

So you've decided to home educate but now you are worried about how you will ever afford all of those flashy curriculum resources, especially if home education means living on one income as it does for most families.

The good news is that home education does not have to be expensive.

You don't really need that \$1000 maths program you saw nor do you need to purchase an entire curriculum or even a reading program.

I recommend that, no matter what your budget, you think carefully before you spend any money on any home education resources at all.

Have a think about what you would like your children to learn and how you might go about assisting them to learn those things without spending a lot of money. Your method of keeping within your budget will differ from other home educators because your home education will vary from the next home educator. You don't have to home educate the way they do and you don't have to buy the same materials as they have. You need to find what works for you and your family and keep within your budget. In the end you might decide to invest in some of the more expensive items but there's no need to rush in before you think about what you really need, what you already have and what you can improvise. It is also wise to keep in mind that your home education program and style may evolve over time. It would be a shame to realise that you can't afford to buy the resources you really need because you lashed out on an expensive program that turned out to be of little use.

So with that in mind here are some suggestions for home educating on a budget but you will come up with other ideas of your own as you go and those will be better than anything someone else suggests because they will suit your circumstances and family perfectly.

Regard your whole house as a place of learning

Have a look around your house and notice how many learning resources you already have. You probably have a collection of books, toys and games that can be incorporated into your home education plans. You probably already have alphabet books or posters - have another look at them and think about whether you can use those instead of buying a phonics program. Board games are great for learning

maths skills - ranging from the basic counting in *Snakes and Ladders* to calculating interest and rents in *Monopoly* and plotting coordinates in *Battleship*. You no doubt have children's books that you can use to teach reading. Clothes pegs and buttons, even sultanas or smarties can be used as maths counters instead of the expensive, purchased manipulatives.

Everyday Experiences

Stop and think for a moment - how did your children learn to walk and talk? Did you have to invest in lots of specialised equipment or expensive programs? Of course not. Learning at home quite naturally doesn't have to end there. Even if you have decided that natural learning sounds way too risky for you, give some thought to what can be learnt in your household whilst the children accompany you and assist you in your normal weekly activities. Once you start to think about taking advantage of the learning opportunities that your life naturally presents, you will be amazed at how many there are and how little they cost. If you wish, you can then begin to supplement these experiences with some cheap workbooks.

Think about your normal household activities. Cooking is a great home education activity where children can learn Maths (practical measurement with the scales, fractions with cups and spoon measurements etc.), Science (how things react together with heat etc), and English skills (learning to read recipes and talking about the process of cooking).

How about your other home activities - gardening, sewing, woodwork and so on. Think about the skills involved and how they dovetail with learning essential academic skills. Primary schools go to great lengths to set up a 'growing a seed' activity for young children and then watch and record its growth. You can do this easily at home. You can also do weather readings and you can do science experiments with kitchen ingredients. Sand, mud and water play are both great and inexpensive for science and maths skills - you can study measurement and volume for example on a hot day with a big dish of water outside. What about the ants and caterpillars and other assorted creatures in your backyard? They too can provide free science lessons. Sewing involves practical measurement skills and things like knitting and patchwork involve recognising and repeating a pattern. Carpentry involves measurement and geometry.

How about your grocery shopping? Think of the learning opportunities it presents. You can have practical lessons in addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, weights, measurements, estimation, percentages, change and value for money. How about working to a budget, calculating change, and comparing prices for volume - which is cheaper, the 1.5 kg pack of washing powder for \$5.50 amount or the 5kg box for \$12.80? And that's just the tip of the iceberg in maths alone. Stores are filled with large print especially designed to be easily recognisable. You can use these for reading practice. Young children can also have a short list with a few items that they have to watch out for - like a treasure hunt where they are looking to match the word 'Weetbix' for example. Grocery shopping also inevitably results in discussions about the food we eat and why, nutrition, diets and healthy eating. This is valuable learning and is covered in school under SOSE. You will cover it long before school-age children get to it and you will cover it in context. You don't need to buy a workbook on healthy eating, nor do you need a book to teach your children healthy habits like caring for their bodies and cleaning their teeth.

