

Tackling High School With Confidence
An Interview with Ann Karaoke
C2C Podcast Episode #15



Jody: For many families, homeschooling through high school is so intimidating that it actually scares them away. If that's you or if you know someone in this boat, stay tuned. We are talking to an author and speaker today who has some powerful encouragement and practical advice for homeschooling in the high school years.

Jenni: Ann Karako writes about homeschooling high school at annieandeverything.com. She's been homeschooling for 20 or more years. We'll stick with the "or more". And has published two books. Her goal is to encourage homeschooling moms that they can homeschool high school and that it's not as hard as they think it will be. So we are super excited to talk to her today. Ann, thank you so much for coming to chat with us.

Ann Karako: Thanks so much for having me. I'm super excited to be here.

Jenni: Okay, so tell us what some of the biggest fears that people have about homeschooling through high school.

Ann Karako: It is a fearful thing to look forward to. And I was that way myself. And so common fears are, uh, that the mom feels so responsible for this and she's going to miss something important and ruin her kid's entire life. This is the thing that keeps moms up at night and I remember a couple of bad nights myself. Um, they are also afraid that they can't teach, oh, like chemistry or ancient history or algebra two, you know, any of those awful high school subjects that we hated when we were there. They're like, "Well, I didn't do well when I was in high school. Well, how can I teach my child that?" So that's another big fear. They're also afraid that their kid is going to miss out on opportunities. You know, that public school...

Jody: Yeah. That's a big one.

Ann Karako: ...has all these extra curriculars and whatever. And so if I homeschool my kids, they won't have all those opportunities. In fact, somebody said that to me once. Um, but that's all we can talk about that story later. Um, and another big one is, believe it or not, although we know that this is not really a valid concern in the elementary and middle school years, it rears its ugly head again for high school. And that is socialization.

Jody: Oh, my goodness.

Ann Karako: Yeah. A lot of moms are concerned about that. So, those are probably the four biggest fears. There's a lot of sub fears that go along with that, but those are probably the biggest ones.

Jenni: So, how can we encourage families to overcome these fears?

Ann Karako: Yeah, well, so, the biggest thing that I find that helps is - Well, okay, I'm going to say two things. One is community. One of the things that happens when people consider homeschooling high school, and as they get closer and closer to those years, I don't know if y'all experienced this yourself, but families start to drop by the wayside. A lot of families are all gung ho about homeschooling during elementary and even into middle school. But then when it comes to high school, these fears overtake them and they put their kids into private or public school for high school. And so if you're one of the families that's still homeschooling in those years, you lose a large part of your community. The kids lose their community and the moms lose their community. And I think that's one of the huge ways to overcome fears is to have moms to chat with about all of these things. And, you know, moms that are further ahead of you, um, online, now we have a lot of opportunities for that with Facebook groups and what not. I've actually also started a new online community called "The Hugs for Homeschooling High School", that I want to be a place for that, for moms who aren't necessarily on social media and also maybe don't have that local community like they used to have. So, um, let's get on and let's chat about these things that you're concerned about and let's help one another through them. So I think that's one of the big ways to overcome.

Jenni: And we'll link to that- We can link to that in the show notes, too.

Ann Karako: Yes, totally. Um, also, though, about these particular four fears that I mentioned, just tackle them one by one, one of the biggest things, and this is kind of my second arm of what I started to say when there's two big things, two ways to overcome the fears. The second largest arm would be, um, do your research. So, uh, make sure you know what your state homeschool laws are in regards to high school. A lot of us are well versed in them for the younger years, but we think high school is different for some reason. But most of the time, when you look back at your state homeschool law, you see that for high school it's really not that much different and you can keep doing a lot of the same things that you were doing. Um, and also I suggest if your kid has even a remote idea of what they think they might want to do after high school, then research that. Research what the requirements are to make that happen such as college. Go to college websites and look at what the requirements are to apply to that college. And they'll tell you, "Okay, we want two credits in math and we want three credits in social studies". I'm just throwing these numbers out. Every college is different. But you see there that you really have a lot of freedom in how you approach the high school years. And that usually the requirements for college, um, or whatever else your kid might want to do are not these big horrible things.

Jenni: Ann, you are speaking our language, because one of the things that we do is, you know, we really encourage parents to view their education,

their child's education as an opportunity to discover what they're passionate about, where God is calling them, what makes their heart sing, what they're good at. So that when they start approaching the high school years, they can have a rough idea and you're not going to have an exact plan. But um, and what we tell parents to do is call the admissions officers because, like, start with the website, know everything the website says, but then get the admissions officers on the phone and say, "You know, I saw all the exciting stuff on your website. What's the X factor? What does your ideal candidate look like?" We've done this now with more than 50 colleges around the country and we are blown away at how dramatically different...

