



***The International MOMS Club®
Fact Sheet***

Sister Chapters

Forming sister chapters is a fun way for existing MOMS Clubs to both participate in the International program and to help their own chapter!

Most chapters form sister chapters when their membership nears the 50 members mark. (We've found that the best size for a local chapter is between 30 and 60 members. Larger than that and the chapter becomes too hard to run and too impersonal.)

By forming sister chapters, a large chapter ensures that it isn't overwhelmed. At the same time, the chapter also strengthens itself and helps spread the MOMS Club opportunity to other mothers who might miss out!

Some other chapters form sister chapters because they are so excited about their own MOMS Club that they can't wait to help other mothers start chapters, too!

Those chapters go out to neighboring communities and actively start other chapters. When a chapter feels that strongly about the MOMS Club program, you know they're doing things right in their own club!

Starting sister chapters always helps the original chapter, but, even so, some members are hesitant to help start new chapters. This Fact Sheet will answer some of the questions your chapter may have about forming sister chapters and will give you tips on how to make it work for your chapter!

BENEFITS OF FORMING SISTER CHAPTERS:

There are many benefits to forming sister chapters. Some of those benefits include:

1) It takes the pressure off your chapter to accommodate all the at-home mothers in your area. One chapter simply cannot help everyone if there are many at-home mothers in your area or if mothers are trying to join your chapter from other areas.

2) Meetings work better because you don't have to worry about handling large numbers of mothers and children. You have more choices about where you meet. You only need one room for the children and significantly fewer child care volunteers. (Some large chapters have needed four babysitting rooms and four times the number of volunteers to watch the kids!)

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3) Playgroups become more intimate, babysitting coops work better and other activities are easier to plan because the members come from the same area and live near each other.

4) All the chapters become more personal. Even when it's very well run, it is impossible to make a large chapter truly personal. No matter what a large chapter does to help its members get to know each other, it is simply too easy to be lost in the crowd.

In fact, when a chapter finds that it has to plan special activities for members to meet each other or to get to know moms outside their playgroup, it can be sure it is no longer personal.

5) Participation increases! Large chapters have more difficulty getting their members to participate in meetings and activities than medium-sized chapters, because the members in the large chapter know their individual participation just isn't important.

Although large chapters have more members than small or medium-sized chapters, they often have fewer members who actually participate!

6) More at-home mothers have the opportunity to join the MOMS Club! When there is only one large chapter in a community, many mothers are intimidated by the sheer size of the chapter and don't join. (People may say they like a large chapter, but in truth, crowds scare people.)



Even when a large chapter has stopped growing, it doesn't mean they have reached all the mothers who might want to join - it simply means that mothers have stopped joining the group because of its size! When large chapters form smaller sister chapters, the total number of mothers who join is actually larger than the total number who would join before the sistering!

7) Members feel more of a part of the chapters as a whole and cliques are less important. In large chapters, members turn to their playgroups or activity groups for the support they need as at-home mothers. That turns the playgroups into mini-MOMS Clubs, which become cliques. Cliques can tear a chapter apart if the members feel more a part of their playgroup/clique than they do to the chapter as a whole.

8) Publicity is easier. The media pays more attention to you because the MOMS Club becomes more visible. Also, if a mother in your area misses an article about your particular chapter, she may see an article about another chapter. When she calls that chapter for information, that chapter will tell her about yours, since yours is closer to her. You gain members who might otherwise never hear about you.

9) Chapters keep their community identity and focus. Lack of identity and focus is a special problem when a chapter takes in members from outside its area. When a chapter spreads itself too thin, it short-changes the mothers in its original area.

With sister chapters in neighboring communities or even in different parts of one town, all the chapters do better because their members have more in common due to their hometown/neighborhood connection.

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10) Members have increased pride in the MOMS Club and your chapter! When there are several chapters in an area, members feel more important because they realize they are part of something larger than just a single chapter. They become more proud of your chapter!

11) You gain energy and ideas from the other chapters in your area! As the sister chapters get going, there are always opportunities to join forces for projects and to share ideas. Area-wide park days, Regional Luncheons, and joint service projects have all been done successfully where sister chapters exist!

ARE THERE ANY PROBLEMS IN STARTING SISTER CHAPTERS?

The only obstacle you may face in starting sister chapters is the attitude of some of the members. Here are some reasons why members may try to prevent sister chapters from starting:

1) Fear of Change: The old chapter may not be perfect, but it's known. Who knows what the new chapter will be like? They may be afraid that they won't like it. Any chapter can be whatever the members want to make of it – if the old chapter was good, then the new chapter will be just as good, if not better!

2) Laziness: For people who don't live in your area, but want to join (or stay in) your chapter instead of starting one in their own area, the only excuse is pure laziness. It's always easier to join an existing chapter than it is to start a new one.

By the same token, some people in large chapters like to sit back and let a very few dedicated members do all the work. They're afraid that they might actually have to help if they were in a smaller chapter!

