

Parenting Groups – Why Should I Join In?

I have lived in Red Deer for almost eleven years and feel very much a part of the community.

It was not always that way. I moved here with my husband and toddler and did not know a soul in the community.

The hours are very long when you are a stay-at-home mom in a new city. I would go to the mall in hopes of having an adult conversation and would talk about zucchinis with anyone who looked my way in the grocery store. The days were endless. I enjoyed the time that I had with my son but I wanted him to be interacting with other children as well.

I met a mom and she told me about a Parenting Program by the name of "Toddler Talk." I was excited that there potentially could be parents out there feeling just like me. I was scared at first to go to the program. I knew no one and I would have to leave my son with childcare workers that I did not know. But the people at the grocery store were getting tired of me lurking in the produce aisle waiting to talk to them about produce.

I attended my first session. It was amazing! There were 10 parents (including one dad) that had small children and they all had similar feelings to mine. They felt isolated at home, they did not feel that they were doing a good job as a parent and they really needed some adult conversation. I knew that I had found a place of comfort and that I could fit into this community. I picked my son up and he had such a big grin from playing with all sorts of new toys and making new friends. It was great to have something in my daytimer to look forward to.

My son and I attended various programs for over 4 years. I learned about parenting, relationships and myself during this time. My son learned how to play with others and to enjoy different experiences. We both learned how to overcome separation anxiety.

I look back fondly at those years and am so not surprised to see parenting groups sprouting up everywhere.

I Googled the phrase 'Mom's groups' and came up with 20,900,000 hits and 'Dad's groups' generated another 15,500,000.

There are formal and informal Parenting groups. Every individual has a different reason for wanting to become part of a bigger group. But usually the common denominator is being a parent and wanting to connect with others.

Parenting groups should meet your family's needs. Groups that you want to attend should have some guidelines for participants to follow to ensure fair and equal treatment of all participants. Parents must have an open mind and not judge other parents and be flexible in how the group grows.

Parents should try and contribute to the groups by providing input and volunteering to help out where needed. The most successful groups are where members are active and committed to coming on a regular basis. Group members should be willing to spread the word about the group to ensure that new members are brought into the group. This helps as people's lives and needs change.

There are many different parenting groups that are offered in the Red Deer area. Family Services of Central Alberta offers parenting groups where the families stay and play together as well as opportunities for parents to enjoy some adult conversation while their children enjoy playtime with our childcare staff. The centre offers programs for dads, young moms, newcomers to Canada and a variety of other groups. The groups are offered at various times including evening and weekends.

Parenting groups can also take place at the mall with such programs as Mom's Morning Out and Babies Day Out or in the park with a program such as Park Passport.

Parenting groups can be of any size and shape. It just takes one parent talking to another parent and the possibilities are endless.

By Valdene Callin

Valdene Callin is a Parent Link and Marketing Coordinator at Family Services of Central Alberta.

For more information on the parenting groups offered by Family Services of Central Alberta please visit our website at www.fsca.ca or call 343-6400.