Jody: Yeah, each college.

Jenni: ...every school is and how, like, for the same program at three different schools, they're going to tell you dramatically different things. Like, we have heard some things, some really interesting things, but like I- Because we knew that from- I'm just going to use my own daughter's example for my own daughter when she was coming- when she was just about to enter, just before high school, we knew where she wanted to go and we started researching the best schools to get her there and we found that for her industry, the best school was Berklee College of Music in Boston, because they have an average of 17 Grammy winners a year. 94% of their graduates are working in the music industry. So we knew that was the only school that had any statistics even remotely close to that. And we contacted- We spoke to the admissions office and they told us some crazy stuff. Like we don't look at their transcripts at all. You have to have one.

Jody: But that doesn't mean anything.

Jenni: It doesn't mean anything. You just have to have one on file and it has to have a date. The only thing we look at is the date. Um, but everything hinges on the audition. And if you get past the audition, then the next step is we look at the interview. So then we started asking questions and we called every year, because each year certain things changed, especially for homeschoolers. We called every year and they told us - and so what we were able to do was create this custom high school plan that was for Berklee that um, the programs she wanted to enter, um, was the most competitive program in the school of course, right? So the school's overall acceptance rate is 32% but her program was 9%. So we started finding out, "Okay, so what is it in the audition that you're looking for? What's the ideal candidate for this program? What does their audition look like?". And that told us we needed very specific training in high school and actually there- It wasn't available in our area. So then we had to figure out how to get her to Philadelphia, where they did have it, we're in Florida. And what was great about that is that we have seven kids and we just can't, you know, drop \$5,000 on each kid who needs to go to Philadelphia. So we started um, part of her homeschool plan became entrepreneurship. And what we found out was in the interview, one of the most important X factors that they look for are really strong entrepreneurs, because ultimately what they said is they're really a business school. They're a business school specifically for the music industry. Their students have to take business law every year.

Um, they have to know how to read contracts. Then they have to be strong entrepreneurs. So...

Jody: You wouldn't have known a piece of that.

Jenni: We wouldn't- If we had not called them, that wasn't on their website, so we wouldn't have known. But they said, um, you know, go ahead and really encourage her to be entrepreneurial. Well, this was great cause we thought, "All right, we're going to teach you how to make money so you can pay to go to Philadelphia to learn this skill that's going to be important in your audition,". But, um, I love that you're saying know where they're headed, because you can really- They can have a- She didn't need an SAT prep, because Berklee doesn't even accept SAT scores. They don't even have a college - they don't have a code for it. Um, so we didn't waste any time on SAT prep for her. Now, you know, I've got another kid who has a different story, you know, when we're gonna train him differently. But I love that you said, you know, look at the schools and know where they're headed, because that can really make a difference.

Ann Karako: Oh, and I love that you said pick up the phone and make a phone call. I don't know why we seem, somehow, forgotten that that's an option, too. But a lot of times, if you are confused by the website or you're not sure what you're seeing, then yeah, pick up the phone and talk to an admissions counselor. And a lot of times those things that you don't understand or those fears that you're creating in your head can be disposed just by talking to somebody.

Jenni: Yeah. And not email, because you don't get the same kind of interaction when you email. You know when you have the human being on the phone and you're like, "Wait, you just said something interesting and it piqued my interest and that made me think of this question and...". You can't do that so easily in an email.

Jody: Well, in an email, you're going to get a generalization.

Jenni: Stock response. Yeah.

Ann Karako: Right.

Jenni: Whereas a phone call, you're going to get some real- We had one school - it was a design school in New York for a student we were helping who told us, um, we said, "What's your X factor? You know, what's the special thing that you look for?". This was nowhere to be found in any of their literature. And she said, well- And remember this is a design- an interior design school. And she said, "Well, we really like to see, um, lots of college level English classes. Writing is really important to us." We were like, "Really?" And she said, "Yeah, if you- If they can send published clips, you know, where they've been, that would be great,". We were like, "Huh," and then she said, "Oh, and we're really interested in social change. We want to see students who can identify a problem in their community and amass team of people and make a change." And we were like, "Really? Well how do you substantiate that?" And she said, "Oh, you know, usually they'll send like a newspaper article that was written

about it." And I thought, "Okay, so now, not only are they creating social change, but they need to have a little bit of marketing ability or else they're going to have to reach out and do some press releases."

