

Home educated children have a unique advantage. They have the opportunity to be supported in developing new friendships by a familiar and trusted adult, who can help them navigate issues that arise, and can facilitate friendships by providing opportunities for one-on-one interactions in a relaxed home environment, without additional pressures, and at a time when the child is well-rested and mentally ready for interactions.

### **So how do I find other home educators?**

The home education community is diverse, connected, and largely very welcoming. The Home Education Network (HEN) in Victoria, provides connection with the wider home education community in Victoria through newsletters, HEN events, and online groups that are for HEN members.

There are also online groups, especially on Facebook (FB). Online community can be a helpful starting point, and for people who struggle with face-to-face interactions, it can be a valuable way of forming friendships and connections. Local groups that have weekly, fortnightly or monthly face-to-face meetups can also provide a fantastic source of friendship, community and support for parents and children alike. These local groups are

often listed on the HEN website, but can also be found by joining the larger Victorian home ed FB groups, Australian groups, and of course the HEN members FB group.

Sometimes it can take a few visits to feel comfortable and make connections in a new group. We have all been the new kids, and while most groups are very welcoming, the people in them have often been together for some time, and will have their own bonds and friendships that can take some time to integrate with. However, if connection and a sense of belonging does not happen for some time, do not be discouraged - look elsewhere, and you will find your tribe. The home ed community is bigger and more diverse than you would expect, and your tribe is out there.

**For more information on home education groups and events, please visit [www.home-ed.vic.edu.au](http://www.home-ed.vic.edu.au)**



## **But what about Friends? What about Socialisation?**

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Whenever we tell people that we home educate our children, they almost invariably ask, “But what about socialisation?”. What they usually mean to ask is, “But how will they learn to be social?”. There is a difference, and home educated children are well-placed to be both, in a considered, thoughtful way.

## What is Socialisation?

Socialisation is the process whereby children and adults internalise the norms and ideologies of society. This is a complex area, often fraught with opposing ideologies and narrow definitions of what is “acceptable”. While children in most schools have a narrower exposure to what those norms and ideologies look like (through specific telling of Australian history or environmental policies, for example), home educated children have the opportunity to be exposed to a wider and more egalitarian view of society and the world.

Home educated children are out in the real world. They follow their parents as they go about their daily lives, and are exposed to and have modelled for them a wide range of interactions. They engage daily with people who are in their workplaces, people from different cultures and they observe the world and society as it functions all around them. They watch their parents interacting with other people, from professionals, to shopkeepers, to close friends, and they become part of these interactions.

Home educated children have more time to devote to volunteering and community service, whether this is

with humans who are in need, or at a local animal shelter. These activities expose children to the struggles of other people, and provide opportunities to consider the welfare of others. It helps children develop compassion and the ability to view others without judgement.

In this way, home educated children come to understand how society works, for good or ill, and can form their own opinions and values. They have the time and space to spend talking with parents and other mentors about these concepts, and to have educated and well-formed ideas about inequality, justice and prejudice.

So home educated children have the opportunity to not just be socialised by a narrow set of values written into a curriculum, but to form educated and thoughtful responses to the norms and ideologies of our society.

## But what about learning to be social?

Being social is a vital part of being human. People who have strong, healthy relationships also tend to have stronger immune systems, better mental health, live longer, sleep better, and are more mentally engaged. It can be argued that this relationship runs in both directions, leading to a cyclical relationship between all these factors. Being social is also central to having

new ideas, being creative, and learning new skills.

Home educated children learn social skills in a very natural setting. They move about in the wider, diverse community, and learn how to talk to and interact with people from a wide range of cultures, backgrounds, circumstances and age brackets. They meet up with friends of all ages, and all abilities.

Home education does not just happen at home - it happens at home ed groups, in workshops, in sporting groups, in co-ops, in the library, at museums, on excursions and anywhere else you can imagine. Home educated children will interact with peers who are of similar ages, but also with those who are a lot older and those who are a lot younger. They learn to adapt how they interact to take into account other people's age, strengths and challenges. These are invaluable skills to possess.

Home educated children also have very real-world relationships. Their friendships are more like adult friendships in how they operate. They meet interstate friends at camps and then maintain friendships through correspondence. They have friends they see weekly or several times a week, friends they see monthly, and friends they see only a few times a year.