



AHEM News

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

**What
you
need
to
know
when
you
need
to
know
it**

Avoiding Homeschool Burnout

by Isabel Shaw

Mother Overload

Yes, there is one downside to homeschooling. Does it happen to everyone? Are some moms more prone to burnout than others? How can you cope, and more importantly, how can you prevent it? To find out, I asked my team of experts — dozens of homeschooling moms — if they experience burnout, and how they deal with it. Their answers may surprise you.

Nearly every homeschooling mom interviewed has, at one time or another, found herself “at the end of her rope.” Homeschool organizer Nancy Plent (Unschoolers Network) said it best: “Most of us are the authors of our own stress. We want everything to be perfect and go according to schedule, everyone in the family to be happy all the time... well, life just doesn’t run that smoothly.” Even so, for homeschooling moms it’s essential things at home “run smoothly.” Home is both our work place and family place. When something disrupts that environment, trouble can arise.

Symptoms of Burnout

The moms I spoke with discussed a variety of symptoms:

- Crying easily
- Lack of patience
- Overeating or no appetite
- Overreacting to minor issues
- Making irrational decisions

Often you have no sense of priority, and what usually does not phase you, suddenly does — in a big way. One mom described her burnout: “I just wanted everyone (in my family) to go away!”

Causes

Homeschooling moms report being hit particularly hard by the “non-negotiables” — those situations in life over which we have no control:

- Illness
- New baby
- Added responsibility
- New job
- Moving
- Change in routine

Then there are stressful circumstances you can control: Over-scheduling activities, unrealistic expectations, rigid adherence to a curriculum, lack of support, and too many commitments. In short, trying to be a homeschool “Super Mom.” Surprisingly, the solutions to stress factors that are either in or out of our control are very similar.

What You Can Do

Most moms agreed that burnout, while unpleasant and difficult, was not necessarily a bad thing. It’s a signal that something needs to be changed, and changed quickly. Homeschooling author Micki Colfax (*Homeschooling for Excellence*) advises parents about burnout: “If you’re feeling stressed, you’re doing too much. Cut back. Lighten up. Time is on your side.” Along with that advice, try these tips:

1. Lower your expectations. My 82-year-old mother broke her pelvis earlier this year and moved in with us. It was very stressful maintaining our routine and caring for an elderly parent. Organized learning was just about impossible. Fortunately, I saw “burnout” on the horizon and let go of any ideas of formal learning. For over two months we did nothing that resembled schoolwork. Watching my two girls learn to care for their grandmother and seeing the love grow between the generations was a far more valuable lesson than anything I could have taught them.

Lowered expectations apply to all of those non-negotiable situations that arise. Housework really can wait; sandwiches are fine for dinner. Children learn from watching their parents. As they see you cope with difficult situations, they learn to draw from their own inner strength. Whatever organized learning the kids skip this month they can make up next month, or even next year, if necessary.

2. Be flexible. If something isn’t working, be willing to try something different. Remember: There should be no tears on either side. If tensions rise, put aside whatever work you’re doing (or thinking about doing) and head for the park or the

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skating rink, or go for a bike ride. Try playing a board game or reading a funny book together. Remember why you're homeschooling: You have the freedom to choose what, when, and where your children will learn. Today's cranky child will be tomorrow's eager learner if you allow some space when conflicts arise as you homeschool.

3. Change your teaching style. Dr. Raymond Moore, author of *Home School Burnout*, believes: "The most frequent cause (of burnout) is the use of conventional 'packaged' curricula, keeping the mother and children tied to books for hours a day." Re-creating school at home is a mistake many homeschoolers make. When dealing with younger children, this can spell disaster.

Mary Pride (*The Big Book of Home Learning*) suggests asking yourself: "Am I overdoing it? Am I making simple subjects too fancy? What can I eliminate? Do I need to be doing this at all? Is my child too young for this subject? Should I give it a rest? Are there other worthwhile things we would like to study or do and come back to this later?" Then read anything by John Holt. Start with *Teach Your Own* or *How Children Learn*.

4. Limit scheduled activities. Homeschool moms schedule too many activities under the guise of "socializing" their kids. This ultimately produces grouchy kids and a worn-out mom. Debra Newby wrote about the Super Mom phenomenon and decided: "My new philosophy is to say no to the good things, and yes to the great things." Other moms suggested allowing kids to pick two activities and drop the rest.

5. Get support. Homeschool dads play a big role in alleviating or eliminating homeschool burnout, with one caveat: They need to be told to do it! Just about every mom agreed — dads didn't pick up on the extent of the mom's difficulties. This, in itself, was often the cause of additional stress. So don't hold your breath waiting for your mate to lift the burden — tell him exactly what you're feeling and what you want or need him to do. My group of moms reported that dad helped by taking the kids for the day (out of the house, of course!) and by assuming a little more responsibility while mom recovered.

