their children to government school must still actively be about the business of instructing their children. Home education is a way that better focuses that effort and fulfills the responsibility we all share.

3. “WHAT ABOUT GETTING MY CHILDREN ‘SOCIALIZED’?”

Many parents have been so convinced by society of the importance of socialization that they have let it overshadow Godly training. Some parents put greater emphasis on socialization than on academic learning, which is supposed to be the primary function of secular schools. Interestingly, this is the first objection the National Education Association raises to home schooling. Yet, socialization begins in the home. Each child must learn to interact with parents and siblings first. God desires that character be shaped in children before leaving the home.

ENOCH is in contact with over 75 support groups in New Jersey (fall '99). These support groups are made up of home schooling families with children of varying ages. This more closely resembles the “real world” since as adults we deal with people of varying ages. The classroom filled with individuals of the same age does not reflect reality. To “socialize” our children in a room filled with their peers eliminates the vertical learning that is necessary for growth. Children may be generally interested in their peers, but they must not be allowed to become peer-dependent.

By agreeing with this view of socialization, we are saying that what is learned from peers is more important than academics or than values transmitted by parents. Home schooling gives a child the opportunity to learn from the older, teach the younger, and be out in the "real world." Our children go with us everywhere, and see the good and the bad...not just read about it in the textbook. Many educational field trips provide good opportunities for socialization with other Christian children. The peer contacts that our children have as home schoolers are far more positive than the random associations afforded on school

buses, on the playground, and in other typical school situations, many of which are minimally supervised, leaving children vulnerable to negative socialization. Socialization calls for conformity to the group. Christian parents need to be wise when choosing the model their children will emulate.

4. “CAN I EXPECT THE PUBLIC SCHOOL TO ASSIST ME IN MY HOMESCHOOLING EFFORTS?”

Even though you are a taxpayer, once you declare your intention to home school, State Department of Education officials tell Superintendents that... “since students instructed at home are not carried on local registers, they have no right to attendance at any school function limited to enrolled students or to participation in extra-curricular activities.”

Also, schools sometimes refer to insurance liabilities and the fact that the home schooling student is not covered by the school's insurance. Additionally, schools are funded based on the number of students attending daily class sessions. While there are initiatives underway in New Jersey to provide some ancillary services to non-public school students, ENOCH can not say at this time to what extent these initiatives will include home school students.

Occasionally home school parents ask the local school for books or other materials, but the school is not obligated to cooperate. Christians generally prefer curriculum materials from Christian publishers because their content will be consistent with a Biblical worldview.

5. “CAN PARENTS OF SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN HOME SCHOOL?”

Yes. In fact, one-to-one instruction by a dedicated, loving parent should provide considerably more opportunity for the child to succeed. Curriculum and materials are available, including the three New Jersey Learning Resource Centers which specialize in special education materials. Information on these and other special needs resources is available through the ENOCH office.

6. “CAN THOSE PARENTS EXPECT HELP FROM THE LOCAL SCHOOL?”

There is an issue here about the basis of the home school legal precedence in New Jersey. The New Jersey education statute says that children must attend a public school “...or a day school in which there is given instruction equivalent to that provided in the public schools for children of similar grades...or receive equivalent instruction elsewhere than at school.”

Parents who seek help from the public school for special needs must be aware that their request could mean relinquishing their own authority to home educate if it could be demonstrated that they cannot provide “equivalent instruction” at home. “Help” may also come in the form of Child Study Teams, harmful labeling and humanistic materials. ENOCH recommends that parents contact HSLDA’s special needs department for helpful assistance in those decisions.

7. “DO I NOTIFY OR ASK PERMISSION FROM ANYONE TO HOME SCHOOL?”

Technically, no. There is no specific law in New Jersey requiring you to contact school officials. Of course, as Christians we have a responsibility before God to be properly and responsibly educating our children. Therefore, we have nothing to hide. Not contacting

school officials does not mean parents are concealing anything, but a school official may contact you, as it is their legal right to ask questions about your children's education. It is your choice whether or not you notify the local superintendent of your intentions. However, if you are withdrawing your enrolled child from a public or private school it is recommended that you do notify (in the proper way).

8. "HOW WOULD I NOTIFY THE SCHOOL ABOUT MY DECISION TO HOME SCHOOL?"

