

Socialization

Rebecca Gutschow

Socialization. The very word creates a cataclysmic effect: potential home schooling families are sent running to the doors of the public school system and new home schooling families are sent scurrying off to the nearest secluded corner of the room. Veteran home schoolers, however, simply smile knowingly, understanding that ignorance is by no means reality.

Ignorance has slowed man's progress throughout history. Before the 1400's, ignorance kept men from exploring the oceans and discovering new lands. Ignorance about germs hindered medical science for years. Today, ignorance about socialization continues to thwart the progress of education.

An accurate understanding of socialization is needed. Is socialization only positive or can it be harmful? Does interaction with only one age group define proper socialization? Is too much socialization possible? Who determines whether or not a person is properly socialized and what defines proper socialization?

If proper socialization is defined as spending the majority of your waking hours with people within one year of your age, then not only are home schoolers not properly socialized, but neither are most adults in the general population. Most employees do not spend their day communicating only with people who are within one year of their own age. Instead, they are in contact with people of various ages, from the newly hired college graduate to the soon-retiring stalwart. If proper socialization, however, is defined as interacting with a variety of people of a variety of ages, then home schoolers, like the rest of the population, are properly socialized. They interact daily with family members, often ranging from very young siblings to elderly grandparents. They also have contact with music teachers, sports coaches, pastors, librarians, and a host of other people in the community.

Even if socialization was improperly narrowed to define interacting only with peers, homeschool students still have a wide range of opportunities for socializing. Because homeschooling has grown so rapidly over the past twenty years, the emergence of homeschool co-ops and support groups has also expanded, thereby providing homeschool students the opportunity to meet regularly with other homeschool students. Many homeschooling families also take the time to meet regularly in homes with other homeschooling families. In addition, homeschoolers interact regularly with other young people from their church. Most communities have numerous churches that offer youth programs. Homeschool students can also get involved in playing community sports where they interact with other young

people. Many are involved in extra-curricular clubs and activities such as 4H, drama club, orchestra, and countless other possibilities. Research by Dr. Brian Ray, president of National Home Education Institute (NHERI), has determined that homeschool students are involved in an average of 5.2 activities. These varied activities provide homeschool students with ample opportunity to socialize with their peers.

Consider the fact that not all socialization is positive. The problem of bullying in the public school system is well-documented. Many schools have installed metal detectors to deter weapons from being brought into school. Police dogs are often brought into the schools in search of illegal drugs. Foul language and bad attitudes are other negative influences abundant in the public school environment. Common sense dictates that daily exposure to bullying, weapons, illegal drugs, foul language, and bad attitudes is not a positive influence on children.

Veteran home schooling families have learned over time that socialization is not a problem. Their children have grown into responsible, caring adults who are a positive contribution to society. Research by NHERI reveals that 92% of home school graduates agree that “having been home schooled is an advantage to them as an adult.” Time has proven that socialization is not an issue with home schooling.

So, the next time you hear the word *socialization*, don't go slinking off as if you've been dealt a devastating blow. Instead, slowly chip away at society's ignorance of this issue and take the time to explain why socialization is not a reason *against* home schooling; rather it is a reason *for* home schooling.

Biographical Information

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Rebecca Gutschow has a BS in education. She and her husband David have three teenagers: one who has graduated from home school and two who are nearing the milestone. Her passions include writing, reading, traveling, scrapbooking, playing tennis, socializing, but above all, homeschooling. She is author of the fictional E-Book, The Journey Home, available at www.theoldschoolhousestore.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=62_157&products_id=8062.