

Some families absolutely love co-op and some families can't make it work. That's okay; co-ops don't "fit" every family. However, after comparing families who sign up semester after semester at our co-op with those who breathe a sigh of relief on the last day, I have determined a few tips that may help co-op fit your family a little better.

1. Make co-op subjects an integral part of your homeschooling as much as possible. If your child takes world history, biology, and creative writing at co-op, don't have him do U.S. history, physical science and another creative writing curriculum at home. Being at co-op one day a week limits the remaining days for "book learning," so make those co-op days count! Our family follows co-op subjects for history and science, and we use our time at home for math and other subjects not offered at co-op. The goal is to let co-op lift your burdens, not create more.

2. Relinquish some control. Understand that another parent may not teach a certain subject the way you would. Instead, at home focus on those subjects not offered at co-op, or just don't sign up for those courses you want to maintain control over, or even better, volunteer to teach or help in those subjects about which you feel most passionate. For example, I knew I wanted control over how my children learned to write essays, so I volunteered to teach their composition classes.

3. Make attendance a priority. Don't let anything, except illness, interfere with going to co-op. If at all possible, schedule appointments between co-op dates and plan vacations during co-op breaks. Not only will your children learn more if they are actually in class, but also you are more likely to be remembered if others see you on a regular basis, and their names and faces will become recognizable to you much sooner.

4. Arrive early. Punctuality is noted and appreciated no matter where you go! Plus, many co-ops start off with a little fellowship time before classes begin, and that's a good opportunity for you and your children to develop friendships or get to know someone new.

5. Participate in as many other activities as possible. Sign up for field trips, go on the moms' nights out, organize an upcoming activity, volunteer to co-teach a class. When there is a group effort to help someone, such as taking meals to a new mom, sign up even if you do not know the person. Active participation will establish you and your family not only as part of the co-op but also as part of the community.

6. Find out what needs to be done, and offer to do it. Everyone welcomes a little help now and then, or you may see a need that others have overlooked and that you are perfectly suited to fill. If that's the case, jump in and take the initiative! The Lord has given you a different perspective and unique skills and talents to bring to the group. All organizations welcome fresh ideas and new approaches, so share your thoughts and ideas.

7. Introduce yourself to one or two of the other parents and try to get to know them. If you click with someone else or if your child makes a new friend, plan an activity together before the next co-op date. Invite another parent and her child over one afternoon to bake cookies or to play at the park. Then you and your child will feel even more comfortable at co-op because you will know someone else just a little better.

8. Read any guidelines, FAQs, and online or printed materials the co-op may have about its policies and procedures. If you can talk to a current member, do that, too. Ask questions, and share what you find out with your children. Only by learning about the co-op can you then decide if co-op will be a good fit for your family. Plus, the more you and your children know about co-op in advance, the more likely it will meet your expectations and the more comfortable your family will be when classes start.

9. Don't give up just because the co-op does not fit perfectly at first. For example, there will likely be parents with different education or discipline methods; you do not have to agree with them. Although you may be fortunate enough to find a like-minded group, you will expand your mind when you learn from those who are different from you. Besides, successful co-ops do not require that members have everything in common.

Just a little effort on your part will go a long way to make co-op fit your family. And if you can make co-op work for you, it will be an enormous blessing to your homeschooling. Good luck!



About the Author:

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