



## Introduction to On-Going PEPS Groups

**WELCOME** to the Ongoing PEPS Group Bulletin! Now that you have completed the formal twelve week portion of PEPS, it is our hope that you have decided to stay connected as a group and continue to grow the community we've helped you create. PEPS would like to continue to be a resource for you as we believe parents need all the support they can get on their journey through parenthood.

PEPS Groups that continue to meet come in all shapes and sizes; some still follow a formal weekly meeting format while others just meet for potlucks or the occasional Parents Night Out. Some groups have a fully functioning babysitting co-op while others have morphed into book groups. Whatever format your group takes, enjoy the ride and try to stay with it through the ups and downs. You will find the friendships that continue to develop to be rewarding and like no other. Parenting is an adventure, one that is definitely worth sharing!



**PEPSNET:** within a week or two of the ending of your formal group session, you will receive an email inviting you to join PEPSNET, our social networking site which is hosted by BigTent. (You can also go to <http://www.pepsgroup.org/parents/ongoing-peps-forum> to sign up now.) PEPSNET is full of great resources for you – read on to learn more about some of them!

### On-Going PEPS Group Manual

We have developed a guide book to get you started on your “OPG” experience. It is available to download from the files section of PEPSNET. We also have lots of great articles there, including ideas for places to go (community centers, parks, gardens), things to do (start babysitting co-ops, toys for the older baby), and helpful hints (on potty training, swine flu, and more.) PEPSNET is also the first place we announce upcoming events to give you first dibs on signing up!

### SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT

All OPG's have access to our list of guest speakers: Some of our most popular speakers include those on nutrition, sign language, financial planning and couple relationships. Speakers have lots of great information to impart and love coming to PEPS Groups. Look on PEPSNET for the list.

# What are On-Going PEPS Groups like?

There are as many answers to that question as there are on-going PEPS Groups. But, to give you a few ideas, we met with some groups to learn more about them:

## ONGOING PEPS GROUP PROFILE #1:

PEPS had the opportunity to spend some time with the PEPS Group of Erin Arguelles. What's unique about them is that they are a village raising their children. It was a bit difficult trying to determine whose child belonged to who because all of the parents responded to all of the children. They were just one big happy family! What follows below is a brief interview with Erin.



Q. How long has your group been meeting and how often do you meet currently?

A. We've been meeting for nearly a year and a half. We celebrated our 1 Year Anniversary at the end of July. We meet every other week (at alternating homes) for dinner and playtime. We also have group activities such as trips to the Zoo and Science Center; we have very important Mom's Nights Out; and some of our families even spend vacations together.

Q. Why do you think your PEPS group has continued to meet?

A. The families in our group are an amazing fit for each other! We are all close in age, and have similar interests and backgrounds. We often wonder how PEPS did such an incredible job matching us up! We are all good friends and our children seem to think we are just one big family.

Q. When you first joined PEPS, did you think you would have this kind of experience?

A. PEPS came highly recommended to me by people who had formed close bonds with their groups. My husband and I were hoping to have the same experience and make friends with other new parents. The friendships we have formed are even stronger than we could have imagined. To me, PEPS means peer-support as a new parent, friendship, fun, and great dinners.

## ONGOING PEPS GROUP PROFILE #2:

This winter we had the opportunity to meet a fabulous PEPS group. They have been meeting for twelve years! After spending nearly an hour laughing with this group of lively ladies at one of their monthly dinners, it was clear why they are still so connected. Basically PEPS provided them with the framework to get the peer support they needed when they had those little tiny babies years ago. Now, they have friendships that require a once a month dinner, well, just because. Group members are all different yet have shared many of the same challenges when it comes to parenting. Two of them moved away and came back, only to run into one of their former PEPS members and rejoin the group without skipping a beat. Others have had children in the same classroom at school, but they didn't realize it until they ran into each other at parents' night. They have also supported each other during difficult times. But mostly, it seemed to us that they laughed and shared some pretty great memories! Now isn't that what PEPS is all about?



