

The Great Bugaboo

Donna Conner

Socialization.

It really is the "Great Bugaboo" of the homeschooling community. Generally, it's the first thing that those on the "outside" ask about when they hear we homeschoolers are educating our children at home. It seems to be the primary first concern for someone contemplating this new lifestyle. By and large, it truly is extremely overemphasized. It is, however, more of a concern for those with only one child.

There is no built-in peer group. No one to automatically learn alongside. No siblings to put one into their place. No siblings with whom to play, to fight, or to work together. No one that one has to share with on a regular and daily basis. Also, no one to occupy oneself while Mom is doing her own necessary chores, duties, or even when Mom just needs a small break in the conversation.

We have to be more proactive in getting our child in with groups to learn all the niceties of social living. We need to encourage a few play dates, and depending on the personality of our own child, consider how many co-op classes might be helpful.

The American psyche tends to think "More is Better" and can easily go into overdrive, living out of their vehicles so that their children are not deprived in some way. Classes of all sorts abound on our schedules (or can if we don't keep this in check): soccer, art, science, history, language, sports for every season, and so forth. Balance is always needed. For those with more than one child, I have heard that some families will allow one activity a season for each child to be involved in. Those with a multiple of little urchins to tote to practices and classes give way to allowing half the children to have one activity and the other half skip this season, rotating throughout the year. This can be tiring and expensive any way you look at it.

With having only one student, it may not be as expensive as if you had 4 or more, but we have to remember a watchword: BALANCE! Yes, we do have to be more proactive on the social aspects of education, but we don't have to do "school in the car" every day of the week.

First, consider your child's personality. Is she a homebody, happy to play and work alone? Or is he a social butterfly that thrives on all that interaction and go-go-go? Both types do need interaction with others (of all ages). The homebody may need to be pushed a bit out of their comfort zone, but doesn't need constant or daily interaction. The social butterfly may *want* constant or daily interaction, but needs to learn to cope with times when they are on their own. Balance for both is needed.

Secondly, list what you already are doing as a family in the way of getting out and about. Remember every outing is a lesson in socialization! How we react to strangers interacting with us – do we run screaming to the nearest exit (or behind momma's legs), or can we learn to be polite without familiarity, knowing that this nice person really is a stranger. Children need to be

able to talk for themselves in all situations, and learning how to deal with a stranger under mom's protective presence is a great way to learn. How to address one's elders is important. If a young man, learning to open doors for others (both ladies and his elders – and even to be polite with peer groups) is more easily taught at the grocery store, the mall, the doctor's office. Church attendance has a whole other aspect to life in general. One has to learn what kind of behavior is expected in the sanctuary, during Sunday school, Sunday morning & evening, and/or Wednesday night services and children's ministry activities. You may find that you are getting a lot more "socialization" in a week than you thought you were providing your child!

Now, thirdly, looking at the age of your child, you can look into the icing on the cake, the extras; activities and classes that are not necessarily imperative, but do add that balance into your charge's life. For the very young, having another family or two to interact with in each other's homes is a nice easy step into play dates at parks with a larger group. Then there are classes. They may or may not be needed for several years. If you have a social butterfly, they may be a bit more necessary earlier than for one who has a homebody.

Don't forget to look at your pocketbook! Classes can be expensive, in either actual cash outlay or in the time you are needed to volunteer. Don't fill up every empty hour. It's not horrible if you are home one, two, or ever three days a week! (Sometimes, I've been home with my son for a full week at a time, or more, with no scheduled activities. We both happen to be homebodies by nature, but I don't allow us to become hermits!) Don't fill up your child's life (and yours) with good programs when the better way of going is to not be quite as active. Don't settle for good when you can settle for best. Every family's calendar will look differently. We're all individuals and unique! Aren't you glad? I don't know if I could keep up with the ones who have 2 or 3 things scheduled every day of the week (and more on the weekends). Give yourself permission to say "no" to some great programs or activities, and don't feel guilty about it! Your child needs to learn balance and he or she is watching you!

Biographical Information

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Donna Conner lives in Fort Worth, TX with her husband, Glenn, their son, Mike, Donna's mother, Charlotte, and their dog, Lucia. Donna and Glenn have been homeschooling their son since the beginning of his education. Mike completed his homeschooling in the fall of 2008. Donna is an artist and has always enjoyed writing. She wrote Homeschooling Only One in 2003, after discovering that there were many other families homeschooling only one child. Her website is devoted to those with only one student in their homeschool, with listings of online resources. You can visit her website at <http://donnac.com> and read her blog at: <http://www.homeschoolblogger.com/DonnaC>