



MUMS SUPPORTING MUMS

Setting Up Buggy Walking Groups

Why buggy walking groups?

Buggy walks are a great way to get to know other mums, get some exercise and they are free. They are easy to organise.

This is our list of the benefits people get from buggy walks.

- Meeting other mums.
- Getting out of the house.
- Having some company.
- Chatting and socialising.
- Getting to know your local area.
- Getting fresh air.
- Losing weight, getting fitter.
- Reduces anxiety and stress.
- Improves mood.
- Something to do if the Toddlers Group stops for summer.
- It's free.

"The baby loves the walks too. Then he sleeps after all that fresh air. Double bonus!!"

"I came here and knew nobody. Now I know more mums and even more people in the community – they notice when we are out walking and greet us as we walk by. I feel that I am better able to talk to people in the community".

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Hints & Tips to get you started

Why we wrote these Hints and Tips

Mums Supporting Mums links together small local groups led by mums. We've been developing more ways for parents in rural areas to get together.

These are our hints and tips about setting up buggy walking groups.

We have other hints and tips to help you if you want to set up other local groups or activities. They include Parent and Toddler Groups, informal groups in cafés, Finding the Funds and Using Social Media.

We hope these will give parents in other places ideas on what you can do.

**You will find all
the Hints and Tips
on our website at
www.otbds.org**

Getting started

These are some things to think about.

- Places to go for a walk.
- What day of the week and time suits everyone.
- How long the walks should last. Most groups go out for about an hour.
- Finding out if everyone has a buggy or pram that is suitable.
- Whether some people want to finish with a coffee or not.
- How to tell other people about the group.
- How to keep in touch each week to confirm if people are coming or if the group needs to change arrangements.
- How to welcome new people and make people who can't come each week feel welcome.

How the buggy walks in the Mums Supporting Mums project got started

Some people went for a couple of short walks as a small group to see if they enjoyed it.

Some people went to visit another buggy walking group or a local organised walking group. That gave them ideas on routes and how to organise themselves.

Some people went on walk leader training. This covered all the things to think about when organising walking groups. The ideas can be adapted for buggy walking groups.

It is a fun and friendly one day course which is free and you get an official walk leader certificate. The trainer can help you with ideas, provide you with lots of useful paperwork and help with routes.

Paths for All has a network of community health walk projects. Free walk leader training is organised locally. For details of their courses and local contacts in your area: www.pathsforall.org.uk

"We found it really helpful. The Walk leader training teaches you how to do a risk assessment - one or two of you can do that on your routes before the walk starts. This keeps you safe and more aware of possible risks and dangers as well as checking to see if the walks are appropriate."

Planning your walks

A group of people with buggies is different from one or two people walking on their own. A lot of it is common sense but it pays to spend time talking about all the different things you need to do to make your buggy walking group fun and easy to organise.

You need to check out your routes before you go with lots of buggies. Is the path wide enough? If you are walking beside a road is there a pavement all the way? Are there places that you can go that are away from roads and cars? What would you do if someone felt ill or twisted their ankle?

Thinking about all these things and what you would do if something happens is called risk assessment. It sounds very formal but it is really simple and straightforward. Doing a simple risk assessment and planning your route helps you think things through as a group. If you think about what the risks are, you can reduce the chance of them happening and make it easier to deal with if something does happen.

One or two people could check out walking routes before the whole group goes

- Make a list of things that you want to check.
- Keep notes about what you find and you can share them with the rest of the group.

"We visited another buggy walking group and asked them lots of questions. They were happy to tell us how they started and what they did. They told us what they found worked and what things they had to change. They gave us ideas to get us going."

Where do you want to go? What kind of environment would you prefer for your walk?

"We wanted somewhere that had lots for the children to see like farm animals and tractors. It kept the children more interested than the other routes we looked at."

"We went different places each time. We sometimes walked along the streets. Going with a group of people made us look at things differently."

Route planning

- Think about pavements or paths that are easy to push buggies on.
- Are they wide enough for buggies?
- Wide enough for at least 2 buggies to go side by side (more sociable).
- Are there any places that you can stop at, wait for everyone to catch up and swap around who they are walking with?
- Is it a circular route or one that you go and come back the same way?
- Where are the safe or best places to cross a road?
- Are there any bits without pavements? Is it still safe?
- Are there any other things to look out for e.g. steep slopes, muddy bits, or other parts that are difficult for a buggy?

