

# A Letter to Parents

Dear Parent,

Welcome to a new adventure! You may be feeling both excitement and trepidation right now. After all, regardless of how old our children get, we as parents always wonder if we and they are doing the right thing.

That is the way Dale's father and I felt when we opted out of the traditional educational system in 2004. We were worried that unschooling and doing something different from the norm would hinder Dale's learning and his options later in life. What we found was that the more we stepped away from the established paper-and-pencil path, the deeper and wider he explored in the real world, the more he learned, the more he loved learning, and the more he discovered opportunities.

I do not know all the questions you may have, but I would like to share a little about our experience. I hope that some of what we found will be useful to you and your child as you embark on the UnCollege journey.

First, here are some of the challenges:

1. Self-directed learning is not easier than school. It is more work to determine who you are, what you want to learn, and the best way to go about it. Your child will have to research, create, connect, plan, manage, and self-evaluate. However, it is incredibly valuable to be able to do these things, and these skills will serve your child well in life.
2. You will have to explain, defend, describe, and strongly support your child over and over again. Be proud that you have a child who dares to be different. Trust that they will figure out what needs to be done. Unfortunately, many people feel threatened by someone taking a different path in life. These people will feel a great need to tell you why you and your child are wrong, making a huge mistake, and so on. Be strong, be open, and find a statement you feel comfortable with that will inform critics without prolonging arguments.
3. Your child will have to be determined, persistent, resilient, and confident. Having you listen and ask thoughtful questions may be very useful to them, perhaps in different ways than it would be to a student following a standard, classroom-based curriculum. Some of the things they try may not work the first time. Some people may say no or not answer calls or emails. Your child may need to rethink a situation and try a different approach. Again, these challenges are worthwhile and develop essential problem-solving skills.

Second, here are a few of the joys:

1. Being the parent of a happy, thriving, engaged, and courageous young adult;
2. Being amazed by all the practical life skills they are learning and applying that seem light-years ahead of many of their peers;
3. Watching doors open to your child;
4. Seeing the world become their oyster;
5. Seeing your child make new friends, new colleagues, and amazing new connections with mentors and people around the world. (Sometimes you get to enjoy these connections, as well.)

I could keep gushing.

I hope your family will have as positive an experience as we did when we left traditional schools and came to understand the world as our classroom. I hope that you and your child will develop a community of supporters to share in the joys and trials of self-directed learning.

Yours,

Lisa Nalbone,  
Dale's Mom