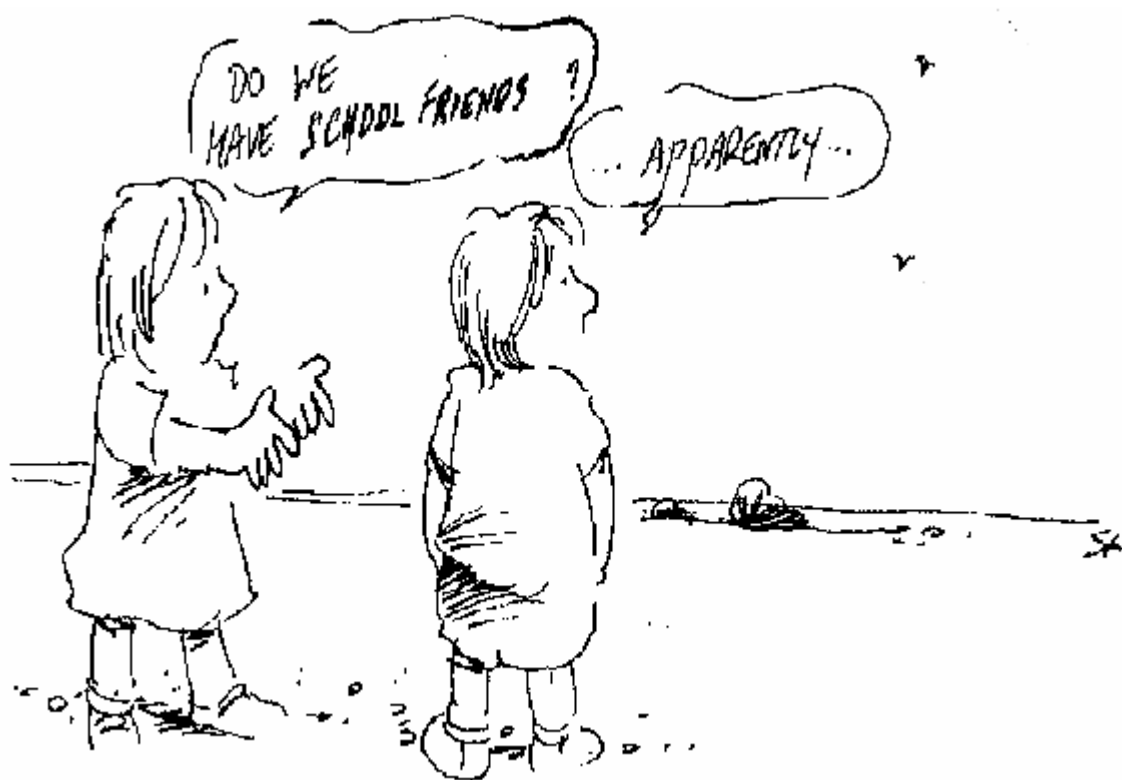


In the Distance Education School Room

by mothers for mothers



In the Distance Education School Room

Was instigated and worked on by the following mothers on a R.I.C.E Telelink in 2002:

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In the School Room with Mum as the Supervisor

In the school room . . . supervising

In the School Room – with REVISE

In the School Room – with a Governess

In the School Room with Mum as the Supervisor

Your eldest child turns 4 and the schoolroom becomes a place where you and the children move to for an hour or so for 'Kindy'. The child at Kindergarten thrives on that one-to-one time they need to spend with Mum, their supervisor. The younger child/children miss mum's attention, quickly gets bored with the activity left for them, or disappears and . . . what are they up to?

Then the older child turns 5 and there is a lot of schoolwork to get through each day. The pressure is on for the 5 year old to 'perform' for a longer time. What do you do with the preschooler when you're working with the school child? How do you balance school, housework, time with your husband/partner and time for yourself? How do people manage on a 'bad day' when neither the toddler, nor the school child, nor you can do it? What can be done now, to save your sanity . . . and the kids!!! Is there help – 'real' help available?

It seems that what works in one schoolroom may not work in another and it is certainly true that some mothers find 'teaching' easy and others find it a real battle. We all have different skills. So here, are a few hints and ideas that may help:

Location of your classroom is very important. It needs to be somewhere that works best for **you**.

One family's classroom was an enclosed verandah that ran the length of the homestead. The mother had access to the kitchen and telephone. The 'classroom' was also the playroom. That way all those wonderful posters about tricky sight words and times tables were staring the children in the face even when they were playing!!!

Other mothers find a classroom away from the house suits the child's mind set that this is school time and mum is supervising – that there is a difference between being at home and being at school.

The Preschooler in the Schoolroom

- Let the preschooler have their corner in the schoolroom, where the schoolchild cannot go without the preschooler's permission – and likewise a corner of the schoolroom where the preschooler cannot go without the school child's permission. This does not work with preschoolers the under 2 years!
- Set up a desk for the preschooler with their paper, crayons, etc. If possible, have an old or toy computer, which the preschooler can 'use'. If you have old 'set work' for the preschool to 'write on' all the better
- Include the preschooler with painting, dance, etc.
- Keep the RICE toys for school time only
- Have a special activity for the preschooler every day – e.g. play dough, painting, help them with a puzzle, cutting and pasting, a special book, lego, etc.
- If your schoolroom is separate to the house, consider doing the afternoon activities in the house so the preschooler can sleep in their cot and/or watch TV quietly.
- Have the preschooler go into the yard to collect leaves or pebbles for counting and sorting
- During the air lesson
 - § Have the school computer away from the preschooler's section
 - § Have a special box of toys/activities for the preschooler, that are only bought out at air lesson time.
 - § Copy the air lesson and have the preschooler sit nearby
 - § Offer a reward at the end of the lesson if they are good (Some mothers found they couldn't do this if they had two preschoolers – they found they could not reward just one child if the other had been naughty)

The schoolroom and schoolwork

The Reception year, particularly the first term, is very demanding on the supervisor but it does get easier.

- If you are having trouble getting through the work:
 - § Check with the goal at the top of the lesson and skip through some of the questions provided (take some questions from the beginning, middle and end)

§ Negotiate with the teacher as to what is expected

§ If things are going wrong and it is still early ring the teacher and ask what needs to be done for tomorrow's lesson

- Use the time table as a guide not the rule
- Break the day into sections – use the schoolroom in the morning and the house in the afternoon – particularly if your schoolroom is away from the house and you have a preschooler
- Change your approach in the classroom - 'play' schools, make lists, re-arrange the furniture, play music.
- Writing a list of tasks to be completed is quite successful too. We all like to think we are 'getting' somewhere, even our 5 year olds! Make the list extensive i.e. don't just write 'finish story' – break the task up into each little component i.e. write story
 - do border
 - draw picture
- If you have a time consuming Reception/Year 1 child/children and feel guilty re your independent older school child, allow the younger child/children 'out' early and spend time working with your upper primary child.
- Change the schoolroom around every now and then – the end of term is an ideal time. Change the posters. Ask the school child/children where they would like to sit next term. It lends to a fresh start and a fresh outlook.
- Encourage learning beyond the classroom. When you are busy encourage, don't discourage the children to help. Problem solving is one of the biggest components in curriculum today. Problem solving is learning by doing. The opportunities bush kids can access is amazing, use them and your children will have an enviable educational foundation. (One mother shared the example that when her daughter was in year 6 they 'lost' one of the shed hands at crutching time. The daughter went out with the men to fill in. She pushed sheep up that crutching trailer for the remaining week and a half and learnt so much they couldn't document it all!! When the mother told the teacher that she was minus a student for a while because they were in a bit of a spot, the teacher (who was on a pastoral lease herself) said, "That's fine she'll be learning something everyday. Don't ever let schoolwork get in the way of a kid's education.")
- Schoolwork is important, especially the basics. Work through the main core work every day and your children will have an efficient and effective learning programme. When they have the opportunity to be active participants in outside work, let them. Children in city schools never get that opportunity

Those 'bad' days

- Some times some one loses it! It may be the child. It may be you. Have a ten minute break (for Occ. Health and Safety reasons) – it is no use persevering. If possible separate the mother and the child but keep an eye on the children so they don't (...it has been known ...) abscond! Relax don't go back until you lose that tension.
- Go for a walk, together, and talk about it
- If your child realizes that by upsetting you they get out of doing schoolwork you do need to persevere, somehow! Have the child run around the house/schoolroom (outside) 3 times and come back to the task at hand or try changing the subject.
- Remember you are only human and can only do your best.

