AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION

As people go through life, they come into contact with many individuals, groups, and forces that impact their growth and understanding of the world. All of these factors together are called agents of socialization and shape people as they grow through childhood and far beyond. **Agents of socialization** are therefore defined as the influence of key factors on a person's development and ability to play a role in society.

So what are the agents of socialization specifically? The primary agents are family, schools and daycares, peers, and media. Other agents of socialization include religion and ethnicity, political groups, work, neighbourhoods, social activities, and institutions.

Primary Agents of Socialization

The primary agents of socialization are the most notable and most important socialization forces in a person's life. They are most formative during childhood, when individuals are still learning how to interact with the world around them. The four primary agents of socialization examples are family, schools, peers, and mass media.

Family

Almost all children are raised by biological, adoptive, or foster families who teach them how to care for themselves and how to interact with the world around them. Of all the agents of socialization examples, family is the one that is typically the most impactful. Families pass on many things to their children, including:

- Cultural knowledge

- Values

- Religious practices

- World views

These often shape the kinds of families and relationships children will go on to create for themselves in later life. Families can have both positive and negative influences as agents of socialization. They can teach children to respect others and to value their own strengths, and they can also reinforce potentially harmful ideas about gendered expectations, social class, and other social issues like racism and homophobia.

Schools

When children attend schools and daycares, they receive instruction and socialization outside the family, sometimes for the first time. While young children are often the center of attention at home, they spend time in school learning to respect and value the time and opinions of others. They also learn a lot of social skills that will eventually prepare them for the work force that they will enter as adults. Perhaps the most notable thing that children learn in school is to respect the authority of their teachers.

Many aspects of school can be positive in terms of socialization: children learn social skills, independence, and time management techniques that will remain useful in the future. However, schools can also have some negative influences. A hidden curriculum is information explicitly or

implicitly given by schools to children that is either biased, incorrect, or omitting important details. Schools that teach students to be patriotic while hiding information about the negative elements of America's past may be contributing negatively to students' understanding of the world and socialization with others who may see things differently.

Peers

Peers are another major agent of socialization both for children and for adults, but their influence is most clearly felt in childhood. Children learn how to interact with others from their peers. In many instances, peer groups affect children's interests, speech patterns, beliefs about the world, and approaches to a variety of situations. Children who regularly interact with their peers in positive ways tend to develop robust social skills and may have a clearer sense of their place in their own society.

Sometimes, peers can be negative socialization agents. Children who are bullied, for instance, may experience negative mental health effects and other problems as a result of their peer socialization. Some parents disapprove of peer socialization because it means that children run the risk of being exposed to concepts and material that parents may deem inappropriate and harmful to children.

Media

Mass media includes TV, the Internet, radio, magazines, books, and more. It is an increasingly important agent of socialization in the lives of many people, but it may be particularly impactful in the lives of children. As with all agents of socialization, media can have many positive benefits, such as:

- Broadening one's cultural horizons

- Allowing individuals to connect with friends and family

- Giving people access to information they may not otherwise have had

Mass media can be a positive or negative agent of socialization.

All of these things can help children understand the world around them and can make media a positive kind of socialization. However, mass media comes with risks too. These include:

- The potential to expose children to violent or sexual material

- Media bias, which can reinforce harmful stereotypes about gender, race, and more

- A potential reduction in in-person socialization in favour of online interactions

- The potential for unsafe online interactions and socialization

Other Agents of Socialization

In addition to the four primary agents of socialization, there are a number of other elements that can function as agents of socialization in people's lives. They are not considered "primary" because they may only be a part of someone's life for a short time, do not affect all people, or are more variable than other agents of socialization.

Religion, Culture, and Ethnicity

An individual's religion, culture, and ethnic group can all hold sway in a person's life. For instance, religion and ethnicity can: