



MUMS SUPPORTING MUMS

Setting Up Informal Groups in Cafes

Why Café groups and other informal groups?

There are lots of reasons why mums want to have contact with other mums. Dads and grandparents who are also looking after small children can also feel isolated and need some peer support from other parents.

Some people go to parent and toddler groups. But this isn't possible for everyone. In rural areas there might not be a toddler group, or it might have closed due to lack of numbers. Or existing groups might be very busy, or you might not be ready to join in with a busy group.

Another option is to meet in a local café or somewhere similar.

There are lots of advantages.

- Just turn up on the day.
- You can come late and go away early.
- Someone else makes the tea and coffee.
- You can have a nice cake if you want.
- You can stay on after the other mums leave.
- You don't need to clear up at the end.
- There are no running costs for you or a group (no rent, insurance and so on).
- Very little to organise.

"Some of us started this group because we wanted somewhere that was very welcoming and easy for everyone. All the best bits of other groups we knew of and friends in other places had told us about."

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 informal groups in cafes and similar venues when you don't need to pay for hire of rooms or other costs.

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, Buggy Walking groups, 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

What are mums looking for?

This is our list. Doing anything that helps with some or all of these benefits is a good idea.

- Meet other mums, new people.
- Making new friends.
- Good to talk (and listen).
- Sharing experiences.
- Gaining confidence.
- Having fun.
- Talking to other adults and not just children all day.
- Break from routine.
- Getting out more.
- Feeling less isolated.
- Babies and children mixing with other children and adults.

"You are trying to be friendly but some people might be shy or they are very tired and it might just feel too much."

"The lady who runs the garage in our village has been great. She put up the poster and told people about the group when we were getting started."



"It can be too easy to fall quickly into the habit of sitting at the same table and talking to the same small group of people...and the 'clique' has already started!"

"We have a chat with whoever we are sitting beside but then we find something for us all to talk about and share ideas. Some weeks it's what to feed the children, others how to cope with lack of sleep, or which shop has got what bargains this week and sometimes it's lots of different things."



"Just think what made you feel welcome when you were meeting people you didn't know that well."

Getting started

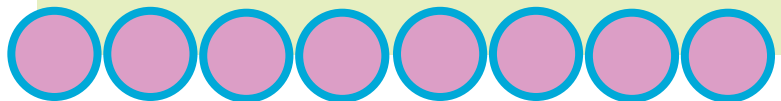
Find your café (or similar)

Go for a look first.

- One or two of you pop in and suss it out. Take the children too.
- Is there enough space?
- Is there somewhere for the buggies as well?
- Can you bring your own food for babies and toddlers? Or will they heat babies' food?
- Check out the menu and the cost: you want to make it affordable for everyone.

Talk to the owner (or manager).

- Tell them your idea.
- Find out quiet time for them (Mondays or Tuesday mornings might be quiet times).
- Tell them what they'd get out of it: regular customers would be known as family friendly café, extra publicity through your posters. Be gently persuasive as you sell the idea to them.
- Ask if they have another room that they aren't using if space might be difficult in the main part of the café.
- Mums would have something with them to keep the children going, just as if they were visiting a café with a friend.
- Once you're established you might ask if the group could store some toys, paper and crayons in the café to save you bringing them each week.



Getting going

Once you've found your café and got it agreed, you need to let other people know.

- Posters.
- Telling people you know.
- Asking people like Health Visitors and community groups to pass the word on.
- Using social media routes such as Facebook – our tips and hints on using social media will be useful here.

Put up posters.

- Bright and interesting to catch people's eye and make people want to come and join in.
- Remember the basics - date, time, place, who the group is for and what happens.
- Great if you can give a contact phone number as some people might want to find out more before coming along.
- Remember to replace them every so often. Make them look slightly different as that gets people looking again.

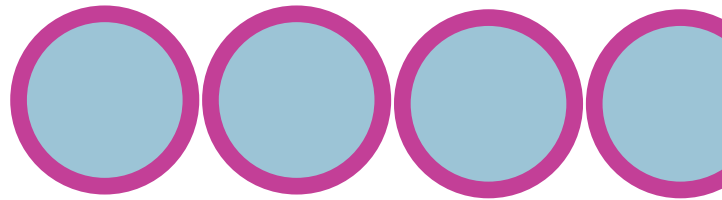
Think about where you put up information. Basically, it is everywhere mums, dads, grans and mums-to-be in your area might go.

- Local shops.
- Local café.
- Library, library van.
- Health centres, medical practices.
- Post office.
- community notice board.
- Local toddlers group, and explain you are not setting up a rival, just something different.

- Other local groups.
- Don't just hand the poster in, offer to put it up (helps to make sure it does go up).
- Tell them about it – they will then help to spread the word.

Talk to people.

- Health Visitors and midwives.
- Staff at the school and nursery.
- Existing Parent and Toddler groups.
- Community classes.
- Contacts at local churches.
- ESOL classes – English as a second language.