How long does it take?

- How far is it – and more important how long will it take to walk with a buggy?
- Remember some people may walk slower than others and it's important not to make them rush, leave them behind or make them feel that they are holding everyone up.

"We finish with a cup of coffee in a local café. Some of us are able to stay on for a chat over a cuppa. Some people can't and some people can only stay sometimes. We make sure everyone knows it's ok to just come for a walk and to stay on for coffee when they want. We work hard at making everyone feel welcome."

Start and finish points

- Can you all walk to the starting place?
- Is there some place big enough for people with buggies to gather?
- Is there space for some people coming by car?
- Toilets?
- And what about coffee or tea and a chat at the end. Is there a Café?

What happens if something unexpected happens? For example, agree as a group what you want to do if someone becomes unwell.

"We agreed to try to walk at the pace of the slowest group member so no-one is left behind."

"We start and finish at a nice cafe – good loos, nice cakes and toys for the toddlers."

"We didn't want to go out for more than an hour."



What about the weather?

Some groups go out no matter the weather because they enjoy the walk and the chat and they come prepared. These are our tips:

- Dress for the weather conditions.
- Have layers on so that you can take your jacket off if it gets warm.
- Make sure baby or toddler is well wrapped up and protected from the rain, or sun.
- Remember the sun protection cream – the sun does shine and it can be very hot.
- Remember your hat if it is cold – or sun hat if it is hot and sunny.
- The weather can be changeable – dry one minute, wet the next – be prepared at all times!

This is our experience on when to have a buggy walk in winter.

- Play it by ear.
- When the walking conditions are difficult - the paths are icy and you might fall - do you still go out or just meet up in a café instead?
- You can get grip things to put on your shoes to help you, but make sure everyone has grip things and able to walk on icy pavements.
- If in doubt, don't go.

“I enjoy getting out of the house – especially in the good weather. But you soon forget the cold in the winter when you are walking. The baby sleeps some of the time - I make sure she is well wrapped up.”

“Some people say it's not the weather that's unsuitable, it's the clothes you wear that are unsuitable. We've all got wellies now.”

Who does what

In some groups one or two people take the lead and organise everything. In other groups more people get involved.

There are lots of advantages.

- If the key person is unable to come along one week the others will know what to do.
- If you share things from the start then it doesn't become a burden on one person, everyone knows what they are doing and they all feel that the group is 'theirs'.
- It is much easier for new people to join in.
- Everyone can help and take turns.
- When someone leaves it doesn't mean that the rest of the group don't know what to do.

These are the main roles. It doesn't matter if they are all done by different people or if a few folk take on several roles.

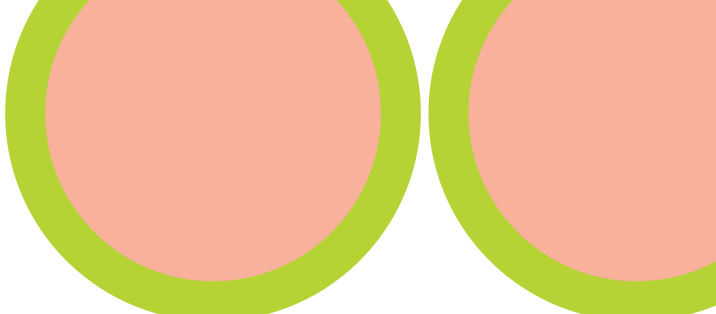
- Someone to organise things – be the one who keeps a note of everyone's contacts, check in with people on whether to walk when it is raining or snowing.
- Publicity – putting up posters in local shops and so on.
- Being the walk leader, who knows the route for the walk.
- Welcoming new people, walking alongside them for the first few times.

Will you have a 'walk leader'?

- Will you want someone in your group to be your walk leader?
- Do you want to take turns in being the walk leader?
- Some groups have a 'back marker', someone who makes sure nobody is left behind. (You can tell we have got really into the terms that walking groups use!)

The walk leader could be the person who:

- Welcomes everyone.
- Has a list of who is coming on the walk.
- Is the person to contact if you are not coming that day.
- Makes sure everyone is there before you set off.
- Has everyone's emergency contact details.
- Has a pen to get contact details for any new people coming along. You can then get in touch with them and invite them to the next walk.
- Takes the first aid kit and a mobile phone that is fully charged.



