

Although an estimated 2 million American children are now being homeschooled, with that number rising by 15 percent each year, homeschooling is not so common that you're likely to find another family living right next door. However, fellow homeschoolers are apt to be closer than you think!

If you want to make new friends, seek support in your education efforts and give your children a chance to make some homeschooling friends, then you need to join a support group. Take a look at the benefits of joining a homeschool support group for parents and children.

Friendship

Homeschool support groups provide parents and children with the opportunity to make new friends. As you get to know others in a support group, you may find that you have more in common than just homeschooling. Indeed, both children and adults can make lifelong friends in their local support group. That alone is reason enough for joining!

Socialization

Homeschool support groups encourage relationships between all age groups. As a result, homeschoolers are comfortable with and learn to get along with toddlers, adolescents, teens and even other adults and the elderly, all from varying levels on the socio-economic ladder. Socialization is just as important for children as academics are, and homeschool support groups provide a wonderful opportunity for socialization.

In addition, local homeschool support groups can offer both playtime and structured activities that appeal to a wide variety of ages. During play, children learn valuable skills, such as how to share, take turns and role-play. Engaging in crafts or other structured activities provides other equally valuable skills.

Extracurricular Activities

Nearly all homeschool support groups schedule field trips, monthly parties and other special events for their members. The field trips can be "behind the scenes" tours of such places as fire stations, police stations, and other no-cost locations. Members get a chance to see the local sites and learn more about the area in which they live. Some groups even become involved in the community through various service projects.

These days many groups are actually large enough to organize clubs and sports teams for the children. Through a support group, your children will benefit from participating in these extracurricular activities.

Seek Advice and Share Experiences

All parents need a break now and then, but many don't have the extra money to spend on babysitters or on going out. Like a playgroup, homeschool support groups offer the opportunity for parents to get a regular break from home, and yet spend time with their children at the same

time.

During that therapeutic break, parents have a rare opportunity to seek homeschooling advice and share experiences. From others in a support group, parents learn about new curricula, other ways of handling difficulties, and practical tips for homeschooling. They can also keep abreast of local homeschooling laws. In this way, membership in a homeschool support group is as important to a homeschooling parent as membership in a teaching association is to a classroom teacher.

Help During Personal Need

Most homeschool support groups provide valuable help during times of personal need or family emergencies. Since many families these days do not have relatives nearby, their local homeschool group provides that missing element of support. Indeed, many parents find it convenient and comforting to have someone whom they know and trust that they could call at the last minute for just a quick babysitting duty in an emergency. In addition, through the group, their children know and feel comfortable with that other adult as well.

On a related note, homeschooled teenagers make wonderful babysitters! They often have experience with younger children through the support group, and they don't have many of the hang-ups of other teens brought about by peer pressure. In addition, they are usually available during the day when other teens are in school.

Sharing, Borrowing and Exchanging

Many homeschool support groups offer various barter systems, where members exchange goods and/or services with other members. These can include coupons, children's clothes, and other items as well as services such as mowing the lawn, painting a room, or sewing clothes. In addition, some groups organize special seminars or classes for students that are difficult or impossible to teach at home, such as drama or higher mathematics. But classes are not limited to students. Many support groups organize seminars on homeschool topics and issues for parents as well.

Discounts

Many local businesses offer discounts for non-profit groups, allowing members to save money at the stores they frequent. They can often get discounts on curricula and on memberships to national associations, such as Home School Legal Defense Association.

All of these benefits make homeschool support groups a valuable asset for homeschooling families. Support your own homeschooling efforts by joining your local support group – or start your own! You and your children will be glad you did!



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