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BY AZIZI TUERE BIRKELAND

# The Untold Guide to Homeschooling

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The Questions You Should Answer  
Before You Ever Choose a Curriculum

A CHECKLIST FOR THE CONSCIOUS HOMESCHOOLING FAMILY

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## A NOTE FROM AZIZI

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I'm Azizi Tuere Birkeland. Brooklyn-born, globally grown. Author, parent leadership mentor, and homeschool mother of two daughters, now 14 and 16, who have been home educated from the very beginning. My husband is from Norway, and together we've traveled to nearly 30 countries and lived in 6 as a family. We currently live in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where both of our daughters became fluent in Spanish within their first year. Our learning has never looked like school. It looks like life. This guide comes from over a decade of building that life, making every mistake, and learning what actually matters before the curriculum ever enters the conversation.

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*"The way we were educated becomes the water we swim in.  
We don't question it. We just replicate it."*

Let me be honest with you.

Most parents who begin homeschooling start from a place of reaction. Maybe something went wrong at school and you pulled your child out. Maybe you never enrolled them in the first place but you're still looking over your shoulder at the system, wondering if you're doing it right. Either way, the first question is almost always the same: What curriculum should I use?

It feels responsible. It feels like the right first step. But it's not. It's the familiar step. It's the step that was programmed into you by a system that taught you education is something delivered to you, not something you design with intention.

**You were never taught to define education for yourself. You were taught to follow it.**

Whether you left the system or never entered it, when you build from an anti-premise, from comparing yourself to school rather than creating from your own vision, you end up replicating the very thing you chose not to participate in. Same structure. Same performance model. Same pressure. Different building. And now you're expected to be parent, teacher, administrator, and evaluator. All day. No wonder families burn out.

This guide exists because there is a handful of questions you should sit with before you ever open a curriculum catalog. They aren't about reading levels or math programs. They are about you, your child, your family, and what you are actually building.

**The families who thrive are not the ones with the best curriculum. They are the ones who got clear on their foundation first.**

This is that foundation.

# 01 — YOUR REAL WHY

Not the surface reason. Not the crisis that pushed you. The deeper truth about what you want for your child's experience of learning, growing, and becoming.

- Why am I choosing home education, and what am I moving toward, not just away from?**

If your answer starts with "because the school..." keep going. What's underneath that?

- What do I want my child to feel about learning ten years from now?**

Not what scores they have. What relationship with curiosity, challenge, and growth?

- Am I building something new, or am I replicating school with more control?**

Be honest. There is no wrong answer yet. But there is a costly blind spot.

- What does an educated person actually look like to me?**

Not what you were told. What do YOU believe? Write it down. This becomes your compass.

- What fears am I carrying from my own educational experience that might be shaping my decisions right now?**

Our wounds become our children's curriculum if we don't name them first.

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*"A child who is met with presence will learn anything. A child who is met with performance pressure will learn to perform or shut down."*

## 02 — YOUR CHILD AS THEY ACTUALLY ARE

Not the version the system measured. Not the label they were given. The whole, living, developing human in front of you.

- When is my child most alive, most engaged, most themselves?**  
This is data more important than any assessment. Pay attention to it.
- What has the traditional system taught my child to believe about themselves?**  
Gifted? Behind? Difficult? Quiet? These labels live in the body. They shape everything.
- What does my child need to heal from before they can fully show up to learn again?**  
Some children need space before structure. Rushing past this creates resistance, not progress.
- How does my child actually process the world: through movement, conversation, solitude, building, story?**  
This is not a learning style quiz. This is knowing your child.
- What is my child curious about when no one is assigning anything?**  
The answer to this question is worth more than any scope and sequence.

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*"When we rush to teach, we often miss who is sitting in front of us.  
The curriculum can wait. Connection cannot."*

## 03 — YOURSELF, HONESTLY

You cannot pour from an empty cup, and you cannot educate from an unexamined one. Your capacity, your patterns, and your own relationship with learning will shape everything.