Years later the children remember how you made them feel, not what you taught them, so go for more walks and persevere less

Some days you may have trouble to credit it but being a mother-supervisor helps to build a very strong relationship with your child/children which lasts well into adulthood.

In a few years your child may be off to boarding school and you will be surprised how much you miss them . . . and sometimes even school!

Team work

It is hard to balance schoolwork, housework, meal times, time with your husband and still have time for yourself – throw in a preschooler or two and it calls for teamwork!!!

- Call a family meeting and discuss the work to be done and also discuss sharing the work. First find out what jobs various members of the family would like to do and delegate jobs if the work load hasn't been

shared around enough – forget the under twos, but a two year old can pick up toys. And make a list recording who is to do what.

- Supervisors have trouble getting some older boys into the schoolroom as they see school as useless when they plan to be out working the property. Fathers can be a wonderful role model for these boys by letting the boys see them do their bookwork
- If putting things away is a problem either in the house or in the schoolroom make a game of it. Have a ¼ of an hour (show the younger ones where the big hand will be) for everyone, including your self, to put toys, shoes, cups, jackets etc away in their right place (regardless of who put them there). At the end of the ¼ of an hour do a check. Award a star to those who have nothing left out and have put things in their correct places. 10 stars = a treat
- When it is safe and practical send a preschooler off with dad

Some mothers have had surprises to come out of the classroom to a clean kitchen or a meal being prepared by a Dad. Several dads also wash the dishes, bath the kids, read to the kids and put the kids to bed.

Remember to take time out for yourself. Ring the school and say the children will not be on air today and cannot be contacted. Make it a Friday or a Monday and that way you can have a long weekend. Do whatever jobs or tasks you feel you are behind in and the kids can do whatever they want make cubbies, go with Dad, explore, ride horses, etc.

It does get easier as the children get more independent.



School Days

It seemed fitting to include this article by Claire Tiver written for the Catalogue Queens' Project ('Dirt Roads and Desert Roses'). We thank Claire and Catherine Murphy (Arts Council) for their permission to reproduce this.

There I was. A married woman living at Tuilkilkey Station, thirty-seven kilometres and five gates north-east of Terowie, with three young children, one of whom was ready to start school tomorrow. It was 1964 and she was five years old on the twelfth of January and because she was well advanced and looking for something to fill her days and occupy her mind, I had decided to start her at the Correspondence School, situated in Pennington Terrace, North Adelaide. (The Correspondence School, now known as the Open Access College was begun in 1920. It was set up for children such as ours, who lived in isolated areas. Sets of lessons were worked on for a fortnight, then returned to the Correspondence School, marked, and in our case returned to the pupil, festooned with encouraging words, stars and animal stamps). The second child, a boy, was not quite four, also well advanced and very interested in numbers and counting. Our third child another girl, was not quite two years old and barely able to walk. I knew I was in for a difficult time with the three children, providing meals for the family and any other workers who came often to help with shearing, crutching, dam-cleaning and the many other occasions when extra help was needed.

I was one half of a married couple employed by my husband's uncle to work on his property. My job was to cook, manage the house and to have the children educated. Although I was a country girl brought up on a sheep and wheat farm north-west of Burra, nothing had prepared me for station life. Tuilkilkey Station was not on the road to any other station and so nobody passed through. My husband, the other half of the married couple, was often away on a second property and I was so lonely for adult company that I often thought of running our own car to the side-gate to pretend that I had visitors. My eyes were often on the road willing a cloud of dust to turn into someone coming to visit. Three children in less than four years was proving to be quite a busy period for me and I often thought that the sixties and I passed each other by without either of us getting to know the other!

All was in readiness. Twenty sets of lessons had arrived with their grey-blue covers early in the new year and had already been perused by our school-age child. She had written her name on many of them in a bold hand which showed plenty of character even then. The green desk and stool stood in the shearer's dining-room waiting for the eventful day to begin. (The shearer's dining-room was next to the kitchen and so was convenient to set up as a school-room. A desk, a stool and a chart with the letters of the alphabet on it were our only "props". It was only at mealtimes that the room was used and so in between meals school-lessons took place.)

The overwhelming responsibility of supervising my own child's lessons hit me like a blow from a sledge-hammer. If I failed, then my child would be a dunder-head unable to take her place with her peers when the time came. My own education and the help of a faraway teacher were the only two things I had to cling to.

That night when all were asleep except me, I prayed. I prayed for a school-bus to take my child to a school where trained teachers would mould her the way she should go.

Morning came. My prayer unanswered. No gleaming school-bus stood at the gate. We, my daughter and I marched into our improvised classroom with two little hangers-on straggling behind and thus began eleven years of supervising school lessons.

It was a difficult role to play, that of being a teacher in the schoolroom and a mother in every other room. I felt that I was unnecessarily hard on the children, thinking that if their work was poor then it would be seen as a reflection on my supervising ability. I often thought that it would have been easier to have taught someone else's children, but as we were the only ones with young children, that was not a possibility. They, the neighbours could have taught my children! My husband was helpful in that he thought education was very important and nothing interrupted the day's lessons.

After only two terms of what then was a three-term year, we moved to Spring Dam Station, thirty-two kilometers south of Yunta. Which is situated on the Barrier Highway, but no nearer to a school and still no sign of a bus! In

our new house the schoolroom was once again setup in the dining room, next door to the kitchen where I could if needs be work there while the children worked on their own. I found however, that it was much wiser to sit in on all lessons because unsupervised, the classroom like any other, anywhere, could deteriorate rapidly into a mini cyclone. Rubbers, rulers and pieces of paper became airborne and even the pet mice would be sneaked in and with Adam disappearing into someone's pocket and Patch circling the table, not much in the way of lessons was done. I found too, that if I could stay calm then the children would work quietly, but if I allowed myself the luxury of letting off steam then the children became cranky too. The garden was my refuge. Just to escape from three classes being held in one room for a few minutes seemed to help and although my garden was no Garden of Eden it was Paradise for me! Each child would delight in writing each others words during spelling tests and would shout out "I've Got Ten" long before they should have. They all loved story-time and peace would reign whenever a story was read to them. By this time we had joined up with School of the Air in Port Augusta and although it made our day busier than ever with three children having to spend fifteen minutes "on air" each day, it was good socially. We all benefited from knowing other children were working in lone classrooms all over South Australia.

Each child was different to teach. The older girl who always showed promise of being "out of the Box" was difficult to supervise and had strong opinions on every subject. She needed no help with writing and my early attempts at helping were met with, "This is my story. I want to tell it my way!" When asked to check her arithmetic answers she would say, "I have checked the answers and they appear to be incorrect!" Her teachers were always intrigued with her work and she finished Grade 7 with a glowing report. (She now has a PH.D. in Plant Ecology and lectures at the University of S.A.). So much for all the worry the night before she started school all those years ago!

Our second child continued on with a wonderful ability for "new maths" when that dread subject (for me) was introduced when he was in Grade 1. He was able to tackle Venn Diagrams, Attribute Blocks, Complimentary Sets or anything else that presented itself, which was lucky for me.

Sometimes I wondered who was the pupil and who was the Supervisor when he would say, "Don't you understand that Mum!"

However when it came to writing anything other than a true story, he needed all the help he could get. On a particularly bad day ink was seen to run down the glass-doors behind where he sat when he would throw his arms heavenwards and the fountain-pen would spray its contents everywhere! He too, joined the unique band of children who did all their primary education with the Correspondence School.

Five years in Adelaide at secondary level saw him matriculate, excelling in maths and Physics.

Number three child found everything difficult and she needed much help and encouragement from both her teacher and me. She loved her School of the Air lessons and one day sitting in front of the transceiver it gave a lovely gurgling sound, and she turned to me and said, "She nearly came Mum", meaning her much admired teacher. She also loved joining in with the other two children and once when our boy was stumped by the question, "Who traveled with Bonney when he brought cattle overland from New South Wales to South Australia?" she offered up the obvious (!) answer "Clyde"! Who else? Her schooldays ended unfortunately at the beginning of Year 10 when ill health prevented her from going any further.