Dad working extra hours or not available? Join a homeschool support group. I also found help and support by joining homeschool email groups — there are groups for every interest imaginable.

Final Suggestions

Remember to schedule time for yourself, paying someone to stay with your kids, if necessary. I try to get up at 6 AM to have some quiet time. Sometimes I read, exercise, go through my mail, or write a friend. This helps clear my mind before our busy day begins.

Learn to distinguish between what is essential, and what can be put aside for the time being. Know what your priorities are and try to stay focused on them. As your children grow and become more independent, homeschooling becomes easier. (Trust me on that one!) Most importantly, remember that those "rough" times are just temporary.

Success will come when the realization finally sets in that the direction of this homeschooling adventure is up to you. It's not about what the school-kids are doing or what your mother-in-law says your kids should be learning, but what you and your family have decided will be your path of education. That is learning in freedom. And when you're there (it took me several years), "mother overload" will be just a memory.

Reprinted with permission from Family Education Network:
<http://school.familyeducation.com/home-schooling/stress/38363.html>

Current State Scene . . .

Legislative Update

The 187th Massachusetts Legislative session (2011-2012) is now underway and our legislators are in the process of filing new bills. AHEM is monitoring all new bills filed that have the potential to impact homeschoolers in our state. The following education bills were filed within the first few months of the new session:

H 1909, Rep. Antonio Cabral, Democrat, New Bedford; Rep. Stephen R. Canessa, Democrat, New Bedford; Rep. Kay Khan, Democrat, Newton; A *PETITION RELATIVE TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN*
This Bill would amend MGL Ch. 69 Sec. 1B by directing the Board of Education to "establish the permissible and mandatory ages for school attendance provided that each child be required to attend a full-day educational program at kindergarten age."

This bill would effectively lower the required school attendance age by making kindergarten mandatory. Home-schoolers in MA would presumably need to begin filing education plans for their "kindergarten aged" children. This Bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 2/25/11. A hearing was held May 31, 2011.

H 1081, Rep. Martha M. Walz, Democrat, Boston; A *PETITION RELATIVE TO THE MANDATORY MINIMUM AGE FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE*
This Bill appears to go hand in hand with H 1909. It also amends MGL Ch. 69 Sec. 1B by further directing the Board of Education to "promulgate regulations setting a uniform calendar date each year for the purpose of determining the mandatory minimum age for school attendance..." The Bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 2/16/11. Hearing was held May 31, 2011.

H 1964, Rep. Martha M. Walz, Democrat, Boston, and others; A *PETITION FOR LEGISLATION TO REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE OF STUDENTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS*

H 1964 also amends MGL Ch. 69 Sec. 1B by changing the mandatory high school attendance age from 16 to 18. It further amends MGL Ch. 76 with the "age 18" requirement and directs the school Superintendent to notify the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) if a person between the ages of 16 and 18 withdraws from school. The RMV may then revoke that person's driver's license, except in certain extenuating circumstances. This Bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 2/25/11. **A hearing is scheduled for**

September 27, 2011 from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM in Gardner Auditorium.

S 1743, Rep. John A. Hart, Democrat, Boston; *A PETITION FOR LEGISLATION TO DENY DRIVER'S LICENSES TO TRUANTS*

This Bill amends MGL Ch. 90 by adding a section requiring that an application for a driver's license or learner's permit be signed by a parent or guardian and be accompanied by certification from the school district that the applicant is enrolled in high school or, – among other possibilities – “ a home education program that satisfies the requirements of all state laws governing such courses...” This Bill would seem to require homeschoolers to present an approval letter or other certification from the school district that they are engaged in an approved homeschooling plan prior to obtaining a driver's license. The Bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Transportation on 1/24/11.

AHEM has contacted the offices of Rep. Walz and Sen. Hart to clarify how certain wording in the bills would affect homeschoolers. We will continue to follow these bills, as well as numerous others that are likely to be filed during this legislative session, and keep our Friends informed about additional proposed legislation that could affect MA homeschoolers.

Around AHEM . . .

Commonwealth Museum

<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mus/museum/index.htm>
Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts is planning a tour of the Commonwealth Museum, 220 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA, from 10:00 am - 1:00 pm on Friday, September 16, 2011.

The recently renovated Commonwealth Museum celebrates and documents the history of Massachusetts from colonial times to the present. The scheduled program includes a focused classroom activity and a tour of the interactive Museum galleries. The program is appropriate for ages 8 - 18.

