Difficult adoptions

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Thank you so much. Your answers are a big relief and encouragement. I am grateful that you exist and help so many people like me. It’s a joy to be a member.

John H. | California

Thank you so much for this information. These educational resources are amazing. We now feel more confident about homeschooling this year!

Melvin L. | Idaho

Thank you for your diligence in helping our family resolve our legal homeschooling issues! Wow! We’re so grateful! You are awesome!

Don T. | Virginia

I just want to give a great, big “thank you” to all of you at HSLDA for your hard work and tireless dedication in protecting and fighting for our right to homeschool. Keep persevering.

Anonymous | Georgia

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Why I think homeschooling will grow

In my column in the 2019 second quarter Home School Court Report (which you can read at hslda.org/Q219JMS), I described how my family’s homeschool journey began with the ideas in Dr. Raymond and Dorothy Moore’s 1978 book Better Late Than Early. But the story of the homeschool movement started even before Dr. and Mrs. Moore: the first real shift away from public schools began with Engel v. Vitale and Abington School District v. Schempp, the 1962 and ’63 Supreme Court decisions that removed prayer and Bible reading from the public schools. This prompted a revival of the Christian private school movement and marked the very beginning of the modern homeschool movement.

From the 1980s through the early 2000s, the modern homeschooling movement grew at a tremendous pace; from 1999 through 2012, the percentage of school-age children in the United States who were being homeschooled surged from 1.7% to 3.4%. In contrast, while the past couple of years have seen significant advances in homeschooling freedom, the movement’s rate of growth has flattened out—as of 2016, that figure has remained around 3.3%. (I suspect this has something to do with us reaching a point where homeschooling has become mainstream, so everyone who wants to homeschool has already heard of it.)

But going forward, I believe that we can expect a substantial increase in the number of homeschooling families. Let’s take a look at a snapshot of K–12 education in the US and why I think homeschooling will grow.

• It’s anticipated that about 56 million children will be enrolled in public and private K–12 schools this year.2
• Nearly 6% of school-age children will attend charter schools, which are essentially public schools with a little more autonomy.3
• About 10% of school-age kids will enroll in private schools, with nearly 75% of these schools being religious institutions.4
• About 4% of school-age kids will be homeschooled this school year.5
• Out of all US parents whose kids are enrolled in public school, only 33% list public school as their preferred educational option. 42% would choose private schools as their first choice, 15% would choose charter schools, and 7% would choose homeschooling.6
• Approximately 93% of parents with children in private schools are satisfied with the academic experience. 90% of homeschooling parents are happy with what they have, while only 73% of parents with children in public schools are satisfied.7

These statistics indicate that there are millions of children in public school whose parents are dissatisfied with their current educational choice. And 32 million children in the public school system have parents who would actually prefer a different schooling option. That’s a lot of discontent.

Here are some reasons parents are dissatisfied with, or wish for an alternative to, public school.

• Homeschool and private school students, on average, have scored higher on standardized achievement tests than their public school counterparts.8
• The adoption of Common Core state standards has greatly restricted the ability of local public schools to provide a student-centered education. This one-size-fits-all approach cannot meet the individual needs of students and, in most cases, fosters a teach-to-the-test classroom approach. Common Core puts a lot of stress on the teachers and students alike while failing to nurture a love of learning for the students—a failure reflected by empirical results.9
• Bullying continues to become more of a problem, with a significant percent of students—especially students with special needs—living in fear when they go to school each day.10

Sadly, politicians’ long-proposed solution of “more money for education” has not worked.

Several analysts also forecast a bleak future for the public school system. For many reasons, including the method and content of education in the schools, these
thinkers—such as authors Mary Rice Hasson and Theresa Farnan—suggest that American parents who are concerned about their children’s education and faith should seriously consider educational alternatives.11

Other reasons parents choose to homeschool may include concerns for kids’ health and safety. We’ve come alongside numerous families who have withdrawn children with special needs from public school because the public school system was unable to adequately care for their kids. (You may have read about some of these cases in the Court Report, such as when we defended the Hoffhines family in Missouri back in 2016. hslda.org/Q4195SNcase)

Another aspect of health concerns has to do with states eliminating vaccination exemptions. All states require children attending public or private schools to be vaccinated. However, most states also have exemptions for medical, religious, or personal reasons for refusing some or all vaccinations. And homeschoolers, with few exceptions, are not required to vaccinate.

Three years ago, California did away with the personal-beliefs exemption, leaving only the medical exemption for public- and private-schooled children. However, the legislature excluded “home-based private schools” from the requirement, and I’ve spoken with many families who’ve found their way into homeschooling because of this regulatory change.

And earlier this year, New York eliminated the religious exemption to the vaccination requirement for public and private school students. Homeschoolers are exempt; so, many New York families are looking into homeschooling as a way to exercise their parental rights to make responsible, belief-based decisions for their children.

The educational crossroads

These concerns are bringing many parents face-to-face with the question of what is truly best for their child: public school, private school, or homeschooling? Private school usually entails expensive tuition. Homeschooling may be more financially affordable, but requires great personal sacrifice by parents—time, effort, curriculum costs, and often living on a single-salary income. Although the decision isn’t an easy one, parents of almost 2.3 million homeschool parents are happy with their academic choice.
children this year have already made the choice to homeschool for the good of their kids and their families.

We homeschooling parents know both that it can be done and that the benefits reaped are oftentimes more than what we invest. We are able to choose an education that best fits our children’s physical, educational, intellectual, and spiritual needs. We can start our young ones in school when we know they’re ready—not when the government says they’re ready. (Speaking of which, how early should we start our kids? [hslda.org/Q219Early](https://hslda.org/Q219Early))

And we can spend more time with our kids as they grow and mature on a daily basis.

To help parents who want to homeschool get started, we want to be a resource by guiding them through the legal requirements, helping them sort out their academic and curriculum needs, and providing financial support for those that need help making homeschooling possible for their family. As you meet families in the process of making that decision, please feel free to refer them to us. We’d love to help them!

ENDNOTES


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Difficult adoptions

» Finding a way forward!
It’s a familiar story: two people meet, fall in love, start a family, homeschool . . . and one day, Martha says to Joe, “Remember that Tri-City Adoption Center presentation at church a few weeks ago? I haven’t been able to stop thinking about it. All those children who don’t have families. It breaks my heart.”

Joe waits a quiet moment before responding, “You know . . . I’ve been thinking about the same thing.”

Hesitantly, Martha continues: “. . . do you think the Lord might be calling us to adopt?”

So Joe and Martha begin the process of considering adoption. Two years, countless interviews, endless forms, and tens of thousands of dollars later, they welcome two precious children into their family: biological siblings Olivia and Logan. Joe, Martha, and their four older kids—Joe Jr., Charlotte, Emily, and Jackson—are thrilled.

