

## Will My Child Turn Antisocial Because Of Homeschool? (4/15/09)

Hello everyone! Today I'm going to address a hot topic among homeschoolers: whether homeschooling is hazardous to your child's socialization.

### Common Argument

The common argument from the non-homeschool community is that although homeschooling has scored impressive marks in academic achievement, this comes with a huge price since homeschooled students don't have opportunities to socialize with their peers, which ultimately hinder their ability to succeed in society.

Now, before I start, I want to be upfront about something. You see, a part of the misconception fueling this socialization argument probably has at least something to do with the use of the term, "homeschool", which immediately conjures up images of students being taught, obviously, in their homes, which is far from accurate these days. And we as homeschoolers may have to bear some burden of guilt since we allowed this term to be used to describe our community for all these years. Therefore, (and I'm really talking to the homeschoolers here) we really need to think about changing the term, "homeschool", to another, more accurate term that involves education outside the walls of the traditional classroom instead of the current term that suggests a symptom of academic xenophobia - more on this later (maybe we'll address this in another article!). Ok - apologize for that sidetrack, but had to get it out there - back to our topic.

### Breaking It Down

The real truth here is, although the common socialization argument was more valid in the past, the introduction of the Internet, cell phone/handhelds, and popular momentum of the homeschool movement itself makes this argument obsolete for today's homeschool environment.

First, let's agree on the definition of "socialization". The critics of homeschooling use the term in reference to homeschooled students' interaction with their peers. I agree that interacting with peers is important, but I also believe that interacting with people outside their own age groups is just as important and that interacting well with both groups really defines a well-rounded sociable person. So socialization should include the ability to interact with ALL people, regardless of age. After all, isn't that what we do in everyday life?

So, let's adjust our lens to take in this new definition of socialization and go back to addressing the argument above.

Now, let's review a typical day of the homeschooled child and you try to pick where there are issues with socialization:

Morning - Conduct core lessons. Typically this is individualized one-on-one interaction with the homeschool teacher. The location is usually home, but can also be at the library, near by café, etc.

Mid-Morning - 15 minute break.

Mid-Morning thru Noon - Finish core lessons and supplement with activities. These activities may include: 1) Math - visiting the supermarket to have the child add up the

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groceries and interact with the cashier to complete the transaction, 2) Social Studies - visiting the local fire station to go on a tour and ask questions, 3) Science - going on a nature walk to learn about plant life which concludes with a visit with the park authority in which the child interviews the park authority.

Noon - Lunch at home or restaurant. If at a restaurant, have the child order and interact with waiter/waitress. Lunch can be with other homeschool kids.

Afternoon - Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, sports, dancing, whatever activity the child wants to be involved in with her peers.

Alright. So based on the above, where are the gaps in socialization? The only time the child is isolated from the outside world is during core lessons in the morning, but that's in the context of a custom-fitted curriculum, which inherently requires a one-on-one approach, which we all know is far superior than the one-to-many approach in typical school classrooms.

Based on our definition of socialization, does the homeschooled child interact with her peers? Yes. And how about interaction with others outside the child's age - does the homeschooled child get that experience? Also, yes.

### Yeah, But...

But, how realistic is it for the homeschool child to get her daily dose of social interaction with her peers, especially when other kids are at school? Well, I've already addressed that by stating that peer interaction usually occurs after school when all kids (homeschool and non-homeschool) are done with their lessons. With the entire afternoon available to cover peer interaction, the only time when there is no peer interaction is when core lessons are given during the mornings. But since we've already established that individualized attention is best to teach a customized curriculum, which usually occurs in the morning, there's literally no other time in the day where the common argument is relevant.

But let's play devil's advocate for a moment and see where this goes. So, afternoon is available for peer interaction. Fine. But even though individualized attention is important for teaching a customized curriculum, can there be an argument for getting more out of the lesson when peers are discussing and interacting with each other around the lesson being taught?