I loved teaching our children and if I had had someone to do all the other jobs that had to be done I think I would have not got so worn out by it all. There is a special bond between us all I am sure because of those primary years spent together with all its ups and downs. Our middle child always said his mother was very well educated – she'd done Grade 7 four times – once herself and three more times with each of us! Only the third child spent any time in an ordinary school classroom and that was for a fortnight. She thought because of that she was better equipped to cope with secondary school!

One by one the children left home to do their secondary education in Adelaide, which left a gigantic hole in my life. The schoolroom was dismantled and was only used for that purpose when our two grandchildren did school lessons there when their mother was sick. It was strange to look around and see the odd ink stain there and to remember how the pet mice used the table for a race-track!

Claire Tiver, Yunta

In the school room . . . supervising

by Colleen Manning

The ABC of supervising

A aim to be well prepared

B bend or you will break

C communicate



A Aim to be well prepared

1. Check that you have all work and materials. Boxes of gear will arrive from the Open Access College. Check through the materials and briefly familiarize yourself with what is there. Then find somewhere to put it!
2. Read through your Supervisor or Course Information Guides for each year level. Some of the middle and upper primary grades and of course secondary years have a Course Information Guide for **each** area of study.
3. Look at the timetables provided in the Supervisor or Course Information Guides. These are a guide only but they will give you a good idea of how your child can work through his/her day or week. You will need to add times for your air lessons, telephone lessons etc and if you have more than one child in your classroom you may like to make one area of study e.g. P.E. or Art/Craft at the same time for everyone.
4. A timetable and/or some sort of routine is essential. It gives the children security and this in turn gives you security. Children look for routine. If you need help organizing a timetable for the children in your classroom you must ring your teachers for help. They are there to assist you.
5. Prepare for your day if possible and have resources (e.g. video, tapes, and additional books from Marden Education Resource Centre) ready prior to commencement of a particular topic or area of study. A well prepared day or week works wonders. An ill prepared one can sometimes spell disaster but all supervisors, even the 'old hands', have experienced the odd disaster!

B Bend or you will break!

1. There will be times when you will need to be flexible. Your child may be ill, you may have a lot of commitments, you may be busy with other demands on the station, or you may be on the move. Speak to your teachers and negotiate your child's workload with him/her.
2. Sometimes all of your children may be doing a similar area of study within one term. Ask the relevant teachers if you can all do it at the one time. Sometimes, there may be an overlap of areas. For example, your child may be doing something in English that is similar in Health or Society and Environment. Let your child do one really terrific piece instead of three mediocre ones (She/he may become bored if work is repeated)
3. Don't panic if your child doesn't complete everything. Explain to the teacher why this happened.
For example:
 - She/he spent a lot of time doing something else that she/he was really keen on
 - She/he had difficulty in understanding the exercise and you used a lot of time explaining to him/her the process required.
 - She/he found the exercise easy so she/he chose to spend extra time on something more challenging.
4. Change your approach from time to time if you wish. For example, use contracts as something different.

C Communicate with

- **Teachers**
 - **Itinerant teacher (remote families)**
 - **Other supervisors**
1. Your teachers are there to give advice or assistance. Your regular feedback to and from them is vital to your child's success.
It is important to check your child's work and go through any incorrect work with him/her. However, it is just as important to leave any incorrect work there and show his/her latest attempts underneath. It gives the teacher a better idea of how your child is going. For example, if the child is having trouble with number work, it is difficult for the teacher to identify the problem if incorrect work is not shown. Because the teacher is only receiving the end product it is important that you let him/her see as much of the process as possible, through the child's work and your feedback.
 2. If you are a remote and isolated supervisor you will have an itinerant teacher visit once a term. She/he is there to give assistance and because the itinerant teacher visits regularly his/her role is very important. Participate as much as you are able in school activities such as school experience weeks, mini-schools, workshops and camps. It is good to get your child into group situations and for you to mix with other supervisors.
 3. If you are a new supervisor and you do not know any other supervisors ring the school and ask for some names. Most supervisors are happy to chat and everyone has a common goal.
The role of the supervisor is very important. Whether you have one child or three or more, whether you are experienced or inexperienced, nobody is going to tell you it is easy. However, you will find it very rewarding and you will be in the position of having a direct influence on your child's education.
The school provides learning material and support through written feedback, telephone and radio lessons, home visits, itinerant teacher visits (to remote and isolated families), camps, mini-schools, supervisor workshops and access to a student counselor.
As the teacher is in direct contact with the student for only a small proportion of the total teaching time, much of the routine work is done by the supervisor.

Hints from the supervisors

I think a timetable with air lessons and every thing catered for is the way to go. Without a routine I found that we were only getting through $\frac{3}{4}$ of the day's work.

Find out all the resources available to you e.g. Resource Centre, library. It makes a difference.

I get into a hell of a mess sometimes and you can bet that when the place is at its worst that's when someone arrives.

When I first began supervising I read through the work and found out which lessons the children would be able to manage alone. Then while I helped one child the others would be given work they could manage themselves

If one child is being taught something and another pupil needs my attention then they must be trained to go on alone while the other is helped. This helps to teach the children respect for each other.

Children must be trained to be self-reliant and be taught to follow their own timetable. They must be able to change to other work while waiting for help!

Try hard to be consistent. Most kids look for order, firmness and fairness. Believe me, they have no respect for inconsistent supervisors!

Be realistic. Attempt only the possible!

Try to participate in sessions, workshops, etc for supervisors. By listening to others you can learn a lot. It is good to contribute to discussion too because sometimes the 'little' thing you said was just what someone else was waiting to hear.

I just keep remembering that others have done it before me!

Prepare and familiarize yourself with the kid's work.

Sometimes, when the going gets rough and everyone is really ratty we 'down tools' and go outside for some physical exercise.

Sometimes, when you're really busy and school is a pain in the neck it is really hard to be positive, bright and eager. However, try hard. As I've discovered, the old saying "one jolly good is worth a thousand don'ts" is all too true.

A supervising mum's role is easy. All you have to do is give up your lunch hour and work a 25 hour day!

I think it's great to get together with other supervisors – 'govos' and mums. You find everyone has similar problems and between all of you there are lots of solutions. Sometimes it's good just to talk about it. You feel better.

Give the kids some sort of responsibility in the schoolroom. They like this and feel proud of their room.

Try to create as bright and as good a learning place as you can.

I think it's really important to talk to your teachers. At first I felt like I was being dumb – but my problems were common and between us we ironed them out.

I find that reading a bit out of a book at a certain time each day and continuing the story over a week settles them down. Too ratty no story.

Your day will be organized if you are!

Induction programs for supervisors

- An induction program for supervisors is held at School of the Air on the Monday of Term 1. The program is aimed at both new and experienced supervisors. For new supervisors it includes
 - Procedures at SOTA
 - A basic introduction to course materials
 - Setting up a schoolroom
- For experienced supervisors the program focuses more on
 - The course materials
 - Teaching/learning methodology
 - Curriculum support
- An induction follow up program occurs at the SOTA camp later in the first term
- SOTA has fortnightly sessions of a general nature, on air, that supervisors can attend. These address issues such as school policy and structures, general curriculum areas, etc.
- Individual teachers at SOTA have weekly sessions with their students' supervisors to discuss more specific issues.
- At Marden, supervisor induction occurs on an individual level between teacher and supervisor.

Supporting student learning

- Have a positive and enthusiastic attitude
- Take interest in the work
- Talk with the teacher about the welfare of the student
- Provide a secure, stable and positive learning environment
- Have an established routine
- Provide firm, consistent and fair discipline
- Encourage the student to be responsible
- Support the student to work independently
- Encourage learning beyond the classroom
- Keep the teacher informed about the educational needs of the student
- Inform the teacher of special needs
- Consult/negotiate with the teacher to adapt materials to suit the needs of the student.

