

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction	2
II. The Support Group Leader	2
A. Experience/Qualifications	
B. The Leadership Type	
III. Beginning a Group from Scratch - plan for growth	5
IV. The Group Purpose	6
A. Having a clear purpose	
B. Possible purposes (good or bad)	
V. The Group Meetings	11
A. Why are you having meetings?	
B. Suggestions to make meetings meaningful and attractive	
VI. Ideas for Home School Parent Group Meetings	13
VII. Group Activity Ideas for Home School Students	15
VIII. Legal Considerations	17
A. HSLDA	
B. Insurance	
C. Liability Prevention	
IX. Problems	18
X. Suggested Calendar for leaders	19

I. INTRODUCTION

This manual has been written with you, the MassHOPE affiliated support group leader in mind. MassHOPE wants your support group to be successful so that families homeschooling in Massachusetts have local help that they can look to for guidance that will be true to God's Word, and activities that will enhance their children's academic work, while keeping an atmosphere that is supportive of a Christian homeschool. We recognize that some groups are open to non-Christian homeschoolers but groups affiliated with MassHOPE have leaders who agree with the MassHOPE statement of faith, and who wish to lead their groups from a Christian perspective that would please our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

II. THE GROUP LEADER

A. Experience and Qualifications

Homeschooling Experience

The Leader of a MassHOPE support group should be a homeschooling parent, or a former homeschooling parent whose children have graduated from homeschooling. This gives the leader the experience necessary to identify with the logistics, pressures, and challenges of homeschooling.

Spiritual Experience

The homeschool support group leader should be a Christian who can subscribe to the MassHOPE Statement of Faith. When leadership exists in a shared leadership style, all those who are considered part of this leadership team should be able to agree to and sign the statement of faith also. This is filed with the Network Director and if leadership changes midyear, the Network Director should be notified. You can always reach the Networking Director via e-mail at Networking@masshope.org. In addition to ascribing to the Christian faith doctrines, any leader should be willing to be the Lord's servant, and therefore a humble, loving servant to His sheep. A leader must always remember that his love for God is modeled by his love for God's sheep.

Leadership Experience

It is not necessary to have leadership experience to lead a support group, but it is necessary that leaders are already leading their own homeschooled children adequately. To lead others to success, we must practice good leadership in our own homes, with our own children, and in their academic work and spiritual training. Leading in God's Kingdom must, when possible, lead by example as well as by exhortation. No homeschool family will be perfect, but if leadership takes precedence over one's own home and the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of one's own family, then the leader needs to prayerfully reevaluate priorities before God.

Permission

A sometimes neglected area to consider is that sometimes we can have all the qualifications for a job, yet lack permission to take on a task, even for the Lord's work. Do not neglect to ask "Is my spouse in agreement with this decision?". There may be a need, and there may be an opportunity, but this can distract you from something else that God wants you to do. Ask God to show you through prayer and agreement with your spouse whether this is something for you as a couple to take on.

B. Leadership Types

Leadership in any organization will be most efficient depending on the size and nature of the group and the personalities and abilities of the leaders. In a Christian homeschool group, there is no one leadership type that is best. Consideration should always be given to the responsibility and pressure on the leadership, especially since support group leaders are not paid, and rarely compensated in any other way for their work. Groups often fail to survive if a leader steps down when that leadership type has been a single person doing all the work. Most homeschool groups are small to medium size (up to 50 families) and there are many factors to consider. Following is a list of types of leadership setups, some of the advantages or disadvantages of the type, and the type of group it is best suited for.

Single Leadership

If you have a strong, available leader, and your group is small (under 20 families), then a single leadership consisting of one married couple is often most efficient. The disadvantage of this type of leadership is that no one is being trained for future leadership unless the leader is consciously grooming someone on the side. The advantage of single leadership is that small everyday decisions are easy to make, and if the group is small, decisions aren't as big and don't usually involve large numbers of people or money. Even in a single leadership situation, it is best to have a separate treasurer if any money is involved, so that there can be no temptation to misuse funds, and no room for accusation of the leader.

Shared Leadership - 2 or 3 leaders

A shared leadership is often preferred by some as it allows for the work and decision making to be shared. This is an advantage if the group is larger and more decisions need to be made by the leadership. Another advantage is that if one leader leaves the group for any reason, there are still leaders in place who know what is going on and can continue the group with little or no interruption. The disadvantage of the shared leadership comes when the leaders do not agree on something important to the group, there are overbearing personalities, there are feelings that get hurt easily, or when the specific areas of responsibility of each leader are unclear. It is always best to have a way to make a final decision if there is a 'deadlock' in the leadership over any issue of

concern to the group. Having this planned before problems occur is always easier. Planning for the worst case scenario may seem unimportant, but when difficulties come, it is so much better to have clearly laid out plans and rules in place.

Tiered Leadership

A tiered leadership style consists of one or more key leaders with a lower level tier of sub-leaders or assistants under their direction. As a group grows, this style of leadership involves a team doing different tasks within the group. This is especially important if a group has large activities such as coop classes, physical education groups, plays, etc. where leadership supervision is needed for these individual areas. This delegation of responsibility for areas of the group's ministry frees the top leader or leaders to supervise the other leaders, and be available to families for more specific needs. This is what I like to think of as the Moses model. When the Israelites were in the desert, Moses was overwhelmed by the amount of needs he was called to address from the people. His father-in-law, Jethro, saw the stress he was under and said to him, "The thing that thou doest is not good, you will surely wear out....." (Exodus 18:18-19). This observation was godly, and Moses was advised to set up leaders under him who were men of character who could take care of the smaller matters to free Moses up for the larger concerns of the people. If a group has more than 10 families it is a good time to start a shared leadership style - this allows leaders to take on supportive leadership roles before the jobs become overwhelming. The tiered leadership also allows for new leaders to be gently groomed by training them in smaller areas to gain confidence and be in a training mode for upper level leadership. A large group without some form of tiered leadership may soon have a burned out leader.