Six-year-old Olivia seems to settle in just fine. But Logan, 4 years old, is another story. He hoards food in his room. He rages when his new mom and dad tell him to pick up his toys. He hates being hugged, and in one violent tantrum, he even gives Joe a black eye.

A year later, the whole family is on edge. Joe and Martha’s stress is affecting their marriage. Of their five other kids—Joe Jr., Charlotte, Emily, and Jackson—are thrilled.

The legacy of trauma

Let’s go back to Joe and Martha, our hypothetical family. These parents joyously welcomed each of their first four children from the moment they knew that Martha was pregnant. While carrying each child, Martha ate a healthy diet and avoided drugs, alcohol, and secondhand smoke. Each child was born into a safe and predictable world filled with loving family and friends. As the children grew, Martha and Joe were able to provide for them, protect them from danger, and guide them. The parents knew their children, and the children trusted their parents.

“Adoption begins with loss: a birth mother unable to care for her child, a child unable to be raised by the mother and the family that she was born into,” says Lea Ann Reynolds, a mom of five whose youngest daughter was adopted from Kazakhstan at 13 months old. “There is deep loss. But where there is loss, there can also be beauty and healing and a journey that only God could see from before the beginning of a family.”

Lea Ann is a founding member of Woven, a program at her Northern Virginia church that serves foster and adoptive families. When she and her husband, Kelly, first brought their new daughter home, they realized they needed to find a community that understood the particular experience of parenting an adopted child.

“We just started seeking out other adoptive families,” she recalls. “We started an adoption ministry in our church, and we prayed—prayed for God to bring people into our lives who needed support and who could support us.”

Woven is the second church adoption ministry the Reynolds have helped to start since adopting Nuriya 12 years ago. Currently, Woven offers financial assistance programs, a monthly support-group meeting, seminars and workshops, a clothes closet, an annual park day, and quarterly potlucks—in addition to networking among families, area churches, and community resources.

“It’s easy to look at adoption through rose-colored glasses, just seeing it as bringing a child into your home; you love the child, the child loves you,” Lea Ann says. “But it’s not that easy. It’s complicated—like all parenting.”

Goodbye, rose-colored glasses

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Olivia and Logan, on the other hand, came with histories that Joe and Martha could only guess at. The orphanage from which Olivia and Logan were adopted did its best to keep records, but all that was known about the young siblings’ origins was that they had been dropped off three years before by a woman claiming to be their aunt.

What had these kids’ lives been like before they arrived at the orphanage? Had they been happy and loved, abused and neglected... or, at different times, all of the above? Had the orphanage kept them safe and well cared for, or had staff or other children harmed them? Had they known hunger, fear, pain, or loneliness?

“With adopted children, some of them have had trauma in the womb,” says Jane Woodruff. She and her husband, Scott (Senior Counsel at HSLDA), adopted a daughter after their three older children were adults.

Marie was brought home by the Woodruffs when she was still an infant, but based on what they knew about her short life up to that point, she was at risk for severe special needs: physical, intellectual, and emotional.

Damaging experiences leave their marks on a child’s body, heart, and mind—even if the child can’t remember the traumas. “A mother giving her child up for adoption,” Jane continues, “has probably been experiencing significant emotional distress, health issues, or a very trying life situation.”

Dr. Karyn Purvis, a developmental psychologist who devoted the latter half of her life to helping children heal from trauma, based her treatment approach on an understanding of trauma’s complex physiological effects. In The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family, she and fellow authors David R. Cross and Wendy Lyons Sunshine wrote:

> From the hour of birth, a well-tended baby is immersed in a soft and nurturing sensory bath. He feels the warmth of his mother’s body and hears the joy in her soothing sounds. He sees her smile, mirroring back his own preciousness, and they engage in the dance of emotional bonding. This is enormously important to his healthy development. She cuddles, feeds, and carries him, and his senses are awakened. They coo and smile at each other, and he discovers the joys of bonding and attachment and how to behave in synchrony with other humans. Through this simple shared activity, his brain begins to build the neurological pathways of learning and healthy social connections.

By contrast, a child who does not receive this warm care will develop differently. Dependent on caregivers who may be unpredictable, violent, distant, absent, or unable to consistently provide basic food, clothing, and shelter, the child’s brain will build pathways toward survival rather than maturing in the natural, organized way of human babies. At the same time, nutritional deficits and high stress levels can alter early neurochemistry, setting the child up for problems with attention, executive function, sensory processing, and emotional regulation.

**When love is not enough**

Inextricably linked to trauma is the concept of attachment. Purvis, Cross, and Lyons continue:

> Child psychologists talk about “attachment.” This refers to the interpersonal bond between a child and his or her parent or caretaker. A child who felt consistently safe and nurtured by a reliable caretaker in early life will become securely attached. He knows that Mommy or Daddy will be there for him, and he is confident of a safe base to return to as he explores the world. A securely attached child learns to be comfortable in close relationships.

Without this early experience of close connection to a parent, a child can have trouble functioning in other relationships. The most extreme form of this is Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD), which sometimes requires institutionalization.

Adoption begins with loss: a birth mother unable to care for her child, a child unable to be raised by the mother and the family that she was born into. But where there is loss, there can also be beauty and healing—on a journey that only God could see from before the beginning of a family.
“RAD happens when a child doesn’t get enough human interaction when they’re little,” explains Scott Woodruff, Marie’s dad. “The typical scenario is an orphanage where the nannies go around giving everybody a bottle every six hours. It doesn’t matter who cries; they just wander through—a bottle every six hours. So a child learns that crying doesn’t bring a human to meet their need. And once that happens for a while, the kids stop crying. RAD can also happen if parents are emotionally unavailable, often because of physical or mental illness, drugs, or alcohol.”

“Remember that old song, ‘Everybody Needs Somebody Sometimes’?” Scott asks. “What the song didn’t say is that needing someone is actually a gift. We want people to grow up needing people. That helps them be happy and function and find satisfaction in life. We want them to know instinctively that their needs will be met through relationships. That gives them a powerful stake in maintaining those relationships. But a child with RAD may not believe there is a connection. The child’s behavior may communicate that relationships are expendable.”

Jane explains, “For children whose trust has been harshly violated by someone that should have been trustworthy, authority looks really, really bad to them. There’s a lot of connecting and trust to build.”

“Those kids might be going through trauma and pushing you away,” adds Lea Ann. “It’s fear. All they’ve known is temporary and broken attachment. You have to re-teach the brain and the heart how to attach.”

Some children with attachment problems are indiscriminately friendly—rather than being appropriately attached to their parents, they appear to attach to everyone. “Especially if they’ve come from an orphanage, and they’re always with a big group of people with different nannies in and out—they might seem really happy and well-adjusted with a big group of people around all the time,” Lea Ann says.

