

Help! My Daughter Wants to Go to School!

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For the past several months, my heart has been in turmoil: my daughter wants to go to school. Last year, she talked about going to school several times, but with school already in session, it wasn't even remotely possible.

However, no sooner had we finished last year's schoolwork, when Sarah asked if she could go to school in fall.

"Why do you want to attend school?" I asked her.

"Because Alexa is there, and I want to go to school with her. I want to see what school is like. I'd like to have different teachers," Sarah said. "And I'd like to get some awards and trophies like Alexa." Sarah was envious of her friend's academic awards.

So, we talked about envy.

"But it's not just that, Mom," Sarah explained. "I want to study and learn and see if I can be as smart as Alexa. When I'm at home, it's just me."

So, my husband and I started talking about school. We had homeschooled Sarah since she was five and we vaguely planned to homeschool "as long as it worked."

Now, Sarah wanted to attend school. And we had to determine if her desire was one we should act on or not.

Part of me could completely understand Sarah's interest in school. She is a mature girl, ready to face the world, and what better place to start than the

comfortable family of the small local Catholic School?

There was one problem, though. Sarah had just completed sixth grade work at home, but was the age to enter sixth in the fall. Should I put her in seventh grade? Her girlfriend was entering the seventh grade, and Sarah assumed she would go into seventh. I wondered how I could decide whether Sarah should go to school or not when I couldn't even figure out what grade she should go in.

Another thing was that Sarah was bright and quick. I didn't think she would enjoy all the waiting and explanations of things she already understood. I thought it would take her a year to adjust to school; my husband thought it would take two weeks.

"Maybe after two weeks she'll hate it and want to come home," I told my husband. "She doesn't know how slow it goes, and how you have to wait for the teacher to explain things to the students who don't get it. She learns fast. When she finds it boring, then what will we do? I'll want her home, but I don't feel two weeks will be giving it a fair shake. Besides there's the tuition factor, and what will the school think if we pull her out after only a short time?"

"Maybe we could find a gifted school for Sarah," my husband wondered.

"I checked into them. There are only two near us, one cost \$12,000 and has a waiting list, and would take 45 minutes to drive to, the other cost \$13,000 and would take an hour to drive to," I said.

"O.K. St. Peter is \$2,500, which suddenly seems inexpensive. Let's send her to St. Peter, and make her stay till Christmas," Mike said. "That way she'll get a good idea of what school is like."



"But what if they wreck her before then?" we wondered.

What did we mean by "wreck?" We wondered if the other children at school would so badly influence Sarah that she might change. We had heard about sending a child into a school to be salt and light, but we remembered that rotten apples spoil even the good apples just by being near them. She would certainly change if we let her go there. Would the change be reversible if bad? Would she still be the Sarah we knew and loved? (We doubted that Sarah might change for the *better*.)

Besides that, was the fact that we would dearly miss her presence in our family each day. Though her need seemed to be to broaden her horizons and move out into the world, our family needed her, too.

As I began to see this question about school was going to take some consideration and time, I began to pray. Was it best for Sarah to go to school this coming year? I prayed and asked God to guide me to the right answer. I asked the Holy Spirit to inspire me with the right questions to ask, the right books or web sites to consult.

I called the school to make an

appointment to meet with the principal. She sent me some papers and said to call her in a month.

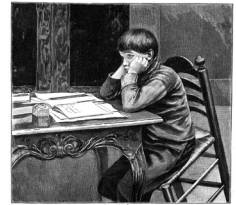
This delay proved to be Providential. We had time to think more, pray more and gain some additional information.

I started a page of questions to ask other school parents and the principal. Then I called two school mothers I knew. I asked them their opinion of the school and how they felt it was run. This helped tremendously. The two mothers gave me both positive and negative things to think about.

As the summer progressed, Sarah still asked about school, and continued to state she was looking forward to trying it. I told her that her dad and I were praying and thinking it over.

On the advice of a gifted program teacher I asked, we decided to arrange privately for Sarah to be tested. The teacher explained that teachers deal with hard data. If Sarah entered school and I told them she was gifted, they would want some test results.

I made an appointment with a professional. I thought I'd ask the psychologist her opinion about the sixth vs. seventh grade issue, and what advice she could give me about transitioning Sarah into the school environment.



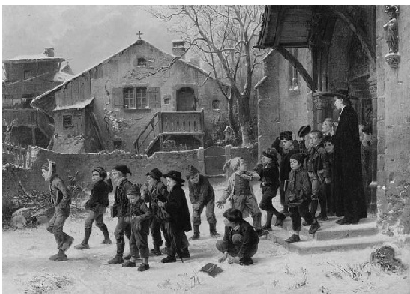
Just before the testing, I was visiting with a friend who suggested praying to Saint Padre Pio, to whom she has a great devotion. I immediately began asking Padre Pio for help in knowing what to do for Sarah.