Start to think of the conversations you have as an essential part of your home education. Even when you are talking about something mundane, the children are getting experience with speaking and listening - both are skills which are specifically addressed in the primary school English curriculum. Your children may also be learning other subjects at the same time. Many early mathematical concepts for example are covered very naturally in conversation - empty, full, heavy, light, close, far, less than, more than, on top of. These things are taught in grade prep maths. You don't need to spend any money to teach your children these things - you have all the equipment you need in your kitchen cupboards.

Your conversational learning can cover many things - from the day's news to why the sky is blue. Keep on talking and keep on listening and learning will just keep happening for free.

Inexpensive Resources

One of the best resources to home educators is completely free - your local library. You can use it not only to borrow lots of fiction for the kids, but also as resource material for everything they are interested in. You can also use it as a resource for yourself. Not sure why the sky is blue? Not sure how to teach reading? Check out the resources at your

library. They will also have great resources in the maths section and plenty of books on science experiments you can do at home. Naturally they cater for all ages and levels.

Don't underestimate your children's librarian either. She is likely to be a fantastic resource in herself. Have a chat to her one day and explain that you are home educating. You will probably find that she is quite accepting and encouraging of home education as librarians are probably more likely than any other professionals to have come into regular contact with home educators. They generally appreciate our thirst for learning and want to help in any way they can. If you tell your librarian that your daughter really enjoyed reading the Tashi series and ask for a recommendation for something similar, she will probably hand you half a dozen books. If you tell her you are looking for something for an eight year old who is interested in physics, she will point you in the right direction. If you ask her to recommend some fiction which covers maths skills, she will be able to help.

You might also like to consider joining your local TAFE or university library. Members of the public can join as community borrowers for around \$50 a year. If you have teenagers, these libraries may yield some fantastic resources and, if it happens to be a university that has an education faculty, it is likely to have teaching equipment, games and resources available for loan as well as a children's section of fiction and non-fiction. Student teachers access all these materials to assist with learning how to teach and you can access them also if you wish. Have a good look around before you decide whether it is worth your while to join. How easy is it to access the library - in terms of the hours it is open, the parking available and how difficult it is to use the library, possibly with several small children in tow?

Second hand book sales and garage sales will yield useful resources as can Ebay if you know what you want and how much you are prepared to spend on it.

You will need some simple mathematical equipment - rulers, tape measures, a compass, protractor and so on. You will also need some writing and drawing materials for the children. All of these things can be purchased quite cheaply in the supermarket, as can beginner Maths and English books.

The internet is another great resource which, for home educators, is a very cost effective tool as it opens up a huge range of resources for a fairly reasonable cost. In many ways

it is like having an instant library in your own home. For a moderate price per month you can have access to stacks of downloadable worksheets, games and programs if you wish to use them as well as a fantastic research tool for your students as they get older and move into projects and autonomous research. Teach them how to use a good search engine and they will have material from across the world at their fingertips.

You will find your own favourite websites with the kinds of educational materials you need. If you are not sure where to find them, use your favourite search engine and search for just what you need - e.g. "free reading program" or "free phonics program" or "fractions worksheets" or "Montessori maths" or "chemistry podcasts" and so on.

Your Community

Your local community can also be used for various inexpensive learning experiences. Parks, museums, exhibitions, public lectures, clubs and special interest groups all yield their own learning experiences. Community courses and mentors may also be available.

Don't forget your extended family. If they are nearby and supportive of your decision to home educate, they may be able to assist with the various skills and resources they have. If they don't live nearby, they might still like to be involved by sending your children letters or postcards and receiving letters and drawings in return or, as the children get older, being 'subscribers' to family newspapers that your children run or receiving copies of projects the children are particularly proud of.

Home education groups, magazines, newsletters, and email lists will also help you to find lots of great websites and other cheap resources. Home education groups may also run activities, classes and excursions at reasonable prices as they exist to support home educators rather than make a profit.

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