But for well-attached kids, “it’s natural and normal to kind of hold back from others and be attached to your mom. And then you broaden that circle to dad and siblings. And then you broaden it to people beyond your immediate family.”

It is helpful to imagine attachment as a continuum, with healthy attachment on one end and the somewhat-rare RAD on the other. In between are attachment problems varying in severity. Even children raised in loving homes can experience challenges with attachment, depending on their parents’ own attachment styles.

Recreating the parent-child bond

When the Reynolds brought their 13-month-old home from Kazakhstan, they intentionally limited her interactions with non-family members in order to create plenty of opportunity for her to attach to her new parents.

“Naturally, when a baby is born, they’re held and nurtured by the whole family, but more so by the mother,”
says Lea Ann. “We made a conscious decision to make me the primary person that met her needs. For the first several months, I was the one who fed her, and I was the one who changed her diaper, so that she would associate that natural mother-daughter bond with me. It’s hard because everybody sees your cute baby and wants to hold her, but I didn’t leave her much—I just kept her close, like you would a newborn baby.”

Providing opportunities for healthy attachment will look different for older children than for infants, but it’s still important. No matter a child’s age, says Lea Ann, “they need the same things newborns need—age-appropriate connection, touch, eye contact, play, and your being there. They need to feel safe. Even if they’re 16 when they come into your life, there are ways to foster that attachment. It’s not going to be perfect, and it’s not going to look like it would for a baby, but we’re human beings seeking family and love and attachment; that’s what we’re made for, so all children need and want that, even if they don’t know how to tell you.”

**Wired to survive**

Children with a history of trauma can behave in puzzling, dangerous, and downright disturbing ways. These logic-defying behaviors only begin to make sense when we consider that a child being abused or neglected is powerless to change his or her situation. Instead, children must develop other ways to survive. Long after these coping mechanisms have outlived their usefulness, they remain in a child’s “tool belt” of life skills.

Scott describes how he has seen this play out in his own daughter’s life. “When Marie was around 3, if anything painful would happen, she’d bite, scratch, and scream. It occurred to me, I wonder what it was like when she was in the hospital for the first eight months of her life?”

He goes on to imagine the experience of a tiny, helpless infant spending weeks in a hospital: repeated painful procedures interspersed with occasional pleasant experiences. “You don’t know if the next person is coming to talk nicely to you or to hurt you. But you know it’s a violation of your person. And so over time you develop a posture where you believe the world is trying to hurt you and you learn to fight back. How does a young child fight back? You fight back by scratching, screaming, biting. That’s how you resist.

“If I want to see through my traumatized child’s eyes and enter her world, I must see and enter through her experiences.”

**A cascade of fear**

As Martha and Joe (our fictional couple) continued to explore the effects of trauma on their two adopted...
children, they began to understand the dynamic that was disconnecting them from Logan. They were trying to raise him just like they had parented their other kids, not realizing that the reason their parenting style had worked before was because it was predicated on a trust-based relationship already built between parent and child.

Meanwhile, Logan was viewing Joe and Martha just like he’d viewed his previous caretakers: as unpredictable threats. Every time the couple unwittingly activated Logan’s past trauma, his brain and body launched into full-blown panic, causing him to unleash his repertoire of immature survival skills.

Purvis, Lyons, and Sunshine describe “the biochemical cascade of fear” that Logan was experiencing:

Important body and brain functions are controlled by substances called neurotransmitters. These work on the cellular level much like a set of interrelated chemical switches and control functions such as blood pressure, mental alertness, and body temperature. The right amount and ratio of neurotransmitters allows optimum functioning, but when they’re out of balance, they set the stage for behavioral dysfunction. When a child becomes frightened, her neurotransmitter “switches” respond in one of two possible ways. One way is to become extra alert and aroused, which would enable the “fight-or-flight” response. . . . In the alternative fear reaction, the child goes numb and dissociates, in order to mentally escape from the threatening situation. . . . As fear escalates, it triggers a series of biochemical events in the body that reduce a child’s ability to behave calmly and think clearly. The progression moves from calm to vigilant to alarm to fear to terror. By the time that fear kicks in, it is immediate and survival oriented and supersedes all other mental processing.

Some of the most traditional forms of discipline—including spanking and timeouts—actually perpetuate this fear reaction. Purvis and her colleagues developed calm, structured techniques (a method called “Trust-Based Relational Intervention”) for guiding and correcting children with a history of trauma and for dealing with specific problems like food hoarding and disrespect.

Scott admits that changing his parenting style was challenging, to say the least. “We were advised not to spank Marie,” he says. “I’ve had to think of very different ways to communicate parental firmness. It’s been very stretching.”

For Scott, applying Purvis’s principle of “correction within connection” requires a lot of careful thinking ahead. “Before I give Marie an instruction, I ask myself how I am going to respond if she doesn’t comply. If I can’t think of an appropriate corrective response that is available to me, I may not give her the command at all. I want her to have the habit of listening to me, so if I can’t compose a reasonable consequence, it’s almost better for me to not say anything.

“I’ve developed lots of little weird ways to make things fun. For example, Marie leaves her shoes out. So I say in a silly voice, ‘Oh, I want to go home! Please take me home!’ ‘Who said that?’ I ask Marie. ‘Oh, your shoes said that! They’re lonely, they want to go home! Will you help your shoes come home? I’ll carry one and you carry the other one.’ ‘OK, Daddy!’ Then we have a game of putting the shoes away.

“Children all love fun and interaction, and almost anything that I would want her to do can be made interactive and fun. So very little of what I do is punitive in a conventional sense, because she’ll do nearly anything for fun. As long as our relationship is a source of joy to her, there’s a natural predicate for correction.”

Scott has also learned to offer Marie choices: “I’ll ask, ‘Marie, do you want to wear this dress or that dress?’ ‘Marie, do you want to go to pizza tonight or Chick-Fil-A?’ ‘Do you want to go in the moon bounce or ride your bike?’ Giving her a choice says that I value who she is as a person.”

Understanding the physiological reasons for Marie’s behavior has helped Scott and Jane deal with particular challenges, such as when she went through a hitting phase. “Do you remember getting so excited as a little kid that you began doing goofy things?” asks Scott. “It was because of the excitement. That excitement can actually get you in a situation where your brain isn’t getting enough oxygen.

“We discovered that if Marie played too long at a stretch, she’d start hitting other kids. So I got to where every 25 minutes I’d pull her out and I’d make her sit really still. And that was just to let the oxygen circulate properly to her brain so she could make better decisions.”

Jane strongly encourages all parents—not only adoptive ones—to take advantage of Purvis’s resources. “I wish I had those materials with my biological children. I would have parented differently. I would have parented with a lot more grace. I would have emphasized connecting with a child before correcting, really working hard to understand that child.”

