Hesitant to Homeschool?

ANSWERS TO 20 COMMON QUESTIONS

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To my loving husband and our wonderful children—your inspiration, support, and love make all things possible.

—Jessica

To Micah, Ruby, and Maisy—you are my sunshine and rainbows. I love homeschooling you. To Marcus, for being my partner and cheerleader in this grand adventure.

—Mandi

Contents

Introduction 1

Part I: I Want to Homeschool, but What If 7

1. What If I Don't Know the Content? 8
2. What If I Don't Know How to Teach? 22
3. What If My Child Won't Learn from Me? 29
4. What If I Don't Have the Patience? 42
5. What If I Don't Have the Space? 50
6. What If I Don't Know What to Do All Day? 57
7. What If I Can't Afford It? 75

Part II: Missing Out 81

8. Will My Child Miss Out on the School Experience? 82
9. Will My Child Miss Out on Community? 92
10. Will My Child Miss Out on Diversity? 101
11. Will My Child Miss Out on the Academic Classroom? 109
12. What Will I Miss Out on If I Homeschool? 117
13. What Will We Miss Out on If We Don't Homeschool? 126

Part III: The Big Ones 135

14. What about Socialization? 136
15. Will My Child Fall Behind? 145
16. What about College? 152
17. Can I Homeschool My Neurodivergent or Gifted Learner? 161
18. What about the Naysayers? 174
19. Is It Possible to Work and Homeschool? 178
20. I'm Overwhelmed! How Do I Start Homeschooling? 185

Conclusion 192

Appendices 195

Quick Start Guide 195

Glossary 201

References 205

Index 210

Acknowledgments 213

About the Authors 215

Introduction

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen nor even touched, but just felt in the heart."

—HELEN KELLER (QUOTING HER TEACHER, ANNE SULLIVAN)

Homeschooling is not simply an educational choice, it's a lifestyle that brings beauty and freedom to our lives. We cannot put our finger on one homeschooling element that we do or teach that makes it beautiful; it's all of it. It's the quiet and loud moments during the school day. It's the tears from frustrated math struggles, the regret of wasted time arguing, the shared spark of curiosity, the joy of progress, the heartfelt laughs at silly stories, the memory-making adventures, and the restoring of relationships after a storm—for both parents and children. For us, this beauty floods our homes because we live the whole day together. We have freedom to grapple with and celebrate the little lessons learned in partnership, freedom to make our own decisions with nearly every second of our day. It's amazing for us to get to spend as much time as we want with our children. We get to schedule what we want, when we want, for how busy we want to be. We get to customize the life and learning experiences our family desires.

From our blog, podcast, homeschool conventions, and dozens of Facebook groups, we hear many reasons why people are hesitant to homeschool. They like the idea, but they dismiss it for reasons that aren't always grounded in facts. In this book, we focus on twenty questions that we hear again and again. Whether you think you aren't capable, you believe your children will miss out on opportunities, or there are some big boulders you cannot fathom facing (like working full time), we say: do not let that get in the way of your family's dream

life. So, we wrote this book for you: to empower you to make the choice that is right for you and your family.

This is what we want you to know.

Any loving parent *can* homeschool. The next twenty chapters will show you why *you* can. It may take time for you to research and develop your own unique homeschool path, you might need some extra support, or you may need to get creative with navigating schedules. We are here to show you that if you truly want to homeschool, you can do it.

It's true: you are capable of homeschooling. Like many endeavors, homeschooling takes work, perseverance, and—for some—big lifestyle changes (especially for single or working parents). A new responsibility can seem daunting and almost impossible. But we are here to tell you it's possible—and it's beautiful.

You've already done one of the hardest things a person can do: you became a parent. Let's begin by reminiscing about the early parenting years.

Did you parent a newborn? It was a huge lifestyle change! Jobs and careers were put on hold, transportation anywhere took twice as long, and emotional and physical energy were maxed out by lunchtime. Many of us had little or no prior experience changing diapers, nursing a bleary-eyed babe, or bathing a slippery infant. We had no experience functioning after multiple sleepless nights, dealing daily with the colic crying, and we had little patience for the constant drop of the pacifier. But now we can look back on that and say, "I did it!"

Did you parent a toddler? We did, and that was quite a challenge. It was full of joyous and hard moments. Our daily happenings included chasing the runner we could not catch and cleaning up spoonfuls of mashed avocado, not to mention dealing with our toddlers' inability to control inappropriate impulses. Among the electrical outlets, coffee tables, stairways, and sidewalks, the accident traps around every corner seemed overwhelming. But we did it. We made it through. Not only did we make it through, but our children are healthier, stronger, and felt loved because we were there. We have been guiding our children all along the way.

Did you parent a preteen or teenager? Are you in the midst of it right now? This is another major stage of parenting that might be difficult. It feels a bit like parenting a giant toddler all over again, but now we catch glimpses of the

young adult they will soon become. Between the arguing and eye-rolling, we get to have deep conversations about life and relationships. We have opportunities to explain to our children the hard decisions they will one day face. The conversations change over time—the parenting styles may change as well—yet we still guide our children, love them, and support them as they continue to grow up.

