

## Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions on Starting a Small Group

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### The Essential Tips for Starting a Group

- Start small! No matter how big of a vision you have, you want for your group. My advice is to start small and establish your foundation for the group.
- Know your goal for your group and stick with it as you start.
  - While it is great to say you want to get together to provide classes for “\_\_\_\_\_” kids and do “\_\_\_\_\_,” you need to make sure you are staying in that focus. Do not start adding the extras until you have accomplished the goal.
  - Set limits to what extras you will add.
- One of my takeaways from setting leadership in place is to have odd numbers of leaders. You will not always agree, but there will be a time you have to ‘vote,’ and it will make the process easier if there is already an odd number of votes built in. You will not have to deal with ties for resolution.

### Record Keeping - How and Requirements

- If you are part of a homeschool group, the responsibility for record-keeping can lie with the parents rather than the group. However, the group may keep some records, such as attendance, and provide information to the teachers offering academic classes that will count as credits. This information could include lab books, assignment grades, and tests that have been graded by the group’s teachers, which parents can then add to their own records.
- If you plan to exchange money through one entity, you need someone to maintain detailed records of receipts and payments.
- Lastly, present your families with an evaluation at the end of the year to get opinions on how they view your group’s structure. This can provide valuable insight to make your group function even better.

## The Best Way to Connect People Within the Group

- Think through what you would have liked to happen when you started in a group. When we started each year, I used to do simple things like play party games to get to know each other. Games that identified who was a veteran parent and who was the new parent. Who had high school students who only had little ones? This was a great tool to let everyone be on the spot and identify who might be your new friends without pointing them out one-on-one.
- Hosting a few moms' nights or mom's coffees at the beginning of the year is another way to start making connections. I feel that when moms are connected, they can connect with the students.
- High schoolers appoint a senior mom to organize outings for the students. It does not need to be a lot, but maybe in the fall, when towns are having fairs, they can all go to the fair together. If you live in an area where that isn't possible, you can also host a game night. Maybe you can meet at the church or someone's house.
- Field trips are a great way to connect people. It is amazing how quickly connections are made when they are removed from the classroom.

## Finding a Meeting Place Within a Budget

- This will depend on the size of your group and geographic location. If you live in a southern state, you can meet outside longer into the fall and earlier in the spring. But if you live in North Dakota, you are already experiencing frigid temperatures, and your meeting places need to be inside.
- Community Centers are another great place to start a group.
- If a member of your group is part of a church, ask if you can meet. Often, a church is welcoming to have groups meet during the week.

## Finding Families to Join You in Your Group

- Your best marketing is going to be word of mouth. When you have a good group that people enjoy, they tell their friends. They also don't tell their fellow homeschool families that they don't feel will be a good fit for the group. So word of mouth is best.
- If you are opening up to new families, I would get my group listed in the state listing or HSLDA, which would direct new families to your group.
- Social Media groups/pages are another way to advertise your group.
- Set up your website with keywords to direct traffic to your group.

## Collaborating With Others in Your Group

- Set mandatory meetings for planning. When they want a class, start by assuming they will teach it.
- Volunteer positions must be filled before enrolling students. This will allow you to know the commitment level of parents before you fill classes. Some classes will just need some extra hands-on experience in the rooms. These are vital positions to make the classrooms run smoothly.
- Document and put it in writing. If it is in black and white, there is less room for misunderstandings.

## Advice for Managing All the Things

- Document everything and keep it in an easily accessible place. When you begin, use free resources like Google Drive.
- Create a 'board' or leadership team that can divide the responsibilities, even if it has just three members. This will give the support to keep it going.

## What Sort of Support Should You Provide for Small Group Instruction

- In a high-level overview, it will look like a typical classroom. For a small class of homeschooled students, you must work with the parents to provide what is required. Lean on the parents to help you when there are extra needs. Do not play Super Hero!
- Be willing to repeat the same instruction differently. Until the students learn your teaching style, you may have to learn their different learning abilities.

## Ways to Overcome "Fear of Failure"

- The old saying goes, "Fake it till you make it." You are not going to fail unless you let yourself fail. A wise friend reminded me that there is value in speaking success into your endeavors vs. speaking fear of failure for the same endeavor. One of the best examples we can show our students is the process of making something work by repeatedly making efforts to reach the goal. Remember you are homeschooling for your students; pour into what they need.
- Keep a notebook of the small successes throughout the year. Add to it the things you think may need improvement for the subsequent year. If you do this as you go through the year, evaluating the success at the end of the year will be far easier.

## How Do You Attract Others Who Will Work for the Student's Benefit

- Finding like-minded people to partner with. This goes back to how you build your group. You allow word of mouth to guide you. Families in the group are going to be looking for like-minded people who will be a good fit for the group and who will share their knowledge about your group.
- Take on the approach that this is a job, and they need to be interviewed when you allow them to be in a teaching or leadership position. On the other side of the interview, you will be evaluated as well. This is a great opportunity when a family is interested in joining your group to see if it is also a good fit for them. You will find there are times you mutually decide to travel in different directions after an interview.

## What Might Be the Most Successful Classes for Elementary Students

- Hands-on classes. For Demme Learning courses, you can look at any of the products to have them work in a group environment. All have been used successfully in homeschool group environments. But it does take working with the parents to make it truly successful.
- Don't discount the value of beginning with an idea of what might work across a group of ages and then adjusting as the season continues.
- Remember that students often have terrific ideas, so be open to asking them for their suggestions on how to make a group experience even better.