

Nurturing Loving Children, or ... How to Teach Socialization Skills

by Ruth Lindstrom

Homeschooled young adults have made quite an astonishing reputation for themselves. Research shows that they exceed their contemporaries not only academically, but also socially. Yet the question, "But what about their socialization skills?" continues to haunt the souls of good and conscientious parents. We see the flaws and failings of our own flesh and blood, and in our heart of hearts, if we are honest with ourselves, we wonder if maybe our children wouldn't be better off in a conventional school setting or with other tutors and teachers?

What will our children learn in a conventional classroom?

Sending our children off to a conventional classroom will certainly teach them a lot. But will it teach them behavior which will serve them well as adults? Hopefully, because your children have been taught well at home, they will not pick up bad habits like cheating, lying, ridiculing, stealing, sexual immorality, drug use, and violent behaviors. In addition, I know you hope that they will not join so many Americans who now follow occult and eastern religious practices taught in many government schools.

However, I can guarantee that your children will learn where they are in a pecking order, they will be taught to value their peers' opinions as more important than adults', they will either learn to stand up for their rights or else how to avoid being hurt, they will learn how to guard their possessions, and other self-serving skills.

The question is: Is this the kind of socialization you want for your children?

What is "good" socialization?

The word "socialize" is defined in *Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition* as:

vt. --ized, --izing 1 to make social; adjust to or make fit for cooperative group living 2 to adapt or make conform to the common needs of a social group 3 to subject to governmental ownership and control; nationalize 4 to cause to become socialist -- vi. to take part in social activity -- socialization n. -- socializer n.

Thought provoking! None of the above definitions begin to describe the much bigger goals I had in mind for the "socialization" of my children -- and some are downright antithetical! My desire for my children was that they would grow up to be loving, gracious adults who would be able to work together with others to further the Kingdom of God; to have the confidence to love and be loved as marriage partners; to be able to lead and train their children; to have the social skills necessary for employment; to take their place as servants and leaders in the church and community.

Fortunately, we realized early in our children's lives that other semi-socialized peers would not be able to help our children achieve these goals. Only by living with and learning from adults would we be able to see this kind of fruit. In addition, who else but us as their parents would ever care enough to see these goals come to fruition in each of our children's lives?

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There is no social institution which has been devised which is a better laboratory or classroom for the socialization of children than the one created by God from the beginning of time -- the family. Families will be even more effective if they realize that their home provides the prime opportunity to impact their children in such profoundly important ways.

Every parent is socializing their child(ren) from birth. Some do an excellent job, others are abysmal failures. Let me share with you some tips to help your children develop excellent "socialization skills."

1. Model Social Behavior in Your Home.

The behavior children are exposed to in their homes has the greatest and farthest reaching impact on the kind of socialization skills they will develop. How parents relate to one another, how they relate to others, and the quality of respect they show through their speech and actions imprint the hearts and spirits of children for the rest of their lives in subtle and overt ways.

Your relationship with your husband or wife is of paramount importance in teaching your children socialization skills. More important than demonstrating romantic feelings is being supremely courteous and thoughtful to one another, even when no one seems to be noticing! There is no such thing as 50/50 in love -- those who truly love are always looking for ways to out-give and serve each other.

The behavior your children observe as you relate to others outside of your home will also have an inestimable impact. For example, do you treat others with respect and courtesy? When food is brought to you in a restaurant which is not up to your standards, how do you treat the personnel? How do you react to clerks when inferior merchandise must be returned? Or, what do you do when someone endangers you by cutting in front of you on the highway? The behavior parents demonstrate in all kinds of circumstances will influence the kind of social skills their children will embrace.

Kindness, truth, and helpful attitudes are learned in the home and are the seeds of future behavior. Do you disparage others with unkind gossip? As Peter Rabbit's mother said: "If it isn't kind, if it isn't true, if it isn't necessary, don't say it at all." Yes, homes lay the foundation for learning all socialization skills -- good and bad!

2. Read and Study the Word of God, the Bible, for Knowledge about Socialized Behavior.

Basically, "socialization skills" is modern nomenclature for learning how to love in ways the Bible teaches we should.

- * Genesis starts out with man's relationship with God, each other, and instructions on the family...
- * The Law codifies relational behavior...
- * The wisdom books teach about wise ways to relate to one another...
- * The Prophets warn about wandering away from the truth and loving God...
- * The gospels again spell out what love is and how to love...
- * The Acts of the Apostles reminds us of the early church and its example of love in action...

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- * The epistles over and over instruct us to love and how to practice love...
- * Revelation culminates in scenes of worship, love, and restored fellowship with our Creator and Redeemer, the Almighty God.

