

Get Connected!  
The Benefits of Connecting with the Local Homeschool Community

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I clearly remember the day my husband and I decided to homeschool our children. After weeks of praying about it, I met with our daughter's second grade teacher and broke "the news." She was surprised but supportive and even gave me a brief tutorial on Savannah's academic progress. We packed up Savannah's desk, thanked her teacher, and walked away.

As I left the school building, it hit me. I felt like I was in an educational and emotional free fall. Our relatives thought we were crazy to homeschool, and since my husband and I had experienced only "traditional" school, we had no solid vision for what our new homeschool might look like. I could count on one hand the number of homeschoolers I knew personally.

It didn't take long before I began to realize how keenly alone I was. Most of my friends were involved at the local public or private school, and their schedules conflicted with my new routine. I longed to talk about the struggles I was facing as a new homeschool mom, and to share the joys, too. My heart was bursting with excitement because of what I was watching God do in our family as we taught our children.

In December 1999, Jay and I moved our family to Mount Vernon, Washington, where Jay had taken a new pastorate. I began a friendship with Patty, a homeschooling mom at our church. Patty shared my desire to participate in a Christ-centered homeschooling group. We envisioned being part of a ministry that offered supplemental classes for our children and brought homeschooling families together once a week.

It soon became clear that nothing capturing the vision that was swelling in our hearts was available in the area. In January 2000, we began to draft the beginnings of what would become First Class Homeschool Ministries. We expected five or six parents to come to our first information meeting, and instead over sixty parents showed up! They were as eager to be part of a homeschool group as we were to start one. God was doing a work in our midst.

A co-op was the answer we had been looking for. Belonging to a larger community of homeschoolers—even with all our different ideas and idiosyncrasies—has been one of the highlights of our homeschool experience! We've made lasting friendships with other homeschooling families, and these relationships have made our homeschooling journey much more than we had ever dreamed it would be.

If you're wondering what a support group is and what the difference is between support groups and co-ops, keep reading. The possibilities they can provide for your family are as

endless as your imagination. It's time to get connected!

## Co-op vs. Support Group

When you begin to look for a homeschool group in your area, ask yourself a few questions:

- Could I benefit from the support and encouragement of other homeschooling moms?
- Do I want to actively participate in a homeschool group?
- Do my children need or want to meet other homeschoolers?
- Would we benefit from classes taught by other homeschooling parents?

If you answered yes only to the first question, then a support group is likely what you are looking for. Support groups are exactly what the title implies: a group of moms (and, less frequently, dads) who meet regularly to offer support and encouragement to each other. Often they will focus each meeting on a particular theme, such as “teaching grammar” or “homeschooling on a budget.” Other groups may meet simply to foster relationships. These groups require little to no commitment on the part of the participating parent.

If you are saying “yes!” to all four questions, you may want to consider finding a homeschool co-op in your area. Co-ops are generally run as a cooperative effort by parents, and they offer classes and other activities at least once a week during the traditional “school year.” These groups require participation by parents in order to be successful.

Getting connected with the homeschooling community has a variety of benefits. Here are just a few of the wonderful things support groups and co-ops do:

### Prevent Isolation

I believe isolation is the number one reason parents give up on homeschooling. Becoming part of a co-op will give you the opportunity to get out of the house at least once a week for classes and will get you into the hub of your homeschool community. Making a connection with these families helps to combat the feelings of isolation that homeschoolers sometimes experience at different points along the way.

### Provide Encouragement

Worried about homeschooling through high school? I was, until I had the courage to talk to other moms at our co-op about my fears. Before I knew it, I was not only encouraged but empowered, because I had been able to benefit from the wisdom of seasoned homeschoolers. They took the fear out of homeschooling through high school. Over the years, I have had the chance to pray with and encourage others at our co-op as well.

## Build Relationships

Two of our six children are teenagers now. As they have grown older, friendships with other homeschoolers have become very important to them. Because of the co-op, older students have a group of friends they will graduate with who understand where they've come from and are excited about where God is leading them.

## Unify the Homeschooling Community

When homeschool co-ops and support groups follow Jesus' example of love and stay away from arguing over disputable matters, amazing things happen. Homeschool groups can be a testimony of the benefits of homeschooling and can unify the homeschool community as they work together toward a common vision.

## Instill Confidence/Strengthen Resolve

Have you had successes in your homeschool? Share them! Have you experienced failures? Be honest about them. Others benefit when we are honest and open about our lives as we walk them out before the Lord.

## Provide Opportunities for Learning

Co-ops usually offer classes during the school year. At "Friday School" our children have learned to draw, been in musicals, taken dance, learned how to dissect a pig (glad that wasn't on my kitchen counter!), become "doodle artists," speakers, web designers, and candy makers. They are discovering their passions and gifts in this rich environment, and they cannot wait for each new semester to start.

## Grow Homeschooling

Want to grow homeschooling? Start a co-op! I can't tell you how many parents have come up to us and said that the reason they felt comfortable enough to try homeschooling was because they heard about our local co-op. Being part of a growing, thriving community of homeschoolers can make all the difference in many situations.

Through our common experiences we are finding that the journey really is the reward. It's a journey worth sharing. Enjoy it!

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## Biographical Information

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