

What is Deschooling?

A guide for parents who are just starting out

From someone who's been home educating for ten years. You've got this.

If your child has just left school — whether that was their choice, yours, or simply the only option left — the most important thing you can do right now is **not very much at all**.

That probably sounds counterintuitive. You've just taken on responsibility for your child's entire education. Surely you should be *doing something*?

You are. You're deschooling. And it matters more than almost anything else you'll do in those first weeks.

"Deschooling is the long, deep breath your child needs before they can start learning again."

So what actually is deschooling?

Deschooling is the period of decompression between leaving school and starting home education. It's the time your child needs to shake off the stress, the anxiety, the association of learning with pressure — and remember that curiosity is natural, and that they actually *like* knowing things.

It was first described by writer and education philosopher Ivan Illich, who suggested that for every year a child spent in school, they needed roughly **one month of deschooling** before they'd be truly ready to engage with learning again in a new way.

You don't have to follow that formula rigidly. But it's a useful gut-check. A child who spent five years in a school that wasn't working for them probably isn't going to bounce back in a fortnight.

What does deschooling actually look like?

Honestly? From the outside, it can look like not very much. And that's the point.

- Sleeping in. Not having to be anywhere at 8am.
- Reading whatever they want — or being read to, or listening to audiobooks
- Following an interest down a rabbit hole with no particular destination
- Playing. At any age. Play is learning.
- Baking, building, gaming, drawing, watching documentaries
- Spending time outside. Moving their body. Breathing.
- Just... being at home. Feeling safe. Not being assessed.

None of this is wasted time. All of it is part of the process. A child who is regulated, rested and reconnected to their own interests will learn ten times faster than a child who is burnt out and braced for pressure.

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continued...

The deschooling timeline — a rough guide

Every child is different, but this is a useful framework. Think of it as a starting point, not a rule.

Week 1–2	Do almost nothing structured. Let them sleep, play, exist. Don't mention lessons. If they ask to do something educational, great — follow their lead. If they don't, that's fine too.
Week 3–4	Gently introduce rhythm without routine. Meals at regular times. A walk. Some reading together. No pressure, no timetable — just a gentle shape to the day.
Month 2	If they're ready, try a Study Week — a loose, interest-led week where they explore things that genuinely interest them. Watch and learn: this tells you so much about how they learn best.
Month 3+	Start to introduce light structure if they seem ready. Follow their lead. Some children bounce back faster; others need longer. Trust what you see, not what the calendar says.

What about you?

Deschooling isn't only for your child. You probably need it too.

If you've been watching your child struggle — fighting to get them into school, dealing with the fallout when they got home, fielding calls, attending meetings — you are tired. The decision to home educate, even when it's the right one, is enormous. Give yourself permission to settle into it slowly.

Use this time to observe. Watch how your child spends their time when there's no pressure. Notice what they gravitate toward. Notice when they're energised and when they're not. You're gathering information that will shape everything that comes next.

"The best thing you can do right now is create a calm, relaxed environment for curiosity to grow in."

When you're ready to start — remember

- There is no race. The school system's timelines are not compulsory.
- GCSEs don't have to be taken at 16. Kids don't need to be reading by 7.
- Home education doesn't have to look anything like school.
- You don't have to be a teacher. Your job is to facilitate their education — that doesn't have to mean teach.
- Changing your approach isn't failing. It's responding. That's good parenting.

Things they've gravitated toward during deschooling (clues for the curriculum ahead):