Scott understands why adoptive parents can get caught in a downward cycle with children from particularly traumatic backgrounds: “It’s hard to acknowledge that your
tried-and-true parenting techniques don’t fit with this child. If you’re finding yourself in this situation, perhaps the most important steps you can take are to acknowledge that you’re out of your comfort zone, refuse to give up on learning how to parent your child better, and get professional help. If parents don’t do that, then they can become more and more intense about the things that aren’t working.

“Here’s an example: A child disobeys, you punish the child. The child still doesn’t obey, now you punish them twice; the child still doesn’t obey, you punish them three times, and they still don’t obey. You ought to be thinking, *Maybe this approach doesn’t work.* If, instead, you think, *I’ll just do it one more time,* then you are on a losing spiral. If that type of punishment is what worked for your other kids, it’s hard to make the transition and say, ‘Oh. Maybe I just have the wrong idea and need to try a fresh approach for this child.’

“Sometimes, we are part of our child’s problem, and we just need to own that,” adds Jane. “Isaiah 43:19 says, ‘See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.’ So in parenting Marie, I don’t rely too much on how I did it with my adult children. What I need to do is face my regrets—any regrets I have as a parent with my adult children—and work not to repeat those with Marie. And rejoice in the new outlooks I have and the successes and work to apply them appropriately to Marie.”

**Everybody needs somebody**

People need people. That’s not only true for children learning how to attach, it’s also true for their parents. But no matter our age, feeling needy and helpless can drive us away from safe relationships rather than toward them.

This is what had happened to Martha and Joe—first because they were adapting to their suddenly expanded family, and then because they felt embarrassed about Logan’s behavior and their struggle to cope with him. They worried that by opening up to other people about their struggles, they would be ignored or judged.

“It’s so typical of our human nature: not wanting to reach out and admit when we have problems or need help,” says Lea Ann. “It’s isolating. It’s the same way with homeschooling moms—I’ve seen that a lot, where you think all the other moms have it together, but really, none of us do! We all need each other.”

And just as homeschooling parents benefit from connecting with other homeschooling parents, adoptive parents need to interact with other adoptive parents.

“When we got home with Nuriya, we didn’t have much support; we didn’t know a lot of adoptive families,” Lea Ann recalls. She and Kelly knew there were other adoptive families in their geographical area, but not how to connect with them—or if those families had the same needs. “That’s really what led us to start an adoption ministry: seeking out other families and trying to be the encouragement that I wished I had had.”

**Building your community**

Adoptive parents need to consider whether they and their children could benefit from professional help. For example, an adopted child may need to be seen by a medical doctor with experience in the child’s particular challenges, such as nutrition and feeding problems, trauma, or an unknown medical history.

It may also be necessary to include therapists, psychiatrists, or residential programs to help meet the child’s needs. “You have to be ready to say, ‘OK, this is really beyond what I can do,’” says Scott. “If your child had appendicitis, would you yourself take out her appendix? No. There could be a relational, emotional, or behavioral issue that’s in the same category. You don’t say ‘I’m a failure.’ You say ‘my child has a need that I’m not equipped to meet.’ And you bring in someone who has a proven track record of success.”

“I think families should be very, very open to the fact that their child and *they themselves* might need professional counseling,” Jane suggests. “Adoption has a great way of
Overcoming obstacles together: little Marie Woodruff (center) laughing and talking up a storm with big sister, Betsy, and their parents, Scott and Jane.

...continued on page 21
COLORADO  In Uproara, Colorado—whoops, Aurora, Colorado—home-school families are speaking out against the school district’s unlawful demands for unnecessary information. hslda.org/Q419CO

NEW MEXICO  HSLDA recently helped send a homeschool graduate to jail! Wait . . . what? hslda.org/Q419NM

CALIFORNIA  We’ve seen this sort of problem before . . . in fact, it’s an issue that has a long bloodline. The California Department of Public Health denied a graduate’s application for a phlebotomy certification because she was homeschooled. hslda.org/Q419CA

JULY–SEPTEMBER 2019 HSLDA LEGAL INVOLVEMENT

339 government contacts

208 discrimination cases

3,108 general legal questions
WASHINGTON, DC  Homeschool grad Zion Utsey has overcome the early death of his father, visited Ghana to put on a musical performance, and earned a recognition of excellence by the DC attorney general’s office. Now, he faces one more challenge: the University of the District of Columbia is trying to force him to take the GED. hslda.org/Q419DC

MICHIGAN  Public education officials in Michigan should be careful how they tally attendance of students in their virtual homeschool partnership programs . . . otherwise, as this school district discovered, $1.9 million in state funding could be in jeopardy. hslda.org/Q419MI

VERMONT  see page 19

MARYLAND  see page 18

ARKANSAS  We’re always happy to see legislative changes that help make homeschooling easier for families, whether that means passing new laws that help homeschoolers, or getting rid of old laws that hurt. hslda.org/Q419AR

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WASHINGTON, DC  Homeschool grad Zion Utsey has overcome the early death of his father, visited Ghana to put on a musical performance, and earned a recognition of excellence by the DC attorney general’s office. Now, he faces one more challenge: the University of the District of Columbia is trying to force him to take the GED. hslda.org/Q419DC

MICHIGAN  Public education officials in Michigan should be careful how they tally attendance of students in their virtual homeschool partnership programs . . . otherwise, as this school district discovered, $1.9 million in state funding could be in jeopardy. hslda.org/Q419MI

VERMONT  see page 19

MARYLAND  see page 18

ARKANSAS  We’re always happy to see legislative changes that help make homeschooling easier for families, whether that means passing new laws that help homeschoolers, or getting rid of old laws that hurt. hslda.org/Q419AR
Maryland’s “observe instruction” rule overthrown at last

The last remaining regulation in Maryland calling for government officials to watch and evaluate homeschool parents as they teach their children has finally been abolished, effective August 12, 2019.

Following a 16-month campaign by homeschooling families, advocates, and allies, the Maryland State Board of Education voted this past July to strike the homeschool “observe instruction” rule as well as the related rule requiring umbrella programs to annually visit the site where a homeschool student is receiving instruction.

The board voted 6-1 (with two members abstaining) to abolish the rule, agreeing with State Superintendent of Schools Karen Salmon who said that Maryland homeschool families care about providing a well-rounded education for their children. She added that any attempt to enforce the rule would simply waste resources on what amounts to an invasion of privacy.

Though the “observe instruction” rule had remained on the books for decades, education officials invoked it intermittently and inconsistently. For example, some counties chose to ignore the regulation, while others insisted that homeschool parents bring their kids into the school office during the family’s annual portfolio review. This inconsistent and unconstitutional regulation made some families feel vulnerable, which is why Home School Legal Defense Association consistently defended families against the regulation.

