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Thinking About Home Educating?

A practical first-steps guide

What to actually expect, and what to decide before day one.

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Why families choose this

There's no single “right” reason to home educate, officially called Elective Home Education (EHE) in the UK, though we'll just say “home education” from here on for readability, and you don't owe anyone a justification for the choice. Common reasons include: school genuinely not meeting a child's needs despite real effort on both sides, recovery from burnout caused by years of masking to cope in a classroom, wanting a different pace or rhythm than a school day allows, or simply a values-based preference for learning outside an institution. All of these are legitimate starting points.

Common Myths Worth Clearing Up First

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- **“You need to be a qualified teacher.”**
  You don't. No formal teaching qualification is required to home educate in the UK. What actually matters is whether a child is receiving a suitable education for their age, ability and aptitude, which is a far broader bar than replicating a classroom.
- **“You need to follow the National Curriculum.”**
  You don't. Home educating families aren't required to follow it, which is exactly what makes an individually paced, interest-led or adapted approach possible in the first place.
- **“It has to look like school, just at home.”**
  It doesn't, and for many neurodivergent children, trying to recreate a school day at home imports the same difficulties without any of the reasons a school actually needs that structure.
- **“Once you start, you're locked in.”**
  You're not. Home education can be a temporary arrangement, a long-term one, or something revisited every year depending on how it's going. Returning to school later is always possible to explore if circumstances change.
- **“Your child will miss out on friendships.”**
  Socialising looks different, not absent. Home education groups, clubs, and community activities provide a different social structure to school, not an automatically worse one.

The legal side: start here, not with us

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This guide isn't the place for legal specifics, and we don't want it to become one. Deregistering from a school roll, local authority contact, and what's expected of you as a home educator are all genuinely legal matters, we're not legally qualified to advise on them, and rules can and do change, which is exactly the kind of thing a guide like this shouldn't be the last word on.

For reliable, up-to-date legal information: Education Otherwise (www.educationotherwise.org) is a long-standing, dedicated UK home education charity and a genuinely good place to start, for the legal process itself and for wider practical support from people who actually know the current picture. Please check there, not here, before relying on anything legal.

What a week can actually look like

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There's no single home education model, and most families land somewhere between these:

- **Structured, “school at home”:**
  a timetable with defined subjects and times. Can suit children who want predictability and a clear sense of what's coming next.
- **Unschooling (sometimes called autonomous or interest-led education):**
  the child's own curiosity drives what gets explored, with far less fixed structure. Can suit children, including many with a PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance) profile, for whom imposed structure itself is the barrier.
- **Hybrid:**
  a loose structure (an anchor routine, a core focus block) with flexible space for interest-led exploration around it. Many families end up here after some trial and error.

None of these is more “real” education than the others. The right one is whichever your specific child and family can actually sustain.

Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Start

Worth sitting with, not answering in five minutes

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There's no right answer to any of these, and you don't need to have them fully resolved before you begin. But sitting with them honestly tends to save a difficult few months later.

- **What's actually driving this decision, right now?**
  _____
- **Who else needs to be involved in making it work (a partner, other children, your own work)?**
  _____
- **What does a sustainable week realistically look like for you, not an ideal one?**
  _____
- **What support do you already have access to, and what will you need to find?**
  _____
- **What would tell you, honestly, that this isn't working?**
  _____

Worth doing now, while it's calm: that last question isn't pessimism, it's a safety net. Deciding in advance, while things are calm, what "this isn't working" would actually look like makes it far easier to notice and act on later, rather than pushing through out of a sense of having committed.

The first month: what's normal

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Most families go through a period sometimes called deschooling, unwinding from school's pace and expectations before a genuine home education rhythm appears. This can take weeks, sometimes longer, especially after a difficult school experience. During this period it's common to see reduced pressure, the reappearance of a child's curiosity and personality once school-related stress has lifted, and, often, very little that looks like conventional "lessons" at all.

Worth remembering: if the early weeks feel disorganised, that's a normal part of the process, not a sign you're doing it wrong.

Practical Logistics

Worth thinking through before day one

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- How you'll keep a simple record of what's covered, useful for your own confidence and memory regardless of what's formally required, Education Otherwise can tell you what, if anything, applies in your situation.
- What resources you'll actually use: the library, free online resources, local home education groups and their shared resources.
- How socialising will work in practice: home education groups, clubs and meetups provide a different social structure to school, not a worse one, but a genuinely different one worth deliberately seeking out.
- Your own capacity, and whether any subjects are better outsourced to a tutor or a group class rather than taught by you directly.