“One person took the lead to start with but we found that sharing responsibility and having equal roles actually works out better. We feel much happier doing it this way and it helps to keep everyone involved. Everyone knowing what is happening and we are all involved in making decisions and finding out what will work best for everyone.”

“We’ve found that good communication is important when sharing responsibilities. We make sure we check who is doing what and identify someone for every task and not just assume someone will be doing it.”

“Everyone’s input is vital to the success of the group. We’ve found it helps to remember that we all contribute in different ways.”

Keeping going

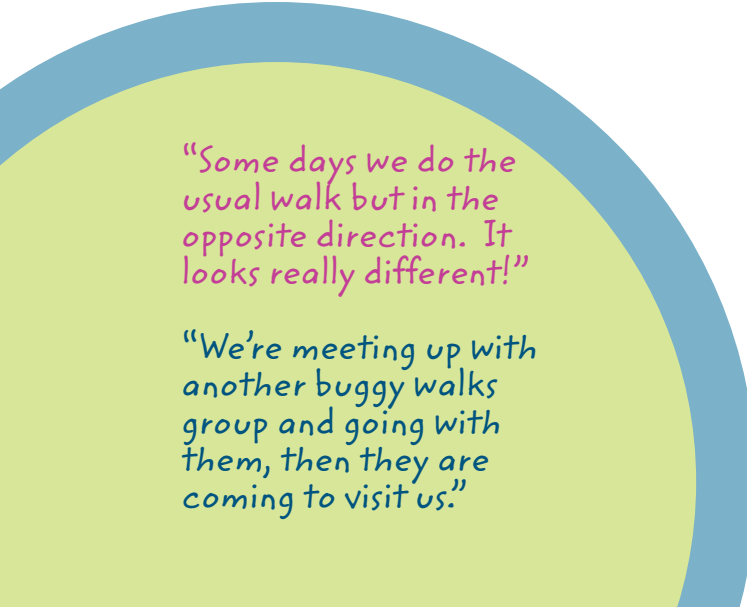
Here are some ideas to help you keep your group going.

- Make sure that everyone knows how to organise the walks so that when people leave the others can keep things going.
- Don’t be ruled by what you set up originally. Change with the times. Change with the needs and circumstances of those people who want to come / are able to come now.
- Sometimes you need to change days and times, or start up a separate walk on another day – so you’ve got two groups going.
- Meet up occasionally with another buggy walking group for a change.
- Change the route every now and then to keep it interesting.
- Have the occasional special event. Ideas we have heard of include a teddy bears’ picnic (mums can bring a teddy too), wear something pink weeks, treasure hunts and Halloween fancy dress walks.

- Some people can’t come each week - make them feel welcomed even if they can only come occasionally.
- Think about who else you know who might be interested. Have a ‘bring a friend week’ to encourage new people to come along.

What about school holidays?

- Some groups keep on running during the holidays.
- Others decide to stop during the holidays.
- If mums bring the school age children then they will have to look after them.
- Getting other family members along can sometimes help with looking after the older children.
- Special events over the summer are good.
- Some people might not come during school holidays but come back once schools have started up again.



“Some days we do the usual walk but in the opposite direction. It looks really different!”

“We’re meeting up with another buggy walks group and going with them, then they are coming to visit us.”

Getting more people involved

- Tell other people what you are doing and invite them along.
- Tell your friends.
- Tell people like your family and neighbours, as they may have friends who know someone who has young children.
- Talk to other mums' groups in the area if there are any. There may be people at a parent and toddler group or cafe group who would be interested in going for a walk.
- Tell the Health Visitor and Midwife team – they will pass the information on to new mums.
- Talk to the staff at the school, especially the nursery class.
- Put a poster up in shops, café, library, post office (and other places where mums go).
- Go and talk to the local toddler group or to parents at the school gate.
- Have a regular notice in the free community news section of your local newspaper.

“It was a bit scary coming along to a group of people that I didn't know for the first time. I had phoned up beforehand and spoke to Jane. She came right over to me when I arrived and made me feel very welcome. She introduced me to everyone and then we all set off. A couple of mums came and walked with me and the next week I walked with some of the other mums. They were all really welcoming.”

Making people feel welcome

Many of the women we talked to said that joining a group for the first time was difficult. Coming to a buggy walking group for the first time could be just as difficult.

