

Parenting Power Article - Socializing Our Children

Contributed by Joshua & Margie Boswell

Question: What are the top 3 things we can do to appropriately socialize our children, without letting peers corrupt their standards and values?

The little boy's eyes were wide with wonder. His face was infused with pride and achievement. The sheer elation in the room was thick – almost tangible.

Reaching out, he softly – almost reverently – touched the trophy sitting on his window sill.

My, how the shiny metallic coating sparkled in the sun. See how the baseball player took his stance… elbow up, arms pulled back and tight, ready to take that swing and knock one out of the park. You could almost see the resolve to win, on the plastic, silver face of the 3 inch high trophy-man.

Running his fingers down the tiny bat, the boy pointed to the engraving on the bottom of his grand prize… “Alpine Little League T-Ball – 1st Place”

Oh, yeah – First Place. #1.

And he had been the catcher on that team – picked up every ball that dribble off the tee and set it back on. Not only that, but when the opponent rounded third base, he was there to tag them out… if the ball got thrown to him in the heat of the moment.. and if he could actually catch it.

That trophy was something else to this young boy. In a day when his parents were always fighting (they divorced shortly after he won his grand prize)… and when money was too scarce to buy the latest clothing (a fact he knew because the kind 5th graders at Alpine Elementary School informed him of his bell-bottom pants and checkered, plaid button-down shirts on a daily basis)…

and when his best friend was the boy down the street whose dad was in jail (also a fact the other kids enjoyed bringing up)…

This little, shiny, plastic tee-ball trophy was his emotional saving grace.

It proved that he was someone special – or so he thought. So, he didn't just relish in the joy of being handed this trophy, he actually defined himself by it.

That little boy was Joshua T Boswell… yep, it was me.

Even in 5th grade, I was learning my first lessons in human socialization. This experience has stunning implications in the lives of our children today, and the impact socialization can have on them.

Before we slice and dice the tee-ball trophy, let’s step back and explore a few fundamental ideas that surround the social development of our children.

Socialization vs Peer Pressure

For most of our married life, we have had a desire to home school our children. The number one questions that has been fired at us is, “Well, what about their social skills? Won’t home schooling make them a little backward?”

Since this is not an essay on the merits or pitfalls of home school, I’ll leave off my two bits about that aspect of the question and focus on the social aspects.

The underlying concern here is that we, as parents, have a deep desire to give our children good social skills. But what does that mean, really?

From a shallow perspective, I think that many parents – maybe most parents – want their children to be popular, well liked, and in with the cool crowd. No one wants their son or daughter to be the out-cast, the loser, the brunt of every joke, the poor, picked on kid who has to run around singing “Nobody likes me, everybody hates me, I think I’ll eat some worms…”

No, we want our children to be socially acceptable and, if possible, even mainstream.

But, going deeper, there is more to socialization and good social graces than just being popular.

For one thing, if you switch the wording from social skills to peer pressure, the mood in the room instantly changes. None of us want our children to be the weak link in the family chain by falling prey to negative peer pressure.

For another thing, being popular and being a productive member of society can be two very, very different things. Just reflect back on the typical non-brain, all body cheerleader in High School that every football jock wanted to date. Yes, they were popular and ran with the in crowd, but there wasn’t much substance to their life in a post-high school world. (Of course that is not to say every cheerleader and every jock suffered from this malady, but they are out there…)

What Do We Really Want?

So, what is it that we really want? We want popular children with a solid head on their shoulders, that are anchored in good values so they won’t be kicked around by every wind of peer pressure that comes along.

Tall order.

But it is possible.

I remember a guy named Chris Cardon. Chris was a straight "A" student. He was on the football team – a fairly good running back as I recall. He never had a lack of dates and was just as comfortable hanging out with the upper crust as he was chumming with the "other side";.

More than that, Chris was far and away the nicest guy you'd ever meet. You just felt good when you were around him; you felt like you wanted to be better. And swayed by peer pressure? Hardly. Not a person in our school would have thought to ask Chris to do something unethical, immoral, or illegal. He was a rock and everything about him told you so, though he never wore his values or religion on his sleeve.

Now, when I think of good social skills and having your social cake and eating it too, I think of Chris.

Isn't this the kind of person we all want our children to be? I don't think I ever met Chris's parents, but, now, as a parent myself, my hat goes off to them. They did it right.

So, What Is the "Right"; That They Did?

As Margie and I have studied and carefully observed children like Chris and their home environments, we have come to the conclusion that there are three key things that we can do as parents to encourage the growth of more Chris Cardon's in the world.

I'll address those three things in just a minute. First, let's talk about a few pitfalls that so many parents fall into.