**What is my own relationship with learning, and how does it affect what I expect from my child?**

If school was traumatic for you, that memory is active. If school was easy, you may not understand struggle.

**What am I afraid of if my child doesn't keep up with grade-level benchmarks?**

Name the fear. Is it about your child, or is it about how others will judge you?

**Where does my need for control show up in how I think about education?**

Scheduling every hour, needing visible output, comparing to school peers. These are signals.

**What support do I actually need to sustain this, and am I willing to ask for it?**

Community, rest, co-learning, help with specific subjects. Martyrdom is not a curriculum.

**Am I willing to let my child's education look different from what I imagined?**

This is the question that separates families who survive homeschooling from families who thrive in it.

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*"Your children don't need a perfect teacher.  
They need a parent who is willing to grow alongside them."*

## 04 — YOUR FAMILY ECOSYSTEM

Home education is not a solo project. It lives inside the rhythms, relationships, and realities of your whole family. If the ecosystem is ignored, even the best curriculum will collapse under the weight of daily life.

- Is my partner or co-parent aligned with this decision, or are we carrying unresolved tension about it?**  
Unspoken disagreement becomes daily friction. Address this before you buy a single workbook.
- What does our family actually need right now: more structure, or more spaciousness?**  
Some families need rhythm. Some need room to breathe. Know which one yours is starving for.
- How will this affect the financial, emotional, and logistical reality of our household?**  
Not to scare you. To prepare you. Sustainability is not optional.
- What community and connection does my family need, and how will I build it intentionally?**  
Socialization is not the real question. Belonging is. For your child and for you.
- What does thriving look like for our family, not just our child?**  
If homeschooling works for the child but destroys the parent, it is not working.

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*"Home education is a family practice, not a child's program."*

## 05 — THE REAL SHIFT

These final questions are the ones that move you from reacting to creating. From replicating someone else's model to building your own. This is where homeschooling becomes home education.

- What would I build if I stopped comparing our days to a school day?**  
If a school day didn't exist as a reference point, what would your family's learning life look like?
- What would I let go of if I truly trusted my child's ability to develop at their own pace?**  
Testing? Grade levels? The need to prove it's working to someone who isn't in the room?
- What values do I want embedded in our daily rhythm, not just taught as a subject?**  
Kindness, courage, creativity, justice, rest, wonder. How do these show up in Tuesday afternoon?
- What would it look like to educate from a place of abundance instead of anxiety?**  
Not "will they fall behind?" but "what is possible when a child has the time and space to become?"
- When I imagine my child at 25, what do I hope they carry from these years?**  
Not credentials. Character. Not performance. Presence. Let this answer guide everything else.

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*"The most radical thing you can do is educate your child  
from a vision, not a wound."*

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NOW YOU ARE READY

## Now choose your curriculum.

Now ask about math programs and reading levels and schedules. Because now those questions have a foundation underneath them. They aren't floating in anxiety. They are anchored in clarity.

You didn't just pick an approach to education. You excavated your own beliefs, examined your child's actual needs, looked at your family honestly, and built a vision that no curriculum company could have sold you.

**That is the difference between doing school at home and building a life of learning.**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Azizi Tuere Birkeland is a Brooklyn-born author, parent leadership mentor, and home education advocate raising two daughters, now 14 and 16, who have been home educated from the beginning. Together with her husband from Norway, their family has traveled to nearly 30 countries and lived in 6, currently calling San Miguel de Allende, Mexico home, where both daughters became fluent in Spanish within their first year. Their learning has never looked like a classroom. It looks like Tiny Green Chef cooking programs, recording original albums, writing and publishing books, freelancing for authors, and project-based work that turns curiosity into real capability. Azizi is the author of the award-winning "Because I Am..." and "Playground Parables" children's book series. She believes learning should be practical, personal, and designed to bring out the talents, gifts, and interests that grow capable, self-accountable adults.

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If this guide moved something in you, share it with a parent who needs it.