

Episode 46. Kids and Homeschooling with Alison Morrow

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SPEAKERS

Deana Thayer, Alison Morrow, Kira Dorrian, Future Focused Parenting



Future Focused Parenting 00:03

What happens when two parent coaches, one a Christian and the other an agnostic Jew, sit down to talk about parenting? They take their listeners from surviving to thriving. I'm Deana Thayer, and I'm Kira Dorrian. Welcome to Raising Adults, a podcast brought to you by Future Focused Parenting.



Deana Thayer 00:22

Hi, everyone. Kira and Deana here from Raising Adults podcast. And we have the distinct privilege today of speaking with Alison Morrow, who is a homeschool transition coach with goodschooling.net. And we're really excited to hear from her about how families can make the dive into homeschooling, if they're maybe interested or curious about that. So we'll get right to that in a minute. But we do need to give a little bit of a disclaimer about what you might be hearing in the background today. Right, Kira?



Kira Dorrian 00:51

Absolutely. There's a lot happening.

- D** Deana Thayer 00:53
So we've got literally across the street from where Kira and I record, a gentleman with a chainsaw working to take down a tree. There's a storm where Alison is so we have already heard some thunder before we got going here. So just know that if you hear some of that, it's just life, and we're all about life and being relatable and things happen. So just have some grace for who knows chainsaws, storms, all of the above?
- K** Kira Dorrian 01:18
Yeah, I mean, if you thought Rhiannon coughing, and Dave being on the brink of back surgery was noisy, and then this is gonna put that to shame.
- D** Deana Thayer 01:26
Yeah. This might be kind of next level. So.
- K** Kira Dorrian 01:28
Exactly. So welcome, Alison, thanks for being on the show.
- A** Alison Morrow 01:32
Thank you so much for having me on. I'm so excited to be here with y'all.
- K** Kira Dorrian 01:36
So I would love to just start by having you tell us a little bit about yourself. A little bit about yourself, your business, what you do, and how you ended up doing what you do. And then we have a bunch of questions for you about homeschooling, and why someone might do it and all, dispelling some of the myths of homeschooling, and all that good stuff.
- A** Alison Morrow 01:53
Awesome. Sure. So I am a homeschooling mom of two, I've got a 13 year old and 11 year old that we have homeschooled since the beginning, they've never attended school, traditional school anyway. I actually had my start in education. I've been a classroom teacher, I was a classroom teacher for six years in elementary and then later in middle school. And I actually had the idea that I wanted to homeschool my own kids back before I even graduated college. I actually, I can actually remember the day I decided. And it was

when I was in the middle of my student teaching takeover that, the two weeks when you kind of become the classroom teacher at the end of your senior year of college, when you're getting your education degree. And I remember thinking I love teaching and educating and I still do. I love coaching, which is why, one of the reasons I do that now. But I thought I, I love this. But I would never want to put my own kids in this system because I could already see even after that short amount of time in the system, I could already see the flaws and the cracks. And so, you know, our first daughter was born. And luckily, you know, for whatever reason, kind of didn't think to talk about that desire with my husband before we got married. But luckily, once we actually had children we started talking about you know, okay, well, the whole preschool thing, are we gonna do that, and started talking about homeschooling and realized he was totally on that same page. And so we, like I said, they've never been to conventional school. We've homeschooled since the beginning. And actually the very beginning of our homeschool journey, though, was fraught with a lot more trial and error and frustration than we thought it would be. Because I kind of assumed being a teacher myself that the homeschooling thing would be easy. Like I understood curriculum, I understood pedagogy, all these different things. And then we started homeschooling our first year, and it was, it was disastrous. And once we finally came out on the other side of that, and found ourselves talking to other parents, we realized almost all of us went through this same disastrous first, sometimes even second year. And I thought there has got to be a better way for people to start homeschooling than just trial and error, because nobody wants to gamble two years of their children's life and education on gee, I hope we figure this out. And so that was what started me down the path of coaching. And I actually systematized the whole homeschool launch, the transition into that, to help families have a much more structured and standardized approach to starting homeschool, so that they could figure out what was going to work best for their family at the beginning, instead of having to fumble through and make all of these mistakes and cross their fingers and hope that they made it to the finish line.

