

When School Stops Working for your Child Resource List

There is a reason why [*Do Schools Kill Creativity? by Sir Ken Robinson*](#) is the most popular Ted talk with over 75 million views. Many families, especially after the pandemic, are finding that traditional school does not work for their children and are seeking other options. This resource list is a starting point to learn about alternative educational options.

When families come to me and they are not sure what to do next, this is some of the information I share with them. If you'd like more individualized support, contact me for a free consultation at www.nicoleconnell.com. I help parents and kids figure out what works for them.

First, how do we determine if school is *working* or *not working* for your child?

As an Educational Therapist, these are the signs I look for to see if your child's current school is working well or if it may be time to look at other options.

When school is working for your child, you will see signs that your child:

- Has healthy confidence and self-esteem
- Has healthy mental well-being and can cope with stressors
- Feels safe at school with healthy nervous system regulation
- Makes steady progress in their learning
- Feels good about themselves as a learner
- Has regular chances to feel capable
- Healthy peer relationships
- Respectful, positive teacher relationships
- Regularly engaged in class
- Completes classwork and homework with no or minor difficulties

When school stops working for your child, you may see some or all of these signs:

- Refuses to go to school
- Self-harming behavior
- Struggles with mental health
- Has low confidence and low self esteem
- Feels unsafe at school
- Experiences high anxiety and nervous system dysregulation at school
- Not making steady educational progress
- Does not feel good about themselves as a learner
- Does not feel capable or intelligent

Complains about school regularly
Unhealthy peer relationships
Negative teacher relationships
Disengaged in class
Difficulty completing classwork or homework

Second, if school is not working for your child, are there changes you can make to make your child's current school work for your child?

There are many reasons why school may no longer work for your child. It is important to figure out the underlying reason(s) school is not working for your child. For some, making some changes at your child's current school or getting extra outside support can make a big difference.

If you've already tried making changes and getting extra support and it is still not working for your child, it may be time to look at other options to find an educational option that can meet your child's current needs. This could be for the short-term or the long-term.

What are the other options?

1. Alternative in-person schools

Tuition free options include charter schools like [Discovery Charter School](#) or [Summit](#).

Private, tuition based schools: Examples include [Bowman Montessori School](#), [Living Wisdom School](#), and 1:1 schools like [Fusion](#) which also offers virtual and hybrid options.

Please note that these are just some examples and not exhaustive. It is important to look for the right fit for your child.

2. Virtual Schools

If physically attending school is a primary part of the current challenge, virtual can be a great fit for some kids.

Free public virtual school is available: [CAVA](#).

There are also private tuition based virtual schools with independent study, group and/or 1:1 options.

Here is one example of a private tuition based virtual 1:1 school: [Pacific Preparatory](#). It can be a whole school experience or it can also be part of a homeschooling or unschooling pathway (see below). This is just one example; there are more options available.

3. Design an education personalized for your child: Homeschooling and Unschooling

The idea of creating a personalized education just for your child may sound daunting but every time I've supported a family in creating something just for their child, it has been even more effective, meaningful and fun than we could have imagined. It is an educational option that can be tailor made to what your child currently needs. It can be designed to support areas of challenge with just the right amount of scaffolding as well as nurturing areas of strength. It also can give space to focus on what your family uniquely values and would like for your child's education (ie: real life skills, soft skills, creativity, entrepreneurship, topics that your child lights up about etc.)

Some children do much better with more freedom, individualization and a different approach. If the structure of school is the problem (ie: homework, standard curriculum etc.) or the current primary focus is creating space to regain mental health, one of these two options below may be a good fit:

- a. **Homeschooling:** There are many ways to homeschool with a spectrum ranging from following a traditional textbook based curriculum to completely customizing a curriculum for your child.

Homeschooling does not mean that parents have to teach everything themselves. That is one way but many families opt to take classes at homeschool academies and/or hire tutors or educational therapists to help or do all of it. Families can choose and hire professionals that are a great fit for their children and change if needed if it's not working. This can help ensure a positive learning environment and can allow for healing if previous school experience was traumatic.

There are organizations that can help navigate homeschooling. One is [Ocean Grove Charter School](#). It is tuition free and they actually even give away annual instructional funds to families. Each family gets an educational specialist who provides assistance and guidance. Another is [Peach Blossom](#) which is a PSP. They can help with legal enrollment, record-keeping, guidance, transcripts, graduation,

college application assistance and more. There are other organizations as well; these are just 2 examples.

- b. **Unschooling:** This is actually a form of homeschooling with a strong emphasis on freedom and choice. It invites your child to take the lead. The approach is flexible, self-directed, and follows the child. The child is very involved in the creation of their own education. It often involves a period of “deschooling” when leaving school to recover from school and adjust to a new educational philosophy. It gives children and teens more choice which can be very empowering and healing. Children may choose to do structured classes or programs but the distinguishing feature is that the child is choosing. They may take a project based approach. This path can allow for a lot of self awareness, self growth and exploration of passions, development of real life skills and healing and recovery if traditional school was traumatic. Parental involvement can be very high or not as high if doing group classes (homeschool academies, community college, online classes etc.) or hiring the assistance of tutors, mentors or educational therapists. Hiring a team of great fit educators can take some work and research but can allow for an individualized, customized approach for your child without having to do it all. Unschoolers can still go on to college.

Sir Ken Robinson, the most popular Ted Talk speaker mentioned earlier, chose a self directed education (unschooling) path for his daughter which he shares about in this Time article called [Why Dropping Out of School Could Actually Help Your Kid, According to One Education Expert](#).

Homeschooling and Unschooling are both legal in California. If you choose either path, it is important to learn about homeschooling laws and legal requirements to make sure you have your bases covered.

Please note, this list is not exhaustive. The examples I listed are just some of the options available. Finding the right educational option for your child is not a one size fits all process. The key is to discover your child’s unique needs to help determine the best fit that will allow your child to learn well, be well and feel successful.

If you'd like more support with the process, contact me at www.nicoleconnell.com for a free consultation. I help families figure out their child’s unique needs and explore educational options. I also offer [educational therapy](#), [support for homeschooling + unschooling](#) and [girls leadership groups](#).