

## Back to school - or not?

From my experiences of helping to run a local home educators' support group, I know that the school summer holidays can be a decision time for those families who are facing problems with their children's education. Sometimes it is the act of going away together that gives parents and children the opportunity to talk about difficult issues for the first time. Sometimes there have been niggling problems for some months and the summer holidays are a chance to bring them to a head and decide to make some changes.

In our society it is a commonly held belief that children go to school, end of story. It is assumed that that's how they get an education. After all that's what happened with us wasn't it? What many do not realise is that it is **education** that is compulsory for children, not **schooling** (and education and schooling are not synonymous). What's more, it is the responsibility of parents not that of the state, to ensure that their children receive a suitable education, although in the UK and many other countries parents may choose to delegate part of their responsibility to the state by sending their children to school.

The vast majority of parents take their responsibility for their children's education, along with their health and wellbeing, very seriously. When there are problems at school, not only is it difficult for the children concerned, but parents find themselves questioning their parenting skills, their choice of school, their faith in the education system. As with many parenting issues, being in this type of situation, where our expectations are suddenly dashed, causes anguish and heartache.

What can be done to remedy such situations? Here are some general suggestions which I've come up with from chatting over these issues with many families:

- Get informed. Find out all you can about the educational options open to you and your child in your area. Remember, home education is an option wherever you live in the UK. For the legal situation in the UK see:

[www.home-education.org.uk](http://www.home-education.org.uk)

For the legal situation in other countries, see:

Learning Unlimited: [www.learning-unlimited.org](http://www.learning-unlimited.org)

For further information on alternative forms of education, see the resources page on my website. ([www.sallylever.co.uk](http://www.sallylever.co.uk))

- Clarify with everyone involved what your educational priorities are. Write them down as this helps to focus everyone's attention on them.
- Remember to consult your child and respect their wishes. (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 12.)
- Talk with other families who have experience of the form of education you are thinking of using.
- Remember, you are the expert on your child. If you feel that their educational needs would be better served by an alternative form of education, then you are probably right!

Finally, whatever choices you make with your child about their education, the decision is reversible. Whilst many children are educated totally through a school, there are tens of thousands in the UK who are totally home educated or spend part of their childhood in school and part of it at home. It really is your choice.

© Sally Lever 2005. [www.sallylever.co.uk](http://www.sallylever.co.uk)

Sally Lever is a Sustainable Living Coach who specializes in supporting those who are downshifting or otherwise moving towards a more sustainable way of life. She offers one-to-one coaching, teleclasses in "How to step off the Treadmill" and a free email newsletter.