Social Pitfalls to Avoid

In our drive to socialize our children, we sometimes send the wrong signals. Many years ago, Margie and I watched several of our friends raise their children. They had those kids in just about every sport and music lesson that you could imagine.

Not only that, but, at every turn, they encouraged and pressed their children to have lots of friends, regular parties at the house, and they frequented all the social gatherings that 7, 8, 9 and 10 year old children can pull together.

On top of that, they fed their youth on a regular stream of TV, the latest movies, the hottest fashions, and the most "in"; music.

The Power is In Parental Emphasis

Though the message might not have been intended, the lesson learned by those children was that they should not just enjoy a good social life and social accomplishments like sports and piano, but they should define themselves by these activities.

With the TV blaring in their minds and the fine examples of Bart Simpson and the children of "Married with

Children” running through their heads, they quickly and easily saw that to make it in life you had to be popular, in-style, and free of parental nonsense.

(Sidenote: for our views on TV consumption, don’t miss the article, “Parenting Without Television”. You can find it under Articles, or just search for Television.)

The parental emphasis had been placed on self-esteem and self-worth through peer review, and so that is what these children strove for. In fact, they, like most youth of our day, learned it so well, they placed everything else in life below the need for social acceptance… including their parents and their values.

The result is an otherwise fine and bright boy or girl who looks to their peers while setting aside respect for authority and traditional values that make men and women truly great.

We see it all around us.

The hard part is that, for the most part, the sports, the computer games, the social activities, public school, the popular crowd, etc… are not inherently evil or corrupting.

But like water, air, and most things in life, too much of it can kill you.

The difference is the emphasis the parent places on these activities and the priority position they hold in the family circle.

The 3 Most Important Factors In Safely Socializing Our Children

So, back to the question: How can we give our children good social standing and social skills without turning them into these kinds of mindless lemmings that do little more than follow the crowd?

1. Define The End Result and Be Pro-Active.

Sometimes, don’t we just drift along in life, without a real game plan or clear understanding of the end results we want? I think we all do this in some aspect of our lives.

While we might be able to safely do this with what’s for dinner on Saturday night, we really don’t have the luxury of this kind of lazy, shortsightedness when raising our children. The results can be disastrous.

I like to compare this whole process to a garden. You may not be much of a gardener, but you’ll get the picture.

If I want cantaloupe, corn, carrots, tomatoes, and other yummy stuff in my garden, I can’t go down to the local supermarket, buy each one of these fruits and vegetables and simply stick them in my garden spot in the middle of the summer. They would rot and nothing would happen.

Instead, I need to go and buy seeds. The funny thing about the seeds of all these plants is that they don’t look like the final fruit. Carrot seeds don’t look a think like carrots… but they produce carrots.

So, you need to not only define the final results that you want, but you also need to understand what seeds you need to plant in order to reap that harvest. Some parents place a huge emphasis on social events and social acceptance, without realizing that they are planting the seeds of mistrust, insecurity, and rebellion.

Then, one day they wake up and find this wild and wooly teenager on their hands and say, "Overnight my sweet little boy changed into this person that I don't know. How did this happen??"

It happened, in many cases, because an attempt was made to plant end results, when really, appropriate seeds were needed. Or, even worse, it happens by unwittingly planting seeds for fruit you never wanted in the first place.

This is sort of like admiring a nice bed of thistles growing up in the middle of your garden, first admiring the lovely purple flowers, then wondering at the large white, fluffy tops, and finally playing a game with kids to see who can blow the fluffy white stuff the furthest around the garden; never suspecting that the white fluffy stuff, were millions of seeds that would one day take over every square inch of your garden and destroy all your hopes of fresh fruits and vegetables.

So, plan ahead and be proactive in putting that plan into action. Put the right seeds in the ground and reap the harvest.

What are the right seeds? Let me give you two of the most powerful ones; so powerful in fact, that they may be the only ones you need.

2. External versus Internal.

Most of our world today is defined by what some have called a "victim mentality". Society seems to think that everything in our life is the cause of someone else's actions and choices. And if not the result of everyone else's choices, they want you to feel like we are subject to the whims and forces of some unseen genetic code or inner spirit that we cannot see or control.

Both of these notions are false. The reality is that we are sovereign citizens of ourselves. We are the rules, makers, and developers of our own lives, our personalities, and our environment. No greater truth was ever spoken than when the Psalmist said, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he";

There is great responsibility in this statement. But, there is also even greater joy and power. Think of this, if my life is the result of everything going on around me or is the slave of internal, unseen forces, then I am a slave – a victim – without power to define my life or control my appetites.

On the other hand, if I am the ruler and master of my self, my emotions, and my thoughts, then I can dictate who I am and what my life will be like.