Organizing student learning

- Check course packages to ensure all lesson materials are included. If anything is missing, contact the teacher.
- When beginning a new course or year level read the Course Information booklet. Have it on hand when supervising lessons for easy reference.
- Familiarize yourself with individual lesson requirements before each lesson. This will avoid interruptions and ensure the lesson flows smoothly
- Expect the student to organize the relevant materials for each lesson and pack them away when finished. Even young children are able to do this.
- Establish set lesson times and try to follow them consistently.
- Adjust the timetable to suit your individual requirements.
- Discuss the work with the student during the lesson so that s/he receives immediate feedback or extra assistance if needed.
- Ensure that student work is returned to the teacher regularly.
- Package all work in the post paid envelopes or mail bags. Record the teacher's name in the top left hand corner of the envelope
- Return resources (packs, kits, texts) to the teacher once a topic/unit is finished. However make sure you keep resources which are needed for the whole year.
- Look through returned work with the student and discuss feedback given by the teacher.

Organising the school day

- Be flexible. There will inevitably be unplanned interruptions.
- The student is receiving more individual attention than in a large class so the work is often more intense and productive.
- Normal school times (9.00am -3.30pm) may not be the most appropriate for your situation. Some supervisors prefer to start at 8.00am and finish early in the afternoon. Others may prefer to have the morning free and work later.
- If supervising two or more students, arrange a timetable which has them working on the same area of the curriculum at the same time, e.g. plan independent reading or writing for the same time.
- If you have more than one student to supervise, encourage them to work together sometimes, e.g. an older student could conference a writing task with a younger student.
- Program activities into other areas of the curriculum e.g. use independent reading time to research information and read texts for Society and Environment, Health, Science, etc.
- Some activities may be appropriate outside normal lesson times, e.g. independent reading or video viewing could be done at night.
- Talk with the teacher about incorporating local events into the programme, e.g. travel diary for writing.
- Plan ahead. Look at the whole term, e.g. visits of the itinerant teacher, school camps, mini-schools, visitors, local events and include time for these.
- Plan the timetable with the student so s/he is quite clear about what is required.
- Contact the teacher to discuss any difficulties you see in completing the work in the time available.
- There are some subjects that are best after a break or in the morning session. Each student will find different subject areas more or less demanding.
- If a student finishes work early or if you are busy s/he should be encouraged to find something else to do, eg go onto another subject, read a book, complete unfinished work, tidy the work area.

Hints for telephone/air lessons

Air lessons

Supervisors can provide support in air lessons by ensuring that the student

- Attends air lessons punctually
- Notifies of intended absences
- Identifies him/herself clearly
- Has all materials ready for the lesson (the air lesson notes will indicate this)
- Has a supervisor present whilst on air if in Years R-3
- Has a supervisor nearby whilst on air if in Years 4-7 in case problems arise.
- Calls in to say 'I don't know' rather than remain silent (this will indicate to the teacher the level of understanding).
- Says 'Over' at the end of a response or sentence to indicate the message is finished
- Takes care when using the hand piece as fine wires can break where the cable joins the hand piece.

Telephone lessons

Supervisors can provide support in telephone lessons by ensuring that the student

- Speaks clearly into the mouthpiece
- Is not interrupted
- Waits his/her turn to speak
- Identifies him/herself before speaking
- Does not interrupt other students
- Uses his/her voice expressively
- Does not eat whilst talking
- Has all books/equipment for the lessons within easy reach
- Uses a hands free phone if one is available

In the School Room – with REVISE

& Max Jahn

The REVISE Scheme has been set up to relieve mothers supervising their children's Distance Education schoolwork.

A REVISE teacher can also help a mother or paid supervisor adjust to supervising in the schoolroom.

If teachers are available there is no limit as to how long a placement can be – 4 to 10 weeks is recommended. Book a teacher as soon as possible to allow time to find a suitable teacher. There are sometimes difficulties finding enough teachers to cover Term 4.

Teacher's sometimes have a partner stay with them

All teachers need 2 referees to be accepted by REVISE and Police checks are currently being worked on.

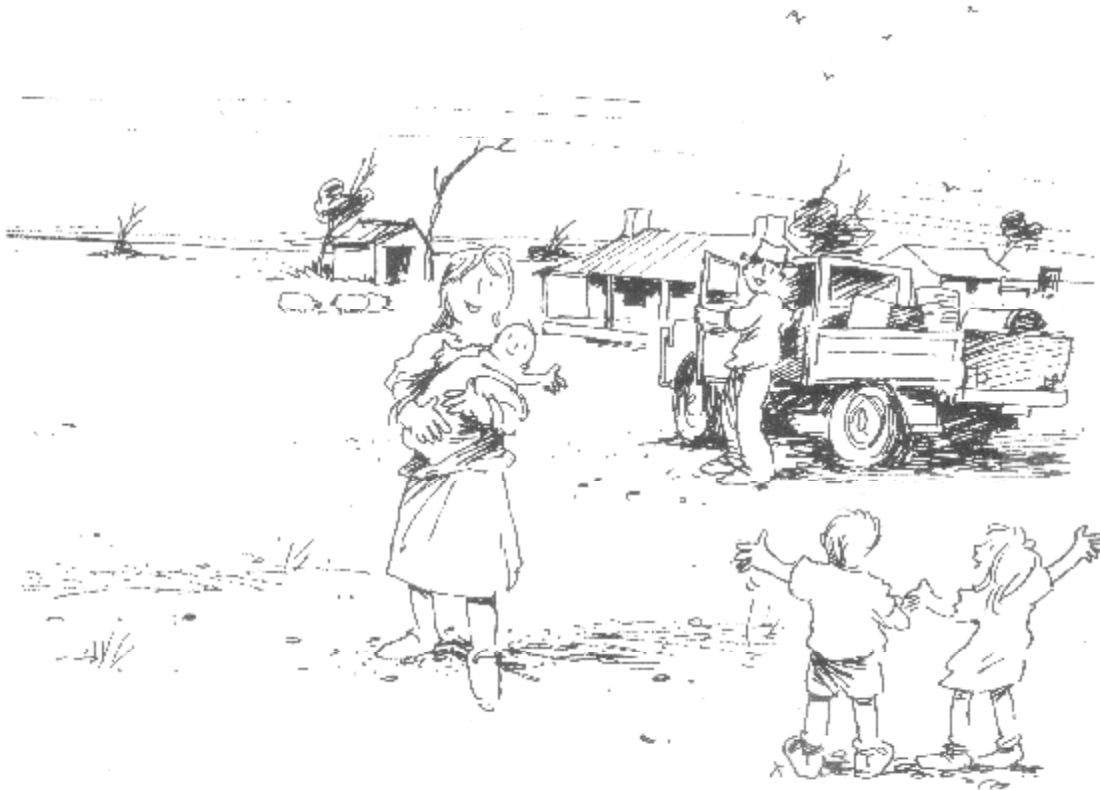
How it works

- q Ring Max Jahn the Coordinator of REVISE (Phone 8523 3073). Max has an extensive list of Teachers willing to help. The REVISE teachers are retired teachers (generally in their 50's or 60's) they are well, wanting to teach and wanting to have a 'taste' of the outback. As the teachers volunteer their time, families are asked to pay up to \$300 towards travel costs and provide board and accommodation (own room with bath room nearby). If this is too difficult for a family tell Max as arrangements can be made to relieve the costs (no one should be in a position not to have REVISE)
- q Max will send you an application form to be filled out and returned
- q Max will then contact a teacher/s. Where possible he will match the teacher's expertise (year level/interest) with the child/children's year level. REVISE is currently trialing sending 2 teachers for different year levels (e.g. for Reception and year 6 children a Junior Primary Teacher and an Upper Primary teacher) – the teachers' may travel together so only the one lot of travel costs is required.
- q The mother is given the teachers' name/s and phone number to ring and make contact – and get to know and iron out any concerns either the family or the teacher may have.
- q If time permits further contact is made over the weeks. If it is an older child they are to teach maybe the child will write a letter telling the teacher a little about themselves. The ideal is that the child/ family and teacher know a little of each other before they meet so that they are not total strangers and there is also less likelihood of a mismatch.
- q Ideally the teacher arrives two days before they are to commence teaching. This gives them an opportunity to rest, settle in, get to know the family a little and prepare the school work
- q Meanwhile the mother/supervisor needs to talk to the child/children about the good fortune of having their own teacher for a few weeks. On the first school day the mother needs to hand the child to the teacher, and trust them to build a working relationship with the child/children. Some children will play one off against the other and the mother and teacher need to trust each other and understand that the child needs time to adjust to the new situation. If the child leaves the schoolroom to find mum, mum needs to lead the child by the hand back to the schoolroom and teacher.
- q The teacher/s will teach your child/children between the usual school hours and can be left entirely to this task. After hours are their own to prepare for the next day or to relax.
- q If there is a timetable for the schoolwork the teacher will follow it. If there is no timetable the teacher will introduce one. The teachers are flexible and will adjust to routine meal times.
- q If the placement is not working either the mother or the teacher should ring Max (or a Management Committee Member). Max will talk to both the family and the teacher and make a decision as to what should happen.