"There wasn't a toddler group in the village – it closed a few years ago and we didn't want to get into that anyway. We went and talked to the manager in the local café. They had a back room so we use that. They make us feel really welcome and they've got to know us all.

We have it for an hour but some mums stay on a bit longer. We asked if we could bring some toys and store them, save us bringing them each week. The owner thought about it and realised that if he bought the toys then anyone who came into the café could use them. He said that being seen as a child and family friendly café makes good business sense."

Making people feel welcome

Many of the women we talked to said that walking through the door into a busy toddlers group for the first time was really difficult. Coming to a group in a café could be just as difficult.

Here are some ideas to help.

- Can someone take on a welcoming role?
- Or agree that it is everyone's responsibility to make new people feel welcomed.
- Get up, say hello, come over here... anything to make the person feel welcomed.
- Pull over a chair and make space for them.
- Introduce them to people sitting closest (don't overload them with too many names all at once).
- Get their phone number before they leave (and get in touch if they don't come next time).
- Tell them it's ok to come whenever they want, and they don't have to come each week if they can't.
- Take care that you don't ask lots of questions and keep them general.

"In a few months we hope that we'll have a toddlers group going. That means we'll have two places that mums can go to in our village".

"You want everyone to feel they can help to decide what happens and how to keep it going."

Mix people up – get them talking to different people.

- Move chairs and tables around if you can.
- Agree from the beginning that anyone can sit anywhere.
- Make it a 'rule' that you have to sit with different people each week.

Keeping in touch with everyone, especially new people.

- Find out what will work for the mums in your group - some people have mobile phone and access to the internet but others don't.
- It might be a mixture of phone, text messages, email and more open communication such as posters.
- Some groups have set up private Facebook pages to keep in touch. We have produced separate Hints and Tips about this and you can find it on our website.



Keeping going

Once you have got started, think about what will help the group keep going over the coming months. You won't want to make it formal. But you do need to talk to each other about your café group and keeping it going.

Points to think about.

- Every month or so have a short discussion about the group itself – is it still a good time and day for people?
- Remember that numbers will fluctuate as people move on.
- If the numbers get big you may want to – or have to – start having 2 sessions on different days/times.
- Remind people the group is here and that new people are welcome. Put up new posters, remind

the health visitors. Go back and look at the list for when you first started.

You can be flexible about who comes along, and this can adapt and change over time.

- You might want it to be ok for mums to come on their own once their wee one is at nursery.
- Are dads welcome? And grannies?

Think about how your café group complements the other sources of support mums give to each other.

- Some people might want to buddy each other to the local Parent and Toddlers Group.
- Some people may decide that they are ready to start a toddlers group now that they've got to know each other.
- You can keep in touch with each other through Facebook and similar ways.
- Some people will make friends and see them outside the group.

Even though it is an informal group, you may find that someone takes on the role of organiser (in a very low key way). It is a good idea if this gets shared, so the group continues if that person leaves or steps back.



"You don't want it to be seen as one person's group— it is everyone's group."

"We are quite busy now. The health visitor told us a wee while ago there were quite a few pregnant women in the village. We realised that the group was getting a bit big for the café. We have got to know each other and so we are going to set up a toddler group in the village hall but we are going to keep the café group going — it is great for mums with babies and toddlers. Some of us want to be able to pop in too to keep in touch with everyone we've met and made friends with and we want to be able to get to know the new mums too."

Background to Mums Supporting Mums

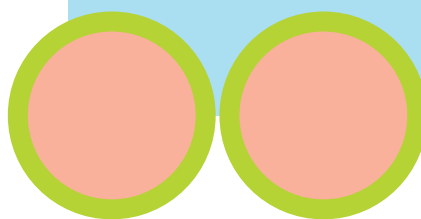
Outside the Box has been working in partnership with Healthy Living Network in Scottish Borders, Healthy Valleys in South Lanarkshire and Building Healthy Communities in West Wigtownshire, Dumfries and Galloway. The project works with women who want to develop small-scale support services and activities 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 the LEADER programmes in Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire. Hollywood Trust, Comic Relief small grants through Foundation Scotland, 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

If you want help to find premises in your local area, or want help to set up a toddlers group, your local community learning and development service in the council might be able to help

The local Third Sector Interface (TSI) might be able to help. They are sometimes locally known as CVS.

To find your local TSI go to www.vascotland.org

SPPA (Scottish Preschool Play Association) will help with information about setting up a toddlers group: www.sppa.org.uk

To find out more about the Mums Supporting Mums project or about other sources of information go to our website at www.otbds.org/mums

Look for our other Hints and Tips on: Toddler groups, buggy walking groups, finding funds, social media.

Contact us

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

Outside the Box
Unit 23, 150 Brand St
Glasgow G51 1DH
0141 419 0451
admin@otbds.org

www.otbds.org

1 905149 09 3



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