It's true that most people are joiners, not doers, by nature - but it's not fair to the doers or the original chapter for other members to make them do all the work, all the time -- and for an ever increasing number of members! Laziness is no Excuse!

3) A mistaken belief that bigger is always better. Some people (they're usually officers) need to see large numbers of members to feel that the chapter – and they – are important. They don't understand that numbers have nothing to do with quality.

A large chapter starts to have significant problems that people often refuse to realize are a sign they are too large – decreasing participation, invisible members that nobody knows because there are just too many members for everyone to know everyone else, board burn-out – those are all signs that a chapter is too large.

Bigger isn't better... it's just more impersonal.

4) Fear of losing existing friendships: If done properly, starting sister groups won't end any friendships. Instead it will give you opportunities to make new friends and keep the old!

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HOW DO WE GO ABOUT STARTING SISTER CHAPTERS?



It depends on whether you are starting chapters outside your area or if you are sistering your original chapter into two or more chapters. In either case, though, one thing to remember is that your chapter does **not** vote to start a sister group.

For example, if the new chapter is going to be outside the original chapter's area all that is needed is for there to be at least one mother who wishes to start the new chapter – she registers the chapter and together, we'll help her get it going!

If an existing chapter is sistering into two or more chapters, it still does NOT require a vote of the membership. If the membership of the existing group is 60 members or more, the President or Executive Board can simply discuss the situation with International and implement the plan to form sister groups.

If the membership is smaller than 60 members, but the President or Executive Board feels that the growth potential in the area will make the group soon reach the 60-member mark, then again, no vote is necessary - all the Board must do is discuss the situation with International and implement the plan.

Also, if there are two or more “groups” within the original chapter that do not get along and that are making things uncomfortable for all the members, sometimes a good solution to this social problem is to sister into several chapters.

If this is the situation in your chapter, be sure to talk it over with your Coordinator, but sistering can sometimes be the perfect solution when different groups simply do not get along.

TO START A SISTER CHAPTER OUTSIDE YOUR CHAPTER'S AREA:

There are three ways you can do it:

1. A member or members from the original chapter who lives in the sister chapter area registers the sister chapter with International and starts the chapter;

2. The original chapter helps start the new sister chapter by registering the new chapter with International. The original chapter then handles the preliminary publicity for the new chapter and helps run the new chapter's first meeting.

After that, volunteers from the new chapter start to lead the new chapter themselves. Usually there are no formal elections for the first board, which is made up of volunteers. The original chapter gives financial assistance to help the new chapter get off the ground by paying for things like the new chapter's first registration fee, any initial publicity costs and first meeting costs;



3. The original chapter can also colonize a new sister chapter. This is like #2 except that the original chapter handles the new chapter's publicity, planning, meetings and money for the first three months, training the sister chapter's members to take over at that time. Elections for the new chapter are usually held at the two-or three-month point. The original chapter must use special care to let the new members take as much charge as possible so new members will know it's their own chapter!

(Note: So far, no chapter has truly "colonized" another, although several have started out with the intention of doing so. Instead, the new chapters have been so eager to get going that they did not want someone else planning their activities for a couple of months - they wanted to do it themselves!

If this happens, let the new chapter take off on its own! A good rule of thumb is to plan for colonization, but to allow the group to fly on their own wings as their enthusiasm grows and as soon as they are able!)



TO START TWO OR MORE SISTER CHAPTERS FROM ONE ORIGINAL CHAPTER:

If an existing chapter is dividing to form two or more sister chapters, they should register the new chapter(s) with International and keep their International Coordinators informed at all times about their plans.

Either a committee or the Executive Board should study the chapter's membership and the natural boundaries of their town to determine the most logical way to sister the chapter - it can be divided by areas, streets, schools, or zip codes.

Current members are then given a choice of which chapter they would prefer to belong to. New members automatically belong to the chapter closest to their home.

To ease the transition for existing chapters which are forming sister chapters, the easiest time for sistering is usually at the June elections. Plans are made for the sistering before the election and then each new sister chapter elects its own board. At that point, the two chapters are treated as separate chapters.

If an existing playgroup crosses chapter boundaries, each mother in the playgroup chooses her chapter based on her personal needs, not those of the playgroup as a whole. In many cases, this will mean forming new playgroups by chapter to accommodate all the mothers. This is good! It makes room for new members to join in the fun!

When a chapter knows it's going to be sistering in the next year, many chapters find it's easier if they arrange this year's playgroups by the areas they anticipate sistering into. Then when the sistering happens, everyone keeps basically the same playgroups.

Each playgroup member will still make her chapter decision independently, but the chances are that virtually their whole playgroup membership will automatically want go with the closest chapter!

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After the new sister groups are formed, the two chapters can continue to do some activities together if they wish, especially for a transitional period. Park days and MOMS Nights Out work well with several chapters joining together!

As time passes, though, each chapter should develop its own calendar of events and save the inter-chapter activities for special occasions!

If you have any questions about sistering,
talk to the MOMS Club volunteer Coordinator who has been
assigned to help your chapter!