Hints from Parents and REVISE

- q It is recommended that you aim to have a teacher who has taught the year levels of your children
- q If you plan to have a REVISE teacher during a busy period, if possible get the placement a minimum of 2 weeks before so any adjustment difficulties can be worked through before you get busy.
- q If it is the first time you have had a REVISE teacher try to get someone who has been 'out' before. It is hard enough for Mum to adjust to 'letting go' and having a guest, and the child adjusting to the teacher. If the teacher is also adjusting it all can be just too difficult.
- q During the initial phone call with the teacher coming out on placement discuss:
 - o The teacher's teaching experience, outback experience, general background, special dietary requirements, health problems etc.
 - o The mother's pre station life, the children including their likes and dislikes, discipline techniques
 - o If appropriate give the paid Supervisor's name, age (general), background, feelings towards REVISE teacher attending.
 - o Restrictions at the placement i.e. your location) e.g. power, water, shopping, etc
 - o The schoolroom's location (inside or outside the house). Is there heating/cooling through the day.
 - o REVISE accommodation – locality, are there others using the toilet/bathroom, heating/cooling, tea/coffee making facilities
 - o If the REVISE teacher has a partner what do they hope/plan to do whilst on the property
 - o Give general information about the property including other adults living on the property.

For REVISE to work, the family needs to be happy with their teacher and the teacher needs to be happy with their family. Enjoy each other - a wonderful relationship can result.



In the School Room – with a Governess

There are positives and negatives regarding having a Supervisor but if the opportunity is there to employ one - take it. If it doesn't work out you're it anyway! Teaching your own children is damned hard work and very, very demanding but it's extremely rewarding.) If you can, try having a supervisor and see how it works for you. The chances are you will get someone who will work really well with you and fits into your lifestyle well.

Advertising for a Supervisor

There are a few different ways to look for a governess.

1. Use an Agency such as Outback Staff, or a Register such as the Home Tutor Register run by the Alice Springs ICPA
2. You can advertise through:
 - The Stock Journal
 - Go to Governess Australia website – www.governessaustralia.com and advertise on the Job Board
 - Boarding Schools' Career Notice Board (these girls have lived away from home and are often more mature and independent and settle in quickly)
 - Various School of the Airs (Port Augusta, Broken Hill, Alice Springs) and leave name and address.
 - Notice Boards at Magill, Underdale or Whyalla Universities – each of these institutions run Bachelor of Education or Bachelor of Early Childhood. The Itinerant Teachers go to each of the Unis. and talk about Distance Education - sometimes either qualified graduates or Uni. students who are looking for a year's break may apply.
 - Some Pastoral Companies will employ a Supervisor, but then you may have to live with their choice unless you can be on the interview panel.

Start putting an advert in the paper or on Notice Boards in Term 4 as some are looking for jobs then, but keep in mind that some people may not be looking for a job until December or January – so don't despair.

Keep the advertisement simple e.g.

Supervisor/governess required to tutor (number of) child/children in 2003 via Port Augusta School of the Air.
Contact

(Giving your phone number allows people to ring you and ask questions about the job.)

When they make contact, tell them your location, wages, set-up, expectations etc. If they remain interested ask them to send you a hand written application including why they would like the job, with their CV (which should be written using a computer). These will determine whether or not you will interview.

It is important that the applicant shows both good literacy and computer skills. Once you have the applications work through them and decide who you wish to interview and write to them giving the interview date and send a map showing where you live (it gives them the opportunity to look up the Internet and find out more about the area).

Qualifications

Most families go for a Supervisor with Year 12 level. The minimum requirement is Year 11 English and Maths for Supervisors working with Reception to Year 4. For Year 5 students and higher, Year 12 English and Maths is necessary.

Some people look for the highest education possible – if you wish so you need to target that area (advertise on Uni. Notice Boards).

If you think of the job that they will be doing, the reading, planning, reporting back that is expected their literacy skills need to be good. It is an important job – they will become role models for your children. But, also look at their free time or what jobs they have had - have they been baby sitting (if they have done a fair amount it tells you that they like kids)

Interviewing

Some things for you to consider before the interview:

- What hours are they going to work – school hours plus time to plan the next day's work and to keep the schoolroom clean (e.g. 8am to 3.30pm). Or will you pay them for 8 hours which includes the work mentioned above plus extra duties such as sweeping the verandah (how often), wiping the dishes (each evening), etc. (it works best if you are very specific)
- Are you paying them for just the school terms, or are you paying them for school terms and school holidays (they are eligible for 4 weeks leave at the end of a year)
- What are you going to pay them? As there is no Award for paid Supervisors their entitlements vary. As a round figure, work on \$331.70 (in 2002), less board (\$82.70 in 2002), less tax, plus extra for older person, experience/qualifications, number of children, remoteness, etc. Some pay \$410 (in 2002) if very experienced and supervising more than one child - this is the wage for a station hand with more than 12 months experience. Others pay according to the age award for young station hands. Some offer pay when on holidays. Some do not. This needs to be decided by the employer (company/family)
- How are you going to pay them (cash, cheque, direct banking)
- How often are you going to pay them
- Who pays the traveling expenses.
- Who pays when you go out as a family
- What happens on a long weekend – due to distance they possibly can't get away
- Will busy times mean extra work for them.
- Will they be paid for out of hours work.
- Accommodation – are they in your house or will they have quarters of their own. Quarters away from the family gives them, and you, space and the employment is often more successful.
- Will they join you for meals.
- On RICE Days, as employing parents do you wish the Supervisor to:
 - Go to the RICE Day and assist with your family's children (particularly the school child/pre-schoolchild)
 - Continue with a normal school day with the school child/children whilst a parent attends the RICE Day with the younger child/children

Some interview in Port Augusta so the Supervisor knows they have been part way to where they hope to be employed – it gives them a sense of the distance involved.

Allow 2 hours per interview. Keep it informal. Talk to them. Get to know them as you will be living with them.

When interviewing some people have their children in for part or all of an interview to see how the prospective Governess reacts/responds to the children (do they smile, ask their names, etc. – or are the children a nuisance). Remember, a governess must be able to earn the child's respect in order to be able to exercise proper control in the schoolroom, thereby creating a pleasant learning environment for all.

It can be nice to meet the parents of the Supervisor – but it is not applicable that they be around at the time of the interview.

Questions to include:

- What experience with children do you have? (There are a lot of things you don't pick up from the Supervisors' application – e.g. they may not mention any work with children but come from a large extended family.)
- What strengths do you have that you consider would be valuable when working with children in a remote location?
- Can you outline what skills you have which may be useful in the schoolroom? For example:
 - Organizational skills
 - Neatness
 - Singing

- Art
- Music
- Sport
- Keeping records
- How would you establish a good rapport with the children and the family?
- There will be some other duties you will be expected to perform such as sweep the veranda and wipe the dishes. How do you feel about this?
- What are your hobbies/interests? (Can their interests be continued at your location? This question also gives you an idea if they are able to entertain themselves or if you will be expected to entertain them!) What outdoor hobbies do they have? (Bush walking, horse riding, etc. gets them away a bit)
- What do you think the job entails? (to make certain they have an honest idea of the job)
- Think of doing a case scenario for example:
 - If you are teaching the eldest child and the two preschoolers wander in what would you do?
 - The school child refuses to do a lesson. What would you do?

Things to look for:

- How do they respond to the children (do they smile and talk to the children or are the children an unwanted interruption/distraction)
- They should speak correctly (as they are going to be teaching your children)
- Do you feel they have a sense of fun

Explain to the 'Supervisor' about Mini Schools, Host School Days and Camps.

