Resocialization

The primary socialization received in childhood is just one part of the lifelong socialization process. Adults go through a process of resocialization, which is the learning of new norms and values that occurs when they join a new group or when life circumstances change dramatically. Learning new norms and values enables people to adapt, though newly learned things may contradict what was previously learned. A new job, the loss of friends or a spouse, children leaving home, and retirement are all milestones that require resocialization.

Most instances of resocialization are mild modifications, such as adapting to a new work environment. Extreme forms of the process can include joining the military, going to prison, or otherwise separating from mainstream society. A total institution is often involved with these types of processes.

Example: The Workplace

The workplace is an agent of socialization—in this case, resocialization. A new job brings with it new norms and values, including the following:

- What papers to fill out
- What equipment to use
- What tasks to complete and when to complete them
- When to arrive at work
- When to take a break
- When to leave
- How to behave as an employee toward customers and fellow employees

The employing organization also has its own values. The resocialization process involves learning how strictly the company enforces work-related norms, such as whether it’s acceptable for people of different job levels to fraternize outside of working hours, or whether a very late arrival will incur some kind of punishment. During resocialization, people learn how to modify behavior to fit the new situation.