D

Deana Thayer 04:37

That was really smart.

K

Kira Dorrian 04:38

That's so cool. I love that. I mean, homeschooling's something I've kind of thought about off and on and I don't think I'm ever personally going to be able to do it. Maybe I'll be convinced after this interview though. But that's always been the big question is like how in the world does one make that leap? Especially if you've been in school? How does one make that leap because it just feels so, so daunting. So let's start. Let me just ask you why might someone choose to homeschool in the first place? I'm sure there's lots of different

reasons. But can you kind of talk a little bit about where that decision even comes from for lots of families?

A

Alison Morrow 05:14

Yeah, of course, you know, I think there are, like you said, there's a zillion reasons, right. But I think we can categorize them into three, three specific kind of overarching reasons. And the first would be your family values. And that, people hear that, they automatically assume that means like, religious values, but that's not necessarily true. Whatever your family's personal values are in terms of not just your beliefs, but the kind of life that you want to live, the kind of things you want to do as a family. For example, you know, families who are very adventurous, they want to go live off the grid, or they want to be able to travel, you know, on the offseason, and go to these awesome places that, when they're not filled with everybody on spring break, and all that kind of thing. Whatever the family values are that you have for the kind of life that you want to live with your family, not just your beliefs, but the kind of experiences that you want to have as a family. I think that's one of the reasons nowadays that a lot of families are starting to make the leap, particularly now that the internet makes it so easy for a lot of parents to be able to work remotely, be able to do what they do from wherever in the world. And so they're realizing I don't have to be tied to a commuter schedule and have my kids in school, we can up and move and go wherever we want to. So I think that's one reason. I think another reason is because kids are falling through the cracks. And I know a lot of parents think, well, if my child has special needs of any kind, there's no way I could possibly homeschool. But both of my girls have unique needs, health wise and learning wise, and I can tell you, you absolutely can. And I think that's a reason why a lot of families are choosing to is that they're realizing that schools are very often not equipped to deal with children who are at the far ends of the bell curve. And so even if their child is, you know, for example, very gifted, unfortunately, a lot of schools, their version of a gifted program is just giving them more work. That's not utilizing their intelligence, that's not challenging them, that's just loading them down with more, it's almost punishing them for being smart, you know. And then on the other hand, you have kids who are struggling, they're falling through the cracks, because this poor teacher, and I, having been there, I feel for them. I know exactly how it feels to look at your classroom and know that you've got three or four kids that you are not able to do everything that you need to be able to do to really reach them and help them reach their potential because you are so burdened with all this other stuff that you have to do. And so parents see that and think, my kid's not getting a good education, you know, despite the things that the school says they're going to do because of the IEP, I'm constantly having to chase them down, make them stick to the IEP. And then they think, why, why am I spending all this time this way? Just bring the child home and I'll figure it out myself. I'm spending this much time trying to get them the education they

need anyway. Why don't I just do it from home? And then I think another reason is just seeing how schools are now. It's so different from when we were kids. Not just the safety thing, that is obviously huge, but also just the amount of testing, the amount of pressure, the classroom size, the curriculum, and parents are looking at this and thinking, this is not what I want for my, for my child. So, you know, obviously you've got things in there, like we talked about religious reasons, and, you know, maybe even health reasons, but I think really, those three areas are the main reasons why we're seeing so many families right now, taking this leap into starting their own homeschool adventure.

D

Deana Thayer 08:44

Oh, Alison, I wish you could have seen me I was nodding furiously during that part of describing the second reason about just adding more work to a child who's maybe on the stronger side academically. And Kira knows, we had this exact scenario with one of my kids. And so I was relating and nodding furiously. And it's so true that sometimes the school isn't equipped to capture everyone on the far ends of the spectrum. So I love that you mentioned that. So say a family, for maybe one of these three reasons or another one, has now made that decision to go ahead and homeschool. How would you recommend that they get started?