Questions the Supervisor may have for you:

- Some background information on your children, home, etc. Take a map of where you live in relation to Adelaide and Port Augusta. Maybe take a few photos of around your property to show the Supervisor
- What is the weekly pay?
- Am I paid on a weekly basis or given a cheque monthly?
- Do I receive holiday pay?
- How many people live on the station
- How often the mail/stores arrive
- Whether you have 24 hour power or generator power
- What they need to bring (e.g. shampoo, linen, bedding, etc)
- Washing? Do their own or with family.
- If necessary tell the Supervisor they will need a Backcard/Mastercard for personal shopping by phone
- Who are they directly responsible too

Tell the Supervisor if there are other supervisors in the region and that the nearest is 'x' kms.

Tell them there is no mobile phone coverage – that there is a phone they can share with others – and that they pay for their own phone calls.

Notes from one mother:

(after going through the resumes) I would look through and decide on 3 or 4 to interview. I didn't look for anything in particular. Although I did browse over the type of subjects they studied at school. Something on each resume just stuck out. Some employers would have a list of criteria e.g. have to be over 21 years of age or high academic marks. We had an excellent 2 years with a 16 year old. I would usually take (the girls) to the interview and then listen to what they had to say on the way home. It is amazing what influence they had on the decision. Some girls we interviewed just would not have fitted in.

Questions asked:

- Why have you decided to governess?
Usually it was a year to fill in before going on to Tertiary Studies. Was not all that impressed if the first question they asked was how many workmen we had.
- Do you like children?
Often the 'govo' would just talk to the girls during the interview which was great
- Do you like being outdoors?
Very important for them to want to go out on a water run and be interested with life on the property
- Do you like your own company?
The 'govo' can feel very isolated away from family and friends. 'Govo' has to be prepared to put up with the girls in and out of the classroom? We were always very conscience of giving the 'govo' time out from the girls
- Are you an organised person?
It is important to have an organised classroom and a well run timetable when you are employing someone to supervise. Our 'govos' were only employed to supervise in the classroom, not to do the housework as well

We made it quite clear to the prospective 'govo' that both (*the girls*) had different personalities and they were to be treated accordingly

We enjoyed for the 'govo' to be part of the family and join in with our activities and hoped she realised that we needed space as a family. For most of our 'govos' it worked.

Notes from another mother:

I didn't actually ask many questions but asked the girls to ask me about the job.

I would then make a decision depending on our conversation.

Questions:

- Why do you want to do governessing?
- What is your academic achievement?
- What do you want to do in the future?

The girls then asked me questions and I would then tell them what they were expected to do as my governess.

I was able to eliminate some applicants on the questions they asked?

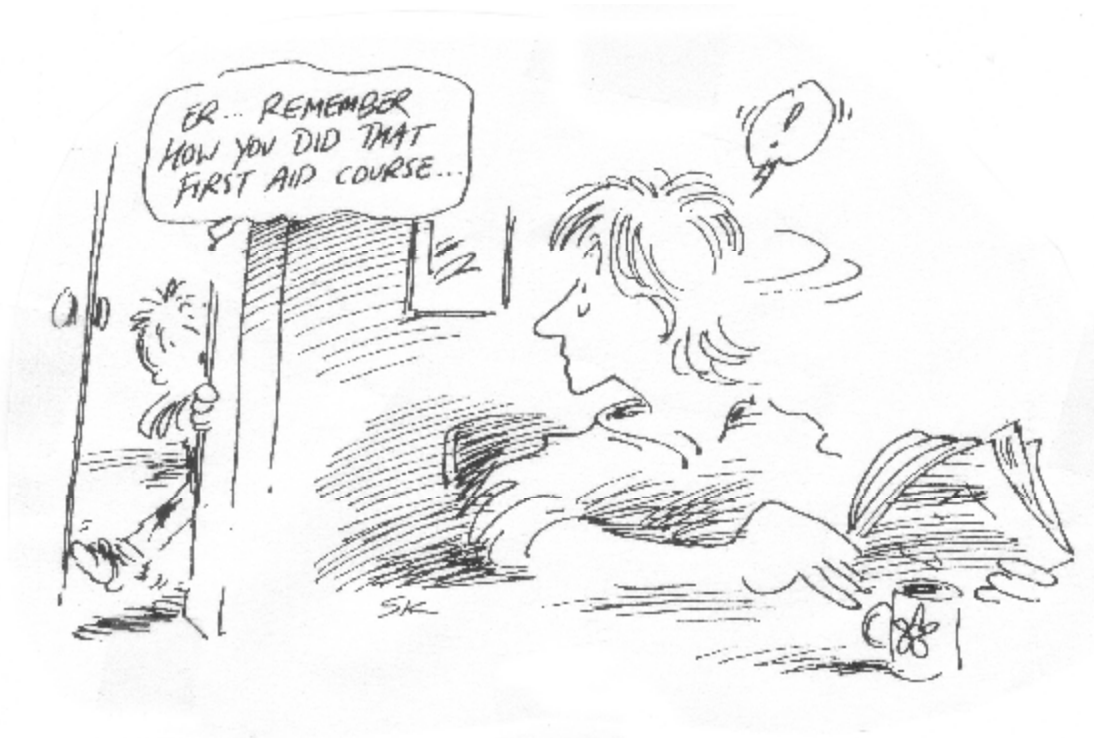
For example – One girl didn't even ask me about the children, but just asked how many horses we had. I obviously was not interested in that particular girl!

I chose girls who were interested in the children, were happy with their own company but realised that they would have to fit into station life, which might mean doing something with sheep etc., had a reasonably sound academic background and as the children (boys) grew older, I chose older and more experienced girls, as I found after about age ten the boys were a bit difficult for younger girls.

I think it is also very important that the girls know how far away they will be from their home and other social activities

Notes from an experienced Governess

Even being experienced, interviews are nerve racking. Personally I like the prospective employer to outline the job. Now that I'm older and more confident, I know what questions to ask but as a young girl looking at her first job, I didn't know what information I needed. If the prospective employer has a contract or has written out their expectations, that is even better. It is great to have this information right at the start of the interview. This means there should be no surprises after employment. When I have an interview I like it to be relaxed and casual. I always give them a resume with a paragraph at the top telling them about me, my family, car, pets and other details that could be relevant. If I'm on the phone I have a map book nearby to look up where they are. I also like details on what happens around the station, area and where the nearest Services are and how often you can visit. Interviews are hard for both sides. But if we all come prepared then hopefully you have a govo and I have a job.



.... After the selection of your Supervisor

If possible pay for the Supervisor to either join you for the SOTA Get-together or have them come out to your home for a few days before the end of the year to give them, and you, a chance to say, this is not really for me.

General Hints:

- A Contract is the way to go to be successful, that way the Governess knows exactly what is expected of them and vice versa. The contract should be signed by both you and the paid Supervisor. (There is a 'generic' contract further on in these notes)
- . . . and when the Supervisor commences work make it quite clear what is expected. Don't presume they know what to do! Do not expect them to walk into the schoolroom and take over immediately. Most supervisors are straight out of school and often it is the first time they have been away from their family. They will 'tread water' for many weeks. Some will take weeks to cope just looking after themselves personally, let alone with supervising children and living with another family. Do not throw

them into the schoolroom and shut the door! Make sure they know if they need to discuss a problem you are there to listen.

- Put the Paid Supervisor on a term trial (a review after 6 weeks followed by a further review 3 weeks later). If there are problems in the school room give a warning or two, then if things get drastic you can ask them to leave. This is your children's education you are working towards. **Remember – the problem should be with school** – their work. It can be tricky not allowing personal problems and annoyances to interfere.

When the new governess arrives

Don't just send the governess and the child/children into the schoolroom and leave them to it. It's a recipe for disaster! By doing that you may not know there are problems, or that things are not being done, till mid term and by then it's too late. Keep constant but discreet monitoring until you know that things are going well. If after a few months, you are sure that everything is working well, you can slacken off the checks on schoolwork, etc, if you desire. On the other hand don't keep popping into the schoolroom all the time. You need to give the governess some 'space' to get on with their job.

