



MUMS SUPPORTING MUMS

Setting Up Parent and Toddler Groups

Getting started

Find some people who want to meet.

- Talk to a friend. Ask people such as family and neighbours if they know of any parents who might be interested.
- Put a poster up in the local shop, post office, village hall or community notice board.
- Get a few more people together.
- Organise a meeting. Ask if you can use the local hall or room in the centre for free for the meeting.
- Find out who is interested and what they want from a toddlers group.
- Find out who wants to help.

“There will be some mums who want to be part of more than one group. We got good ideas and help from someone who was part of another group which met a few miles away.”

“Anyone can set up a toddler group. All you need is a bit of motivation and commitment. Find a few other people to help. It helps to share ideas and the things that you have to do.”

“You just need 2 people to get started. It doesn't have to be a big group if there are only a few mums where you live.”

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 Parent and Toddler Groups.

We have other hints and tips to help you if you want to set up other local groups or activities. They include Buggy Walking 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**

“It's ok to have a second group even in a village. We started ours because the other one was meeting at a time which didn't suit us.”

Find a place to meet

These are some of the places people have used:

- Village hall.
- Community centre.
- Church hall.
- School.
- Youth club.
- And some people have used the local pub (hotel).

“They had a nice back room that was suitable with a separate entrance and it didn’t feel or look like we were going into a pub.”

“Look at all the possible places. Find out what is available and how much it costs.”

What will you need?

- Kitchen facilities.
- Toilets.
- Baby changing facilities.
- Storage space for toys.
- Space for buggies..
- Accessible for buggies.
- Car parking.
- Close to public transport routes.

“Ask if they’ll let you have it for free until you get going, reduce the cost for the first few months or give you reduced rates if your group becomes a member?”

“We got donations from the local Rotary and the Community Council for the hall rent and insurance to help us get going.”

Ways to get equipment

- Ask for donations of toys and equipment.
- You may need toys, mugs, kettle, high chairs, baby mats etc.
- Advertise in local shops, community notice boards, local library and library van.
- Put an advert in local community Facebook page – sales and wants section.
- Ask a local shop or supermarket for donations of tea, coffee etc to get you going.

“Once we got a committee together we were able to apply to Awards for All for a grant but to begin with we got lots of donations and help from the Community Council for our insurance.”

How much will it cost the mums?

You will need to work out roughly what your costs are so that you can decide how much to charge for your weekly fees. You may have to do some other fundraising activities or look for donations to help so that you can keep the weekly fees affordable.

Some of the things people told us.

- Groups usually charge weekly fees.
- Some charge extra for teas, coffee and snacks.
- Some groups have joining fees or annual fees.
- Income from weekly fees will go up and down, so you need to budget for this.
- Costs such as rent will stay the same no matter how many parents come each week (which is where the annual fee comes in useful).
- Ask about the rent or hall charge. Does this include heating and lighting?
- Things like paint, paper, crayons need replaced regularly.
- What about replacement toys when they get broken?
- For insurance, ask if there is an organisation which supports lots of groups with volunteers, such as the Third Sector Interface or SPPA. They may be able to help with insurance cover, or know of places which give competitive rates for volunteer-led groups.
- If it helps to have membership of the village hall, or of another group, check if they will want an annual membership fee.

We have written ‘Finding the Funds’ with information about fundraising and applying for grants.

There are local organisations to help you. 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.vasotland.org

Telling people about your group

Word of mouth through:

- Health visitors and midwives.
- Early years teams - local Council and NHS.
- Other local organisations that parents may have contact with.

Write a few sentences about your group.

- Local newspaper.
- Local news section in local newspaper.
- Community newsletter.
- Community Facebook page.
- Mumsnet.

Put posters up where parents with babies or children go.

Put them up in:

- Local shops.
- Local cafe.
- Library, library van.
- Health centres, medical practices.
- Community notice board.
- Send them to other local groups.

"Make them bright and welcoming. Say it's for mums, dads and grandparents too. Encourage people to drop in."

"Don't just hand the poster in, offer to put the poster up."

"Tell the people in the shop about the group. They will then help to spread the word."

Getting going

Make people feel welcome

- Have someone to welcome people when they come in.
- Make people feel welcomed and want to come back.
- Introduce them to a few people to start with.
- Make sure you get their contact details.

Think about how to organise it

- How will you organise the first few sessions?
- How will you lay out the room?

Keep records from the beginning

- Keep a list of everyone's contacts.
- Keep a note of who comes each time. That helps you notice who is not coming so often and may appreciate a phone call to say hello.
- Keep a record of who has paid their weekly fees.

