

Peer Pressure

Tina Hollenbeck

For my family, homeschooling is a multi-layered blessing.

One benefit is that my children do not face a daily barrage of negative peer pressure. Abigail needn't feel prodded to badmouth a teacher because a classmate does. Rachel doesn't feel the need to behave like a tween in order to be accepted into a clique. They don't need to have the "right" clothes. Instead, they can enjoy being 6 and 7 (little girls still!) loving and accepting themselves for who they are as unique individuals.

Why then do I struggle with "peer pressure" of an adult breed?

I read the email seeking information about a good phonics program for a newly-minted 4-year-old, and I cringe. I didn't even start teaching the girls to read until they were 5. Did I miss the boat?

My dear friend off-handedly comments about the independent math and language work her 7-year-old readily takes on each day, and I grimace. Rachel and Abbie are sometimes comfortable accomplishing short tasks without my guidance, but they still need quick reassurance. Should I push them to do more on their own?

Another friend explains how her girls start math and language at 6:30 in the morning so her husband can take the lead with those subjects, and I bite my lip. We're lucky to begin a day by 9:00; sometimes 9:30 is more the norm, and 8:45 is reason to stop the presses. Is my schedule screwed up?

The thing about this pressure is that it's actually self-imposed. My friends are not criticizing my homeschool efforts; they are not pressuring me to be more like them. Instead, I put myself in the pressure cooker when I feel insecure about my abilities or effectiveness.

Is regular self-evaluation good and necessary? Absolutely. I do that and make adjustments as real needs arise. But getting stuck in comparisons negates everything I want to model for my girls.

For all of us, support in our homeschool enterprise—informally among friends and in more structured ways through local, state and national groups—is essential. Going it alone would make the job ten times harder. But let's put a moratorium on "peer pressure."

Don't succumb to the trap of comparing yourself, or your children, to others. By educating your child at home, you have the wonderful privilege of being able to truly individualize what you do to fit his needs. Celebrate that freedom, and use it to answer your calling—that is, to educate *your* particular child in *your* specific situation in the unique ways that suit *you and her*. And then celebrate all the different ways other homeschoolers can do the same for their children. What a gift!

Biographical Information

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Tina Hollenbeck and her husband, Jeff, are raising and homeschooling their two daughters in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Tina is staff writer for Celebrate Kids, Inc. (www.celebratekids.com), a regular contributor to The ChatterBee (www.thechatterbee.com/), and also operates a small in-home daycare. When not teaching, she enjoys working out, scrapbooking, and singing on her church's worship team. To read more articles like these, visit her blogs at <http://tinahollenbeck.blogspot.com/> and <http://tinahollenbeck-celebratekidscolumns.blogspot.com/>.