But in 2018, a state lawmaker introduced House Bill 1798, seeking to elevate the “observe instruction” regulation to the statutory level, which would have made it even more burdensome. Maryland’s homeschool community vigorously opposed the measure, and it was subsequently withdrawn.

Try, try again

Following the victory against H.B. 1798, state homeschool leaders and I got to work abolishing the “observe instruction” rule once and for all. And as a first step, we decided to seek the department of education’s support.

As a first step, we decided to seek the department of education’s support.

Finally, the vote occurred . . . and the rest is history.

Thank you for standing with HSLDA so we can continue to team up with homeschool families and leaders and government officials to make homeschooling possible—and easier—for children in Maryland and across our nation.

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE TERMINATOR SUPPORTS HOMESCHOOLING?

Until 2008, California homeschools could not qualify as private schools; the courts had ruled that the only legal way to homeschool was if the parent or tutor had a current California teaching certificate. The 2008 In Re Jonathan L. case changed all that. Now, California homeschoolers can operate as private schools to satisfy compulsory attendance.

The surprising part? Then-governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, along with then-attorney general Jerry Brown, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and the California Department of Education supported our position. You can read about this exciting case and the events that led up to it in Mike Smith’s new book, The Battle for Homeschool Freedom in California. Get your copy now from the HSLDA store.

(And don’t forget to log in to activate your HSLDA member discount!)

hslda.org/Q419JMSBook
No booklist? We’re throwing the book at you!

Homeschoolers in Vermont have to submit a significant amount of paperwork to the state agency of education, so it’s not surprising that HSLDA members Gregg and Arielle Moore were told to provide extra documents.

The simple error threatened to become a big problem, however, when an official insisted that not submitting the extra paperwork could result in legal action.

That’s when the Moores contacted us.

Annual paperwork

At the end of the school year, Greg and Arielle submitted information required by the state for their child as well as an end-of-year assessment by a licensed Vermont teacher. (This was their choice out of three end-of-year assessment options state law offers homeschooling parents.)

Shortly after the Moores submitted their paperwork, the agency of education official sent a notice demanding they also submit a list of the books their child had read that year. The agency then stopped processing the family’s end-of-year assessment and refused to resume unless the family submitted the booklist within 14 days.

To make matters worse, if the assessment wasn’t fully processed by the beginning of the school year, the agency warned that “the child may be considered truant.”
That’s when HSLDA stepped in to help. We clarified that a booklist is an optional accompaniment to a report and portfolio but is not a requirement for an assessment by a certified teacher (which the family submitted here). We then contacted the agency to correct this misunderstanding and ask the officials to complete their review.

**Problem solved**

The following day, the agency of education confirmed that the booklist was not necessary because the certified teacher had provided sufficient documentation—and a couple of months later, the family received the completion letter from the school.

The Moores expressed relief at the prospect of having the situation resolved. “We’re grateful for the way you stand up for our right to homeschool our children,” Greg wrote us. He added that he would “love to see the word passed along to other homeschoolers as well as to why you are all so important!”

**HOMESCHOOL SNAPSHOTS**

**What’s brewing in there?**

During homeschool day at our local art museum, I took my kindergartner to look at some exhibits we had talked about over the year—ancient Egyptian pyramids, Roman and Greek monuments, African art, etc. My 2-year-old son came along for the ride.

What would they learn and remember most from the trip? I wondered silently. Just then, we turned into a side gallery to browse some East Asian pieces that included ornate ceramic teapots. My 2-year-old promptly launched into a hearty rendition of a famous nursery rhyme (complete with hand motions):

**I’m a little teapot short and stout!**
Here is my handle here is my spout!

Jennifer O. | Shawnee, KS

**Attached to learning**

While studying medical practices in regions like China, my kids and I covered the topic of leeches in our curriculum. When I asked my 8- and 9-year-olds if they knew what a leech was, my 5-year-old daughter—who I thought wasn’t listening—piped up very proudly, “that’s what you walk your dog on!”

Elizabeth T. | Greeneville, TN

**Adding some leaven**

One night while we were eating dinner, my 4-year-old daughter didn’t want to eat her bread. When I told her to eat it, she cleverly paraphrased a quote from Scripture, “[girls] cannot live by bread alone.” How could I argue with that? We all laughed!

Cathy B. | Fate, TX

**An age-old “oopsy”**

In 2018, my young daughter and I studied George Washington’s life and times extensively. This year, while standing in line at a store, she noticed a female soldier in full fatigues standing behind us.

“Wow, you’re a real soldier! What do you do?”

The soldier smiled and proudly responded, “I’m a medic!”

“Cool!” my daughter replied, “Did you fight in the Evolutionary War?” I closed my eyes in disbelief, but not before I saw two elderly gentlemen choking back their mirth behind the soldier.

Lynn D. | Lenoir, NC

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**Share your story about why homeschooling is the best!**

*A Contrario Sensu* has graduated...now we’re Homeschool Snapshots! But we’re still looking for your warm anecdotes and true stories to illustrate homeschooling’s humorous or poignant moments. All material printed in the *Court Report* will be credited, and the contributor will receive a $10 coupon for the HSLDA Store. Submissions may be edited for space. Please be aware that we cannot return photographs.

Send us your story online at: hslda.org/stories

Or, mail submissions to:
Stories, HSLDA
P.O. Box 3000
Purcellville, VA 20134
normalizes the experience for the parents, too. “It’s becoming more and more common for churches to have orphan and adoption ministries,” says Lea Ann. “If you can’t find a supportive adoption community at your church—or even if you don’t go to church—search the websites of churches in your area.”

Virtual and in-person communities can also be found by searching Facebook groups and websites like Meetup.com. Check the library shelves or Amazon for books on adoption; many books include resource lists that can help you track down a support group or respite care. National adoption organizations, such as Empowered to Connect, host conferences and offer other avenues for adoptive families to connect with each other.

“Being isolated is not where we are meant to be,” Lea Ann says. “Don’t be afraid or embarrassed to reach out. We all have times when we can’t make it without support.”

**Progress, little by little**

When Scott and Jane first began caring for Marie, they were concerned she might never talk. “She had missed out on some of the experiences before birth and in infancy that are super important for a child’s hearing and sense of language to develop,” explains Scott.

Sure enough, Marie’s speech was delayed—to the point that Jane and Scott began teaching her sign language. But they also talked incessantly to her, seeking to provide the developmental experiences Marie had missed out on due to her medical fragility. Scott describes taking Marie for walks up and down their street, telling her stories about the things they saw happening around them.

“We prayed a lot for her to talk,” he remembers. “And you know what? She made a little progress here and a little progress there, and she gradually crept up—so much so that when we had her evaluated for special needs, they said that her speech was so good that she didn’t qualify for speech therapy. Hurray!”