Cost is \$10/person to reserve your spot; the full price will be refunded to you at the museum, making your visit FREE. If you don't show up, your money will be donated to support the non-profit mission of AHEM.

If you want to go: Mail a check made out to Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. Please include:

- the number of children and adults,
- names of attendees
- ages of children,
- your address, and
- email or phone number.

Those with email will receive confirmation about a week before the visit.

Space is limited; checks must be postmarked by September 2nd. No refunds after September 2nd except those made to attendees at the museum on September 16th.

IMPORTANT: If you sign up for a field trip or event, please do your best to attend. Remember:

- When you sign up, you are reserving a spot that then cannot be given to someone else.
- It is disrespectful of our host and reflects poorly on all homeschoolers when we reserve space, and a large part of our group doesn't attend the event.
- If you sign up and do not show up, AHEM reserves the right to no longer treat your reservation request on a first come, first served basis for future AHEM events, only assigning you a spot should there be room after the deadline has been met.

Email FieldTrips@AHEM.info for more information or call 781-646-4541.

Directions

See <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/sec/mus/hours/houidx.htm>.

Parking

Free parking at the museum.



Huckleberry Finn

Monday, October 17 at 10:00 AM

Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain presented by New Repertory Theatre, Arsenal Center for the Arts, 321 Arsenal St., Watertown, MA.

Join Huck and Jim as they travel along the mighty Mississippi River in this brilliant adaptation of a true American classic. Witness Huck wrestle with moral conflict between conforming to society's will or remaining true to his friendship. Written in 1884 by Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was considered largely progressive in its day: speaking humorously yet squarely against racism, segregation, and intolerance.

New Rep on Tour (<http://www.newrep.org/ontour.php>) presents compelling, relevant productions created especially for students. Recommended for middle and high school students. Be aware that this particular New Rep production is an abridged version of the play (90 minutes) designed for school shows and is followed by a Q&A with the actors.

No food or drink is allowed in the theater – snacks may be consumed in the building but not in the theater itself. Panera Bread is next door to the theater, and will be open serving soup, sandwiches, bagels, pastries, and drinks all day.

Cost: \$14.00 per seat for adults or children. Homeschoolers ages six and up are welcome – no children under six allowed in the theater.

If you want to go: Mail a check made out to *Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts* to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474.

Please include :

- your name
- the number of children and adults,
- ages of children,
- your address,
- and email or phone number.

Those with email will receive confirmation about a week before the visit.

Space is limited; **Checks must be postmarked by September 30.** No refunds after September 30. For more information call 781-648-5579 or email FieldTrips@AHEM.info.

IMPORTANT: If you sign up for a field trip or event, please do your best to attend. Remember:

- When you sign up, you are reserving a spot that then cannot be given to someone else.
- It is disrespectful of our host and reflects poorly on all homeschoolers when we reserve space, and a large part of our group doesn't attend the event.
- If you sign up and do not show up, AHEM reserves the right to no longer treat your reservation request on a first come, first served basis for future AHEM events, only assigning you a spot should there be room after the deadline has been met.

Directions:

New Repertory Theatre is located at the Arsenal Center for the Arts, 321 Arsenal St., Watertown. For directions see <http://www.newrep.org/directions.php>.

Parking

After turning into the Arsenal on the Charles Complex, take a right after the stop sign and an immediate left into the six story FREE parking garage.

Become a Friend of AHEM

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. (AHEM) is a nonprofit, independent, grassroots, volunteer-run, educational organization that gathers and disseminates information about homeschooling in Massachusetts through education, advocacy, and events. We believe that informed and active homeschoolers are their own best advocates in maintaining the right to independently homeschool. We welcome and value the participation of anyone interested in homeschooling in Massachusetts. AHEM, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All donations are tax-deductible.

Friends of AHEM keep abreast of legislative and other issues that affect Massachusetts homeschoolers via an announcement-only email list or this newsletter. Friends of AHEM with email get special notice of AHEM events, field trips, and get-togethers. Be proactive: become a Friend of AHEM. Even if your involvement is simply to stay informed, that strengthens all of us.

To become a Friend of AHEM and receive email updates, send your name, address, and email address to info@AHEM.info. To become a Friend of AHEM and receive *AHEM News* by US mail instead of email updates, send your name and address to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. Donations to offset cost are appreciated.



www.facebook.com/AHEM.ma

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Friends of AHEM without Internet access* must complete and return the following form to continue getting *AHEM News* hard copy after this issue. Our goal is to utilize the most efficient and effective option of communicating with our Friends that uses the least amount of resources.

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- ☐ I would like to donate to AHEM.** I am enclosing a check for:
- ☐ \$5 ☐ \$10 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ Other \$_____

Please print neatly:

Name (s): _____

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**AHEM, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax-deductible.