

Tips for Choosing a Support Group

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Choosing a support group is an important step in beginning and sustaining your home school experience. The variety of the groups and their activities make it difficult to decide which group will fit your family and schedule. I recommend that you consider several factors before you commit to a specific group.

The home is where Godly character and strong relationship skills are developed. Before you join a support group it is important to consider how much time you are willing to spend away from your home each week. When you combine cooperative and tutorial classes, music lessons, participation in sports, activities (scouts, church, clubs, etc.) it is easy to spend more time away from home than in it. Try to plan your time and stick to your plan. Combine activities and limit options more if you have multiple children. For example, our family limited our children's sports participation to the same sport (they all were members of a neighborhood swim team) in order to avoid having multiple practice schedules to fit into our busy week. If your children want to play musical instruments, consider directing them to the same instrument or placing them in a band where they can all rehearse and perform at the same time. As they grow older and can drive themselves you can consider adding additional activities.

The strength of home school social training lies with the ability of parents to supervise their child's interaction with other children and adults, and to provide immediate praise and correction. While your children participate in cooperative activities they are being socialized by teachers and students who may not share your family's values. Commit to being with your children as they participate in classes and activities so that you can observe their interactions, monitor their friendships, and make appropriate adjustments.

Don't forget to consider the fact that a support group will make demands on your time as well. In addition to travel time, most support groups require parents to participate in leading or supervising activities. Resist the "drop off" mentality which may give you some free time, but will add to the load of other parents who are supervising activities. When you drop off a child you delegate away some of your freedom to responsibly raise that child.

Support groups provide valuable encouragement, academic help, and social opportunities. We must be intentional, not passive, in evaluating the multitude of choices to insure that they do not become a substitute for teaching our own children. Careful use of support groups will allow us to enjoy their benefits without losing the valuable opportunities available only in our homes.