At the psychologist's office, I found out Sarah is definitely gifted. The psychologist told me privately that what she usually saw in her office was a gifted child who was bored with school. Her recommendation to those parents was to home school!

The psychologist's opinion on grade level was that there was no doubt Sarah should not go into sixth grade. She already knew that information, and if she entered sixth simply for "social" and "adjustment" reasons, she would be unbelievably bored with the academics. That was no way to start a school experience for Sarah. However, the psychologist told me that with Sarah's quick brain, Sarah had no idea of how dull school would be, even seventh grade—unless she were in a gifted classroom. Our local Catholic grade school has no gifted classroom or program, I told the psychologist. The two schools we knew of were out of our price and driving range. "Then I recommend you keep her home, you're doing a terrific job with her!" she said, to my amazement. "When she gets to high school, they'll have advanced classes she can take. Homeschool her till then."

On the way home, I kept smiling to myself. "I'm doing a terrific job!" I said to myself.



Once home, I told my husband everything the psychologist had told me. At that moment, my husband relaxed. "We should keep homeschooling her, then. That's what's best for Sarah."

"I think you're right," I said. "Even though she wants to go to school, she doesn't really know what she's asking for. In a way, I'd like her to know what school is like, and I'd even like her to have the experience of being bored in school; but not," I stated, "not at the risk of ruining her love of learning," I said.



"And not at the risk of ruining her loving, wonderful character," my husband continued. We still had the school tour and meeting with the principal to get through, but at that point, we felt we'd pretty well made up our minds to keep her home. I felt Padre Pio had helped us to consider all the possibilities and decide what was best.

It was very difficult to meet the principal with our minds made up to homeschool. The principal gave us the tour and highlighted the positive aspects of the school. I knew that Sarah could survive there, and even do well there. It just was a matter of what was best.

When we returned home, Mike and I holed up in our bedroom for a long talk. We discussed school, pro and con. We talked about the fact that we'd never really thought about the point where we would put Sarah in school. We discussed and reviewed the psychologists report. We talked about our daughter and what we thought was best for her. We prayed.

Then we decided that the best thing

would be to continue to homeschool Sarah.

I said a prayer of thanks to the Holy Spirit and to St. Padre Pio, and then I began to worry about Sarah's reaction to our decision. She had been operating all summer on the assumption that she would go to school in the fall.

After we let our decision rest for a day, and we allowed the Holy Spirit to fill us with a sense of calm and reassurance that we were making the best decision, we called Sarah to us, and told her our decision.

"Really?" she said, "and I was so sure you would say yes. Oh well, this way I can still go to chess club." (A homeschool group activity she particularly would miss if she went to school.) And then, after we told her all the reasons why we decided, she skipped off to work on the computer.

"Well," Mike said in amazement. "Now I wonder how much she really wanted to go to school."

"Did I agonize all summer for nothing?" I asked.

"No, it was really good we went through this," Mike said. "Now we know just where she is academically and intellectually. And we know that our local Catholic school is not an option for us, now or in the future." (We had found out some things we didn't like about the school.)

"And perhaps," he said, "we'll send her to

the local Catholic high school in three years, when she's at the right age to enter ninth grade."

"Or, we'll keep homeschooling her, if that's what's best," I added.

"Yes," he said. "we'll just keep trying to do what's best."

And that is how I spent my summer vacation.

What I learned from this experience:

1.) I have always listened to Sarah and I've wanted to provide learning opportunities that she requested. This worked fine when she wanted to learn

to play chess, the recorder, and to swim. Attending school is in another realm. Even with these other things, the child often doesn't know what she's asking for. Who knows when one starts piano lessons with enthusiasm what ordinariness sets in after practicing daily for two years? It is the parent who must decide what activities the child should start, which she should stick with, and what can be left as "untried" or "the road not taken."

2.) The process of looking into school was eye opening. Having never had a child attend school, the whole school idea, though familiar to my husband and I because we had both attended, was unfamiliar and strange. School is both the same as when we were kids and very different. There are agendas now that were not around 20 years ago.

3.) Testing our daughter proved fruitful. First, we now know her ability and intelligence level, something we suspected before but we now have



confirmed. Also, the tester confirmed our current schooling choice as the best thing for Sarah, which, of course, influenced our final decision. Third, it was a good experience to discuss our situation with a professional.

4.) It drew Mike and I closer this past summer. We had to really work together to discover what was best for our daughter in terms of education. He was always supportive of my homeschooling efforts, but this experience reinforced to him all that I was

already doing, and how much money I was saving our family.

5.) The goodness of God and the way He answers prayers, as well as the intercession of the saints: St. Padre Pio really helped us to come to understand our situation and decide what to do. I could not have made it through the summer without my heavenly helpers.

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