

SOCIALIZATION: OUR BIGGEST GRIPE WITH HOMESCHOOLING

By John O. Andersen

Yes, it has been a huge problem for our children. But with experience, we've learned to bring it largely under control.

You see, we live in Portland, Oregon. Before we moved here, we suspected it was a good place to homeschool. Talk about understatement! After a few years in this area, we've got lots of hard evidence that if there ever were a contest for America's homeschooling mecca, Portland would easily make the short list.

Everywhere we go, we run into homeschoolers. We have associations with dozens of homeschooling families. Without exception, they are all involved in a variety of activities. There are homeschooling roller-skating parties, archery classes, a homeschooling basketball group, access to high school band, community college courses, and varsity sports for teenage homeschoolers, co-op language classes, volunteer opportunities, daytime art classes, music classes, singing groups, theater productions, science labs at a local museum, organized field trips practically every day of the week, girl and boy scouts homeschooling groups--the list goes on and on.

And that, dear reader, is the core of our children's socialization problem: too many activities, and too little time.

Homeschoolers, without the constraints of a 6-hour-a-day school schedule, are extremely vulnerable to falling into the trap of too many outside activities and too much social interaction. This can be dangerous, especially if we hope to teach our children to appreciate and enjoy the quiet reflective life.

So, my wife Mandy and I are learning to apply the brakes; to slow things down a bit. One step we've taken is to develop a weekly schedule of sorts. We don't hold hard and fast to it, but rather use it as a guide. It looks something like this:

Monday

At-home academically-oriented day; also clean-the-house day. Our children usually spend the late afternoon and early evening outside playing with the neighborhood children.

Tuesday

Co-op learning with other homeschoolers; also some academics, and afternoon outside play with neighborhood children.

Wednesday

Mandy and children volunteer at the library. At the moment, they shelve books, label items, and help with other projects. We try to do some academics as well and, of course, there is time for afternoon outside play with neighborhood children.

Thursday

Slow day (intentionally); sometimes co-op classes; evening achievement group for our daughter and soon cub scouts for our son.

Friday

Family outing day; this can be a volunteer project which we do as a family (our current one is helping out a pioneer living history museum), or going to the beach, visiting historic sites, the zoo, public gardens, museums, etc.

This general plan helps us to pace ourselves throughout the week, and provides a "first-line defense" against the constant barrage of social activities. It gives us a sensible framework and enables us to enjoy unhurried time together on a daily basis.

So, if you're thinking about homeschooling, and you live in a city with tons of homeschoolers or lots of interesting things to do, you'll definitely need to come up with a strategy to keep the socialization problem under control.

Because, unless you do, you could easily slip into the over-socialization trap. Believe me, you don't want that. It'll wear you out, and could seriously detract from the quality of your homeschooling experience.

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About the Author: John O. Andersen is the spouse of Mandy. They have a 12 year old daughter and a 9 year old son. They do lots of fun things together like travel, tickle fights, and gardening.

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