

By far the most frequent question about home education is: “But what about socialisation?”

In order to answer this question, it is important to look at what people mean when they ask about socialisation as the question can be taken in more than one way.

Will the children have friends?

Home educating families go out of their way to ensure their children do have plenty of opportunities to form friendships.

Those who are concerned about children not having friends, tend to think of home education as an isolating experience. It is not. Rarely do home education families suffer from isolation and, if they do, it is more a matter of their geographical location, than of home education itself, causing the isolation.

Most home educated children regularly take part in sports, clubs and community activities and groups. They interact with extended family. They play with local children after school, on weekends and in the school holidays. They are not confined to home or isolated from other children.

There are also lots of other children being home educated with whom social activities and events are available. Home educating families organise get-togethers with each other for children to have plenty of time to play. Because these occasions do not have to happen outside school hours, they tend to be longer and provide an excellent opportunity for good friendships to develop over time.

Home education support groups such as HEN assist families to meet each other. We have a contact sheet to enable families to find one another and we run activities, events and camps throughout the year.

Local support groups are listed under the Information tab of our website and they run weekly activities such as gymnastics, pottery classes, picnics and so on.

Will they learn to behave themselves?

Yes they will.

Parents naturally want their children to be able to get along with people, to have manners, be courteous and friendly and to be part of their community.

Throughout history parents have proven themselves to be very capable of achieving these goals and bringing up children to become responsible, caring adults. Every parent sometimes doubts that they are doing a good job of this, but parenting is a long-term task and frustration is part of the journey. Along the way, parents are very mindful of the fact that their children will one day need to take their place in society and, each in their own way, parents work gradually towards establishing the level of independence and behaviour which will be required of their children as adults.

Are schools really as good at teaching children to ‘behave themselves’ as you think they are? What about the bullying that goes on there? What about the vandalism? The drug use? The anti-authoritarian attitude which many young people develop? What about school children who are abusive, angry, violent or suicidal? Is this the kind of behaviour we as a society wish to perpetuate in the next generation?

The young people making the news for very anti-social behaviour are not home educated.

It looks like schools aren’t doing such a great a job after all. Have you ever wondered why that might be? Maybe it is that in school, children are in an authoritarian situation. Adults are often seen as ‘them’ and children may resent the rules that are imposed on them.

At home, a more cooperative lifestyle can be lived. Home educated children take an active part in the daily lives of their families. Rather than being cut off from the day-to-day concerns of their family, they are intricately involved and come to appreciate what goes into making a household and family work. They have frequent contact with a mixture of ages. As a result they do become

respectful of other people’s needs and feelings.

Because home educating families spend more time with each other than the average Australian family does, there is more time for important relationship-building to happen. Problems between siblings can actually be solved rather than always shelved because of a busy school routine. As a result, positive family relationships are an added bonus for home educating families. Good relationships are a great basis for personal development and home education provides the necessary time needed to develop relationships which stand children in good stead as they grow into well-adjusted teenagers and adults.

One very common observation of home education families is the absence of teenage rebellion. This is not because home education families have greater discipline than schools - in fact they often have less discipline. The lower incidence of teenage rebellion amongst home ed kids results because they grow up in a more respectful environment in which their needs are acknowledged and catered for and in which they are expected to acknowledge and allow for the needs of other family members. They learn to give and take, to consider the effects of their behaviour on others and that they are an integral part of the family unit.

School children are separated from the family on a daily basis and removed from its real concerns. Consequently they have little understanding of the stresses and worries which beset the family. Instead they see everything from their own point of view and experience and are heavily influenced by peers with whom they spend most of their time. It is difficult for children to grow into adults when they spend so little time with interested and caring adults and are instead thrust into the constant companionship of people who are at a similar developmental stage to themselves. Who can they look to when they need help? Many school children and teenagers become very peer dependent purely because they have not had the time and opportunity to form good relationships with adults who can guide and mentor them into adulthood.

In contrast, home educated kids see what is going on in

their family, they have a context in which to place the concerns and opinions their parents express and, because they form such good relationships with their parents, problems and concerns are often openly discussed and resolved respectfully. They are not cut off from people their own age but nor are they confined to their constant company and influence for most of their waking hours.

Many families come to see socialisation as one of the great benefits of home education as they watch their children grow and develop into the kinds of young people they always hoped they would be.

Will they learn to 'fit in'? I don't want them to be social misfits!

This question is an interesting one in terms of what motivates the asking. There is a public perception that school teaches children how to behave in 'socially acceptable' ways. When you stop and think about it, isn't school really supposed to be about teaching academic subjects? Why do so many people feel that schools are somehow responsible for teaching children to fit in with society? ...and then fear that if children don't go to school, they could turn out to be 'social misfits'?

In America, home education is more prevalent than in Australia and there is now a large group of young adults who were home educated who have attracted some attention from interested researchers. The largest study found that 71% of home educated adults participated in ongoing community service, dispelling the myth of the anti-social misfit. Another study found that two thirds were married (the norm for their age) and none were unemployed or any form of welfare assistance. (Further details of these studies are available on the research page of our website along with our own alumni study).

There is also a growing number of young adults in Victoria who have been home educated and they are living proof that home educated children grow up not only capable of pursuing the courses and careers that they wish but also to be caring and responsible citizens.

In fact, they are nice people to know.

Will they be socialised?

Ahhh... well, here we go again. What does it mean to be 'socialised'. If it means that young people will be prepared to take their place in society and contribute to society, yes they will and grown home educators are proof of this.

Believing that school 'socialises children' in the sense of making them ready to 'fit into society' seems to assume that schools are in some way a smaller version of society itself and that, by learning to fit into school, children will learn to fit into society. Schools are actually a unique environment. Nowhere else in society do you find people assembled into groups of twenty or thirty by age. Schools do not resemble the work environment or community that your children will eventually live and work in.

If, however, 'being socialised' means blindly accepting the values of mainstream society and the media, then they may not be. The truth is that many home educated young people have not grown up with mainstream 'approved' ideas, nor have they been subjected to the peer group culture and pressure that schooled children are. They therefore do think objectively about many issues.

With the many problems facing humanity today - the ability to think 'outside the box' is an important one and one at which home educated young people excel.

My objection to the social life of almost all schools is that it is for the most part mean-spirited, competitive, ruthless, snobbish, conformist, consumerist, fickle, heartless, and often cruel. Most children come out of school with far less self-esteem, less sense of their own identity, dignity, and worth, than they had when they went in. I know this was true of me. Most children in school feel like losers and outsiders, and most will do almost anything that will, if only for a short time, give them the feeling of being insiders, truly 'One Of The Gang'

- John Holt

Socialisation

