



the best kind  
of socialization



“Socialization is just a process by which we learn to be part of a community.”

– Dr. Robert Epstein

“Every child should experience a bloody nose in the schoolyard. This is simply 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 Steadman’s Medical Dictionary* defines socialization as “the process of learning 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, non-conformists—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’s 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.

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.

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 preindustrial cultures, where teens spent most of their time with adults, the majority of these societies didn't even develop a word for adolescence, and most young males in these cultures did not display antisocial 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 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.

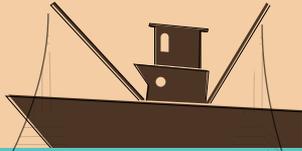
Although it is hard for many of us to accept the transition, we are preparing our children to think for themselves and to make wise decisions when they

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.

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 articulate their opinions 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 friends, so be it. God gave us specifically to our children to raise them to please Him, not to please anyone else.

*Dr. Robert Epstein was featured in the July/August 2007 Home School Court Report article "A Q&A with Dr. Epstein." This brochure is adapted from HSLDA President Mike Smith's Last Word column in the same issue.*



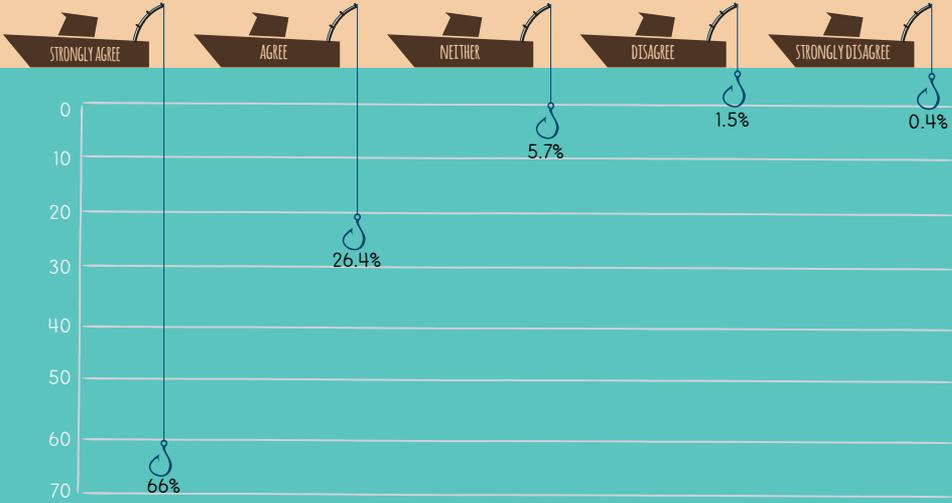
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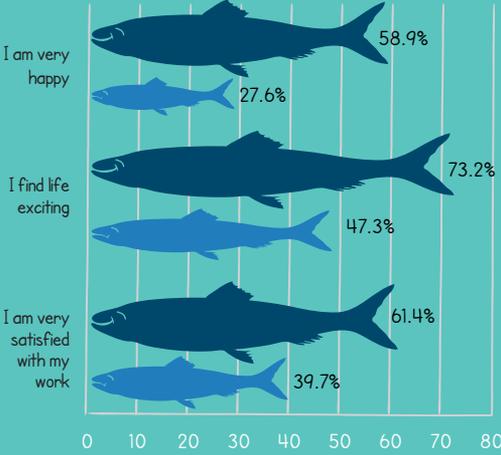
**SOCIALIZATION**

This data is from *Homeschooling Grows Up*, HSLDA's synopsis of a 2003 research study by Dr. Brian D. Ray, available from Home School Legal Defense Association. The complete research report, *Home Educated and Now Adults: Their Community and Civic Involvement, Views about Homeschooling, and Other Traits*, is available from the National Home Education Research Institute ([nheri.org](http://nheri.org)).

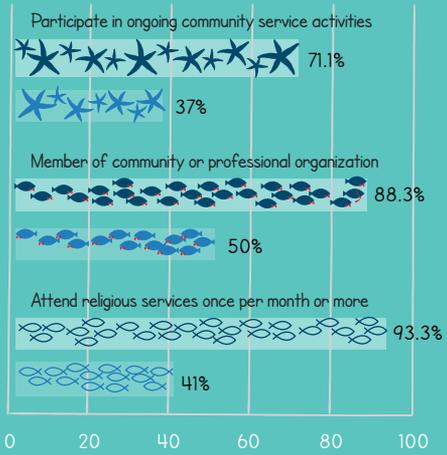
HAVING BEEN HOMESCHOOLED IS AN ADVANTAGE TO ME AS AN ADULT.



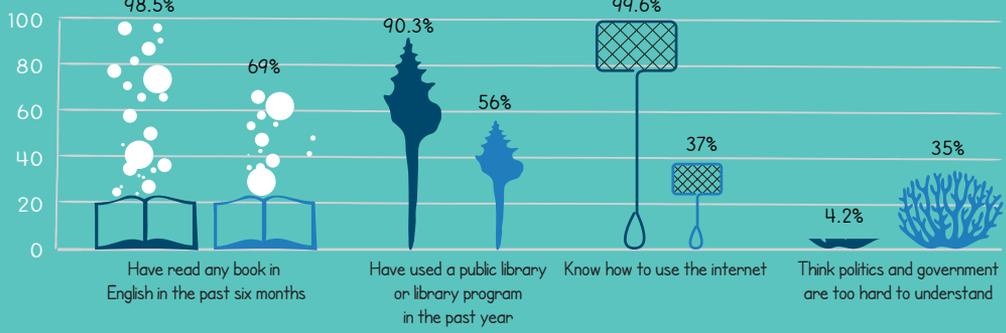
LIFE SATISFACTION



GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY



PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY



INFLUENCE