Jody: But, who would've known?

Jenni: But, because that student knew that, I mean she was able to make that part of her high school curriculum and man that was- And she enjoyed it, it was fun. And you know, that just- they were like, "Wow, look the perfect student."

Ann Karako: But even if... Even if your kid doesn't know what they want to do, doing some kind of broad-based research, maybe looking up several different colleges or the local beauty school or what have you...

Jenni: Yes.

Ann Karako: ...and coming up with an overview or a general idea of what they're asking for can still give you so much more confidence as you plan the high school years.

Jenni: Ann, you say that, um, you say you're not obligated to follow public school laws for your state. Can you talk more about that?

Ann Karako: Oh yes. Um, this is huge, because I actually tried to do this myself. Uh, as I was getting my oldest ready for high school and I was doing my research and I was trying to come up with a plan, I looked up, I was in Missouri, I looked up the Missouri public school requirements for high school, their graduation requirements in order to graduate from the public school in Missouri, the kids must have completed X, right? And um, I got so intimidated. Uh, one of the things they expected kids to do was identify a career path by the end of eighth grade. And I was like, "Okay, we're almost at the end of eighth grade and I know we don't have one of those." Um, and then some of the courses that they were requiring kids to take, whether it be, you know, health or uh even Missouri history or just ones that I didn't feel qualified or I didn't feel like I wanted - thought were really that necessary, I just, um, I was very intimidated by what they had to say. And I took the- I printed it out and I took the piece of paper to my husband and I'm like, "I don't feel like I can do all this." And he's the one who had to say to me, "Ann we're homeschoolers. We don't have to do all that." And it's very true and, but I needed him to tell me for some reason, so for anybody who needs to be told the public school graduation requirements, the ones that you find at the state.edu website, um, those are the ones literally for the public schools. Homeschools have a different law and you want to know your homeschool law. And for most of the States in our country, there are very little to no graduation requirements for homeschoolers. They don't have to take X credits of English or X credits of math. Now, if you've done your research into colleges, you're going to want to build that into your kid's program. But it's not something that has to happen in order to give your kid a diploma. So, um, when you look at those public school requirements and you try to follow them, A(it leads to intimidation like I experienced, B(it leads to a lot of frustration, because it's a heavy load. Um, and B(it really restricts your kid as far as

what you guys are talking about, exploring your interests, looking for the out-of-the-box ways to meet what they are trying to accomplish. And so I tell people don't even bother looking at them. Make sure you know your state homeschool requirements and there are a few states that do specify numbers of credits or, you know, what have you in their homeschool law, but they are actually just a few states, just a handful, but the rest of the states take a look and see how much freedom that you do have. And that again is also going to reduce that fear level and boost that confidence level.

Jenni: Speaking of parent freedom, can you talk about the importance of encouraging independent learning in high school and give our listeners some suggestions for how families can do this?

Ann Karako: Yes, I certainly can. And this actually ties back to one of the fears that we talked about at the beginning, which is, "Hey, I can't teach chemistry, so how can I, you know, how can my kid take that in high school, in our home?". And this is one of the best ways to handle those types of subjects is to teach your kids to learn independently. So I always say a good goal to reach for is to have your teen responsible for their entire education by junior or senior year. So that means that they are learning everything, content-wise, about the course, whether that be reading a textbook or watching a video or doing their own research, however that you want that to happen. Then also doing whatever the daily work might be in math. It might be the problem set in chemistry. There might be some questions to answer or history, um, and studying for whatever test or evaluation that is going to happen. And then all that the mom should be doing, at that point, is being available to answer questions and then grading that final chapter evaluation or paper or project. But the rest of it should be completely up to the kid even time of day that they're working. Let's build in some time management skills here amidst the independent learning. Now why do I say that? First of all, because it does, it takes a load off of moms. She doesn't have to try to teach those classes. Her kid becomes responsible for them. So all of my kids up to this last one who happens to be taking chemistry in a co-op, all four of the others taught themselves chemistry from the front side of the book to the back side of the book and did their own labs, they wrote their own lab reports and I just graded things as they came along. And um, the reason I say that is first of all, homeschooling high school is a great place for your kid to learn to do this in a safe space. They can fail and you can help encourage them about how to do better. And it's not costing you thousands and thousands of dollars to have this happen. And B this is really the way college is done. College is your student is responsible. Now the professor is there to lecture and the professor may have office hours, but they're not going to be on top of the students to turn everything in on time and to remind them of when things are about to happen - uh to tell them, "Hey, I need to see you in my office hours, because I can see that your grades are slipping." None of that happens in college, for the most part. The student is responsible to get that syllabus on the first day and follow it and make that everything is in on time. And then if they have questions, they're the one that has to go to the professor. They have to take the initiative. And so again, let's make that happen at the high school level in our home, not only so that it makes high school

a much more doable thing, but also because it prepares the kids for the college experience.