A

Alison Morrow 09:21

You know, nowadays one of, it's funny, there's so many resources now, which on the one hand is fantastic. There's so many blogs, so many books, so many resources to help families make that, that jump. But on the other hand, it's overwhelming now, because there is so much. 20, 30 years ago, people wanted to get homeschool, start homeschooling, they had no idea what to do, and they couldn't find help because there were so few people. Now we kind of are having the opposite problem where there's too much help. It's like how, where do I go? And so I try to really simplify it for people. I tell them there are just five steps. There's just five things that you need to do. And the first is just figure out your state laws. Those are the lines that you kind of need to color within and every state is different. So you know, which on the one hand is frustrating because I can't just say just do this, this, this and you're good. But on the other hand, you know, depending on the state you're in, it's fantastic because for example, here in Texas, we have very little regulation. And so it's, it's very easy to get started with homeschooling. But figure out first, you know, your state laws, figure out your methodology. And this is what people skip. So often, it really dings their entire, their entire journey and start, starts it off on the wrong foot, is not figuring out what your own approach needs to be. A lot of times people jump straight into curriculum, they go, I'm going to homeschool. So what am I going to use? And they start looking at programs, but they don't realize that curriculum is

created to line up with specific methodologies, specific philosophies. And so if you don't know what your family's methodology and philosophy is going to be, then you're kind of at the mercy of just other people's opinions, Oh, I love this program, this program is great. Well, maybe for them, but that doesn't mean it's going to work for you. And so the next step is really figuring out, what is your methodology going to be? And then the third step, then would be go find that curriculum. And then the next step after that is figuring out how are you going to organize all this, because for a lot of states, you have a lot of record keeping to do. And so then it's a matter of figuring out, okay, you know, I have to save paperwork for a portfolio. Or I need to save, you know, the work that we've done in some way so I can send it to district officials or whoever happens to oversee homeschooling in your state. So figuring out, you know, how are we going to do that? And then the last thing is finding a tribe. And I think this is something people tend to kind of skip as well. But it is so important, especially in your first year, to have other people around you who are going to encourage you, who are going to give you solid advice. People who follow the same methodology as you so that when you come up with these, you know, problems that are specific to how you want to homeschool, the advice they're giving you is in line with the same kind of goals and values that you have for your child's education. But those five things are, are really the main, the main steps that you want to take. And we can fill in a bunch of other little things along the way as well. But if you really strip it down, those are the five that are the most important. And I would also say too that if you go to our website at goodschooling.net/blog, we have an article called How to Homeschool. And we have a free download there that has that, those five steps on a checklist with all the little sub steps that kind of go with it. And that's a free download, people can grab that and use that to kind of help them get started with their launch.

K

Kira Dorrian 12:39

The thunderstorm in the background is, I love it. It's like, it's making this conversation so dramatic. And important. It's wonderful. And so I love, you know what I love about those five steps is the methodology piece is so similar to our why, like having that strong foundation of why, so that you set that up first, and then you're building around that. I mean, that's, that's fantastic.

D

Deana Thayer 13:03

Let the how come from that? Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

K

Kira Dorrian 13:05

So here's a question. This is one of my biggest concerns, whenever I have even dabbled in

the thought of homeschooling is, you know, how, how do children socialize if they aren't in school? And I know that there's enrichment programs and things that, things they can be doing. But that doesn't seem the same to me as having to navigate day to day, other people, and you know, other, other teachers and other, other points of view. And so, help me understand some of the ways that homeschooling parents can still provide that for kids.

A

Alison Morrow 13:40

That is, that's definitely one of the biggest issues a lot of people have is, is worrying that their, their children are going to not have the social skills that they need, because they've been homeschooled. And I think part of that comes from not necessarily understanding all of the resources that are available to homeschoolers, and the fact that when you homeschool, you're not chained to the kitchen table. Like, I know so many homeschoolers who spend less time at home than they do just out in the world because they're taking advantage of the fact that homeschooling is portable, like you put it in your backpack and you take it with you, you can go anywhere. And so for example, my, my daughters are both involved, we make them cap their activities at two activities each, because otherwise we would never be home and we would never have time for school either. But they're both in different sports and activities, some with other homeschoolers, some with other, quote, regular kids, unquote, I guess. And so they're going to those multiple times a week. We have a neighborhood full of kids, they're constantly out with those. We do go to church, they're, they're at church twice a week and, and interacting with those kids as well. And we also make sure that they are in either some kind of a class or some kind of an academic activity with other kids as well. And one of the things that I love, at least about our area here, and I will fully admit that a lot of these resources are going to depend on how hard or easy it is to homeschool in your state. The more regulation you have, the more intimidating it can be. And so a lot of parents kind of get turned off by that. They don't even want to try. And so you know, law of supply and demand. If there's not a lot of demand, because there's not a lot of homeschoolers, it's true that you're not going to end up with as many resources and you, the homeschooling parent, do need to work a little harder to make sure you're getting your kids out there with other kids. But for example, here in Texas, we have some of the most laid back homeschooling laws in the country, which is actually one of the reasons we moved here. And we have multiple homeschooling groups that we belong to that all have very different kinds of people. And that has been a value of mine, wanting to make sure that my children are not just in a little bubble. We kind of live in an economic bubble where we are anyway. And so I wanted to make sure we were breaking out of that as much as we could. But we have a secular group, we have a Christian group, because that's how we identify, we have different like I said, the different activities that we're in that don't really line up with any particular philosophy or