- q Encourage the Governess to attend the 'Supervisors Course' at the beginning of year (if one is being held) and to attend 'Sup. Sessions' or groups as it is important that they have contact with other supervisors. Encourage them to join DES (Distance Education Supervisors) the SA governess support group.
- q Write out exactly what you expect of the governess
 - o School day starts at . . . / finishes at . . .
 - o The Governess does need to mark children's work as they go, so that the children can correct it before it is sent away (otherwise it can be a month from when the child did the work to when they see their mistakes corrected).
 - o If the governess has any problems with the schoolwork they are to discuss the work with you – if it remains a problem then ring the teacher.
 - o Have the governess check the next 'Set' well in advance of commencing work on the 'Set', so if anything needs to be ordered for the schoolwork there is time to do so.
 - o Jobs out of school time
 - § Expectations in the school room
 - Prepare schoolwork for the next day
 - Clean and tidy schoolroom at the end of the day
 - Mop floors at end of week
 - o Have the Governess listen in at assembly each day and give you messages – i.e. OPFA meetings, special things that are coming up. If necessary ask them to take notes
 - o Agree on an appropriate discipline to be used in the schoolroom that does not involve smacking or screaming!

Do not expect much other work to be done (unless you pay) as Governesses are generally on a low wage, but some times they can be asked to help wash windows or sweep the verandah. Some Properties employ on a higher wage and expect 8 hours work for the 8 hours pay, so other work is given daily.

- q Set up the schoolroom with furniture, books, etc., but encourage the governess to arrange it as it suits her and the children.

Remember the governess can be feeling nervous etc., etc., you need to be supportive of them, especially in the beginning. It is a very different lifestyle etc. for them. Make them feel welcomed to be part of the family, watch TV in the evenings, have meals with you, etc. Encourage them to spend some time with the men and make friends there too.

Extra hints

- q Go through the children's work
 - o When the 'Sets' arrive at the beginning of the term go through them so you know what is expected. You may find things in there that may present a problem to your child, and you may be able to help the governess with strategies to overcome problems.

- Go through the schoolwork on a regular basis with the governess (approx. once a week, though others leave it until before the 'Set' is sent away – every 10 days). By doing this you know what is happening, and where children are at with their schoolwork. This way if there are problems, you keep on top of them. Some governesses don't like admitting to a difficulty, but if you are going through the completed work together you should pick things up and be able to offer advice when necessary.
 - Encourage the Governess to have informal chats about what is happening. Don't make it a chore for both of you. Make sure the governess knows you support her.
 - Have realistic expectations – remember that things can be done in different ways with the same outcome.
- q It's good if the governess can have separate quarters, if not, make rules, especially for kids so they don't badger her out of school hours if she wishes to be left alone. Sometimes a governess can become a real friend, which is a great bonus. Sometimes there are personality clashes but it's the luck of the draw.
 - q Governesses generally eat and watch TV with the family but also encourage them to make friends with other workers
 - q Encourage Governesses to bring their hobbies, join libraries etc.
 - q Some families stipulate that the Governess have own vehicle
 - q Always back the governess in front of the children
 - q If you have a problem with what she is doing, chat to her in private about it. Try to keep things friendly – talk over a cup of coffee, etc. Most annoyances will happen over little niggles that may have nothing to do with the schoolwork. Try to be diplomatic and patient.
 - q You usually have a good idea of how well the governess is going to fit in with the family and job by the end of the first week. If there are little things that need straightening out do it diplomatically early on, and you should have a good run.

If you have a good Supervisor it tends to be that a 12 month period is enough as they sometimes get sour (due to the close proximity of living) or your children become like little brothers or sisters and become bits of pests and other people's children are more appealing. Also changing the Governess each year means people with different interests for your children. Each Governess also brings different skills into the schoolroom – e.g. art and craft, cooking with kids, sport, computing, etc. Kids and governess can get stale by the end of a second year.



Paid Supervisor's (Governess) Employment Contract

This position entails supervising (Number of children and Year level/s) through the Port Augusta School of The Air, (SOTA), at (Name of Station/Town) for the School Year of 200.....

You will be employed by And will be responsible to (Names of Parents). The job involves daily supervision of (names of school children) in the schoolroom, as well as regular SOTA outings, such as mini-schools, camps, Host School Days and so on. (Name of Station/Town) iskms (direction) from Port Augusta.

Nearest Public Transport is (Stateliner/.....) to (name of town)kms. from (where you live) where we will pick you up if required. When necessary to attend school functions and some social functions nearby, supervisor will be transported with the family as room in vehicles allow. Own car is preferable to allow supervisor to have time away at the weekends and holidays.

The pay is \$...... gross per week, less board (\$...... per week) and tax, excluding school holidays. You will be paid by cheque at the end of each (week/fortnight/month) and advances are available through the month up to the value of your earnings to date. Personal phone call and fuel are available at cost and will be deducted from your wage. There is a fax and e-mail and the cost of these are treated as per personal phone calls. We would ask that you keep personal phone calls, faxes and e-mails to out of school hours.

School hours are 8.30am to 3.00pm each day. Preparation time is necessary to ensure the lessons you deliver are well planned and organized. This Preparation time will be between 8am and 8.30am and 3pm until 3.30pm. The schoolroom must be cleaned and tidied at the end of each school day and the floor washed once a week. It is also expected that you help (e.g. washing the dishes of an evening, child care for short periods of time, etc). Should we ask you to do any additional work you will be paid accordingly.

We will review your employment as supervisor 6 weeks after you start, followed by a review 3 weeks later, to ensure expectations are being met and that everyone is happy. Your input into this process is vital. Any misconduct will not be tolerated and this includes illicit drugs. No illicit drugs will be consumed or committed on site.

Daily responsibility will be to (Mother's name). We are confident you will give this position your maximum effort and we trust that if a problem should arise you will consult (Parent's names) immediately. Open and honest communication between everyone concerned is the most important part of your success as a supervisor.

You will be expected to liaise regularly with the appropriate teacher/s, as well as the local Itinerant Teacher (who visits once a term), by phone, fax, email and mail. We expect to be informed of this contact.

We aim to have as much 'face to face' experience with the child/children's class as possible and will attend as many camps, Host School Days, mini-schools etc. as possible. You will be expected to supervise and support our child/children as necessary during these outings. Shopping, etc to be done out of school times. The cost of any school outing or function will be borne by (The parents/employing body).

A room will be provided for you in (Our home/staff quarters). You will be provided with linen, towels and cleaning equipment. Keeping this room and linen clean and tidy is your responsibility.

Meals will be with family and staff. (*Option 1*) We get a weekly store order from (Name of town), and your order needs to be with (Name whom) by (Time and day). You are welcome to order personal items, such as toiletries, alcohol, tobacco, etc. with this order, and the cost of these items will be deducted from your monthly wage. (*Option 2*) We keep a basic store, but personal items will need to be provided by you. Items purchased from the store will be deducted from your wage. (*Option 3*) As we do not deal in cash on the property it is suggested you have a Bankcard/Mastercard for payment of phone order stores.

(*Optional*) The Supervisor must read and sign the OH&S policy.

We receive (Number) mail delivery/deliveries a week (e.g.. Tuesday and Friday).

We expect regular communication regarding children's 'Set Work' remittance and return. (Mother's name) will go through each 'set' with you before it is posted and again when it is returned. Turn around time for 'sets' is at least a fortnight.

Our expectations of the paid supervisor are:

- q A positive and enjoyable learning environment (i.e. no negativity or put downs)
- q Adequate lesson preparation and organization
- q Attend daily Assembly at 8.40am.
- q Regular attendance at weekly supervisor sessions with class teacher/s and general sessions for all supervisors. Your involvement with the Paid Supervisor's group, DES (Distance Education Supervisors) is at your own discretion but we would encourage and support your involvement
- q Regular updates to parents of the child/children's progress
- q A clean and tidy schoolroom and room (including washing schoolroom windows once a term)
- q (*Option 1*) That you be a positive example and role model for our child/children (e.g. no swearing, well mannered, appropriate dress and conversation styles at all times)
- q (*Option 2*) You must set a good example for the children at all times (e.g. no swearing, well mannered, appropriate dress and conversation styles at all times).
- q A firm and structured disciplinary environment within the schoolroom, developed in conjunction with us the parents and our child/children, that does not involve smacking and screaming
- q When possible include younger children (preschoolers) in school activities (e.g. sport, art, drama, etc.)
- q A willingness to admit that problems will occur and an ability to recognize them before they become insurmountable and the capacity to then seek assistance from an appropriate person, in liaison with us the parents
- q Flexibility in this position is most important, both in and out of the schoolroom
- q That you maintain the following; respect, caring, fairness, patience, enthusiasm, helpfulness, acceptance, flexibility and confidentially of family and business matters. In return, we will do the same for you
- q No smoking in the school room (*optional* – or our home)
- q No alcohol or personal visitors permitted in the school room
- q If a relationship develops with another employee, you must be discreet at all times.
- q That you and our child/children have fun and enjoy your learning

We look forward to working with you as our child's/children's supervisor in 200.....