One of the qualities that makes children so resilient and remarkable is that human brains don’t stop developing. Missed developmental steps can be made up. Neural pathways can be built. Old habits can be replaced by new ones, and the ability to connect with other people can be nurtured.

Now, when they get in the car to drive somewhere, 6-year-old Marie says to Scott: “Daddy, turn off the radio so we can talk!”

**SOME RESOURCES TO GET YOU STARTED . . .**

**Trust-Based Relational Intervention**

- *The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family*, Karyn Brand Purvis, David R. Cross, and Wendy Lyons Sunshine
- Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development resource page, child.tcu.edu/resources
- TBRI®: An Overview, youtube.com/watch?v=T43zJDgTNPA
- Empowered to Connect, empoweredtoconnect.org

**Help and encouragement**

- Focus on the Family adoption articles: focusonthefamily.com/tag/adoption
- *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*, Sherrie Eldridge
- *Adopting Older Children: A Practical Guide to Adopting and Parenting over Age Four*, Stephanie Bosco-Ruggiero, MA, Gloria Russo Wassell, MS, LMHC, and Victor Groza, PhD

**Financial and other support**

- Christian Alliance for Orphans, cafo.org
- Lifeline, lifelinechild.org
- Lifesong for Orphans, lifesong.org
- Show Hope, showhope.org
- Tim Tebow Foundation Adoption Aid, timtebowfoundation.org/adoption-aid
On the bust of economist and Free to Choose author Milton Friedman at Chapman University, passersby can see the inscribed words of former United States Secretary of State George Shultz: “The price of freedom is eternal vigilance and a willingness to act in its defense.”

This simple truth is forgotten all too often, and it’s why we homeschooling parents must teach the principles of good citizenship and civic engagement to our sons and daughters.

It is a tragedy of our time that our society has become so distanced from how our government works that many of us now lack the knowledge necessary to impact the political process—or to even be a good citizen. The University of Pennsylvania’s annual Annenberg Civics Knowledge Survey reported some disheartening data: according to the survey, only 30% of respondents knew that the Senate alone confirms Supreme Court nominees, only 32% of Americans could name all three branches of government, and only 37% could name any of the rights under the First Amendment.\(^1\)

I see it as failure of our country’s education that the most effective political action a student can conceive of these days is to protest or riot in the streets. When young people don’t believe that they can have an effective voice in the political process, is it really surprising that what follows is disengagement, disenfranchisement, and—eventually—disregard for systems of government that safeguard our freedoms?

Sadly, the prevailing assumptions today are that youth are neither capable of being effective in politics, nor able to positively impact the political arena.

I think both assumptions are utterly false: the impact of equipped, hardworking, civically engaged young men and women is tough to overstate. In fact, a few years ago, USA Today published an article that highlighted the effectiveness of enthusiastic Generation Joshua (GenJ) students on the 2016 US Senate races.\(^2\)

As we look forward to the 2020 elections, Secretary Shultz’s words ring true. As is always the case in a democratic republic, the freedoms that we hold dear hang in the balance. So as homeschooling parents, we need to start thinking about opportunities to teach good citizenship and civic engagement to our children.

The better model

For starters, let’s model for our young people what effective engagement looks like and equip them to rightly judge ideas and their consequences. For example, you might demonstrate engagement by voting regularly, getting involved in a local election for a school board (whose decisions can have huge impact on homeschool families), signing up for a poll-watching team, or learning the views of candidates prior to an election and educating your friends and family about those views.

No matter how you and your children choose to participate, the opportunities and experiences of political engagement provide an incredible window into how US campaigns and elections work.

If you have a student who is looking for even more ways to get involved, Generation Joshua can help! One of the ways we train future leaders in GenJ is through Student Action Teams (SATs), which give students the chance to participate in a political campaign, learn to articulate their beliefs in a winsome manner, and grow personally through the resources and support of our experienced leadership team.

We make it our mission to show our young citizens what productive, respectful, and serious political engagement looks like. We’re proud of what our students do and would love for you to take the opportunity to participate with us. A few years ago, we
were involved in a race that was decided by about 100 votes. Each student on the team talked to almost 1,000 voters. According to our statistics, if we had just one less student working with us, the election would have gone the other way. The long-term impact of that sort of electoral front-row seat echoes though our students’ lives, teaching them how to be good citizens, equipping them to educate others, and ultimately helping to create a healthier society.

It would be much easier if freedoms could be won like a trophy and stored on a shelf . . . but freedom doesn’t work that way. It’s elusive, costly, and easy to lose. But for the good of our families and our children’s future, we believe the journey to preserve our freedom is worth it.

Join a Student Action Team today!

Your student can be a part of this journey! The only requirements for joining an SAT are that each participant must have an active Generation Joshua membership and be between the ages of 14 and 19. Parents are also welcome if they have a student volunteering. (Children as young as 11 are welcome if they have a parent in attendance.) We cover your teen’s hotel, food, training, and logistics; as long as your student is a GenJ member, there are no other costs! Sign up for Generation Joshua and our SATs at generationjoshua.org.

ENDNOTES


Invest in the future of homeschooling.

Your homeschool legacy can continue beyond your lifetime through a planned gift in the form of a bequest.

Setting up an advised bequest is easy and provides an effective and lasting statement of your commitment to homeschooling and educational freedom.

Use the following statement to include HSLDA in your will:

I bequeath to the Home School Legal Defense Association, a non-profit organization in Virginia (currently located at P.O. Box 3000, Purcellville, VA 20134), the sum of {______ dollars or ______ percent of my residual estate}. 

hslda.org/plannedgiving
Writing is an essential skill, especially during the high school years. As a parent, you know that learning to write well will prepare your student for college, careers, and communication in the adult world. But practicing writing can feel abstract, subjective, and even discouraging to teens, making writing a challenging skill to teach.

As a homeschool graduate, a writing tutor, and an AP English teacher, I know that parents can teach this skill at home—and the easiest way to do this is by walking your students through writing their first essay!

You may find it helpful to start with this handy metaphor: writing a paper is kind of like building a home. Although it’s a time-consuming process that requires lots of planning, effort, and patience, the results are rewarding. From early brainstorming to final touches, every step of the building process is important.

Laying groundwork

Teaching students to write well often begins with creating a culture of words. This is like preparing the building site for a new home. My parents had wonderful ways of laying groundwork with words. You can try some of these, too:

- Encourage your children to read widely. This can begin well before high school! Introduce them to classics, historical fiction, biographies, and non-fiction on topics they find interesting. Invest in audiobooks to introduce a variety of narration methods. Incentivize reading by making books fun and relevant—prizes, privileges, or special outings can be powerful motivators!
- Use reading as a springboard for short, warm-up writing projects. Students can learn to summarize, describe, present an opinion, compare-and-contrast, etc., by writing a paragraph or two about a book they have just read. Social networkers might enjoy exchanging thoughts with other readers on a community platform such as GoodReads.com⁰.
- Play games that revolve around words. Games can teach vocabulary, spelling, or sentence construction by blending these lessons with family fun. My family especially enjoys Boggle, Balderdash, and You’ve Been Sentenced! There are many more for your family to

You can help your teen get started by identifying a topic that genuinely interests them—perhaps a sports team, popular film, clothing style, or political issue. Think outside the box to find a topic that uniquely motivates your teen.
discover. Here is a fun starting point: hslda.org/Q419Games.

