

Homeschool Co-op Guidance

If you have ever wondered, “Should I join a homeschool co-op?” “Should I help or *form* a co-op?” Then this free resource is for you!

Should I Join a Homeschool Co-op?

There are several major considerations before you join a homeschool co-op:

- Will we have time for co-op and still get all our regular schooling done?
- Will we agree with all that the co-op teaches? Other parents discipline differently, use other materials, may be Christian but not Lutheran, etc.
- What we do about curriculum?

Scheduling

One of the wonderful things about homeschooling is the flexibility. As a homeschooler, you are free to homeschool on a school-like schedule, such as a quarter or semester system, or you can do your own thing. Some people school year-round, and, before you gasp, they may still have the same amount of school days that you do, just by taking different breaks.

My personal experience resulted in a four and a half day school week anyway, since several of my children had speech appointments and piano. For a family my size, that ate up either an entire morning or an entire afternoon. Gradually, we got used to it and still got a week’s worth of schooling done, often in four days because, frankly, for us, if we don’t homeschool in the morning, it was just very difficult to get work done in the afternoon.

As we transitioned out of speech and into co-op, we kept to a four-day school week with our regular curriculum, and embraced a different sort of day, in our case, on Mondays.

Co-ops can be different lengths of time. Many are morning or afternoon only, while others last a full school day. My co-op has subjects in the morning, a long, social lunch together, and then we clean up and part ways around 1pm.

Does a four-day *home* schedule make daily work, like math and languages, harder? It may. At the same time, your children may still prefer having co-op than having that extra day to get assignments done.

Does it mean that our math curriculum lasts a bit longer than our once a week subjects? Yes. Our math curriculum always seems to go longer (even though they do math in co-op, too, so it truly is daily!). Languages, too, sometimes continue in the summer for a little bit, whether it is a grammar course, Latin, or anything else. Still, even young children can understand that this is the sort of thing that happens.

Teacher Agreement

Gathering with homeschooling families is *great*. Still, homeschoolers are *not* a homogeneous group! Not only are there different beliefs about what is true, there are also different beliefs about how to teach and what to teach.

We will address secular, Christian, and Lutheran co-op differences below, but I'd like to offer this perspective followed with a word of encouragement. As Lutherans, we want our children grounded in the Truth. To us, that means Christ and God's Word! We want them to learn, *and practice*, discernment pretty much as quickly as possible. At the same time, we want to teach them to see things with clarity before issues seem to grow cloudy and complicated.

Ultimately it is God who raises us up. It is God who helps us to discern, and it is God who helps our children to grow in both body and understanding—and God is not bound by any curricula or educational philosophy. God raises up with His Word, His Spirit, His Son. God raises up with Baptism and the Lord's Supper. He also lets us help one another, even to the point of hiding His own activity behind our human ways.

Homeschool co-op teachers should be able to respect one another, and parents should know what to expect from co-op teachers and the curriculum they use. Furthermore, if any sort of conflict comes up, there should be a way to discuss it without agitating the entire group.

If discipline may be necessary, be sure that rules are clear before the homeschool co-op begins. Discuss what are accessible forms of punishment. But, honestly? If all the parents stay during co-op, parents remain the disciplinarians. "Get the parent" affirms parenting and its roles in education as well as the household.

Secular, Christian & Lutheran Co-ops

If you are anything like me, you are not surrounded by a glorious host of fellow Lutheran homeschoolers. Your homeschool co-op options may be secular or Christian.

I won't discount secular co-ops out of hand. There are different types of co-op. If a secular co-op consists of arts & crafts, a foreign language, woodworking class, and a sports hour, that's a drastically different thing to consider than a co-op that centers on evolutionary science, right?

As for Christian co-ops, I would ask about what prayers or worship may be included. I would likely even ask about what Christian images would be included, because I don't need my five year old asking about why women are dressed up like pastors.

Even Lutheran co-ops can have very different ideas of what prayers and worship should look like. Will there be chapel? Will a pastor lead it? I don't mean to imply that a Lutheran co-op is actually more complicated than a non-Lutheran one. At the same time, parents can disagree about which hymns to learn. The higher the expectations, and the more assumptions about how much is held in common, the more complicated things can get.