.....

..... Paid supervisor's signature

Parents' signature

We thank Sally Henery for permission to include the following letter from a Governess's perspective. It is one of several letters written for the Catalogue Queens' Project ('Dirt Roads and Desert Roses'). We also thank the Arts Council for their permission to reproduce the letter.

Dear Gran (letters from a Governess)

3 -2-84

Wattle Brook Stn
Blinman SA 5730

Dear Gran,

Well, here I am, writing to you from my tiny new bedroom at Wattle Brook Station. I can't believe I am finally here, but I also feel I have bitten off more than I can chew. I am feeling excited, frightened, nervous, overjoyed and bewildered all at once. As you know, I have never governessed before, and while the idea is exciting, I have decided since arriving here last night that I really don't know a thing about what a governess is supposed to do! Help! I wish I had asked you more questions about when you were taught by governesses on your parent's riverboat, the Merle, on the Murray and the Darling Rivers in the early 1900's. I wonder if they were as nervous when they first set foot on the boat as I feel now?

The trip up here took ages. Mum and Dad saw me off at the Franklin Street bus Depot and I cried heaps. It was only my third trip alone and it felt like I was leaving them forever. We had short stops at some small towns for the mailbag delivery, and a long stop for lunch in Port Augusta at the end of the first leg of my journey. I had learnt that this was where the School of the Air was based, and that the isolated students' lessons were broadcast over the whole of South Australia using High Frequency radio. On the advice of my new boss, I walked across a park from the bus terminal to the School of the Air building and made myself known to the two teachers I would be working with this year to support my two 'charges'. They were very friendly and showed me around the school. It was the weirdest thing, a lovely old building covered (on the inside) with students' artwork, but not a child to be seen! I saw an "air lesson" and heard the children's voices coming in over the radio. Such tiny voices. They sounded like they were so far away.... and I guess they probably were! It was here I think that I started to doubt the wisdom of my decision to 'go bush'. I suppose you would have liked the luxury of speaking daily to your teacher when you were studying by Correspondence, instead of only hearing your governess's voice, with the river bird life and the splash of the paddle wheel in the background.

Back at the bus station I felt pretty proud of myself for having found the school and my way back in a town I had never been to before. I boarded the connecting bus that would take me the next 200 km of my trip, to Parachilna where I was to be met by my employers. The bus was travelling further on to Leigh Creek and I was terrified that I would miss my stop and be taken on and on to the middle of no-where, so I made myself stay awake. I was also worried that I wouldn't recognise the family when I got there as I had only met them once before at my interview in December.

When we finally stopped at Parachilna I realised that most of my fears were not necessary. The "town" looked like it *was* the middle of nowhere, with the addition of a few scattered buildings, and the only people to be seen *were* my "family"! It was kind of awkward in a funny sort of way. These people were virtually strangers but I had basically thought of little else since they had told me I had the job last December, so it felt as though I knew them. Only Bob, the dad, Kathy, in Yr 7, and Tim, Yr 5, had travelled down to collect me. The mum, June, and the youngest child, three-year-old Anna, had stayed home. Bob was surprised at how little luggage I had, but how many clothes would a seventeen year old have who had finished high school just six weeks ago?

After loading my bags into the boot of the family's Commodore we piled into the car and headed east towards the beautiful dark blue ranges in the near distance. Bitumen ran out after only a few hundred metres, and then we were bumping along a corrugated dirt road heading straight for the hills. My nerves settled a little as the children bombarded me with questions and information. They were good-looking, friendly kids, and I was feeling more at ease with each pothole. Passing a homestead, the worldly-wise twelve-year-old Kathy told me there are three "boys" who live there. I asked her if she got to play with them often. Fairly sensible question, I thought. Through peels of laughter Tim managed to explain that the "boys" were in their late teens and early twenties. The young darlings were matchmaking already!

We drove through some magnificent country on the hour-long drive to the station. Ancient gum lined creek beds, with shallow water in the bottoms of the seven rocky crossings, wound their way past massive rock cliff-faces. Being summer there was little green to be seen, but the stunning yet subtle ochre colours of reds, yellows, oranges, whites and browns in front of the brilliant blue-sky background took my breath away. The creeks soon became rugged, dusty Mallee-tree country and I managed to catch glimpses of tiny blue wrens and quick brown finches. But enough of the waxing lyrical from me.

We eventually came to the tiny town of Blinman. Have you ever been here? If you visited it say fifty years ago I don't think it would look any different than it does now! It is such a cute forgotten looking little village nestled into the more rounded hills at the top of the Flinders Ranges. It looks like the rest of the world has moved on without it. After a quick look we traveled yet further, this time heading south. I thought the trip was never going to end, but of course it did. The station homestead is neat and tidy with green lawns in front of both houses, and, you will love to know, rose bushes! It is hilly country here with deep blue ranges in the distance; extremely dry as it is a drought. A drought on the Murray meant your paddle boat could be stranded in low water for weeks, even months, with your family and the boat's crew stuck fast until it rained up river in New South Wales or Queensland, or the snow on the Australian Alps melted. As a child I loved hearing you tell me about walking to the nearest station for food and supplies when this happened. It must have been a frightening experience for you, and an anxious time for your parents. Here, drought means dust and constant pumping of precious underground water to keep the garden and stock alive.

To celebrate my arrival we had a BBQ tea with the toughest meat I have ever come across. Truly, my jaws ached from chewing. I guess I will have to get used to it. Apparently Wattle Brook is a sheep station and as a special treat they bought half a beast from a neighbour who runs cattle, so they think the steak makes a wonderful change! I hope there isn't much left of it so we can get into some home grown chops.

I have unpacked my things in my new room. It is in the family home and I have to share their bathroom. My bedroom is next to the older kids' rooms. It is neat and tidy, maybe a bit bare. We have generator power for only a few hours a day, so my stereo won't get much use. I am looking forward to lots of bush walks, and I think letter writing is going to become my main hobby so I get lots of mail and news from everyone. School is another matter. I start work tomorrow and I am scared stiff. I have no idea what I thought I was doing taking this job. I am seriously out of my comfort zone and I am crying a lot, like right now. Sorry about the drips on the paper. I miss everyone so much and am terribly homesick. Mum said to look ahead to something, so I am looking ahead to the weekend when we are going as a family to Blinman to play tennis on the cracked cement tennis court. Another family who lives somewhere north of Blinman is coming in too. They also employ a governess so it will be great to meet her. I hope she is nice. Apparently we are the only two single girls in the area. Kathy can't wait to introduce me to some of the "boys" in the district. She tells me everyone comes into town on the new governesses first weekend to check them out. Sounds pretty awful.

Speaking of Mum, I tried to ring her and Dad last night and got another surprise. They don't even have telephones here. Not real ones anyway. They have what they call a party line, where a single wire connects all the stations around Blinman. Only one person can use this line at a time and you can't dial the number, you have to crank like mad on a little handle on the phone, and then pick up the receiver to ask the switchboard operator in Hawker to ring the number for you. The line is usually noisy with crackles and pops, or it is busy, or both. Sometimes, they tell me, people even listen in on your conversation. Anyway, I knew I would ball my eyes out when I heard Mum's voice, and the phone is in the kitchen, and you have to yell to be heard, and I couldn't bear to yell at Mum and cry at the same time and it all just seemed too hard... so I didn't ring.

Anyway Gran, sorry I have gone on and on and probably bored you to tears, but I have so much to tell you. Even though I am incredibly scared, I also feel rather brave, and I wanted to share some of my experiences with you.

Hope you are well. How are things in McLaren Vale?

Lots of love from

Sally

xxx

P.S. Write SOON

P.P.S Any tips on how to be a good governess would be greatly appreciated! Wish me luck.

