

If you cannot find an existing group to join, start your own homeschool support group. Follow these steps, and soon you and your children will be making new friends!

1. Make a few preliminary decisions about the kind of group that you and your children would like. Generally, you need to consider such issues as frequency and location of meetings, necessity of membership dues, and the type of meeting you want. Will children attend the meetings, or will meetings be held in the evenings exclusively for the parents? Will the children play while the adults talk, or will your members participate in structured activities? Will you have clubs and co-ops? Will you serve refreshments?

2. Think about a few places that would be suitable for meetings. You may want to meet initially at your house or at the park. After a few meetings, someone may be able to volunteer facilities at their church or another central location.

3. Get the word out about your support group. Here are some suggestions:

- Tell your friends, acquaintances, spouses and business associates to spread the word. Word-of-mouth is still the best way to advertise.
- Advertise in the community calendar of your local newspaper. Most local papers have a community calendar section in which they will allow non-profit groups to advertise for free.
- Introduce yourself to other parents you see with their children during the day just in case they are homeschoolers, and tell them about your new group.
- Place posters in area businesses where parents with children will see them, such as libraries, bookstores, office supply stores, pediatrician's offices, parks and playgrounds.
- Give information about your group to the area cover schools and churches.
- Add your support group to any online directories, such as HSLDA.org and NHEN.org.
- When someone calls for more information, get the caller's name, children's names, phone number and email address and provide details about your new group, such as what activities are provided and where and when you meet. If you have not already decided on the time and place, ask for their input on the days and times convenient for them.
- Prepare wisely for your first meeting. Remember, it will set the stage and tone for future support group sessions, possibly for many months and years to come! Remember to include any local homeschool information to distribute to members, make copies of the group's phone list, and prepare some general guidelines. If your group plans structured activities, decide in

advance what the participants will do and approximately how much time will be spent on each activity.

- Call or email everyone with a reminder of the date, time and directions to the location. Until the group has been meeting for several months and it becomes a habit with families to attend regularly, reminders will be very important.

- Arrive early for the first meeting. Once everyone has arrived, discuss the preliminary decisions you have already made, such as location, frequency of meetings, membership dues, and guidelines.

- Have fun and don't stress out! Within about six weeks, your group will be well on the way to being a successful and long-lasting support group. Before too long, you will find that these members have become close family friends!



Excerpted from *Homeschooling More Than One Child: A Practical Guide for Families* (ISBN 0-595-34259-0) by Carren W. Joye