Step 1: Choosing a topic
When the time comes for an actual writing assignment, your teen gets to brainstorm and envision the finished paper much like a family narrows the options to cast a vision for their dream home.

You can help your teen get started by identifying a topic that genuinely interests them—perhaps a sports team, popular film, clothing style, or political issue. Think outside the box to find a topic that uniquely motivates your teen.

Then have a conversation that allows your student to express their interest verbally. Ask leading questions: “Why does this topic interest you?” “What do you like about it, specifically?” “Why do you like it more than this other topic?”

The more specific the answer, the better. Then help convert the answer into an opinion or claim. This overarching opinion or claim gives direction to the project and becomes a ready-made thesis statement to shape the paper. Here are some examples of a good thesis sentence:

• The Philadelphia Phillies have a brilliant offensive strategy built around big-name hitters and veteran coaching.
• Mary Poppins Returns recreates the elements fans loved in the original Mary Poppins film—colorful characters, memorable songs, and magical adventures.
• The global refugee crisis calls for a humanitarian response that combines national security, true help for the needy, and a reasonable emigration timeline.

Notice that each example thesis has two parts. The bold portion states the writer’s claim without any specifics; it does the thesis’s job, but in a minimal way.

The second portion adds detail to the claim, providing depth and a preview of the points that will be developed later in the essay.

It can be challenging to craft a detailed thesis (also called a closed thesis) at first, but your student can perfect the skill through practice.

Step 2: Making a plan
With this thesis statement, your teen has cast a vision for the essay, so it’s on to the outline. To return to the house-building metaphor, it’s now time to draw up blueprints!

Starting this phase can be challenging. If your student stares at the rest of the blank page in dismay, you can help them overcome writer’s block by continuing your conversation.

Asking questions and jotting down bullet points is a helpful jump-start strategy. Encourage your teen to verbalize their opinions on the topic or list reasons for the claim they are making. Put each opinion or reason in a bullet point. As your student talks through their thought process, they will gain the confidence to convert their ideas into typed words.

Find creative ways to help your teen organize these bullet points to plan the paper’s flow. For doodlers, let them draw bubble diagrams with favorite colored pens. If your student needs to be hands-on, give them a pile of sticky notes and a blank wall or kitchen counter. If your teen is a systematic, linear thinker, show them a traditional outline as a pattern. These diagrams, sticky notes, or bullet points turn into ready-made topic sentences for the essay’s paragraphs.

Step 3: Starting the draft
Once the points are planned out, it’s time to write a rough draft. Your student can use the blueprint they
have made to start framing out the essay, starting with the structure—the way the essay is organized. Just like constructing a house, early progress may seem skeletal and painstakingly slow, but it will take shape with persistence.

A well-structured essay has four key components:

- **Introduction paragraph**—it sets the stage for the points that are coming. A good introduction often starts with a broad view of the topic and zooms in to a specific claim or thesis.
- **Thesis**—this is usually the last sentence in the introduction paragraph. It should reveal the essay’s ultimate destination (the main point to be proven) and, ideally, sketch the route it will follow to get there (the detailed subpoints that prove the main point). See the example sentences under Step 1.
- **Body paragraphs**—each subpoint should be unpacked in its own body paragraph. Essays typically have two or three. These paragraphs work together to build a convincing case, showing why the thesis is true.
- **Conclusion paragraph**—it pulls all the points together and sums up the essay’s main argument. A good conclusion leaves the reader with an interesting parting thought.

If building paragraphs is a hurdle for your student, these tips may help:

- **Begin with a topic sentence** that introduces the topic or point specific to this paragraph.
- **Provide evidence or reasoning** that unpacks the topic or explains why the point is sound.
- **Use clear transitions and explanation** to help the reader trace the train of thought and bridge any gaps between points.

**Step 4: Editing makes perfect**

When the draft is finished, the essay is well on its way to completion. But, like a newly framed and sheet-rocked home, it still needs a pleasing coat of paint and other finishing touches. This process of perfecting is what we call editing.

One key component of the editing process is attention to style. Style is like the paint color that gives a room its unique character. As your teen edits the rough draft, they should consider these factors that set their style apart.

- **Wording** should be clear and understandable. Are thoughts phrased in a way the reader can readily follow? Or are they cumbersonsome, awkward, or vague?
- **Vocabulary** should demonstrate proficiency. Are words used correctly? Do some sophisticated words appear?
- **Transitions** between thoughts or paragraphs should be clear and smooth. Can readers easily trace the progression from Point A to Point C? Or are they left confused by a leap in logic?
- **Sentence lengths and structures** should vary. Do all the sentences follow the same standard formula, or do they switch up the order of phrases and clauses? Does the reader want to keep reading? Are the metaphors or illustrations compelling?

Your teen should also pay attention to grammar and mechanics. Like door knobs and light switch covers, contractions and commas may not seem that important at first glance; but they can enhance or detract from the finished product your teen has labored to create.

As your young writer proofreads to check for grammatical errors, ask them to pay attention to things like capitalization, punctuation, verb tense consistency, complete sentence structure, and correct usage (absence of contractions, abbreviations, slang, etc.).

Find a proofreading checklist to help guide your teen, or make your own rubric! [hslda.org/Q419Rubric](http://hslda.org/Q419Rubric)

Look up one of the many grammar resources available online if either of you needs a refresher on these topics.
key component of the editing process is attention to **style**. Style is like the paint color that gives a room its unique character.

The free grammar rules and entry-level quizzes at grammarbook.com would be great places to start!

**Assessing and grading**

When your teen has finished editing, the construction project is complete and ready for final inspection! You, as the parent, get to play the inspector’s role.

Consult your grading rubric to help evaluate structure, content, style, and mechanics, along with other components discussed in this article.

Remember: not every essay deserves an A! Fair grading should evaluate more than your student’s effort or intent. You can help prepare them for life after high school by giving honest feedback and pointing out mistakes. Healthy critique will empower them to grow as a writer and a young adult. (Check out “Evaluating High School Course Work” by former HSLDA educational consultant Diane Kummer: hslda.org/Q419Grading)

**You’ve got this!**

High school writing does not have to be scary—for the homeschooling student or parent! You can help your teen learn and practice writing skills at home.