Catherine Stine, Belinda Kindschi, Ann Norton, Amy Svetich, Erica Jonlin, Lisa Cummings

## ONGOING PEPS GROUP PROFILE #3

Anita Tourginay has been meeting with her group for 21 years and they are still going strong! Over the past 21 years, their friendship has evolved into one that is like no other.

Q: Why do you think your group has stayed together for so long?

A: I think that there really has to be a desire to stay together and for us there was. We get together every two months or so for dinner. Usually one of us will send out an e-mail and we meet up. Sometimes our leader even comes!



Q. Why was PEPS so important to you?

A. PEPS really created a community and it also created a place where we could find common ground with others regarding our stories about our babies. You know how you have friends who don't have babies when you do? Well there is only so much that they want to hear about how much you are feeding your baby, how the baby is sleeping etc. before they don't want to hear it anymore. With PEPS, it's all about the babies.

Q. Would you say that you would rely on your PEPS friends for support?

A. I would definitely rely on them for support. They may not be my best friends, but they offer great support and I know that they will always be there for me. We went through divorces, post partum depression, and moves. We have a common bond that will always be there. Our children even see each other occasionally. The people in my group will remain my friends for life!

## Does it always go smoothly for all On-Going PEPS Groups?

No! Just like any community, challenges can arise, so we also want to share some ideas for you about how to get past some common hurdles.

## GROUP TUNE-UP #1: Different Nap Times

Q. My PEPS group seems to be struggling with a good time to meet. The babies all nap at different times and everyone seems to be late to our meetings or they don't come at all. What can we do to meet everyone's needs?

A. Struggling with sleep issues is a common problem when PEPS groups continue to meet. Here are some tips that have worked for other groups.

- Try shifting your group up by a half an hour,
- Alternate mornings with afternoons every other week you meet so those who can't make it one week can make it the next,
- Change your evening group to a weekend get-together for brunch or a potluck.
- Keep your time the same and make the meetings longer, but have someone stay after and help clean up.

Regardless, try to get to the meetings you can make, and keep having those parents night out. Eventually, you'll be on track and able to meet again at a time that works for everyone.

## GROUP TUNE-UP #2: Location Challenges

**Q:** We seem to meet only at the same people's houses and it seems like some of the members never want to meet at their house. I've hosted three times in a row and frankly, I'm getting tired of it. What can we do?

**A:** Many times as babies start moving around and growing into toddlers, it becomes a bit more stressful for moms and dads to imagine hosting a meeting. Not only do you have to baby proof your house, chase after your baby for the whole meeting, and clean up after meetings. Time for talking with your PEPS friends has changed. Some houses are simply not suited to having a group of toddlers and parents in them and some people may feel too stressed out to host. In some groups where only a few of the houses are suitable for the group, those members host, but other members bring snacks and help with clean-up after the meeting.

What groups tell us that have weathered through this tough time is that often they decide to meet elsewhere. One group we know of meets every week in a church that one of the members belongs to. Many groups go to drop in play times at community centers (For a list of community centers, check PEPSNET). Some groups will go to malls where there are children's play structures. Some groups just let the member whose turn it is to host decide where they are going to meet. The King County/Snohomish area has many child friendly places where people can take their children during the fall and winter. We even know of a group who meet outside year-round as long as it's not pouring down rain!

The most important thing is to sit down and talk about it with your group. Have a night out without your children and plan for how you now want things to go. Some groups will opt for one potluck a month and then have weekend outing once a month as a way to meet everyone's needs.

## GROUP TUNE-UP #3: Losing Focus

**Q.** We have a great PEPS Group. In fact, we spend a lot of time outside of the group going on walks together, or meeting for coffee. A lot of us have become friends and we just end up spending time together. Now, when we meet for our PEPS Group, it just feels like a big play group and it's not as meaningful as it used to be. We don't even do the highs and lows anymore.

**A:** It's great that your group has such strong connections with one another, but sometimes when that happens, it's easy to go overboard! This is not an uncommon occurrence and can be one of the reasons a PEPS group actually splits up. There are several things you can do.

