

Here are some common complaints of homeschool group visitors:

"I never really felt comfortable."

"It seemed like everyone already knew each other."

"No one made me feel welcome."

Sound familiar? As a recovering shy person myself, I too have felt unwelcome and uncomfortable in groups. It can be difficult to break into a new group sometimes. However, I have discovered in my own experiences and observed from "successful" and "unsuccessful" new members that fitting in with a homeschool group or playgroup is largely up to the individual. Indeed, whenever I made the extra effort, my children and I fit in much more quickly and easily. With the goal of making new friends and letting others know that you are committed to the group, here are certain actions which will help you and your children break into that new group.

Go to every meeting. Make attendance a priority. Don't let anything, except illness, interfere with going to the support group meetings. You are likely to be remembered if others see you on a regular basis, and their names and faces will become recognizable to you as well. Besides, it is too easy to get out of the routine of attending meetings. If you start missing a date here and there, before you know it, you won't be regulars anymore. Plus, support groups often evolve over time; if you go regularly, you will be part of those changes. Otherwise, you are likely to be uncomfortable with the changes and the group won't "fit" anymore.

Arrive early. It is easier for you to start talking with only one or two other adults than it is to approach a group of adults. It's the same with your children. It's easier for them to make friends with just one or two kids before all the children have arrived than to try to join a group once the games and activities have begun.

Participate in as many other activities as possible. Sign up for the field trips, go on the moms' nights out, host an upcoming activity, volunteer for the annual fund raiser or service project. When there is a group effort to help someone out, such as taking meals to a new mom, sign up even if you do not know the person. Active participation will establish you and your family not only as part of the group but also as part of the community.

Don't give up just because the group does not fit perfectly. For example, there will likely be parents with radically different discipline methods; you do not have to agree with them. Similarly, you do not have to find a group that follows the Charlotte Mason method or exclusively unschools. Although you may be fortunate enough to find a like-minded group, you will expand your mind when you learn from those who are different from you. Friendships do not require that you have everything in common. Besides, not everyone has to be your friend.

In short, breaking into a new group requires tenacity and perseverance. Granted, homeschool group members should be welcoming to all newcomers, but unfortunately, they often are not. Perhaps they are simply not focused on the visitors, or maybe they are just not as welcoming as the newcomer wants, or perhaps their idea of welcoming is different from the newcomer's. In any case, breaking into a new group will take some effort on your part, but if you make the effort, it will be worth it.



About the Author:

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