Share out the tasks

- Putting out the toys at the beginning and clearing up at the end.
- Who makes the teas, coffees and sorts out the juice and biscuits?
- Who buys the milk?
- Having a rota means everything gets shared around.
- Some groups put names in a hat to decide who is doing what.
- Tell new people how you organise things so they feel included and can help out.

At the beginning discuss the things you need to have agreement on – try to make it informal but agreeing things and having some 'rules' will help everyone in the long term

- Most groups decide that every parent is responsible for their own child at all times.
- Do you come to the group if your child is ill?
- Do you want to have an arrangement for mums who are having a hard time financially? Or will this cause more hassles?

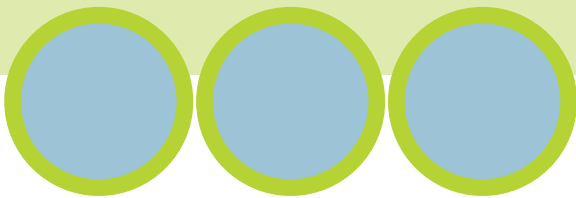
You also need to talk about how you are going to support each other

- Examples are when a child doesn't want to share, when a baby is crying a lot and a toddler is very grumpy one day.
- There will be days when a mum is not having a good day.

- If you feel someone has problems that need more expert advice or support, you can ask a Health Visitor on someone like that for useful contacts to pass on, or talk over how you can support someone.
- You can share information around the group about local support on matters like domestic abuse, money advice and health problems. That way everyone has the information.
- There are good sources for more information and advice on matters such as mums' mental wellbeing on the Mums Supporting Mums website.
- There are contacts for advice on money matters in the resource about employment – Our Working Lives.

Find out about whether the mums need to have police checks if this is something you are worried about

- Some people do not start groups because their understanding is that every mum will need a police check or other disclosure clearance, and think this will put people off getting involved.
- Generally, parents do not need any checks if the children are with their parents and the parents are keeping an eye on things.
- You might need to get police checks if an adult was going to be alone with other people's children, especially if it is on a regular basis.
- You can get advice on this from the Third Sector Interface or SPPA.
- Be aware about other risks, such as money going missing. Be sensible about it. There is lots of good practice advice that keeps things safe for everyone.
- If you ever come across a situation where you are not sure about someone, get advice about what to do.



“It is important that parents feel welcomed no matter what sort of day they or their child is having.”

“You will probably try different things for the first few sessions until you decide what seems to work.”

Making people feel welcome

Many of the women we talked to said that walking through that door for the first time was really difficult.

Some groups have one person who welcomes everyone. In other groups it seems as if everyone is pleased to see you and ready to come and welcome you.

Encouraging people to mix and talk to different people

- Agree from the beginning that anyone can sit anywhere.
- Make it a 'rule' that you have to sit with different people each week – just think, it is too easy to fall quickly into the habit of sitting at the same spot and talking to the same small group of people.
- Change the way the room is set up.
- Have the circle of chairs closer together when the numbers drop with toys in the middle.
- Use one end of the hall only.
- Get people talking by posing a question for a group discussion (works best with smaller groups).

“We all helped out to begin with but once more people came we realised we'd have to take turns and share things out more. We talked about it as a big group and decided together what we'd do, that way everyone had the opportunity to contribute their ideas and it wasn't just seen as the committee making decisions.”

“We found it helps to have a welcome pack. It has a simple membership form, contact details for a few of us and who to phone if they have questions.”

Things to do at your toddler group

Most people want to come, have a chat, have some company. They want toys for the children and simple activities for the children. Sometimes you will want to organise special things which make your group special.

Here are some ideas to think about.

- Have book bug storytelling sessions once a month.
- Have some fun exercise sessions.
- Healthy eating sessions.
- Making meals on a tight budget.
- Sharing ideas sessions. Some of the ones we have had at our groups are: how to make playdough at home, cornflower 'glug', finger paints made simple.
- Some groups want to share ideas on how to cope with teething, feeding, sleepless nights and potty training.
- Someone to come and talk about a topic that the mums are interested in.
- Have a fun event.
- Celebrate birthdays – mums as well as the children!
- Some mums might like to lead an activity such as songs.

