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Creating the Moms Group You've Been Looking For
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Chapter 1

Why Does a Mom Need Professional Affiliations?



After being a stay-at-home mom for a season, I said to my husband, “I am the only person in my office! Where are my coworkers?” After spending four years in college and then holding down several jobs in the workforce before making the shift to becoming a “Chief Home Officer,” I found the isolation of full-time motherhood almost too much to bear.

I was organizationally challenged—always tripping over clutter. My marriage was struggling with the demands of small children taking priority over my husband. Laundry and dishes seemed to be screaming at me all the time, and I felt I could never keep up with the housework. My children were moving through developmental stages that included temper tantrums, pushing the boundaries, bedtime struggles, and more. *Am I the only mom feeling so overwhelmed?* I asked myself. *I must be, because everyone else seems to have it together,* I concluded. Here I was at home with two small children, feeling emotionally depleted much of the time, and thinking, *I went to four years of college for this?* My vision faded, my energies waned, and my self-worth plummeted.

That was 14 years ago. Now after 20 years of marriage and with five children, motherhood is still my profession. My children range from ages 7 to 18, and I have found that the emotions I experience in motherhood are the same emotions most moms experience. I’ve also learned that I have a huge need in my life to connect with other mothers who are experiencing the same joys and struggles as I am. Over the years I have found my moms groups to be the primary vehicle for connecting with my coworkers, learning about marriage, and sharing the joys as well as the struggles of parenting.

I found myself at home quite by accident. When my husband decided to pursue an advanced degree, our plan included my finding a job teaching music in the local school system. But there were no openings for a music teacher at any grade level in our new community. Because we lived on a college campus, we decided I would offer day care in our home to provide for our family financially. Little did I anticipate that my heart and my life would be changed as I discovered the value of being at home with my children.

We eventually moved again, and I found myself at home with my children in a city where I knew no one. Loneliness set in, and I felt ill-equipped to do this mothering job well.

After meeting a few moms at our new church, I decided to take a risk. I asked eight moms to join me one Wednesday morning to talk about the possibility of having a moms group that would meet weekly. Every mom I invited came that morning. I hired a college student to watch our kids in the basement while we met upstairs and talked about our needs as wives and moms. We decided we would read a book together and talk about one chapter each week. One of the craftier women asked if she could provide a craft project for us every once in a while, and even those of us who were craft-challenged agreed that we would enjoy that on occasion. Another mom offered to organize snacks for the moms and the kids. Little did we know we were on our way to experiencing something that would change our lives forever.

The camaraderie we experienced enriched our lives and helped us realize we were not alone in our profession. The education we received equipped us with knowledge and strategy. The encouragement we provided one another kept us going when we felt like quitting. The friendships that developed extended beyond our Wednesday mornings as we learned how to live life together. The laughter we shared helped us keep our sanity in the midst of the chaos of raising small children. And the tears we shed with one another taught us how to be honest and move beyond surface relationships.

Because coming together once a week was meeting our needs, we couldn't help but share the excitement with other moms. By the end of our first year, our group had grown to 15. By the end of the second year, we had 30 participants, and we no longer fit in my living room. We eventually moved to a church building and saw the group grow to 60 women in the third year. In the years following, the growth continued to more than 150 women attending what we now call Mom2Mom.

Why was there such exponential growth? Because the needs of mothers at home are very real. We no longer live in a society where young mothers are naturally mentored by their mothers or grandmothers. Mom or Grandma may be in the workforce herself and unavailable for one-on-one mentoring and encouragement in the daily struggles a mom faces. Or, in our transient society, they may live too far away to be able to lend such encouragement and assistance. Young women are becoming moms and feeling ill-equipped to handle all that marriage and motherhood require. Many have limited cooking skills. Some struggle to keep a home organized. Still others come into marriage and motherhood with poor interpersonal relationship skills. At the very least, moms face isolation when they are home for a season, because their neighborhoods are empty. Many of their female neighbors are at work outside the home. Moms need a place where they can learn about marriage, motherhood, homemaking, budgeting, and more. They need a place to meet other women who are committed to the profession of motherhood just as they are. Ultimately they need a place where they can be introduced to a God who loves them very much and wants to partner with them in parenthood.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

When I was studying to be a music teacher, I was encouraged to be a part of MENC: Music Educators National Conference. Each time I attended an MENC event, I returned home with new ideas for the classroom, fresh vision for the importance of music education, and an excitement about my at-the-time chosen profession.

In the same way, moms need a professional affiliation that includes events from which they can return home with new ideas, fresh vision for the importance of motherhood, and an excitement about their chosen profession. It's a proven fact that people who are involved in professional development activities are enriched by a sense of "belonging"; they stay in their profession longer. Women who experience a moms group are more likely to be comfortable with their chosen profession of motherhood. They experience a higher level of job satisfaction, and they become better wives and mothers as they are exposed to good resources and teaching about taking care of a family and a home.

When a professional affiliation includes the faith component, a mom is also on her way to understanding the importance of a friendship with God. She experiences an improvement in her quality of life when an eternal perspective is a part of the picture. Most of all, she has the opportunity to hear about a saving relationship with Jesus Christ in a setting that speaks directly to her needs.

FROM MY ♥ TO YOURS

What makes a good moms group? Why did Mom2Mom flourish even when the media told us that being at home was a thing of the past? I believe it comes down to two basic things: addressing felt needs and building solid leadership.

There are many different types of moms groups that you can start or choose to be a part of. Different personalities, different seasons of life, and different needs all factor into choosing which kind of group you want to pursue. Yet the basic components of a healthy group are the same regardless of the size or style. If you are thinking about starting a moms group, my hope is that you will find both encouragement and the practical how-to's to make your vision a reality. If you already are involved in a moms group, my prayer is that you will find fresh vision and new ideas to make your group the best it can be.