

The Truth about Homeschooling and Socialization

by Lucinda H Kennaley

It's time for homeschoolers to tell the truth about "socialization." It is a problem! The phone never stops ringing, the teenager's email has crashed the computer, and the front yard is patches of dandelions and dirt because there are always kids out there socializing! It's not uncommon for a home school parent to put thousands of miles on her van hauling kids to sporting events, study groups, parties and overnights. In home school, a child's circle of friends will divide, multiply, expand and grow such that the overflow of socialization can be a worry.

The experience of a homeschooled child doing lessons is not at all like the solitude of an otherwise-schooled child completing homework alone at night. In homeschool, there are co-ops for everything from science, math and environmental studies to physical education and art. There are baseball get togethers, chess clubs, field trips, study groups and reading clubs. Homeschoolers participate in dance, music, gymnastics, scouts and 4-H with school kids, as well as plays, horseback riding, reading groups, library programs, college classes, debates and more with otherwise-schooled kids and always-schooled others. Since most of these activities involve other people, parents are hard pressed to control the socializing that naturally occurs.

In a home school there is "talking with your neighbor." There is time to engage in independent exploration, investigation and invention. There are kitchen explosions, creatures to feed and lab materials to clean. Multi-age peer groups share knowledge that results in unplanned learning. Information gleaned from social interactions can force a home school teacher to scramble for challenging new books. This leads to the library where there are - more people!

Babies freely demonstrate biological facts of life and stimulate off-the-subject discussions; elderly neighbors disrupt class with true stories about the Depression; and 6 year olds need help harvesting sunflowers from the backyard garden in homeschool. There are distractions like fixing a backed up toilet and building a barn for next year's science project: activities that usually require interaction with plumbers, carpenters and volunteer friends and neighbors.

Homeschool "jocks" play sports year round; "prissy" girls giggle into the night; "loadies" conduct regular census of the refrigerator's contents; and "intellectuals" disappear into books even when the schoolwork is done. Peer pressure in home school assures that kids read, complete reports and field work, memorize lines for the homeschool play and perfect that violin crescendo. Together, students will read ahead in history and finish that math book early, finishing this year's school term with next year's curriculum. Imagine!

The truth is that the abundance of socialization does present a challenge to homeschool families. However, since most parents think it's good for their children to have friends of all ages, shapes, interests and customs, socialization is a problem homeschoolers learn to cope with cheerfully.

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