Jenni: And the working world. Because really in the working world, like, you have to decide that you want to, um, learn this new thing so you can advance in your career. You have to decide that you're going to go the extra mile, you're not going to have somebody hold your hand and walk me through it if you're going to be successful. So it's really good and it's one of the benefits really of homeschooling.

Ann Karako: It totally is. And one of the ways to- I mean it's kind of a process, if you're not doing it and your kid's already in high school, then you're not going to want to just dump everything on them and say, "Hey, it's all up to you, now,". But um, I actually have a full chapter about it in my new book that came out this Summer about not only how to teach it to your younger kids, 'cause you can start as young as you want. Um, in my family, it came about just as a must-do in order to save my own sanity, because I had five small children. And so one day, I told the oldest, uh, "Hey, I need you to do your math on your own." She was, um, third grade maybe. Um, "I need you to try to read this and see if you can do it on your own." It was an Abeka math book. It was very brightly colored. It showed her step-by-step how to do everything. And I said, "See if you can read this, do it on your own and I'll come back and see how you did." And she was fine, you know?

Jenni: Yeah, it is. For those also with big families, it's a necessity.

Ann Karako: It is! Yeah. I had things to do with the younger kids and it worked out fine and it kind of - we fell into it, sort of unexpectedly, but it became one of the pillars of my homeschool philosophy and now I have actively pursued it with all of my kids, because I think it's so vitally important.

Jenni: Can you talk a little bit about record keeping and what you recommend for the parents who maybe haven't kept up with it throughout the high school years?

Ann Karako: Yeah. Yeah. And first thing we say is that I have been there and done that. So, um, for some of us this is a constant struggle, so I totally identify with this problem. And the way I've, uh, hacked at it, is to just usually set aside a block of time. So, okay all day Saturday I'm, you know, I'm going to work on this and crunch it out." Or another way to go about it, is to break it down into smaller tasks. Okay, I don't have a full day to work on this, so, but I do have an hour maybe every other day. So, you know, one day, I'm going to get caught up in math or in the next day I'm going to get caught up in history. Um, I do think getting grades is important. I think that's part of the college prep process, because they will be given grades in college. But that's just my personal thing. And I know that a lot of people have a lot of different philosophies about whether grades are important and it's kind of an unschooling versus traditional, you know, type of dichotomy there. So, I'm not trying to offend anybody when I say that, but as far as I believe, you know, I gave all my kids grades in high school and so it does become something you need to keep up with. Because in the end, most colleges are going to require a transcript when you want to apply there and there will need

to be grades on that transcript. If you are an unschooler, then by all means do your research. And I can't speak to that. You know, there may be colleges out there that are going to accept a portfolio in lieu of a transcript. I've not spoken to any of them personally, because I need to know more about that than I do. But, um, when it comes to creating a transcript, you know, your traditional transcript and it is going to have grades on it, which means you're gonna have to find a way to evaluate your kids with a grade. And I always felt more confident, um, when there were kind of some regular tests and quizzes and papers along the way to do that with. But it can get easy to get behind. So those are my two big ideas. Just either say, "Okay, I'm not doing anything else today until this gets done," or make yourself a schedule. "Okay, I'm going to get this done this day and this on that day and it's going to happen and check it off," and then reward yourself when you're done.

Jenni: Yeah. Yeah.

Ann Karako: Just a chocolate, you know?

Jenni: Yeah, it is. And I mean, if you're going to keep a transcript, you have to have something along the way to um, put on the transcript. And I'm- We agree, we think transcripts are helpful, you know, even in, um, for kids who are not going to college, we, at least here in Florida, we've had, um, some places like Police Academy and things like that who've actually asked for that information. So it's important to have and if we don't have it, then it can limit their choices.