Our congregation allows our Christian co-op to meet on church property. Before we got started, I said all prayers said on these grounds need to be to the Triune God. "Do we all worship the Trinity?" This surprised them. "Yes, but what do you mean. Do all prayers start by addressing each Person or something?" "No, but my family and this church worships the Trinity: not Mother Spirit or any other human ideas." "Oh. Ok! That's fine."

I also said we need to avoid saying people decide for Jesus. Basically, all religious material comes from the parents except for the stuff in the agreed upon curriculum or from read aloud material approved by parents.

We say Luther's Table Prayer before lunch. There haven't been any problems, because we worked through concerns before we agreed to start.

What about Curriculum?

Personally, I think homeschool co-ops can be pretty great. There are also a *wide* variety of co-op styles to choose from. Originally, I hoped to find essentially a group of people for play dates and field trips. What I eventually found turned out to be more like a mixture of tutoring and broad overview with socializing and field trips.

While I would love a co-op that is a) local, b) Lutheran, and c) following my every choice of curriculum, I haven't experienced that yet. Our co-op consists of four or five families, each family teaching a single subject. We plan a lunch, so that everyone brings part, and either a free parent or the older class makes lunch. It has worked out well.

Our co-op is small, and every year we make a plan for the following year. We more or less agree on curriculum, and it is much simpler than I originally expected.

No joke. Every single family uses different curriculum and has its own educational philosophy. So, for math, everyone brings their own math books and the teacher walks around, tutoring them. Often that follows an opening like calendar time and skip counting with the littles or math fact reviews with the middles and olders. (We currently have three sections that rotate so each parent also has a free time slot.)

For science, there is an emphasis on labs and hands on work.

For language arts, we do some grammar and spelling. With the littles, we read aloud.

For history, the teacher reads from a history book we've all agreed to, and the history period is always different from whatever is being studied more in depth at home. That way, it is relaxed, broad, but affirming a grasp of history.

Originally, we started with Spanish but we had trouble with only having an actual class once a week. I'm sure it can be done, but that might take some real prep work & follow-up by parents.

Unit studies tend to work fine! I've heard great things about the book, [*How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*](#), for example, and co-op is a great place to have a kids' book club (with a book approved by all the parents.)

I know of one writing program that starts every age out at the same level: [*Write by Number*](#). It basically teaches you how to write a sentence and then follow sentence patterns (like topic sentence and support sentences) until you can write paragraphs and essays. It is mastery-based and doable for co-op, although since it includes the full curriculum it is more expensive than a subject for just a year or two.

If you prefer a broader approach I know of two series that can be helpful. One takes a topical approach, while the other seems to offer a little of everything.

[Everything You Need to Ace . . . in One Big Fat Notebook](#) is topical. The premise is that this is like borrowing the notes from the smartest, most thorough kid in the class. I have not looked through these books extensively, but they obviously exist to highlight basics in a flowing manner. I bought the one for [English Language Arts](#) in hopes that its systematic approach helps me as I teach a variety of families who, again, all are learning different things in different orders.

A broader approach also exists that has been developed, used, and loved since the 1980s: Core Knowledge. (No, this is not Common Core.) [Core Knowledge](#) is a secular resource worth knowing about with many resources available at no cost. Perhaps you have seen books like [What Your Kindergartner Needs to Know](#). There is a [whole series](#) and a very helpful website! Each book contains poetry, stories, history and geography, art, songs, etc. Online you can find the [topics and sequences](#) for each grade. The goal is “preparing your child for a lifetime of learning,” which is great, and this can be a great supplement at home or at co-op. Now, will you agree with everything? I hesitate to say. There is a section on evolution in seventh grade. At the same time, the philosophy behind these books, is [Knowledge-Based Schooling](#), which strikes me as very respectable.

What about Paperwork, Liability, etc?

Paperwork and liability issues are not to be taken lightly. If your congregation is considering hosting a homeschool co-op, they should have a very clear policy about it that can be signed by co-op participants.

