

How to Respond to Criticism about Homeschooling Like a Peacemaker

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Criticism Will Come

The idea of homeschooling is polarizing.

You *will* be criticized: anticipate and prepare for it.

Before Responding

- Inoculate yourself with confidence
- Develop healthy emotional boundaries
- Have a vision: make it easy to recall your successes
- Practice spontaneous, unscripted sharing things you love about what you are doing
- Believe each family is trying to make their own best choices
- Accept you may not be able to remove the criticism, you may not EVER be able to change their opinion about you or about your desire to homeschool your children

What We Have to Remember

Criticism is part of the mortal experience: some needs to be ignored, some needs to be acknowledged, some needs to be heeded. It takes a lot of work to understand ourselves and those around us enough to know what to do in each situation.

Anchor: Quiet your heart so that you can trust what you know is best for you and your child.

Formalize: Write, draw, and verbally practice expressing your convictions so that they are easy for you to share.

Safeguard: Provide momentum to keep yourself going, provide a safety net for when things get hard, prevent the problems you know will occur, and form a network of support.

Choose: Limit time with those who criticize you.

Types of Criticism

Someone might criticize:

- your child's interaction with other children
- your ability to teach your child
- your dual role as a parent and a teacher
- interaction of your child with the outside world
- your motivations for homeschooling

There are good answers to all these criticisms.

The Other Criticism: Barbed Adulation

Instead of criticism, you may find yourself being raised up on a pedestal.

Pedestals Cause a Separation

"She's superhuman!"

"If I was as talented as she is, I would homeschool, too."

"She doesn't have the same challenges I have."

"She's one of *those*."

Pedestals Dismiss Context and Ignore Reality

“I could never homeschool; my children don’t obey me.”

“I could never homeschool; my children fight too much with each other.”

“She’s so different than I am.”

“She can do what none of the rest of us can.”

Pedestals Cheapen the Challenges

“I could never homeschool; I am just not qualified.”

“I would just feel so inadequate if I tried to teach my children at home.”

“I could never homeschool, because sometimes I need a break from my children.”

Sources of Criticism

- * Spouse * Parents * Siblings * In-laws * Children *
- * Extended Families * Neighbors * Friends *
- * Random Strangers * School Officials *
- * People at Church * Church Leaders * Ourselves *

Peacemaker Qualities

Applicable Anytime

1. Look for common ground; find the truth you share.
2. Demonstrate understanding of the validity of their perspective.
3. Acknowledge the pros and cons of the choice.
4. Listen with an open heart: give the benefit of the doubt.

Example:

“I would think that your daughter’s spelling ability would be reason enough for the Superintendent to revoke your right to continue homeschooling.”

1. Common Ground: All of us, you, my daughter and I want to see my daughter’s spelling ability improve.

2. Show You Understand: You see her spelling level as below average, and you are worried that it is because I haven’t been focusing enough on her spelling.

3. Acknowledge Pros and Cons: If my daughter were in the public school system, her spelling would certainly have been a focus of her interactions with her peers and her interactions with her teacher. Perhaps this could’ve given her the push to feel motivated to improve. Or, perhaps this could’ve defeated and belittled her, leaving her feeling insecure and inadequate. By letting her spelling ability improve naturally, her own desire to learn is at an advantage.

4. Listen with an Open Heart: Thanks for wanting to see her succeed in her education. I am glad you want to see her capable and competent. I feel really good about her improvement in our loving home environment.

Learn to Respond to Criticism

Options When Responding:

- Cynical or Sincere
- Brief or Lengthy
- Charming or Biting
- Positive or Negative
- Disarming or Battleground
- Direct or Distracting
- Our Example Does the Talking

Consider the Context

They Feel Accused: *deflect the conversation*

Genuine Curiosity: *make it approachable, be patient*

They Believe Homeschooling Is Wrong: *let them vent*

Determine Validity of Criticism

How do we know when someone’s criticism is something that is valid and necessary? How can we prepare ourselves to hear truth that will encourage us to improve?

Possible Outcomes from Our Responses

- *They continue to criticize us to our faces.
- *They stop criticizing us to our faces, but continue to criticize us in their hearts and to others.
- *They develop greater respect for us and what we are trying to accomplish.
- *They feel more empowered to consider creative, customized solutions for their own problems because of our example.

You can't control their response.

You *can* control how their criticism affects you.

