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## ***The Socialization Myth***

by Bonnie and Lawrence Williams, EdD

Many Oak Meadow families ask for our opinion about socialization. There is a myth that persists about this subject, so we want to look at it more closely.

This “lack of socialization” myth arises from false concepts about the nature of socialization itself and the realities of the homeschooling environment. As John Holt, one of the early advocates of home schooling, once remarked, “If I could give just one reason why children should NOT go to public schools, it would be the socialization they receive there.” Those who feel that homeschooled children are missing a valuable experience by not participating in the socialization that occurs in a public school environment have to consider Holt’s words and ask, “Is this really what we want for our children?”

Many school officials and child psychologists have the impression that homeschooled children are home alone all day without any interaction. On the contrary, homeschooled children have ample opportunities for meaningful socialization with their peers and people of all ages through local clubs and classes, community activities, church involvement and personal relationships with friends. Many cities and towns also have homeschooling support groups that meet regularly to provide additional opportunities. In addition, homeschooling curriculum like Oak Meadow often incorporates community service and interaction into its lessons, creating still more opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and other positive social opportunities.

Research indicates that homeschooled children are not being deprived socially. In a nationwide study, Dr. Wesley Taylor of Andrews University found that homeschooled children scored significantly higher than their conventionally-schooled peers on a measure of self-concept, which is generally considered to reflect socialization. Dr. Taylor concluded that the socialization issue “favors homeschoolers over the conventionally-schooled population.”

In another study, Dr. Delahooke from the California School of Professional Psychology, using a standard personality measure, compared two groups of children: a home school group and a matched private school group. Dr. Delahooke determined that “the private school subjects appeared to be more influenced by or concerned with peers than the home-educated group.”

The results of these studies suggest that home schooling improves a child’s self-concept and helps children develop the ability to withstand peer pressure. Both of these outcomes are indications of positive socialization experiences.

Such empirical research gives us useful information, but it can also cloud the reality of socialization itself. Socialization is simply our ability to function successfully within a group, and the most basic group is the family. Our children learn their first patterns of interaction with others by imitating their parents. Then, when they go into the larger group, they carry these patterns with them. This is true even if the children go to public school. We know that not all of the children in public school are polite, courteous, and well behaved, despite the attempts of the school to teach them to be so. If, however, the parents are polite and considerate of each other,

the children will tend to be polite and considerate, even in the face of the opposite behavior by their peers. If the parents are rude towards each other, the children also learn to be rude and inconsiderate, no matter what they are told by teachers.

We carry an attitude with us in whatever we do. When we wash dishes, we can be in a hurry to get them done, or we may actually enjoy the process and do them slowly and methodically. When we make a bed, we can pull the sheet and blanket up tight and smooth out the wrinkles, or we can pull the spread over the whole mess to hide what is underneath. When we cook dinner, we can enjoy the process and chop vegetables and cook grains, or we can use packaged food to get finished with the process as soon as possible. All of our actions convey an attitude to our children, and our children are learning from us every minute of the day.

Socialization begins at home, and—as conscientious parents—we can insure that our children are positively socialized by becoming aware of our own attitudes and behaviors. When we see our children acting in a manner that we consider socially unacceptable, we have to reflect for a moment and ask ourselves if our children are simply copying our own behavior. Are we supportive in our relationships with others, or do we tend to create strife and conflict wherever we go? Are we able to work cooperatively with a group, or do we demand that everyone in the group do it our way? Do we give our full attention to what we do with others and try to do it to the best of our abilities, or do we just do the bare minimum necessary to get it done? Our answers to these questions—and others like them—indicate the kind of socialization our children are experiencing within their family group.

It is especially important to realize that our attitudes are contagious, and the very attitudes that annoy us the most in our children are the very ones which we ourselves hold. We don't like to see ourselves as we really are walking around in front of us! We must remember, though, that our children take on our attitudes and behaviors simply because they want to be just like us. Why? Because they love us. So when we are tempted to be angry with our children because of behavior we feel they have picked up from socializing with other children, we have to remember that they may quite likely have copied those behaviors from us, simply because they love us. If we want our children to change, we must change first. This is the best possible socialization that we can offer our children. Then, when they have a strong foundation, we can safely send them into larger groups, where they can become a strong influence on the group, rather than the group becoming a strong influence on them.

Homeschooling offers us the very best possible choice for positive socialization of our children, if we are willing to become aware, conscientious parents and bring forth the courage to transform ourselves.