

Carren Joye is the author of A Stay-at-Home Mom's Complete Guide to Playgroups. A homeschooling mom of four children, she has founded five successful playgroups and helped start countless other playgroups around the world via the Internet at <http://www.OnlinePlaygroup.com>.

Single Parents Enjoy Playgroups Too!

By Carren W. Joye

As a single parent, your life is a juggling act! You need to meet deadlines at work, to keep up your home, to spend time with your child, and you need some time to yourself - where do you find the time?! What you need is an activity that meets more than one of your needs at the same time.

Try a playgroup to combine time for you and your child. Generally thought to be the exclusive mainstay of stay-at-home moms, playgroups appeal to single parents more and more these days. Many playgroups offer activities on the weekends and more single parents are joining them as well as starting their own playgroups, according to information at OnlinePlaygroup.com, an Internet resource for finding, starting and managing a playgroup.

Sure, participating in a playgroup may mean fitting another activity into your busy week, but single moms - and dads! - agree that the payoff is worth it. Take a look at some of the benefits for single parents and their children.

Free or Low Cost Entertainment

All parents need a break now and then, but many don't have the extra money to spend on babysitters or on going out. Whether meeting in each other's homes or at a central location like a park, spending time with friends in a playgroup doesn't have to cost a cent! Most neighborhood playgroups do not charge membership dues at all. Playgroups offer the opportunity for single parents to get that weekly break from home and work, and yet spend time with their children at the same time.

For entertainment on a regular basis, the playgroup is unmatched! Weekly playgroups provide an enjoyable diversion where the children can play with friends while their moms talk or where all the members enjoy a structured mom-child activity. Even babies enjoy watching older children play.

Time with Your Peers

At a playgroup, you socialize with your peers. The other members face the same struggles that you do with juggling career, home and family. In the give and take

environment of a playgroup, parents have a chance to seek parenting advice, share experiences, and see other parenting methods firsthand. In today's society many new mothers not only have postponed having children, but also have moved great distances from their families and friends. They no longer have that built-in support system that all new moms need. Playgroups fill that gap.

Friendship

Even if you don't have a playgroup nearby designed specifically for single parents, any local playgroup would give you a chance to make new friends and network. Indeed, friendship is perhaps the greatest reward of joining a playgroup. Many adults find lifelong friends in their playgroups.

Babysitting Co-op

Many playgroups offer babysitting co-ops as a benefit for their members. A babysitting co-op consists of a number of families in a community who decide to share babysitting among themselves without the exchange of money. The co-op is used for errands and doctor's appointments and could even be used for weekends so parents could go out without the hassle of finding a sitter and the expense of paying for one. The parents feel more comfortable knowing their children are watched by an adult they know and by someone with whom the children feel comfortable as well.

"Moms all over have discovered how best friends make the best babysitters," says Gary Myers, author of *The Smart Mom's Baby-sitting Co-op Handbook*.

Help During Personal Need

In addition to babysitting co-ops, many groups offer "in-a-pinch" services. What if you can't get to the daycare on time to pick up your child one afternoon? What if your toddler comes down with a fever and you can't reschedule that important business meeting? Many parents find it convenient and comforting to have someone whom they know and trust that they could call at the last minute. In addition, through playgroup, their children know and feel comfortable with that other adult as well.

Low Stress Parent-Child Activity

Although most children of single parents already attend a day care where they learn to socialize, a playgroup provides different atmosphere for socialization. Many of the children in playgroup will likely be in their classes when school starts, especially if the group is composed of neighborhood residents. Plus, since a playgroup is not a babysitting service, parents stay with their children. That means no worries with separation anxiety! The children can play and have fun without having to worry about

mom leaving. Not to mention, if the playgroup offers structured activities, it's 100 percent quality time with your child!

Sharing, Borrowing and Exchanging

Many playgroups offer various barter systems, where members exchange goods and/or services with other members. These can include coupons, children's clothes, and other baby items as well as services such as mowing the lawn, painting a room, or sewing clothes.

Discounts

Many local businesses offer discounts for non-profit groups, allowing playgroup members to save money at the stores they frequent. That could come in handy for single parents on a budget!

Community Involvement

Many parents' groups and playgroups schedule field trips and other special events regularly. Their members get a chance to see the local sites and learn more about the area in which they live. Some groups even become involved in the community through various service projects.

Single parents need playgroups as much as their stay-at-home counterparts. For yourself and for your children, go out today and look for a local playgroup. If you can't find one or if it doesn't suit your needs, start your own! You and your children will be glad you did.