anything, they're just ways for kids to get together. And because of those, my girls have been able to meet a lot of different kids from a lot of different backgrounds, and have been able to get into more social situations than they would have if obviously, I had not done that.

D

Deana Thayer 16:31

So Alison, I know that another probably outside of socialization, probably another one of the big concerns is higher education. So tell us about that. So say, I'm homeschooling and I'm worried will my child still be able to go to college? Talk to us about that.

A

Alison Morrow 16:46

This has been one of, I think one of the best parts of homeschooling exploding the way that it has over the last 10 years. And that is that colleges are starting to catch on and they're realizing, hey, homeschool students are an asset to our university. Because homeschool students are typically independent learners, they are able to direct their own learning, they're still naturally curious. They've had opportunities to choose, they've had the chance to, to nurture their own curiosity and passion for learning whatever it is that they're interested in. They've had more time to be able to put into things like volunteering, and after school jobs and whatever activities that they're involved in, like, you know, horseback riding, or softball or whatever it is that they want to do. Because they're not at school for seven and a half hours, and then coming home and doing three hours worth of homework. Homeschool, you can finish a full day of challenging high school work in four and a half to six hours. And then you're done. That's not like, you do that, and now you have to work on homework. You're done for the day. So now you have all this extra time. So these homeschool kids are applying to college with these incredible resumes, these incredible transcripts and applications that show all of this stuff that they're able to do because they have so much more time.

K

Kira Dorrian 18:09

So, okay, here's what I'm curious about. And one of the things that has consistently put me off of homeschooling is the fact that I have to teach my children. I am not a classroom teacher. And I don't actually feel like my kids will learn very well from me. I'm not, I am great, I'm a great adult teacher. I work great with adults, but like I teach, I volunteer in the classroom. I teach the little empathy program they have at school, and it is 20 minutes a week. And I'm maxed out. Like I've done my 20 minutes for the week. And that's about all I've got. So what if you're a parent that likes all of this? And it's like, I want that for my kid, but I am not going to be a very good teacher. What do they do?

A

Alison Morrow 18:51

Well, again, this is another awesome time. Another reason why it's awesome to homeschool now, because thanks to the internet and this explosion of homeschoolers, there are an incredible number of resources for parents who are in, in that position either because they just don't want to teach, or because they can't. They have to work full time or they have like a chronic illness or something and they cannot dependably consistently provide the instruction themselves and they need that to be provided in some other way. You would not believe the number of online classes, the number of DVD or CD based resources. And then in places where there are a lot of homeschoolers, you have these homeschool classes where parents will get together and they will create kind of almost like a mini school, but you wouldn't necessarily take all your classes there unless you wanted to. But they'll figure out hey, you know, I love teaching science. And so I'll teach a couple science classes. And this other parent says, I love teaching math. I'll teach that. And so you end up with these little programs where you can sign your child up for whatever classes you want them to take there. For example, I love science, I'm fascinated by science,. I hate to teach it however, because I do not like the mess in my kitchen from the experiments and having to buy all of this stuff that we're only going to use once and, and so I have consistently outsourced our science education almost ever since we started homeschooling. And so we have a program right down the street here, where my girls have taken their science classes for the last three years. And it has allowed me to have, you know, we work on the homework at home together, they only go to class once a week, for an hour, they do all of the fun hands on stuff there and all that cool stuff. And then we come home and at home, we do, you know, I read them the textbook, and we go through the workbook together and that kind of thing. Um, but then there are also programs; they tend to be called hybrid programs. And actually, both my daughters were in one of these last year as well, where the child is at school, two days a week, or maybe three days, depending on the program, and they get all their instruction there. And then on the days that they're home, they have their little homework checklists. And at the particular school that my girls were at, the, all of the Upper School classes were taught by teachers who had a master's degree in their field. So that was incredible. You know, they had this incredible wealth of knowledge and, and really great instructors, but they're also making all of their upper school, high school level classes dual credit, so those kids are actually going to be able to earn high school and college credit at the same time at that particular school. And there are more of these popping up, because there are so many families who want to get their kids out of that traditional classroom, or the public schools, but they may be either or similar to you like, they just do not want to be the one responsible for the, the instruction, or you know, they need to work. And so they need a place for their child to go at least you know, a couple of times a week. And so they can send them to those programs. And then their kids have these checklists. And it helps them to become very independent. You give them their checklist, and you know, obviously, the younger your