Recover: Laugh It Off

Cyrano: It doesn't take long to have heard just about all the criticism there is to offer about homeschooling. The unoriginality of it all reminds me of Cyrano de Bergerac, the hero of Edmond Rostand's play, responding to the same old insult about his large nose. He provides examples of far wittier insults since his opponent wasn't clever enough.
<http://bit.ly/1D53O2I>

How Do You Socialize Your Children? by Homeschool Advantage <http://bit.ly/1H79Szx>

Tim Hawkins: Homeschool Blues
<http://bit.ly/1bjDOuX>

A Warning

Sometimes we become so confident in our choice to homeschool that we become convinced ours is the only right way. We allow ourselves to fall into the trap of criticizing others' choices. Prevent this!

Further Reading

Family Matters: Why Homeschooling Makes Sense
by David Guterson

Boundaries by Henry Cloud and John Townsend
When Your Grandchildren Homeschool
<http://bit.ly/1zB4pZI>

Sharing the Homeschool Light by Misty Foxley
<https://ldshe.org/article-2014-oct-1>

Peacemaking Instruction from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

James 1:19-20 “Swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

“Even as we seek to be meek and to avoid contention, we must not compromise or dilute our commitment to the truths we understand. We must not surrender our positions or our values. The gospel of Jesus Christ and the covenants we have made inevitably cast us as combatants in the eternal contest between truth and error. There is no middle ground in that contest.”

“On the subject of public discourse, we should all follow the gospel teachings to love our neighbor and avoid contention. Followers of Christ should be examples of civility. We should love all people, be good listeners, and show concern for their sincere beliefs. Though we may disagree, we should not be disagreeable. Our stands and communications on controversial topics should not be contentious. We should be wise in explaining and pursuing our positions and in exercising our influence. In doing so, we ask that others not be offended by our sincere religious beliefs and the free exercise of our religion. We encourage all of us to practice the Savior's Golden Rule: ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them’ (Matthew 7:12).”

Oct. 2014 “Loving Others and Living with Differences”

Elder Russell M. Nelson

“Now, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, what does the Lord expect of us? As a Church, we must ‘renounce war and proclaim peace.’ (D&C 98:16) As individuals, we should ‘follow after the things which make for peace.’ (Rom. 14:19) We should be personal peacemakers. We should live peacefully—as couples, families, and neighbors. We should live by the Golden Rule.”

Oct. 2002 “Blessed Are the Peacemakers”

Elder Craig Zwick

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger’ (Proverbs 15:1). A ‘soft answer’ consists of a reasoned response—disciplined words from a humble heart. It does not mean we never speak directly or that we compromise doctrinal truth. Words that may be firm in information can be soft in spirit.”

April 2014 “What Are You Thinking”

Elder Robert S. Wood

“We appear to be living in an era in which many are speaking without thinking, encouraging emotional reactions rather than thoughtful responses. We cannot afford to be caught up in a world prone to give and to take offense. Rather, as the Lord revealed to both Paul and Mormon, we must neither envy nor be puffed up in pride. We are not easily provoked, nor do we behave unseemly. We rejoice not in iniquity but in the truth. Surely this is the pure love of Christ which we represent.”

April 2006 “Instruments of the Lord’s Peace”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

“So, brothers and sisters, in this long eternal quest to be more like our Savior, may we try to be ‘perfect’ men and women in at least this one way now—by offending not in word, or more positively put, by speaking with a new tongue, the tongue of angels... With such words, spoken under the influence of the Spirit, tears can be dried, hearts can be healed, lives can be elevated, hope can return, confidence can prevail.”

April 2007 “Tongue of Angels”

President Henry B. Eyring

“One way I have seen it [peacemaking] done is to search for anything on which we agree. To be that peacemaker, you need to have the simple faith that as children of God, with all our differences, it is likely that in a strong position we take, there will be elements of truth. The great peacemaker, the restorer of unity, is the one who finds a way to help people see the truth they share. That truth they share is always greater and more important to them than their differences. You can help yourself and others to see that common ground if you ask for help from God

and then act. He will answer your prayer to help restore peace, as He has mine.

“That same principle applies as we build unity with people who are from vastly different backgrounds. The children of God have more in common than they have differences. And even the differences can be seen as an opportunity. God will help us see a difference in someone else not as a source of irritation but as a contribution. The Lord can help you see and value what another person brings which you lack. More than once the Lord has helped me see His kindness in giving me association with someone whose difference from me was just the help I needed. That has been the Lord’s way of adding something I lacked to serve Him better.”

Oct. 2008 “Our Hearts Knit as One”