

What about socialization? Excerpt from Michael Farris, HSLDA

A new homeschooling mom asked me about facts about socialization and homeschooling. Here is my best short answer. OK, OK, it is a short answer for me--not short the way FB measures shortness. Some time back I met a sociologist who worked for 30 years-plus for the Smithsonian Institute. He studied cultures where there were no formal schools. Socialization, in a formal sense, is how one generation teaches the rules of society to the next generation.

Once you understand this, the key concept of socialization is apparent. Children need to learn the rules of society from the older generations and not from other children. In fact, we are reaping the havoc in our society where 13 year-olds are learning the rules of society from other 13 year-olds. If you want to understand why today's 16 year olds are so much less mature than 16 year olds of my parents' and grandparents' generations it is pretty simple--my parents and grandparents were socialized by adults while today's 16 year olds have been largely socialized by other children.

This sociologist had been studying these cultures for so many years that he had been able to do before and after studies--cultures that had no formal educational programs when he was first starting, now had adopted compulsory school attendance. He said that his studies demonstrated a clear drop in social competence after the introduction of formal education. Moreover, socially undesirable behaviors including alcoholism and crime levels had gone up dramatically after the introduction of formal education.

This is the reason that Vickie and I started homeschooling--we didn't like the way our daughter, Christy, was being socialized by other six year olds at a Christian school. We just had the audacity to believe that we had better ideas than six year olds. Children get their values from the people they interact with the most. Spend time with kids, get your values from kids. Spend time with parents, get your value from parents.

When Christy was 14, she accompanied Vickie and I at a human rights conference in Paris. One day Vickie and I went for a walk just before lunch and we got back late to the luncheon. Christy was already there seated between a priest from Portugal and a barrister from London. She was engaged in an animated conversation with two adults from different cultures. When we got home, I saw her on the floor playing games with her younger siblings and then soon after, I saw her interacting perfectly normally with girls on her softball who were her age.

My favorite socialization story of all came from a softball team. I coached girls softball for over 20 years. I was a very good coach, winning lots of championships. Parents always seemed happy when their daughter ended up on my team.

One year I called a mom to tell her that her daughter was going to be on my team. She said, "Who are the other girls on the team?" I read her the names. She said, "Oh my, those are almost all 8th graders-- my daughter is a 7th grader--I don't think she can get along with those older girls." I wanted to scream What about socialization?

A public school girl was unable to get along with girls from her own school who just 12 months older than her. Talk about narrow socialization. God's ways work. Parents are the best to teach their children the rules of society. We have always had our children involved with other kids and with other adults. We do not live narrow lives. We do not raise our children in age-segregated herds. Our kids are now grown for the most part, and they are all quite capable people in every sphere of life--including socialization.

If you want your children to share your values then teach them yourself.