# Parent Homeschool Co-op Information

This page provides information on how you as a parent can organize activities with others in your community. HCOS encourages families to connect with each other in support of your children's academic, physical, emotional and spiritual growth and development.

A homeschool Co-op is a parent initiative in which parents share their love of learning with a group of students and also share organizational and instructional responsibilities with other homeschooling parents.



## Why a Homeschool Co-op?

There are many benefits to planning a homeschool Co-op:

- Social activities for both kids and parents
- Various parents can teach their expertise and passion
- Students build and practice collaborative skills
- Builds a personal homeschool support system
- Students get to experience learning at home and with friends
- Some subjects and activities are just more fun in a group!

Families should share learning samples and completed work from the Co-op to their HCOS support teacher.

## How to Start a Homeschool Co-op

Homeschool Co-ops come in many different forms. It can be as simple as a few families getting together at a park for social interactions or going for bike rides, walks, hikes and group field trips. Co-ops can also be a few families meeting at home and rotating teaching responsibilities for a subject or two. Or it can involve hiring a series of professional teachers that are able to instruct a variety of subjects in a church or community centre. Homeschool Co-ops are a great way to share the work of home educating your children with a group of other like minded families.

## Set the Purpose of Your Homeschool Co-op

Are you just looking for a way to socialize with other homeschool families? Do you want to create a way for students to explore electives? Do you want to meet outdoors and explore nature?  Is there a specific age or grade level that you want to include? Maybe your purpose is that you need to switch off teaching days with other families so that you can work outside of the home.

The very first step in starting a homeschool Co-op is to **set the purpose**. Whatever your goals are for your Co-op, it is important to be clear about your purpose which will guide the rest of your start-up decisions. Being clear about your purpose will help you find and attract families to join you who share with similar goals. This can save frustration further on.

## Decide on a Format

Homeschool Co-ops come in many different formats. A few questions to consider are:

- How many classes or activities do you want to offer?
- How often do you plan to meet?
- Will there be social activities, educational opportunities, or a mix of both?

In general, you want to meet often enough to fulfill your purpose and to enable  friendships and connections to form.



## Find Members for Your Homeschool Co-op

You need at least one other family to form a homeschool Co-op so you need to decide how you want to find members. Be clear on the purpose of the group and intended ages/grades you are looking for.

If you already have a few homeschool friends and want to form a small Co-op, it may be as simple as asking your friends if they are interested. You can also advertise on the HCOS facebook group, check out homeschooling facebook groups in your area, ask around at church with home educating families or meet other families at face to face Learning Camps and form a connection.

## Find a Location for Your Homeschool Co-op

The size and purpose of your Co-op will help determine the perfect location for your group. For example, if the purpose of your homeschool Co-op is purely social you might want to choose a local park to meet at each week. Eg. park days on Mondays and/or field trips on Fridays If there is an educational component to the homeschool Co-op you may want to consider meeting indoors, such as someone's home or a church

Larger groups can usually rent space from churches, but this normally carries a cost. Sometimes churches are happy to rent out their Sunday School classrooms during the week. If you choose to go this route be sure to ask the church a few questions before signing a contract:

- Do you need to carry separate liability insurance? (LG/HCOS does not provide this for homeschool Co-ops)
- Is there a cost? If so, will you be billed only for days you use the classroom or will you be charged a set amount each month?
- What are the usage restrictions (food, noise, messy activities, etc.)?
- Are parents required to stay on campus?

Homeschool Co-op purpose, size, and budget are important factors in selecting the right location.

## Insurance Considerations

If you are running a co-op in your home, contact your insurance provider to make sure you have adequate coverage.

If choosing a location that requires liability insurance, speak with the facility manager of the location for information on how to obtain the needed insurance.

## Choosing Homeschool Co-op Teachers

There are two main options in terms of Co-op teachers:

- Parents of Co-op students
- Hire a teacher or service provider

Choosing parents within the homeschool Co-op to teach is an easy choice. They are already committed to your group and are generally happy to teach a class for free, especially if their

children are also attending the class. Another great option is to hire a teacher or service provider who are generally very passionate and skilled in the subjects they choose to teach. Since hiring a teacher or service provider will carry an expense, it's important to discuss this decision with the group.

## Set a Price

The price of your homeschool Co-op is directly related to the expenses.

Possible Co-op expenses include:

- Location costs (+ insurance if required)
- Teacher fees
- Supplies and materials
- Field trip fees (eg. admission fees)

You want to make sure that you are fairly sharing the costs through the homeschool Co-op. Setting a price is easy and straight-forward for small homeschool Co-ops of just a few families. It gets more complicated for a large Co-op where students are selecting different classes, so it may be best to avoid too large of a group to keep costs low (or free!). 2-3 families is a good size to start with for most Homeschool Co-ops.

## Choose the Homeschool Co-op Classes

You are not limited to traditional school subjects. Feel free to get creative! If your kids are interested in learning a specific topic, there is a good chance other kids are interested too.

Some homeschool Co-ops follow selected curriculum, and others make it up as they go. Either option can work well depending on your group's needs and learning styles. If the Co-op is teaching an academic core class like language arts, math, science, or history, they usually ask students to do some work at home and the rest in the Co-op.

> Communicating with your support teacher about curriculum resources is a great way to ensure that you have a solid plan for getting your kids engaged in learning.

## Agree on Homeschool Co-op Rules

Every family has different ideas about how to best run a homeschool Co-op. It is best to agree on some rules right from the beginning.

Think about:

- Can parents leave during class or do they need to stay?
- What happens if there are behavior problems?
- How much notice is needed to cancel a class?
- How will inclement weather be handled?

- Who is ultimately in charge of the Co-op?
- If there is a fee, what is the refund policy?

Thinking through some of these issues can help prevent problems in the long run.

> For most Co-ops, having no fees except for field trips or basic supplies is a great option. Resources can be shared or purchased by each individual family. This keeps the Co-op experience uncomplicated. However, many successful Co-ops have run with up-front fees. It takes excellent communication and organization to set it up.

## Set a Schedule

Once you have a location selected, teachers have been chosen, and classes planned, you need to set a schedule. Plan at least a semester at a time so people can make plans.

Setting the schedule for a small Co-op involves sitting down with a calendar and marking off the dates you will have Co-op classes. Note any holidays so you don't need to reschedule those classes later.Then choose the times your Co-op will run (eg 10am - 12pm or 1pm-2pm etc).  Send the dates and times to all of the homeschool families so they can plan accordingly. Finally, fill in your times with what you will be doing (eg. Group playing at jungle gym 10am - 10:30am, walk in the park 10:30-11am, Art 11am - 11:30am, Bible study 11:30am - 12pm)

Setting up the schedule for a larger Co-op is a little bit more work simply because there are more classes. To set up the schedule for a large Co-op, we recommend using google calendar. This lets teachers add their classes to the calendar. Parents can view the calendar from their computer or phone.

If one of your homeschool Co-op goals is socialization, be sure to schedule some field trips and park days too. Some field trips (eg. museums, science centres) require advance planning, so it is good to get them on the calendar early.

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