child is you kind of have to work on it with them a little bit. But the older they get, the more you can kind of turn that over to them and make them responsible for getting their work done. So you have this wide gamut of resources, curriculum that comes you know, on DVD or is accessible online. Fully online programs where you've got the whole thing, my, my older daughter is actually going to be doing one of those this coming year. We just, we buy the whole eighth grade package. And here you go, she logs in, here's her assignments for the day, all the instruction is right there. She has her textbooks and workbooks, she takes her tests online. I go in and make sure you know, she's actually doing everything that she should be doing. And of course, she can ask me questions. But I'm not the one having to teach every single subject. And then these classes, these resources, things like co ops where families get together. And instead of a drop off class, like those homeschooling classes, where the families all get together, you know, once a week or whatever, and the kids just kind of trade off from parent to parent. This parent is going to do Spanish, she's a native Spanish speaker. So she's teaching everyone Spanish. And when they're done with that, they're going to go over to this teacher and they're going to do some science experiments. And then they're gonna go to this one, and they're going to do a book club. And so the parents all get together and everyone just kind of volunteers, hey, I'll do this, I'll do this. And so everybody gets to do what they're good at what they actually enjoy doing. And then other parents can say, I'll babysit the littles, while everyone else is teaching, I'll take all the you know, the preschoolers and we'll, we'll play with playdough and glitter over here, or I'll do all the snacks or whatever for the parents who don't actually want to teach, but they want to help out and participate so that their children can get the experience and the time with those other parents. So you have so many options now, so many options, which is super exciting, because it just makes homeschooling that much more accessible.

K

Kira Dorrian 23:53

Yeah, I'd be on snacks.

D

Deana Thayer 23:59

That's awesome. So I love, I love that you address the dual credit thing too, because I would imagine even though it's not something we've talked about today, that, that might be another concern that's cropping up now in this age of AP and running start and IB. The families who are interested in that and love the idea of a student getting college credit while they're still in high school can know that that also can be accomplished while you're homeschooling. So before we wrap up, I would love to hear from you maybe some things parents should avoid. So maybe you can talk to our listeners a little bit about what are some of the common homeschooling pitfalls?

K

Kira Dorrian 24:34

And also, is there is there any family that you might dissuade from homeschooling? Like is there a particular child or family dynamic or some situation where you'd be like, actually, this is, this is not the right fit for you. Yeah, I mean, do you see that ever?