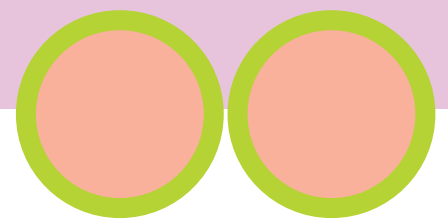
Becoming more organised

Many parent and toddler groups form a committee as a way of sharing the work and it is another way to get to know each other and make new friends. The committee usually has a chair, secretary and treasurer and sometimes some other committee members. They share the tasks, agree who is doing what and they help each other. It helps the group run smoothly, no jobs are left undone and no one person gets overloaded.

Most groups make sure they tell the rest of the members what they are talking about at their committee meetings. They come and ask the rest of the group for their ideas before they make final decisions. This encourages other people to join the committee.

If groups want to apply for a grant then they will need a committee, have written rules for their group (called a constitution) and a bank account.

There are organisations that can help you with all of this. There is also lots of information available on the internet about how committees can organise themselves.



“When we started we just thought we’d leave the treasurer to do all the things with the money, collecting the weekly fees, sorting out payments. But she insisted that she and someone else counted the weekly fees together. She showed us her records and the bank statements at each committee meeting. She said that it was important that the whole committee kept an eye on the money and didn’t leave it all to one person.”

“I used to think I couldn’t do that sort of thing. But I’ve found out that I can.”

“Decision making is a lot easier if it is done on a shared basis.”

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

For information on setting up groups, constitutions, sources of funding go to Community Toolkit at www.slcvo.org.uk

Lots of information for committees www.diycommitteeguide.org

www.trusteenet.org.uk/resources/good-governance-code-summary

Keeping going

Each year some parents will leave the toddler group because their children go to nursery, playgroup or school and new parents will join.

Numbers will go up and down and some years they might drop so much that it becomes difficult to cover the basic costs.

These are some of the things that groups have done when numbers fluctuate.

Go back to basics

When the toddlers group was first started a group of people would have sat down together and talked about.

- What they wanted from the group.
- How they wanted to run the group.
- What they would do.
- What day of the week and time to meet.
- How to promote it.

Why not go back to basics and find out what people want now? For example, you may find that the day or time you meet isn't right for people.

Telling people about the group

Not everyone may know about your group, especially new mums or new families that have moved to the area.

- Create new posters every so often.
- Put them up in shops, cafes, libraries and other places that parents go.
- Look at the list we've put earlier on in these Hints and Tips.
- Remind the health visitors and others who can tell parents.
- Contact local bumps to babies classes and other classes.
- Find out if there is a local directory of groups and make sure your details are in it and up to date.
- Create a Facebook page for the group.

- Promote what you do on the local community Facebook pages.
- Word of mouth – tell the people you know and encourage other people to do that too.

Special events and open days

- Have an open day and invite new people to come along.
- Have fundraising events or fun events and get everyone in your community to come along.
- Events help you raise funds as well as tell people what you do and attract new members.
- Have taster days and free sessions.
- Have a special offer, such as 'Come along for the first three times before you have to start paying'.
- Have book bug sessions once a month, story-telling sessions, or any of the other ideas listed in 'Things to do at your toddler group' on page 5.
- Invite special visitors to the group as an attraction.
- Have a fun exercise session once a month.

"Talk together and come up with something that everyone can be part of."

"Numbers fluctuate at groups and the numbers may be low for a few weeks or months. That's normal in rural areas. It's probably normal in town too."

"Be positive. Don't say we might close. Just remind people that there is a toddlers group and encourage them to drop in."

Welcome new people who come along

- Have your welcome pack to give them.
- Find out what they'd want from the toddlers group.
- Get their details and get in touch with them afterwards.
- Some people only come occasionally – find out if there is something that might make it easier for them to come more often.

Try another type of group

If you think that there aren't enough people to keep the group going but mums still need somewhere to meet, why not try something else?

- See if you can negotiate a reduced rent or move somewhere that works for a smaller group.
- Change to a drop in group in a café for a while.

Find out more about informal groups in cafes in our hints and tips at www.otbds.org/mums

"There is always a need for a toddler group and if you keep promoting yourselves the numbers will probably increase again."

Background

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 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.

"We remembered what it was like when we first came so we decided to make sure that no one was left standing at the door looking as if they didn't know where to go."

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

"We agreed that it is everyone's responsibility to make new people feel welcomed. We will get up, say hello, come over here, pull over a chair and make space for them. ... anything to make the person feel welcomed."



"Make a fuss of them, you want new people to come back and first impressions count."

"The first Parent and Toddlers group I went to was really busy and everyone seemed to know each other. The bumps to babies group was small and much quieter – the other one just felt too noisy and busy."

"Introduce them to a couple of people, don't take them round everyone – it can be too much."

Further information and help

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

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

Contact us

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

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