

Kids Club vs. MOMS Club

What's the purpose of your chapter?

Is participation in your chapter lagging? Do you find that the only members who really participate are those with toddlers up through three-year olds – the preschoolers who are exploring their world, but haven't started preschool or kindergarten yet?

Have you noticed that the moms of babies and the moms with older, school-aged children don't participate much anymore?

Perhaps it's because your chapter has forgotten its mission – to be a MOMS Club, not just a "Kids Club"...

All at-home mothers – no matter what age their children are – need activities that are aimed at fulfilling the mom herself.

Think about it... it takes a lot of effort for a mom with a newborn to go to a park and keep her baby out of the sun, or for a mom with kids in preschool or older to show up at the park on her own.

But, if there are activities aimed at the mom's interest – a craft group, speaker or discussion group, or mom-oriented outing – that would make the effort worthwhile.

Why having only child-oriented activities just doesn't work

Having a child-oriented group starts naturally – what do at-home moms want most? To have lots of things to do with their children! Because of that, all MOMS Club chapters should have a healthy calendar of mom and children activities.

But the key is balance. You need both child-oriented AND mother-oriented activities in a healthy chapter. Without mom-oriented activities, too, a chapter becomes more and more focused on a very narrow group of mothers – usually only those with two- to three-year olds. The activities become more and more child-oriented, and less and less mother-fulfilling, until mothers with other-aged children only feel comfortable at the monthly MOMS Night Out.

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Mothers with babies usually stick it out, but they'll only go to their baby playgroup and they won't feel a part of the group as a whole.

But for the moms with children in preschool or kindergarten, pretty soon they decide there's nothing in the chapter for them. They leave, feeling they have "aged out."

It's a loss for the mother, because she still needs our support as an at-home mother, and it's a loss for the chapter in valuable experience, enthusiasm, and, not to mention, dues.

So, while as mothers, it's natural to want to plan things for our children instead of ourselves, it's important to keep your chapter's activities in balance. We want activities for our children, but, the fact is, we do still need to do things for ourselves. We are much happier as a mother, wife, friend – or person – when we are able to have activities in our lives and chapters that interest us, the MOMS(!), not just the kids!

So should we plan activities without the children?

No, that's not our point. Our point is that – even with the children there – you should be having a balance of activities and programs that include the mothers' interests, not just the children's.

You should have speakers, discussions and outings that go beyond the "how to potty train" and farm field trips. Those are fine part of the time, but you also need to have speakers, discussions and outings that will interest all your mothers, not just the ones with preschoolers.

How do we do that with the children there?

One of our founding principles is that having children around is a natural part of being an at-home mother, and no mother should have to hire a babysitter just to attend our activities.

Because of that, it's a fact that some of our activities will take a little more planning. For example, an activity group hostess will have to make sure there are plenty of children's toys in the room while the moms work on crafts, exercise or discuss their latest book.

And the mothers may have to be more careful with their craft equipment or what they say in their book discussion since the children are around. But that doesn't mean that they can't do crafts, discuss a book or whatever... it just means they have to take into consideration that children will be around.



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For business meetings, there really shouldn't be any difference in how you run your business meeting, because they should almost always be oriented toward a wide range of mothers so the maximum number of members will want to come. Business meetings give the moms a great chance to meet other mothers outside their child's playgroup. And, because of the greater number of moms at business meetings, you can attract more interesting mom-oriented speakers and discussions.

Therefore, when you plan your business meeting, normally you also plan a children's room where volunteer moms will watch the kids while the other mothers participate in the mother-oriented activity in the other room. Some shared toys, a very simple craft and maybe a story or sing-a-long time, and the motivated volunteer moms should be able to occupy the children for a half hour to an hour.

Of course, some children will want to go check on their mothers in the other room and other moms will have their babies with them. None of our meetings or activities will be a calm, Zen-like refuge from the real world, because we bring our real world (our kids!) with us.

But that's what makes the MOMS Club so accessible to at-home mothers – we accept that we're all mothers and we work with it. If you plan ahead and go with the flow, you should be able to have great mother-oriented topics and speakers, even if the children are there.



Can we ever *not* have the children at an activity?

There are only three times children won't be at your activities.