It's likely that most of us have had to work at becoming the parents we are today. We experiment with what works for our unique children. We utilize instinctual tools and recommendations from books, articles, and friends. Most of us already teach the most important stuff: character, ethics, teamwork, responsibility, core beliefs, family traditions, and much more. We do this with unconditional love because we are the parents. We are the loving parents. Our children's hopes and dreams are our hopes and dreams. Our children's successes and joys bring us our greatest joys.

Our children, whether they are two, twelve, or twenty years old, will push back against our guidance when they want different things than we do. They make different choices than we would. But we still parent them, even when it's hard and we aren't sure of the right answer. We parent even when we fail; failure is an opportunity for growth. We learn and do better because of that. And we do it, not because we are all qualified in the psychology of parenting philosophies and studies, but because we love our children and we want what we think is best for them. And that is good enough.

Homeschooling can be just another aspect of your parenting. No one is a perfect parent all the time, nor will you be a perfect homeschooler all the time. When we think back on our own homeschooling experiences, we see failures and successes. The picture of success that immediately pops into Mandi's head is her three children wearing their pajamas, laughing together around the kitchen table, while toying with silly wording for stories they wrote. She remembers rejoicing with her youngest daughter when she wrote the alphabet in cursive for the first time after months of struggle. Jessica remembers the days of snuggling with her newborn son while reading aloud to her six-year-old and giggling over the silly way the Big Friendly Giant speaks. She thinks of the conversations in the car after listening to an audiobook on a family road trip. While those memories are wonderful, we have had hard moments too. Moments where we've all cried,

especially during the times we made the mistake of forcing lessons when our children weren't ready or willing. Some days, we lose our patience over the smallest things and go to bed at night with regret. It's not all sunshine; we have gloomy moments too. But we gratefully take the rain if it means we get rainbows as well.

This is the foundation we rely on, and it is the foundation of this book. If you are considering homeschooling, you are considering parenting your child through their character development *and* their academics. You want to be there for all of it. We understand you have hesitations. "I don't know what I'm doing!" "How will they make friends?" "How will they be equipped with emotional intelligence?" "Will I survive being with my kids all day?" "I don't want to fail my children." "Do I know enough to teach my teens and prepare them for college?" We wrote this book to answer these tough questions and remove your hesitation, because the choice to homeschool your family can be a beautiful and effective one.

We know you have kids to raise, errands to run, and life to live. We wrote this practical guide with you in mind. Each chapter addresses one common concern and can be read on its own to answer your hesitation. You don't need to read this guide cover to cover. Review the table of contents and start with the chapters addressing your biggest hesitations. Then come back to additional chapters for answers to other questions you may have.

- Part I addresses you and your capabilities. We flip the script and show you the capabilities that you didn't know you have or will have. If you think you cannot homeschool because of your inexperience, educational level, personality, or budget—think again!
- Part II tackles the fear of missing out on traditional school opportunities and experiences. Many people have the fear-of-missing-out (FOMO) plague, but we have the cure with ideas for opportunities and memory-making experiences that may feel like gifts to you, your children, and your family.
- Part III meets the major challenges families face when homeschooling. Making friends, getting into college, teaching unique learners, working full time while homeschooling, and finding community are some of the biggest

concerns we consistently hear about. We dive in with stats and insights that can help you make the best decision for your family.

- A "can-do assessment" is available at the end of each chapter to help you evaluate your ability to homeschool. You don't need to check all the boxes. If you check off a couple of the items on the list, you can do this.
- In the Appendices, we help you with our Quick Start Guide, because you can do it! The Quick Start Guide provides six simple steps with ideas to help you begin your homeschool journey.
- Check out the glossary where we define homeschooling terms, such as *traditional schools*, *education*, and *deschooling*.

About Us

We are two veteran homeschool parents: Jessica is mom to a middle school daughter and elementary-age son, and Mandi is mom to two middle schoolers and an elementary-age daughter. Our past experiences and education have equipped us to write this guide, while our passions, struggles, and fun ideas have made it inspiring, honest, and practical.

Jessica left public school in seventh grade and was homeschooled until college. She knows firsthand how life-giving homeschooling can be—it gave her the ability to direct her educational future and the gift of time to pursue her passions in music and dance. She has worked with children for twenty years as a dance educator and has studied child development.

Mandi was a traditional school student throughout her entire formal education and thrived in that setting. As a former junior high school teacher, with a degree in school counseling and a master's degree in education, she understands the enriching experiences that can be offered in the traditional school environment.

We first met when our little girls danced together when they were almost three years old. As families, we connected through our shared passion for homeschooling. Currently, we partner together as co-authors, podcasters, and consultants for all things homeschooling. Together we have led a homeschool group of up to eighteen families for six years. Both of us have homeschooled

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