Costs: What to Actually Budget For

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Home education can be run cheaply or expensively, there's no fixed cost, but a few categories are worth planning for rather than discovering as you go.

- **Resources and materials:**
  workbooks, art supplies, science kits and similar add up gradually. Libraries, free online resources, and shared resources within local home education groups can keep this modest if needed.
- **Group and club fees:**
  home education groups, forest school sessions and clubs often charge a small session fee. Worth checking what's available locally and what it typically costs before committing to a regular routine built around them.
- **Tutoring or outsourced subjects:**
  if you plan to bring in a tutor for one or two subjects rather than teach everything yourself, this is usually the single largest ongoing cost, worth pricing up in advance if it's part of your plan.
- **The cost of reduced working hours:**
  for many families, the biggest real cost isn't resources at all, it's one parent's reduced income or working hours. Worth costing honestly alongside the rest, not treated as a separate question.
- **Exams, later on, if relevant:**
  GCSEs and other formal qualifications taken as a private candidate usually involve exam centre fees, worth being aware of even this early, so it's not a surprise further down the line.

The honest hard parts

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- **Parent burnout is a real risk.**
  There's no assigned break from your child built into the day the way school provides one. Plan deliberate recovery time for yourself, not as a luxury, as part of making this sustainable.
- **Identity friction is common.**
  You become “teacher” as well as parent, and that blending doesn't always sit comfortably, for you or your child.
- **Isolation from the school-day rhythm affects parents too,**
  not just children. Seeking out other home educating parents, even briefly, tends to help more than expected.

Where to find real support

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Look for a local home education group in your area, often organised through Facebook or similar, as a first port of call for everyday, practical support and company. For anything legal, or for a broader national picture, Education Otherwise (www.educationotherwise.org) is the place to go, it's kept current in a way a printed guide like this one simply can't be.

Your First 30 Days

A simple action list, not a race to complete it

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- [ ] Confirm the legal process for your situation with Education Otherwise before doing anything else.
- [ ] If deregistering from a school roll, do this formally in writing, following current guidance.
- [ ] Find and join at least one local home education group, even just to observe at first.
- [ ] Expect, and allow for, a deschooling period rather than planning lessons from week one.
- [ ] Set up a simple way to keep a loose record of what's explored, even a notebook is enough to start.
- [ ] Have the “what would tell us this isn't working” conversation while things are calm, not mid-crisis.
- [ ] Plan at least one small thing in the first month that's just for your own recovery, not for your child's education.

Worth remembering: thirty days is a planning horizon, not a deadline. Moving through this list slowly, or out of order, is completely fine.

A closing note

This is a starting point, not a complete plan for how your home education journey will go. In the same spirit as everything else here: practical orientation for the decision in front of you right now, not a promise that it will be simple once you begin.

If you're ready for the next stage, the companion guide “How to Be a Home Educator” picks up once you're underway, covering the ongoing rhythm, structure, and challenges of the journey rather than the first-steps questions covered here.

Where to Get Help, and a Few Safety Notes

This guide is general information, a set of practical ideas and different ways of looking at things. It is not medical, mental health, legal or safeguarding advice, and it cannot replace a professional who knows your child. Every child is different, and what helps one child can be unsuitable for another. If something here does not feel right for your child, trust your own judgement and ask a professional.

If you are worried about your child

- Talk to your GP, or your child's school SENCO or pastoral team. Say what you are seeing and how long it has been going on.
- Waiting lists for children's mental health services (CAMHS) are long in many areas. That is not your fault. Ask what support is available in the meantime, in school and locally.
- If things get worse while you wait, say so again. You have not used up your chance.

If a child says they want to hurt themselves

- Stay calm, listen and take it seriously. Do not promise to keep it secret and do not leave them alone if you think they may act on it. Get help the same day through your GP or NHS 111, or call 999 if they are in immediate danger.

A note on home education and the law

- We are not qualified to give legal advice, and the rules change. For up-to-date legal information and support, please contact Education Otherwise (educationotherwise.org) and your own local authority.

Helplines

In an emergency or if someone is in danger	**999**
NHS 111, for urgent advice	**111**
Childline, for children and young people (free, any time)	**0800 1111**
YoungMinds Parents Helpline (weekdays)	**0808 802 5544**
Samaritans, for anyone (free, any time)	**116 123**
Contact, for families with disabled children (weekdays)	**0808 808 3555**

More helplines and support organisations are at neurodivergentminds.com/help.html. Phone numbers and services change, so please check each organisation's own website for current details.