One approach is to have your PEPS Group meet formally once a month and do your highs and lows during that meeting, and then have casual playdates between those meetings. By meeting once a month it won't seem like you are doing too much and it might make the time together a bit more meaningful. You can also either schedule a speaker-librarians are great- or you can try bringing up a topic. It might be tough if you have toddlers, but if you come prepared, it could be easier to do than you think. You can also skip your meetings all together and have your moms'/dads'/parents' night out without the kids. It's a nice way to be able to connect with one another as a group to find out what's going on in each other's lives. Many groups have moved on to monthly potlucks or breakfasts. Sometimes they invite speakers to come and pool babysitters or a couple of the moms or dads will watch the kids while the speaker is talking. Some groups also choose to forgo the formal meetings and just meet as friends.

## GROUP TUNE-UP #4: Personality Conflicts

**Q:** We have a member in our group that people don't get along with. Some of us are thinking of quitting the group and meeting without that member. Do you have any suggestions?

**A:** Believe it or not, this is something that has come up from time to time with PEPS groups and people call us, trying to figure out what to do. People love PEPS because it provides them with the support and friendship they need when they have a new baby. Keep in mind that the very person that your group may be having a problem with, is just as much in need of that support and companionship as everyone else. Often times, they need it more and they aren't aware of the impact they have on the group.

One of the ideas that people have used to make things work is for one person in the group is to talk with them about the things you really like about them and how they contribute positively to the group. Then check in with them to see if they need anything and see how things are going for them. The person may open up to you for assistance. If this doesn't work and the person is taking up all the time and draining people in the group, start off, again with the positive qualities of the person and very gently let them know that there are some issues within the group and see if you and that person can address the issues together. If that doesn't work, then the group may have to ignore the situation. The best thing you can do is have open communication as a group and if all else fails, call the community outreach coordinator for a little support!

## GROUP TUNE-UP Summary:

We know that there are predictable transitions that are challenging for On-Going PEPS Groups to manage, that often lead to a group dissolving. These include: members going back to work, the birth of second babies, one of the couples going through divorce, and starting pre-school or kindergarten. During those challenging times, the keys to staying together are: committing as a group to the importance of staying connected, being flexible and adaptable, but still making sure everyone's top priorities for the group are honored as the groups' definition changes.

## GIVING BACK – PAYING FORWARD

*“PEPS gave me support, encouragement, a shoulder to cry on and people to share the little tiny wonders of my son that only another mom could enjoy. Most importantly though, PEPS gave me a place to feel safe when I was questioning everything I was doing and friends that, no matter how old my kids get, I will remember forever.” ~ Allison Jones, 2003 PEPS Group participant*

12 weeks ago you entered a room full of other parents and their infants - perhaps not knowing what to expect. Just like thousands of other parents who participated in PEPS programs over the years, you’ve grown into a community; you’ve shared the Highs and Lows of one of the most challenging and vulnerable times in your life; and you have learned valuable parenting skills from the other parents, your facilitator and guest speakers.

For 28 years people whose lives have been changed by PEPS have given back so that other parents can have similarly powerful experiences. Today, we would like to encourage you to consider giving back:

- Volunteer to be a Group Leader: Over 1,700 new parents like you rely on dedicated volunteers each year. Our volunteers tell us they find great joy and satisfaction in helping parents connect and share through their PEPS Groups! If you are interested, contact Volunteer Coordinator Cate Palmer at 206.547.8570 ext 15 or [catep@pepsgroup.org](mailto:catep@pepsgroup.org)
- Donate: PEPS is a nonprofit organization and receives no government funding. Your fee represents less than one-half of the direct cost of PEPS. Donations from past PEPS Groups members keeps PEPS alive and thriving, supporting new parents every day. Visit <http://www.pepsgroup.org/support/Donate> for how you can make YOUR donation.
- Tell your friends: PEPS would LOVE to serve more families! Most families come to us through word of mouth – they learn about PEPS from their friends, family, and co-workers – people like you who share the word about our programs.