The entire Bible can be viewed in one way as a textbook on socialized behavior. First and foremost, read and study the Word of God. Read through the entire Bible consecutively. As a family, read one chapter in the book of Proverbs each day. Memorize and meditate on sections of scripture such as:

- * I Corinthians 13
- * Matthew 5-7
- * Romans 12
- * James 1
- * I John 1-5

Those who learn to live accordingly will be truly socialized persons in the best sense of the word, because God created us for fellowship with Him and each other. The more we understand his will for us, and the guidelines He has given us for fellowship, the better we will understand true socialization principles and practices.

3. Consistently Train, Teach, and Counsel Your Children.

Socialization begins in a mother's arms at her breast receiving emotional, spiritual, and physical sustenance all at once. It continues as mothers and fathers patiently and affectionately teach their children immediate, unquestioning obedience as preschoolers. During the middle years parents continue the process as they teach and reason with their children. And in the teen years, parents utilize their ability to inspire, counsel, and coach their children as their sons and daughters gain more and more independence.

In other words, the whole process of disciplining and training our children is vital to raising socialized human beings. This is a process the Lord has given to parents. Parents may decide to delegate it partially to others, but it is still the parents who are accountable to God as to how they have performed their parental roles.

4. Learn the Rules of Etiquette.

True etiquette is love in action. Thus teaching our children table manners is not just a misguided carry over from Victorian times -- it is a series of "rules" to make eating more pleasant for those with whom we share meals. Likewise, learning the rules of how to make introductions is a way of showing proper respect, etc.

Regardless of whether one knows which fork to use at a formally set table, a person who has learned the graciousness of treating others as they would like to be treated will innately demonstrate well bred manners. But, it makes it even easier to learn the "rules" in order to put others at their ease.

5. Role Play Appropriate Behavior.

Mealtimes are prime opportunities to learn, role play, and practice courteous behavior and rules of etiquette. Learning to acknowledge introductions, seat ladies, and follow rules of

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eating in way that makes others comfortable can make one feel very self-conscious unless young people have had the opportunity to practice.

There was a period of time that we as a family worked on one new "rule" each week. As a mother, I also made the practice of setting a gracious table for our Sunday dinner (regardless of how the rest of week had gone). Each family member was required to stay dressed up until after dinner, because I wanted our children to learn how to behave in formal as well as informal situations.

6. Practice Good Social Skills -- Bring Others into Your Home.

Hospitality is commanded in both the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament of the Bible. What a wonderful way to teach true intergenerational social skills. There is no better way I can think of to teach our children how to interact with others than to bring people of all walks of life into our homes. Together (parents and children) it teaches us how to make visitors comfortable, how to assist those in trouble, and how to bring joy to others. An added bonus is that by exercising hospitality parents will observe and identify negative social behavior (there is nothing like having guests to make it apparent) which gives them the opportunity to help their child(ren) overcome their social handicaps.

7. Take advantage of opportunities to serve others in your community and church.

Once more, taking your children with you in order to: work together to stock community service food shelves; bring meals on wheels; visit and put on programs at nursing homes; tutor in ESL programs; team teach a Sunday School class; usher for church services; assist the janitor for your church building; etc. will teach your children the wonderful socialization skills of being compassionate and poised adults who can enter the society and move amongst all kinds of people.

8. Pray for Wisdom and the Spiritual Strength to Make the Changes Necessary in Your Own Life.

The hardest part of teaching our children "socialization skills" is incorporating the disciplines we should have into our lives as parents. Because true socialization is teaching our children how to be responsible and responsive adults, our character as adults is of paramount importance in this process.

All of us will fail at times. It is important for our children to see that we are "pressing on toward the mark for the high calling of God" though. So don't give in or give up. Keep looking to the Lord for the wisdom and spiritual strength only He can supply.

9. Pray for Your Children.

After it is all said and done, we must pray for our children. Learning to love in word and deed will be a lifetime pursuit which must come from the heart. While we can teach rules about how to act and dress, only God can place the desire in our children's hearts to love and serve Him and those around them. Both Jews and Christians acknowledge that all the laws are summed up in the Two Great Commands:

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Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Mark 12:29-31 KJV

and again,

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

I John 4:7-8 KJV

What about a "Non-social" Child?

You will need to work with them even more diligently with love, patience, and persistence. The LORD wants to utilize the gifts of all our children in His kingdom, and the LORD wants all of us involved with people. This is a lifetime process which the LORD has entrusted to you as a parent to start, and which He will continue throughout your children's lives until they step into eternity.

"What about Socialization Skills?"

Is there any better place than in the bosom of the family to begin learning? God created the family as the first social institution and it is still the best place to learn and develop true "socialization skills" in a child's life.

Dean and Ruth began home educating their four children in 1983. Now that their children are adults, Ruth has dedicated her life to serving the Lord as an "older woman" as instructed in Titus 2:3-5. She prays that through articles and speaking opportunities she will inspire and enable younger women to experience the joy which comes as they serve the Lord as wives, mothers, homemakers, and teachers.

Ruth Lindstrom serves on the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators (MACHE) with her husband Dean. She may be contacted through the MACHE office at 763/717-9070 or mache@isd.net.

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