One is if the activity is specifically planned for mothers whose children are all in school. Because those mothers have other interests than the moms of infants and preschoolers, they can form their own activity groups, as long as all the moms have all their children in school.

The second situation is if your chapter plans a mothers-only activity on the weekend when the husbands are available to watch the children. This should be a very, very rare situation, because your chapter should be encouraging family time, not interrupting it. Therefore, if you have weekend activities – and most chapters do not – most, if not all, weekend activities should be family oriented.

The final situation is if your chapter plans monthly MOMS Nights Out. While most of our MOMS Club activities are during the day, your chapter may plan a maximum of one evening

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activity for the mothers. Normally, infants are allowed to come to these activities with their mothers, although most mothers prefer to leave them at home with their fathers. It is accepted to ask that older children stay home, since these activities usually do not have provisions for child care or play.

What happens if we don't offer mom-based activities during the day?

Unfortunately, lots of bad things can happen. For example:

Members "Age out" of the chapter – you lose valuable members who have a lot to offer, especially to new moms. "Experienced" moms have skills and talents that can be shared with new moms in the chapter. These moms are also great to have around as "an extra set of hands." And, at-home moms of older children need support, too. There's no reason for any at-home mother to age out of our chapters.

Leaving members out – if all activities are child-based, then only mothers with that age children will participate. Mothers with children that are too young or old will be excluded.

Burnout of your active volunteer members – This is a BIGGIE! Finding new, fun and exciting activities for children all the time is difficult. If there's nothing to help the mothers recharge themselves, it can feel like they're running an unpaid preschool all the time. Planning activities for the mother is much easier to do. And, it creates a feeling of sisterhood because you get to know your fellow members better.



A demand for more evening activities – It's really a cry for more mother-oriented activities, speakers and discussions. It doesn't have to be at night, but if that's the only time your moms are feeling fulfilled by your program, that's what they'll start wanting – more evening activities. What they really need and want is more mother-oriented day-time activities, but you'll have to guide them into seeing all the possibilities that they can explore when a MOMS Club offers mom activities during the day!

How do I get our moms to see we're a Club for MOMS, not just for our kids?

Talk it up! Plant the seeds of this idea with your moms by letting them know from the beginning that this is a group for them, not just their kids!

Ask them how many other organizations or community resources are there for at-home moms? You know the answer – very, very few. In most communities, we are the **ONLY** resource for at-home moms.

Remind them how much the community offers their children – usually there are parks and recreation programs, even for preschoolers. There are baby and me classes, schools and preschools, etc...

... But what about the MOTHERS' interests? Where can she go to have her interests and mind stimulated? There's usually only ONE answer for that – the MOMS Club!

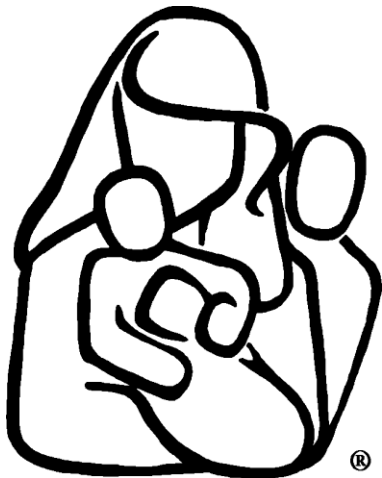
We not only have interesting speakers and programs at our business meetings, but our activity groups allow moms to share special interests. They can exercise, craft, coupon, share books, go to museums – they can do just about anything and share it with other mothers.

And our service projects bring the whole chapter together to help needy children in their community. The planning, doing and seeing the wonderful results of those projects can help revive any mom's bad day.

As you help your members understand that the MOMS Club is for them, ask them what kinds of activities they want. Get them to brainstorm about the activities, outings and speakers they would like – for them. They'll start to see the possibilities and they'll be energized by the ideas. They'll nod their heads, and their eyes will get bigger and brighter. They'll say, "You mean I can have something for ME?"

It's a very exciting concept! Something for the MOMS, not just for the kids!

So start talking it up with your members now, and talk it up with moms who call, even before they join – it's a great reason to join!



*If you have any questions about
either mom-oriented activities
or child-oriented activities
for your chapter, contact
your MOMS Club
Regional Coordinator!*