HSLDA is here to support you every step of the way. Our team of high school consultants can give you as a member personalized advice about curriculum or other resources, and our slate of HSLDA Online Academy English courses can provide extra accountability, input, and reinforcement for your student’s writing journey. Let us help you make homeschooling possible!
Undeniably, homeschooling options for families with students with special needs have evolved and expanded throughout the twenty-first century. But for homeschooling parents, figuring out exactly how to work with their child’s specific learning challenges—or even understanding the underlying difficulty their student may be experiencing—is not always easy. One particular group of students who require more specialized planning are children who struggle with social pragmatic challenges and autism.

Social communication, which refers to the way children use language within social situations, involves more than just spoken word; it also includes social cognition, non-verbal communication, language processing, and social pragmatics. The latter is commonly understood to be the core challenge for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Understandably, at this point you may be asking yourself, “what exactly is social pragmatics?”

Definitions vary to some degree, but the essence of social pragmatics includes three key components: (a) the ability to use language for different purposes, (b) the ability to adapt language to meet the needs of listeners, and (c) the ability to follow the often-unspoken rules of conversation.

Child development and social pragmatics

Early on, we are taught that the ability to communicate effectively is a key skill, and that the better we are at it, the better our quality of life will be. Children begin communicating from the moment they are born, letting their mothers and fathers know they have arrived by that first cry. As these little ones continue to grow and develop, so too will their social communication abilities.

At least, this is the process in most cases. While it would be nice if this were true for all, not everyone is automatically wired with natural social communication skills. For some individuals—such as children with autism—the skills that develop over time are dependent on other factors such as joint attention, perspective-taking, comprehension monitoring ability, and social interest.

These real-life examples of typical adults who do not have autism may help illustrate the different aspects of social pragmatics:

1. After work, Jalynn runs into the grocery store and sees that her childhood friend is the cashier. As Jalynn checks out, she takes a few moments to catch up with her old friend about their families and kids. Since there is a long line forming behind her, Jalynn quickly ends the conversation by exchanging contact information and making plans to follow up the conversation with a phone call. If no one was waiting, she might have remained to talk, but she did not want to be rude to or disrespectful of the time of those waiting behind her.

2. Jalynn sees her psychologist as she walks to the movie theater. She only knows him professionally. They exchange a few impersonal comments related to the movies and continue to the theater without extensive interaction because Jalynn recognizes that discussing personal or medical issues with him outside of his office may be inappropriate.

3. Jalynn meets her friend at the gym. As they walk together on their treadmills, they share creating visuals or written instructions might provide cues, sequential steps, reminders, or setups for situations to your child.
information about various topics until they have both exhausted their interest in each subject. Their interest and understanding of each topic is mutual.

Barring behavior that violates socially acceptable pragmatics, the average person moves from one social interaction to the next without any conscious thought. But for individuals with autism, this natural movement is not the case. Difficulties in joint attention, social reciprocity, and the use of verbal and nonverbal communicative behaviors makes interpreting social situations—such as those found in the above examples—very difficult.

What can homeschooling parents do to help?

Speech language pathologists are definitely a valuable resource to parents who have students with autism or other pragmatic challenges. Homeschooling itself also offers parents the advantages of consistency and flexibility, as the family explores and implements a variety of common, routine-based strategies to support students on a daily basis. Here are some example strategies:

- **Role play**: Engage in role-play activities that involve adults and other children to simulate social situations (e.g. going shopping, going to the park, visiting grandparents).
- **Turn-taking games**: Engage in turn-taking games, such as board games, to teach the child how to win graciously and that it is “okay to lose.”
- **Facial expressions**: Look up images of facial expressions online and discuss the feelings associated with each one.
- **Miming**: Practice different facial expressions through miming faces that show different feelings.
- **Describing activities**: Look at pictures together to encourage descriptive language about a topic or thing, with the adult prompting the child to stay on topic.
- **Puppets**: Take part in role play or puppet shows after watching a modeled situation on YouTube or television.
- **Comic strips**: Use age-appropriate comic strips that illustrate various social situations (dos or don’ts), then talk about what is happening.
- **Social stories**: Find stories that depict how to behave and respond in certain social situations—or develop your own!
- **Greetings**: Encourage your child to say “hello” and “good-bye” in social interactions.
- **Visual or text supports**: Create visuals or written instructions that might provide cues, sequential steps, reminders, or setups for situations and different kinds of people your child may encounter. These cue sheets could list possible topics appropriate to discuss with individuals based on their age, background, interests, occupation, etc. Other cue sheets might offer sample lead-in
sentences for changing the topic of conversation or ways of asking to join a group activity. What reminders would your child find helpful?

- **Social skills groups**: Work with local homeschool or community groups to set up small structured sessions where social skills can be practiced (e.g. turn-taking, waiting, responding, staying on topic, questioning).

Because communication is a vital skill needed to build relationships with other people, systematically supporting a child’s social pragmatic challenges is equally important. Doing so in a homeschool environment offers a multitude of advantages—with consistency, familiarity with the environment, and individualization in programming at the top of the list.

Becoming skilled at social pragmatics is also important academically, as many curriculum-based activities rely on working in groups and communicating between peers. Figuring out how to play appropriately with others, making and keeping friends during structured activities (e.g., playing a sport, attending scouts), and developing an understanding and awareness of how to master specific social skills (such as taking turns in conversations, using appropriate eye contact, and understanding figurative language) are just a few of the advantages that children can experience through direct support at home in social pragmatics.

Because communication is a vital skill needed to build relationships with other people, systematically supporting a child’s social pragmatic challenges is equally important.

### KEEPING IT FUN: SOCIAL SKILLS GAMES

Looking for games that teach your child social skills? Try some of these ideas!

Many games that involve two or more players—such as bingo, matching games, or memory activities—can simultaneously allow children to practice the skills of waiting and turn-taking.

You can lead a small group in exploring idioms (which can be confusing even to children who don’t have ASD), and help them practice staying on topic. You might use a fun book, like *In A Pickle and Other Funny Idioms* by Marvin Terban, that illustrates and explains idioms while children have fun guessing the meaning of each idiom. Or you could use a website such as Idiom Site, Fun Brain, or Vocabulary.co.il.

Learning to read facial expressions and interact socially can be more interesting when part of a game such as Face It. [hslda.org/Q419Facelt](hslda.org/Q419Facelt)

As in an acting class, you can try “mirroring”: have your child imitate you while you touch your nose, stick out your tongue, or make funny faces!

Do these suggestions spark your creativity? You may be able to use or adapt other games—or even invent your own—to reinforce social skills and help your child become more comfortable in various social situations.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rochelle Matthews-Somerville, PhD, is a homeschooling mom of six with over 20 years of experience as a university professor, autism specialist, resource teacher and educational consultant. She has worked in both the private and public arenas, supporting individuals and families with unique learning and behavioral challenges.
INTENTIONAL

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