In particular:

- If someone gets hurt, you want to be sure that a) someone is responsible, and b) no one and no place will get sued. You may need to look into your congregation’s insurance to see whether non-church activities are covered.
- If anyone takes any pictures, you want to be sure to protect that individual’s privacy. There are *reasons* to not post pictures of children on the Internet, and there are very good reasons to have signed permission slips for just about anything if a parent is not present.
- Do not presume that, because you’re all friendly, you can hug or spank a child. Extreme discernment is best!

If you think about summer camps, you know that there are liabilities with giving children medicine, including over the counter things. A child should always be with someone who can make emergency medical decisions and who has access to the child’s health insurance information. Thankfully, if a parent remains present, that simplifies things tremendously.

But here’s the big one that people sometimes miss! Because of intellectual copyright, you are *not free* to use any old curriculum in a co-op setting. Sometimes you need a license for the year. It’s not hard to get and it’s often not expensive.

Additional Resources

[Homeschool New York has a video on co-ops](#)

Thus Far We know of the Following Lutheran Co-ops

North

- Washington, Spokane: [Hope Lutheran Classical Co-op](#)

East

Midwest

- Indiana, Gary & Hammond, My Sable Village, LLC
- Kansas, Bashor, Risen Savior Lutheran Church

South

- Florida, Clearwater

West

- California, Encinitas, St. Mark Lutheran Church

<https://www.lutheranhomeschool.com/product/homeschool-co-op-guidance/>

Such and Such Co-op

Coordinators: _____

Purposes & Guidelines

This home education cooperative exists for two purposes:

1. To facilitate the formation and maintenance of Christ-centered relationships for homeschooling families.
2. To provide educationally enriching activities for children being educated at home.

Guidelines for membership:

1. Respect the beliefs and practices of the Christian faith:
 - a. Salvation by grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - b. Belief in the Bible as God's inerrant and infallible word and the final authority and guide for everything we believe and do.
For more information on the beliefs and practices of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod please visit www.lcms.org.
2. Whole-hearted commitment to home education by aiming for excellence.
3. Commitment to the well-being of the group by:
 - a. Accepting a fair share of responsibility for planning, carrying out, and cleaning up after group activities.
 - b. Participating in every activity possible and notifying the event coordinator as early as possible when unable to attend.
4. Adherence to the following minimum behavior standards:
 - a. Respect for authority and property
 - b. Attentiveness to those in leadership
 - c. Punctuality
 - d. Kindness to all

Policies & Procedures

1. Co-op hours are from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. on Fridays unless there is a field trip scheduled for that day or other arrangements have been made.
2. Each family is to have an adult present at all times and must be responsible for the safety and behavior of his/her own children.
3. Everyone is to help clean up after each session.
4. If you cannot attend a session for any reason, please contact one of the coordinators ahead of time. If you or your child should become ill the morning of co-op and it's too late to reach a coordinator at home, you may leave a message for them at the church office (316) 722-4694.

5. If your family misses three sessions and/or field trips without contacting the coordinators your membership will be discontinued.
6. Any fees for supplies or field trips must be covered before participation in that activity. All money is nonrefundable.
7. All families are required to arrive 15 minutes before the start of each field trip. That means if the field trip is scheduled from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m., all participants must arrive no later than 9:45.
8. We will not meet if Goddard schools are closed due to inclement weather. If you have any questions, please contact a coordinator.
9. Parents are responsible for keeping the coordinators informed of changes in address, phone number, and email address.
10. Please do not allow your children to bring toys to co-op (unless your family is loaning toys for group use).
11. All snacks brought for personal consumption or to be shared with the group are to be nut free.
12. All sippy cups and diaper bags for infants and toddlers should be labeled.
13. The Student Expectations and Communications Note will be the guideline for disciplining in our classrooms.

Dress Code

The clothing of all participants, children and parents, should:

1. Honor the Lord.
2. Be appropriate and safe for the activities in which we will be engaged.
3. Establish the best possible atmosphere for quality Christian learning.
4. Represent the co-op in our community as a witness for the Lord.

We are in agreement with these purposes and guidelines. We are committed to following the policies and procedures and adhering to the dress code. We understand that we are committing to this group for a period of one school year and at that time we and the group can evaluate our compatibility.

Father: _____ Date: _____

Mother: _____ Date: _____

Level of membership:

field trips only

co-op and field trips