Ann Karako: And a quick plug, I do have a transcript form for sale, on my website, that is basically you fill it all in. It's already formatted for you, you just type in the course name and the grade and the GPA and you can print it out and send it to the school. So you don't have to try to come up with a format yourself. I do have that. I also am working on a product that will be specifically about grading and paperwork and it will provide forms and ways to, you know, keep up with it that makes it easier. Because my whole thing is - I just want to throw this out there. Grading and paperwork does not have to be this big mish-mosh of stuff you do. Make it as easy as possible. So for instance, um, when it comes to, uh, saving grades or... how do I even want to say that? Like, I don't even have a spreadsheet. I don't have a program, of any sort, that I use. I grade the test and then I throw in a file 'till the end of the semester. And at the end of the semester, I sort everything into piles by subject and then I figure out the grade. So, um, I'm all about easy. I'm all about making it work for me, you know, and not taking up too much time. And it's all about your confidence level too, of course. But so don't feel like you have to have daily grades all the time. Don't feel like this has to be a big, horrible thing. Um, try to get it down to something that's doable for you yet still is reflective of how your kid is doing.

Jenni: That's awesome. Before we sign off, I think it would be a great to end this conversation on this note. Tell us some of the greatest benefits of homeschooling through high school.

Ann Karako: Oh, yes. Yes. Can I just say that my family, we have really enjoyed this period of homeschooling more than any other? I have felt like high

school was the most fun. Um, and the reasons for that are, A your schedule can be so flexible. You're not tied to any kind of school systems, uh, start time and end time in the day. Um, but also, you know, calendar-wise throughout the year and your teens can sleep in.

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: Yes.

Ann Karako: At the teenage years, they need- They're growing so quickly, both physically and mentally and emotionally. We got the hormones raging, we got the acne going on. Um, and they need their rest. And when you homeschool high school, they can get that rest.

Jody: Oh, that's true.

Ann Karako: Also, they can pursue whatever passion they may have developed or if they haven't developed a passion yet, they can pursue several interests. They can try one and see what they like. And if they don't like that, well, they can try another one. They have the opportunity to just rotate, you know, and try several during high school that they wouldn't if they were tied to a public or private school.

Jenni: Yeah.

Ann Karako: One of my big ones is that you can individualize the curriculum plan according to those interests or just even according to their strengths and weaknesses as far as academics go.

Jody: Exactly.

Ann Karako: They can work at their own pace, whether that be faster or slower. And then one of the big things that we as a family were looking for is we want our family to be interdependent. And I know that at the teen years is when everybody starts to kind of branch off into their own lives. And we weren't ready for that to happen yet. Uh, we wanted our family to be the most important thing until our kids were ready to go to college. We didn't want peer relationships to become more important than family relationships.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: Yeah.

Ann Karako: So that was a big, big benefit for us. And then last, but absolutely not least is just not having to deal with all the yucky-ness that happens at the school...

Jenni & Jody: YES!

Ann Karako: And it's just getting more and more yucky all the time.

Jenni & Jody: Yeah.

Jody: That's a good word for it. "Yucky". That's a good word.

Jenni: "Yucky" is a good word. Yeah. I mean, I think all of us are listening to the really- It almost feels like horror stories that are happening and it just gives us a few more years to help sharpen them and prepare them so that they can be a powerful weapon in the culture when they get out there and they're going to face some of the yucky-ness.

Ann Karako: They can develop their own level of confidence with who they are rather than suffering under the peer pressure and the need to fit in. Um, all of mine went to college with just this idea of, "Okay, this is who I am. These are my strengths. These are my weaknesses. I'm a little weird in this way, you know, and that's going to be okay". And I just- that's what I wanted for them. And so, you know, they didn't buckle under when it came time to people, you know, wanting them to conform or whatever. They were like, "Nope, I'm this way and you can take me or leave me," you know?

Jody: Yeah.

Ann Karako: I think I'm still learning how to do that. So, rather than being scarred at the public school system, you...

Jody: You do get scarred. I'll tell you that. There's a scarring that happens.

Jenni: Soul wounds. And your soul just gets wounded.

Jody: Yeah.

Ann Karako: Yeah. Exactly.

Jenni: Well, Ann, thank you so much. I know that the people who are listening who started out this conversation feeling anxious are probably feeling a lot more relaxed, but I'm sure that they have more questions. So we're going to go ahead and make sure that we link to your Facebook group and your website and create ways for people to connect with you and be able to glean from you, 'cause you have so much insight. Um, and we hope we actually get to meet you in person at some point...

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: And connect with you in that way.

Ann Karako: That would be great. That would be great. I would love that too.