In life, we don't need a pill, a shrink, a government, or an organization to "fix" us, what we really need is an understanding of our own power of agency, combined with a firm grasp on correct principles – the seeds of life and success.

This is also exactly what our children need to learn and understand. Once they understand that they – not life, peer, circumstances, or economy – are the masters of self, then they can and will readily begin to demand excellence from themselves. Such is human nature.

So, the first, powerful seed to instill in the hearts and minds of our children is the concept that our internal agency is far more powerful than external forces.

3. True Identity

The second seed that we must plant in their lives is a sense of true identity. In my mind there are two aspects of this:

First, our children are not million-year-aged creatures that drug themselves from a slimy swamp, running the Darwin paces of slithering, crawling, walking, aping around and finally becoming barbarian cavemen.

Rather, they are children of God – an immovable, all powerful, all knowing force for life and goodness in this universe of ours. They are children of a King – and not just any king, but the King of kings, THE Master.

No, this is not a Sunday service, this is a discussion on truth and how we protect our children from rampant peer pressure and false notions about socialization.

Once we awake to the fact that we are offspring of Deity, we suddenly find a new sense of worth and value that is immovable. Our children hunger for this sure anchor in their lives and we should give it to them unashamedly. Their fundamental rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are theirs exactly because they are children of God. Their internal power to choose and to be free sovereign rulers over their lives is theirs, because they are children of God, not because of evolution, government institutions, or unknown mystical forces.

If they truly understand their Godly heritage, it gives them power to shun lesser things, to be productive, to stand by their values, and live lives of happiness and success.

In the late 1700’s, towards the end of the French Revolution, the son of King Louis XVI of France was taken prisoner by Revolutionists. He was thrown into the Temple prison. While there, he was beaten, and tortured. Every attempt possible was made to brainwash this young prince. He was pressured to do all kinds of vial acts and wicked deeds.

More than anything, these evil men wanted him to deny who he was, forsake his heritage, and renounce the crown.

In the face of this brutal pressure and torture, the Prince stood firm and immovable. He refused to do those vial acts. He refused to deny who he was. He refused to succumb to their prodding and promptings and pressure.

It is reported, that in a moment of rage, one of the Revolutionists violently slapped this young boy and screamed at him, “Why do you continue to refuse? Just do as we ask and you will be free!”

Calmly the Prince turned his bruised and bloody face to his tormenter and simply replied, “I cannot do

those things you ask, because I was born to be a King!"

He knew who he was. He knew his rightful position in life and nothing – not even torture, pain, or pressure could turn him from this knowledge. He was immovable; even though it cost him his life.

When your children really understand this simple phrase, "I am a child of God", they too will have power to be immovable like this courageous Prince of France.

Second, you can help them understand their true identity by helping them understand their core personality style.

Each of us are born with a special set of traits and characteristics. These qualities are uniquely ours. Still, in a general sense, it has been observed that virtually every human being tends toward one of four major personality styles.

Consider it like a large puzzle. The easiest – and most helpful part of a puzzle – is the border. Once you have the border in place, you now have a framework that everything else fits into. And while the insides may differ, virtually all puzzles have a straightedge border that everything else fits into.

So it is with people. Yes, we are all totally unique and different, but there are four major borders or frameworks that each of us can place ourselves into. And while this border does not tell us everything about a person, it does give us extremely helpful insights into how a person fits together.

Understanding these four borders will also help you understand how all the pieces fit together.

So, one of the most powerful things you can do for you and your children is to discover which of the four major personality styles borders them and you. This will give you countless tools, resources, insights, and proper perspectives in dealing with each other.

It dissolves the communication barriers and brings understanding to the parent/child relationship.

Understanding the personality styles also helps you quickly identify what you and your children's potential strengths and weaknesses may be.

For example, the Sanguine and Phlegmatic styles are especially susceptible to peer pressure and negative social influence, while the Choleric and Melancholy are naturally in danger of alienating others through a lack of social graces. In both cases, corrective action can be taken to simultaneously maximize their strengths, while minimizing and strengthening their weaknesses.

For more information on the different personality styles, see our 7 day course called "Parenting With Style" (www.TheHomeFeeling.com/ParentingWithStyle)

Our world is full of negative peer pressure and dark socialization. But it really doesn't have to influence our children in a negative way. As parents we can protect them and provide them the armor they need to come away unscathed and strong.

We do this by planting the right seeds in their lives. The three most powerful seeds are:

1. Define what we would like them to become and being proactive in their lives
2. Teach them the power of Internal vs External
3. Help them understand their True Identity

As parents, we can do all three of these right now, today. If we do, we can be sure that a wonderful harvest will spring up in our life and in the lives of our children.