

these societies didn't even develop a word for adolescence, and most young males in these cultures did not display anti-social behavior. Studies show that, beginning in the 1980s, delinquency increased in non-western countries when western-style schooling, television, and movies were introduced.

Dr. Epstein concludes that the strong and largely negative influences of peers, schools, and the media are the main forces driving teen behavior in developed nations, offering a plausible explanation for why American teens are often immature and rebellious. (Now, aren't you glad you chose homeschooling, especially for your teens?)

Another positive result of the socialization homeschooled children receive is that they mature more quickly and are able to handle responsibilities at a younger age. This reality challenges us as parents: Are we willing to let our children develop independence much earlier than their peers in other school settings? I agree with Dr. Epstein that this is a

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positive thing for young people—as long as they can continue to recognize the responsibility they have to respect and obey their parents and others in authority over them.

Although it is hard for many of us to accept the transition, we are preparing our children to think for themselves and to make wise decisions when they are on their own. This means that we can expect more from our children at younger ages and give them more responsibility. And as they show competence in the tasks we assign them, then we can give them greater responsibility. This is the recipe for preparing young people who can truly advance the Kingdom of God, especially at younger ages.

The bottom line is that we don't want our children socialized to become mindless robots for the mass culture and the state, or to develop attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that are not in their best interests. We want our children to practice the Golden Rule, have good manners, respect people with different beliefs, and have strong opinions based upon a Christian worldview that they can articulate with grace.

Providing the opportunity for our teens' exposure to positive role models and other adults in our families, churches, and communities will reap positive rewards. So will helping them to make choices that limit their exposure to peer pressure and the mass media marketing of undesirable role models. If this nonconformist type of socialization still troubles our neighbors, relatives, and/or friends, so be it. God gave us specifically to our children to raise them to please Him, not to please anyone else.



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The best kind of socialization

by **J. Michael Smith**



“**E**VERY CHILD SHOULD experience a bloody nose in the school yard. This is simply part of growing up and part of the socialization process.”

This statement was made in a legal brief many years ago by an attorney representing the State of North Dakota. He was arguing that education is more than academics. Ignoring the fact that North Dakota’s homeschooled children were doing very well academically, the state took the position that children need to be “properly socialized”—and that proper socialization can only take place in a traditional school setting.

The universal need for a bloody nose experience claim would be comical but for the fact that far too many people share this attorney’s presupposition. In fact, the most common question asked of homeschoolers is, “What about socialization?” Thankfully, it is not difficult to turn the socialization question around and make a strong case for homeschooling.

The term “socialization” has many connotations, but when addressed to a homeschooling family, the implication normally is that socialization means children spending a lot of time with children in the same age group or grade. *The McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms* defines socialization as “the process whereby a child learns to get along with and to behave similarly to other people in the group, largely through imitation as well as group pressure.” According to this definition, we can assume that socialization can be either positive or negative, but not neutral.

In the *New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, socialization is defined as

learning the customs, attitudes, and values of a social group, community, or culture. Socialization is essential for the development of individuals who can participate and function within their societies, as well as for ensuring that a society’s cultural features will be carried on through new generations.

Still further, the *American Heritage Stedman’s Medical Dictionary* defines socialization as “the process of learning

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interpersonal and interactional skills that are in conformity with the values of one’s society.”

A common theme of these definitions seems to be behavior that conforms to the society or group. Hence, nonconformists—when it comes to proper socialization—are suspect. Because homeschoolers do not conform to traditional education norms, many people assume that homeschoolers are not properly socialized.

I like prominent psychologist and author Dr. Robert Epstein’s¹ definition of socialization: “Socialization is just a process by which we learn to be part of a community.” He continues, “So the question is, what community do we want our young people to learn to be part of? Some parents have said to me, ‘Aren’t school and high school, in particular, very important for socialization?’ And my *emphatic* answer is no, because we do not want young people socializing with *each other*. We want them to learn to join the community that they’ll be part of their whole lives. We want them to learn to become *adults*. Right now, they learn everything they know from each other—that’s absurd, especially since teens in our society are controlled almost entirely by the frivolous media and fashion industries.

“If you look through most of human history or you look at many cultures today, you find that teens spend most of their time learning to become adults. Here, they spend most of their time trying to *break away* from adults.”²

Footnotes

1 Robert Epstein is a Ph.D. of Harvard University, the former Editor-in-Chief of *Psychology Today* magazine, a visiting scholar at the University of California San Diego, the founder and Director Emeritus of the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies, and the host of *Psyched!* on Sirius Satellite Radio. For information on his latest book, *The Case Against Adolescence: Rediscovering the Adult in Every Teen*, visit www.TheCaseAgainstAdolescence.com.

2 Dr. Epstein’s definition of socialization is excerpted from the article “Q&A with Dr. Epstein” in the July/August 2007 issue of the *Home School Court Report*.

3 Dr. Brian Ray is president of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI). He holds his Ph.D. in science education from Oregon State University. The complete research report on this study of home-educated adults, available at www.NHERI.org, is entitled *Home Educated and Now Adults: Their Community and Civic Involvement, Views About Homeschooling, and Other Traits*.

Many homeschoolers have specifically chosen homeschooling because their view is that school and the typical peer groups found there are not forces of positive socialization.

We know from anecdotal evidence that the majority of homeschooled teens are not experiencing traditional teen rebellion. *Homeschooling Grows Up*, HSLDA’s 2004 research report by Dr. Brian D. Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute, offers data showing that homeschooled teens are successfully integrating into society.³ There is very little evidence of teenage rebellion, and significant

numbers of students demonstrate their maturity by being involved in their communities and generally report a good relationship with their parents.

Homeschoolers now are not alone in their view of the negative impact peer pressure has on proper socialization. Dr. Epstein is challenging the conventional idea that teenagers have to go through a period of rebellion or turmoil. Dr. Epstein claims that the way teenagers are treated in society by parents, institutional schools, entertainment media, and peers, is more likely to cause observable differences in the way a teen operates as compared to an adult. He points out that if teen rebellion were simply a function of the brain, we would see the phenomenon across all cultures in all time periods. This isn’t the case. In pre-industrial cultures, where teens spent most of their time with adults, the majority of