Here are some ideas to help.

- Can people phone someone to find out more before they come?
- Can someone take on a welcoming role if new people just turn up?
- Or agree that it is everyone's responsibility to make everyone feel welcome?
- Introduce new people to a couple of mums to start with and they can walk together.
- Get their phone number before they leave and keep in touch.
- Tell them it's ok to come whenever they want.
- Take care that you don't ask too many questions and keep the conversation general until people have had time to get to know each other.

Thinking about whether you want to wind up the group

Sometimes the numbers of people who come to the buggy walking group go up and down. People will leave the buggy walking group - their children get older, they might go back to work, their circumstances change.

It is important not to worry. It is ok for a group to start up, run and then stop when all the members move on or don't need it anymore. People sometimes think that that is a sign of failure but it's not.

Remember that you can all still go for walks with your families, or a couple of you keep meeting up and walking together even if there isn't a regular buggy walks group.

“You just think back to how it felt when you did something new with people you didn't know.”

Keeping in touch with each other

What if you've arranged to meet the same day of the week and at the same time and only one or two people turn up and you are not sure if others are running late or not coming?

- It may be ok to hang about waiting on a nice sunny day but not so nice to wait if it is cold and windy.
- Why not work out some way to keep everyone in touch.
- You could organise a phone around. One person contacting everyone or several people contacting the other members.
- When it is only a small group it might be easy to do this but as the group grows it can become more difficult to organise.
- Some groups use text messages.
- Some groups set up Facebook pages to help them keep in touch.

Some groups use a 'closed' Facebook page.

- Remind people of the next walk.
- Confirm the starting point and starting time.
- People say that they are coming or not.
- If someone gets held up then you know to wait a couple of minutes.
- And if the weather is cold and wet – then you can find out if anyone is coming.
- It might be useful to have some helpful tips for people coming on walks.
- This might be helpful to people who don't do much walking or are new to buggy walks.
- You might want to include taking water especially on hot days.

"It lets me keep in touch and still feel part of it when the wee one isn't well and we're not getting outside."

"It was great during the winter. I knew that at least a few others would be there before we went out."

"You can see at a glance who is coming."

Background to Mums Supporting Mums

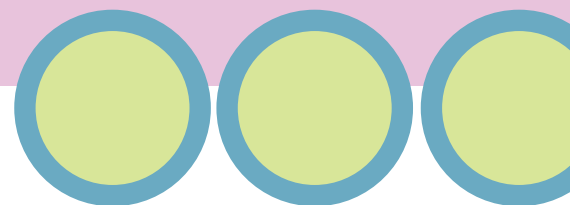
Outside the Box has been working in partnership with Healthy Living Network in Scottish Borders, Healthy Valleys in South Lanarkshire and Building Healthy Communities in West Wigtownshire, Dumfries and Galloway.

The project was aimed at women who wanted to develop small-scale support services and activities for themselves and for others. The aims of the project are to:

- Encourage women to develop small-scale services and activities that support parents and their children, which reflect the circumstances of people living in rural areas.
- Reduce the isolation many mums' experience.
- Point people to sources of advice that will help support their wellbeing.
- Encourage women to use the opportunities for learning and access to employment that are open to them.

The project was funded by LEADER programmes in Dumfries and Galloway, South Lanarkshire and Scottish Borders, Hollywood Trust, Comic Relief, NHS Borders, Big Lottery Fund and contributions from Healthy Valleys and Outside the Box.

There is more information about the project and updates on developments in each local area at www.otbds.org/mums



Further information and help

Paths for All

Paths for All Scotland organise training for people who want to organise walking groups, including buggy walks.

In most parts of the country there are walk leader trainers usually linked to the council or the NHS.

Contact them or Paths for All about local training opportunities.

www.pathsforall.org.uk

Find your development officer in Paths for All:
www.pathsforall.org.uk/pfa/contacts/in-your-area.html

Living Streets

This site has some things to think about when walking about towns. It is aimed more at people who want to make streets better places for walking but has some useful tips for buggy walks.

www.livingstreets.org.uk

Urban walking route planner

This has information about walks in the main cities. It has some hints and tips about walking.

www.walkit.com

We are producing a separate tips and hints about using social media. You can find it on our website.

Contact us

There is more on the Mums Supporting Mums project at www.otbds.org/mums

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The Holywood Trust

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