

School Socialization

DR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM

Children typically care more about being accepted and approved by peers than they do about academic achievement. Some seem to naturally possess the skills for social acceptance. Others act in ways that defeat that very desire.

Successful socialization requires the social and emotional *capacity* to respond in an effective way. Socialization skills enable a child to understand the norms, attitudes, values, and behaviors that are socially appropriate for an occasion. This newsletter suggests HOMEWAYS that prepare children to develop socialization skills.

Create occasions that increase a child's affective (emotional) abilities.

- *Empathy*—identifying with the pain of another
- *Compassion*—doing something to relieve the suffering of another
- *Sacrifice*—denying self for the sake of another
- *Appreciation*—recognizing with gratitude the efforts of another
- *Sharing*—giving self, talents, and possessions to another to use, own, or borrow
- *Sympathy*—showing reverence for the grief of another
- *Sorrow*—expressing remorse with the intention to change

Strengthen the capacity for self-control. Taking turns, inviting others to go first, and delaying gratification. For example, "Yes, you may have (something)... as a lunch treat, after you finish your homework, after you first offer one to each of our guests..."

Teach how to name, claim, and tame emotions and behavior.

- Label the feeling as specifically as possible. For example, *anger* is a generic word; *resentment* is more specific. *Love* is broad while *trust*, *acceptance*, and *inclusion* are more finely tuned expressions of love. A list of *emotional vocabulary* is found on Dr. Michele Borba's website at www.moralintelligence.com.
- Verbally or mentally express a feeling and acknowledge the intensity of the feeling. For example, "I am so embarrassed by my mistake that I want to hide where no one can find me."

- Know the difference between feelings and actions. Frustration, for instance, explains but does not excuse a temper tantrum.
- Manage feelings by controlling impulses, reducing stress, and using self-talk.

Practice the skill of respectful assertiveness. Use "I Statements" to express needs, feelings, wants and desires. "When . . . [state the behavior] I feel . . . [state the feeling] because . . . [state the consequence]." For example, "When dirty dishes are left on the table I feel taken for granted because I am left to clean up the mess that others make."

Be inclusive of classmates. Abide by the school/class policy regarding birthday parties, Christmas gifts, Valentine cards, etc. If no policy exists, think: "How would I feel if my child were excluded from social activities?" Sensitize your child to safeguard the feelings of others.

Cultivate the disposition of gospel love. Distinguish between *love* and *like*. We may not like everyone we meet but gospel love calls us to demonstrate respect, courtesy, helpfulness, inclusion, forgiveness, second chances, fairness, and justice to all people. Guide your child in the ways of discipleship and help him/her to apply Christian principles of socialization at home and at school.

Bully-proof your child. Bullies are unhappy people with low self-esteem. They act out of anger or frustration or to win respect. Bullies target victims who seem, weaker, shy, or who excel in grades or other achievements. A bully-proofed student is respectfully assertive; focuses on how to avoid violence; stays calm and confident; pre-plans how to talk to the bully; uses humor to relax a tense situation without making fun of the bully; and seeks help from a parent, teacher, principal, or counselor. ▲



Dr. Pat McCormack is an international consultant and public speaker on issues of whole-person formation. Contact her at the IHM Office of Formative Support for Parents and Teachers, DrPatMcCormack@aol.com.