A

Alison Morrow 24:50

That is a really good question. Gosh, I think it really comes down to what the parent is willing to do. Like sometimes I think a lot of parents have kind of this idea that if they bring their child home, it's going to fix all the problems that they're having. Um, but if the parent isn't willing to admit that sometimes they are part of the problem, and they maybe need to change their parenting style, they need to figure out how to, how to reach this one child, maybe, you know, they've got multiple kids, and there's this one that just does not respond the way the other ones do. And they're going to need to realize I need, I just need to do things differently for this child, and the parent has to be willing to kind of self examine, and, and decide, okay, am I willing to do what I need to do to change me, instead of just constantly trying to change my child? Not that the child was perfect, and doesn't also have to change, but as the adult, you know, it makes more sense for us to look at what we're doing first and figure out am I, am I doing this right? So that's, that is really the only kind of parent I would say should not homeschool is someone who is not willing to admit that they may need to change, they may need some coaching, they may need to change how they handle discipline or how they handle interacting with their child or how they handle their child's issues if the child has, you know, issues of any particular kind. If you're not willing to have kind of a growth mindset, and be willing to embrace, change, and be open to doing things differently, then homeschooling might not be a great idea, because there are going to be times when what was working suddenly is not, or something you really thought should be working is not and you have to stop and reassess and figure out what do I need to do differently? So if you're not willing to do that, then homeschooling is probably not going to be the best thing for you. But in terms of common pitfalls, common, you know, problems families have. I briefly mentioned this earlier, when we were talking about how to start homeschooling. The biggest problem I see is that parents dive in first to figuring out curriculum, and they just go off of whatever other people have recommended, oh, this program, you know, everybody uses this program, it must be good. Everybody I talked to has told me I should do it this way, or do it that way. But if you don't know what kind of a homeschooler you want to be, then you cannot figure out your curriculum yet. And no matter how well rated something is, it could bomb for your family, because it does not line up with the kind of homeschooler you want to be. So you've got to figure out your methodology first. And we actually have on our blog, we have a, an article that says, it's called How to Choose Homeschool Curriculum. And we actually have a quiz there that you can take that helps you figure out what your

methodology is. So that's a great resource for families who may be here, are kind of starting to look into this. And that's what they've started with. Stop researching curriculum and go over there and take the quiz and figure out what kind of homeschooler you want to be first.

K

Kira Dorrian 27:53

Awesome. Well, thank you, Alison, so much for being with us today. Can you give our listeners your info? So how can they follow you? How can they find you if they want to work with you?

A

Alison Morrow 28:02

Yeah, absolutely. So our website is goodschooling.net. We are also @goodschooling on social, all the various social medias. And you can interact on our blog, we've got tons of free downloads. I have a confident homeschooler coaching program that parents can enroll in, if they want to have that, kind of that one on one assistance, to work through their own homeschooling launch. And of course, you can message me through the website if you have any particular questions or any concerns that you're worried about. We also have a free ebook called *Busting the Homeschooling Myths*. That's a great place to start if you're just kind of homeschool curious, and you're worried about things like you know, the things you were talking about. I'm not a teacher. So how can I teach my kids? Can my kids go to college? Isn't homeschooling expensive? All these different ideas, it helps you work through those.

D

Deana Thayer 28:53

Great, well, thank you again, Alison. I really appreciate it.

A

Alison Morrow 28:56

Thank you so much, ladies.

D

Deana Thayer 28:57

Well, I really hope this has been helpful to everyone. Just hearing more about how you might make a decision to homeschool, how you would get going with it once you decide especially as we head into the school year. I think this is a great time for families who might be considering this. And hopefully you found some of what Alison shared to be really helpful as you consider that in the education journey for your children.

- K** Kira Dorrian 29:18
Yeah, she was awesome. Lots and lots of great insight and I love the idea that I could homeschool and just have to bring snacks. That's, that's sounding really good to me.
- D** Deana Thayer 29:28
That was a great insight for you.
- K** Kira Dorrian 29:30
Totally.
- D** Deana Thayer 29:31
Plus, we had the impact of thunder to just really underscore the importance.
- K** Kira Dorrian 29:35
The thunder was so amazing. Like homeschooling bum, bum, bum!
- D** Deana Thayer 29:40
Yes. Educational decisions. They're big.
- K** Kira Dorrian 29:43
Yeah, exactly. I don't think we heard the tree much though. So that was...
- D** Deana Thayer 29:46
We actually somewhat avoided chainsaw and just went with the storm.
- K** Kira Dorrian 29:49
It was pure thunder. Excellent. Okay. Thanks for listening everyone. As usual, if you have questions you can write to us info@futurefocusedparenting.com. Don't forget to follow us on Instagram and Facebook @futurefocusedparenting and @raisingadultspodcast.



Deana Thayer 30:07

Raising Adults is produced by Kira Dorrian and Deana Thayer, and recorded in Kira's laundry room. Music by Seattle band Hannalee. Thanks for listening.



Future Focused Parenting 30:13

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