Notify your Superintendent, not the Principal, by mail stating (not asking) your intention to home school and listing your curriculum. Remember, you are merely exercising your right to home educate. One home school leader reports that she begins her annual letter with "to comply with state requirements..." Attach a copy of the MASSA decision and/or the 1982 Superintendent's letter from the Commissioner of Education, both are contained in this booklet. Send this information via registered mail to ensure its arrival. You may send in a notarized affidavit rather than a letter (see Escalation Chart and sample Affidavits).

The Superintendent's primary concern should be that you are knowledgeable and responsible. From your perspective, you want to declare that you are legally home educating and are knowledgeable and organized.

We encourage you to **do your notification in writing - not in person**. Establish a file with copies of all correspondence to and from the Superintendent.

9. "WHAT IF A SCHOOL OFFICIAL QUESTIONS MY LETTER OR ITS CONTENT?"

If you are contacted by phone, be kind and courteous. Ask whomever is calling to send in writing specific details of what they feel is not equivalent.

If you receive a letter that does not contain specific details, write to the person who signed this letter and ask them for specific details. If the person originating the letter is not the Superintendent, send a copy of the letter to the Superintendent.

If you receive a letter that identifies specific details that take exception to your curriculum, send a response. If you have not already sent the Massa decision and/or the 1982 Superintendent's letter from the Commissioner of Education, send that and state that you have complied with the law. Again, we encourage you to keep this and all communication in writing and keep copies in your records.

10. "WHAT IF WE ARE ASKED TO GO TO THE SCHOOL FOR A MEETING?"

On occasion, a school official has pressed for a meeting. The return letter described in question #9 has sometimes caused the official to drop the issue of a meeting. If you have legal counsel, consult with them before agreeing to a meeting. A letter from an attorney may end a request for a meeting.

Still, there are conditions when a meeting *may seem* the best way to avert future problems (see escalation chart). If you agree to a meeting:

1. Pray.
2. Ask what their concerns are.

3. Do not sign anything.
4. Make no agreements, especially if you feel pressured to agree to something you don't want to do, or you feel is not right.
5. Remember, your demeanor is a testimony of your Christian life.

Following such a meeting, you can always seek advice or legal counsel.

11. "WHAT IF A SCHOOL OFFICIAL OR SOCIAL WORKER COMES TO MY DOOR?"

As much as possible, you should be polite, and:

1. Pray immediately for wisdom, protection and a Godly attitude.
2. YOU DON'T HAVE TO LET THEM IN. Speak to them outside your door's threshold.
3. Ask for their name, title, address and phone and the purpose of their visit.
4. If they represent the school, tell them you are legally home schooling and that home visits are not part of the law. Ask them to put any complaints in a letter.
5. If they are not school officials and there is an issue about their returning without a letter, tell them to return when your husband is at home.
6. If you are a member of HSLDA, call them, ask for a lawyer, hand the phone to your visitors and ask them to talk to your lawyer.

In general, keep the conversation short. It is best to get everything in writing since the law is on your side. These untoward actions are typically taken by superintendents or other officials who are acting independently of the law (or knowledge of the law). An uninformed official may act as though they are in compliance with the law, when in fact they are not.

12. "WHAT IF THE SCHOOL WANTS TO TEST MY CHILD?"

Advise any official who brings up testing that testing and/or monitoring is not required by law. You can tell them that you may (or will) have your child tested, but you will do so privately. This can be done through sources listed in our Resource section. The school is not entitled to the test results.

13. "WHAT IF WE JOIN HOME SCHOOL LEGAL DEFENSE ASSOCIATION?"

Families which join HSLDA must comply with their regulations in order to be properly represented. Information concerning HSLDA is located in the Resource section. *If you are considering joining HSLDA, it is advisable that you obtain their information prior to contacting your local school district.*

14. "WHAT DEFINES GRADUATION AND WHAT ABOUT COLLEGE ?"

There is no diploma or certificate of completion issued by the local school district for private or home school students. Some correspondence schools do issue diplomas or certificates of completion. Parents of high school students often have their children take GED tests to formally complete the high school obligation. These may be taken at age 16. Some students then take junior college classes to build upon their home school studies. Junior college classes may be taken before the GED is taken even as young as 14. You can earn your GED while attending Junior Collage. Home school students may take the same SAT and college entrance exams as any student. Colleges vary as to what they will accept, but because home education is more prevalent, colleges are gladly accepting the portfolios and essays of home schooled students as proof of high school completion

equivalency.

You may prefer to have your student experience apprenticeship opportunities that teach varied life-skills from knowledgeable teachers that possess high character.

Integral to any choice is the need for well-maintained records and transcripts