

Natural Learning by Kristin Marshall

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This depiction of natural learning represents my own point-of-view, and is not meant to represent the opinions of any other homelearners or criticize other homelearning options. Please take what works for you and your family, and leave the rest behind.

What is natural learning?

For those of you who are new to home schooling, or are still searching for a homeschooling style that fits your family, I would like to present another way of doing things.

Natural learning is an option many parents don't consider, or don't consciously choose. For many of us, it is simply a continuation of the way we've been living with our children from the start. For others, choosing natural learning is a deliberate rejection of traditional forms of schooling.

What is natural learning? It is a whole way of living and learning about life. It defines itself as, primarily, not schooling in the way that most of us have been brought up. It goes by many other names as well: radical unschooling, child-directed learning, interest-based learning, delight-driven learning, whole world learning, and many more colorful and evocative terms. Natural learning makes no distinction between "living" and "learning". There is no school at home.

But what do natural learners do? We live together within our families and communities. We trust our children to learn what they need to learn, when they are ready to learn it. We respect our children as contributing members of the family and society. We grant our children independence to choose what and how they want to learn.

Natural learning manifests itself differently in every family. At our house, we read a lot--independently, quietly, together, raucously. We use educational software. And gameboys. One child writes a lot of books. Another puts on plays and puppet shows. They all play dress-up and act out stories and fantasies. We play board games, cards, puzzles, blocks, lego, trains, dolls, and teddies. We take classes within the community--skating, swimming, gymnastics, music. We spend lots of time outdoors, enjoying and observing nature. Sometimes, someone will request math worksheets. We cook together, and clean (sometimes), and enjoy each other's company. We all have time to pursue our own interests and often the rest of the family is caught up in one person's enthusiasm, and so we all learn alongside one another. One of the greatest gifts of natural learning is time.

In the words of John Holt: "The child is curious. He wants to make sense out of things, find out how things work, gain competence and control over himself and his environment, and do what he can see other people doing. He is open, perceptive, and experimental. He does not merely observe the world around him. He does not shut himself off from the strange, complicated world around him, but tastes it, touches it, hefts it, bends it, breaks it. To find out how reality works, he works on it. He is bold. He is not afraid of making mistakes. And he is patient. He can tolerate an extraordinary amount of

uncertainty, confusion, ignorance, and suspense... School is not a place that gives much time, or opportunity, or reward, for this kind of thinking and learning." (How Children Learn, New York: Delacorte Press, 1983: 287).

We are fortunate in BC that homeschooling regulations allow us a wide range of personal freedom. If you are registered with an unschooling network, such as Wonder Tree or Joy Song, and if you keep reasonable personal records of your child's growth, you will meet BC's homeschooling requirements. There are other registration options, such as Nechako and Ashcroft. Ask people who are parenting in a way that is compatible with your own style, and find out where their children are registered and what requirements they must fulfill.