

## Unschooling - Unveiling the Mystery

The single most asked question about unschooling is, “What is Unschooling”? Definitions, explanations, opinions, interpretations and expertise abound on the subject. The number of people you ask about unschooling will return an equal number of different responses. Unschooling is not as complicated as it may seem at one’s first inquiry into this homeschooling approach. To gain the most basic level of understanding, all one must do is to dissect the word “Unschool” Below are the official definitions of “un” and “school”.

### **un-<sup>1</sup>** *pref.*

1. Not: *unhappy*.
2. Opposite of; contrary to: *unrest*.

### **un-<sup>2</sup>** *pref.*

1. To reverse or undo the result of a specified action: *unbind*.
  - a. To deprive of or remove a specified thing: *unfrock*.
  - b. To release, free, or remove from: *unyoke*.

## School

1. An institution for the instruction of children or people under college age.
2. An institution for instruction in a skill or business
  - a. A college or university.
  - b. An institution within or associated with a college or university that gives instruction in a specialized field and recommends candidates for degrees.
  - c. A division of an educational institution constituting several grades or classes
  - d. The student body of an educational institution.
  - e. The building or group of buildings housing an educational institution.
3. The process of being educated formally, especially education constituting a planned series of courses over a number of years:
4. A session of instruction:
  - a. A group of people, especially philosophers, artists, or writers, whose thought, work, or style demonstrates a common origin or influence or unifying belief.
  - b. A group of people distinguished by similar manners, customs, or opinions:
5. Close-order drill instructions or exercises for military units or personnel.

### *tr.v.* **schooled, school·ing, schools**

1. To educate in or as if in a school.
2. To train or discipline

So, according to the experts, in layman's terms, Unschooling is "not school". I often suggest to people to think of terms they are more familiar with and apply the same theory to unschooling. For instance, everyone knows what unwed, unemployed and unacceptable means. This simplifies the idea of unschooling down to simply "not going to school". I believe unschooling goes a little farther in that it also applies to not "doing" school at home. If a couple has lived together for several years, has children together, has made a home together, but are not legally married, are they still "unwed"? Well, yes, by the legal definition, they are unwed.. But in the eyes of their peers, they would be better described as partners or mates. If a family does school at home, if they replicate a school schedule, structure, atmosphere and ideology, are they unschooling since they do not send their children to a building outside their home for their education? Technically, yes, they are "not schooled" in the conventional fashion. But, "homeschooler" would be a more accurate term, as their goal is to replicate a school environment at home.

The idea of being unschooled seems very foreign and confusing to most people, especially to society at large that supports public schooling. Even among homeschoolers, the concept of unschooling may seem a bit radical and questionable. After all, doesn't the majority of parents want the BEST education possible for their children to insure their future happiness and success?? The prevailing theory is that being successful as an adult means going to school as a child. Being unschooled is a direct contradiction to what most people believe to be normal for an individual. But, in reality, unschooled individuals are the norm. The majority of the population is unschooled. Generally speaking, children from 5-18 are usually enrolled in public school. According to the 2000 US Census statistics, around 20% of the population is from age 5-19, and around 22% of the nations population is enrolled in college or graduate school. So, that means that approximately 42% of the population is either required to, or has chosen to be in school. The other 58% is "unschooled". What does the other 58% of the population do as unschoolers? To put it simply, they live their lives. They learn what they need to know when they need to know it, or, when they chose to learn it because of interest or necessity. They work, they play, they grow, they progress. Above and below school aged people go about their day to day routines doing any and every thing conceivable and they are never questioned as to "why" they are not in school. People who not in school are not regulated when, what, nor how to learn. Unschooled people are free to make choices, free to change their minds. They are liberated from restrictions that schools must employ to manage a group of people to conform them to all learn the same material, at the same rate, in the same manner. ALL unschoolers enjoy these freedoms, not just the school aged ones that call themselves unschoolers. Most individuals only go to school a few years of their lives, even if they go to college or graduate school, they spend their majority of their lives unschooled. Some families have chosen for their children to forego school for those precious, formative, fleeting childhood years as well. What an unschooling family does, how they spend their days, how they learn, how they parent, their values, beliefs, goals and ideals will be as various and diverse as the rest of the general population that is not in school. The commonality among unschoolers is the simple fact that they do not go to school, they do not replicate school at home, and they grow and learn through their daily lives, very much like all the other unschoolers in our population who have no idea they are unschooling.