Let's see if that makes sense. Let's say there are 2 peers, Jesse and Cindy. Now, assume we created a customized curriculum for Jesse and will teach a lesson from this curriculum. Does it make sense that Jesse and Cindy will get more out of the lesson if both are interacting with each other? Jesse might since the lesson is geared towards him (we're sure Cindy will ask some insight questions or make some good comments that would stretch Jesse's thinking). But what about Cindy...do you think she would get the most out of the lesson when she wasn't considered in planning Jesse's curriculum (would it even make sense that Jesse benefits most from the lesson at the expense of Cindy)? Clearly no. And this is where the homeschool critics' argument above falls flat. They don't understand that it starts with a customized curriculum aimed at a single student - that is why one-on-one rules the roost during core lessons and this is one of the key reasons why homeschool kids excel academically. Instead, these critics assume there is some standardized curriculum that homeschool kids are being taught, kind of like at...public schools.

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So, as you can see, it seems that the supporters of the common argument have a little re-grouping to do before coming up with a better argument that attacks the social abilities of homeschool children.

Again, this perception that homeschool children don't get enough social interaction is probably (partly) because of the term, "homeschool", but doing just a teeny bit of research on the Internet or actually (gasp!) meeting and interacting with a homeschool family will be enough to convince anyone that "homeschool" does not only occur at home.

In fact, in today's world of cyberspace and cell phones, it would be hard NOT to find any homeschool peer interaction activities in your neighborhood. Prove it to yourself. Go to the Internet and type in a search for homeschool communities or groups near your neighborhood and, unless you live in a very remote area of the country, you will be pleasantly surprised at the results. Most likely, you will find a homeschooling community near you that gets together regularly during the week with other homeschool kids for activities. Join those groups that you feel fits your child's interests and you will have started off on the right foot to reinforce the fact that your child is learning to socialize with her peers.

**Now It's Our Turn**

Now that I've addressed the socialization argument, allow me to play some offense - let's assess our definition of socialization against a typical public school classroom. A typical school day looks like this:

Morning - Arrive in class with peers. Teaching begins with one teacher and, possibly, a teaching assistant, in the classroom.

Mid-Morning - Recess in school yard with peers

Mid-Morning through Noon - Teaching resumes with peers in the classroom.

Noon - Lunch and recess on school premises.

Afternoon - Teaching resumes with peers in the classroom.

Late Afternoon - Teaching ends and kids pursue outside activities (sports, Girl Scouts, etc).

Do you see what's going on here? Virtually every activity is done ONLY with peers. Therefore, I would argue that it is the public schools that are isolating its students from the real world (except maybe for the occasional field trips) and that *this* may well be the source of other socialization issues for these students.

"What kind of socialization issues?" You ask.

That's a great segue into my final comment on socialization.

**Bringing It Home**

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If a child is lucky enough in public school, she will have a great experience developing her social skills; making several great friends in the process. But unfortunately, all school districts aren't created equal and some districts have serious issues not only with academic teaching quality, but also with other issues such as drugs, violence, and sex. The tragedy here is that these public school students don't have a choice not to interact with their peers because not interacting basically means not attending school, leading to truancy. My point here is that public school students confine themselves to a fixed social environment for better or worse, throughout the next 12 years of their lives.

On the other hand, social interaction in homeschooling is more fluid – the parent and child can choose who to interact with and to what extent – a much better alternative than being stuck with public school social issues such as drugs and gangs and not having much choice but to endure that environment (we won't even go into how these issues can then lead to poor performance in academics).

So you see, the social skills that homeschool children develop from interaction with both their peers and people of all ages results in the homeschool child being actually more socially developed and better ready for college than her public school peers. So no, your child happily will not turn antisocial because she attends homeschool. Finally, in light of our points above, the common argument attacking socialization of homeschool children is really just a dusty and irrelevant afterthought in today's homeschool environment.

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