III. BEGINNING A GROUP FROM SCRATCH - PLAN FOR GROWTH

Home Education has had tremendous growth since the 1980's. This growth is still happening, but may not continue at the same rates. To not expect or plan for growth is to deny that others will follow in our footprints and seek to home educate their children. Therefore, if we are wise, and we can reasonably expect numerical growth, plus expect changeover as students graduate and others start homeschooling, then we should have plans for it. These can be plans to find those people we know will be considering the decision to homeschool, or find those who have already made the decision and are just not associated with our group. Nationally, the organization "Considering Homeschooling" (www.consideringhomeschooling.com), is aimed at attracting young parents to consider the discipleship opportunities in the choice to homeschool. Check out their web site for ideas, materials to pass out to young mothers, etc. (There is a leaflet in the reference section of the Leader Notebook. An effective strategy may be to offer to speak to parents of Preschool children's groups. This could be through library programs, church programs, etc. Advertising your group is also a way to grow it numerically, but you must be wary of how this is done. If the advertising is through public pathways - newspaper, public bulletin boards, etc., you may attract a mixed group religiously. Word of mouth advertising should never be discounted. Good, positive, advertising can be done naturally by having activities that are well-done open to the public or covered by local newspapers. If your group does a public service activity, puts on a play, etc., notify the local newspaper so that the group gets some positive press. It can be the job of a family or group of teens to even write something for a local paper with pictures about an upcoming event. Newspapers are usually very open to new local 'news' that includes young people in positive situations. If you are a MassHOPE group, your contact information will be registered with our Networking Associates who are regularly updated. These associates field phone calls and e-mail directed to MassHOPE from new homeschooling families, families moving to the state, or families who are recognizing a need to be connected to a group. Advertising a group can also be done by mailing an information letter (include a business card or something easy to 'file') to churches in your area. It is often the pastor or secretary that gets questions about homeschooling and they are usually glad to refer families to someone who may know more than they do about home education. The letter should be brief and to the point, include all necessary contact information in a clear form, and could even include some business cards with the group info that can be handed out. It could also be in the form of a small poster advertising an upcoming 'informational meeting' that those in the 'thinking' stage could be attracted to. This should be small, with large lettering to show up on a church bulletin board. If you want something in a church bulletin, then give the exact text so that it can be easily copied by the secretary.

IV. THE GROUP PURPOSE

A. Having a clear purpose

On the MassHOPE affiliation forms, we ask for a purpose statement for your group. For many, their purpose for existing may seem obvious and therefore not necessary to put in writing. But, putting it in writing assures that everyone understands the purpose of the group, and that the group does not get sidetracked with things that are not the purpose of the group. If a purpose needs to be changed or added to, then everyone should understand this change, it shouldn't just evolve. When there is no stated purpose, then by default it becomes any purpose people feel like at the time. This can be chaotic, and makes leadership much more difficult. A statement of purpose provides a focus and a framework for planning a group's activities.

There is no one, right, purpose for a group. There are many valid types of groups. One group's purpose may be solely to coordinate group field trips. If this is what members want, then the purpose of the group defines what it will be doing. Other purposes could focus on working together on specific curriculum activities, or activities for a specific age group, or on just focusing on supporting the parents through meetings, speakers, etc. A group can have several purposes, but the more clearly defined they are, the easier it is to plan and please.

Example (poor): The purpose of the XYZ support group is to support homeschooling in our area. (This is poor because it is not clearly defined - what one person defines as 'support' may be quite different from another. More specifics would help this.)

Example (good): The purpose of the ABC support group is to provide a forum for sharing ideas and experiences among homeschooling parents via support group meetings, and to provide opportunity for group experiences for homeschooled children through field trips, supplementary academic classes, opportunities to present work to a group, and other similar opportunities. (This clearly defines the types of things the group will do and helps both leaders and members know what to expect from the group.)

When thinking about our purpose, we need to ask, "Why do people seek a support group?" Did you ever ask them? Think back to your own family's reasons for wanting to be part of a group. Some of those may still be the same reasons, but you might be surprised at what new homeschoolers today are looking for in a group. Possible reasons: Information, place to meet others who can answer questions; place to meet someone who understands my crazy ideas when my parents don't; place for my children to have friends so they won't feel so weird and strange; place for the children to learn some things I don't feel I can teach them, a place to show my child's accomplishments and projects with those who will understand; a place to feel I belong. Today some people are looking for someone else to do all the work for them also. It helps to know what people are looking for, so you know what needs you might consider meeting, but also so you can make it clear that your group's purpose may not be in line

with what someone is expecting. There are many possible purposes for your group. Be sure yours is only defined for what you think is most important, and that the group is capable of doing. No one should expect your group to do everything, especially you!

B. Purpose possibilities

1. Fellowship

There is nothing wrong with fellowship, but it will happen whether you have it as a purpose or not. There is a down side to this fellowship, though. We must guard against our fellowship becoming a substitute for the fellowship we should have within our own church body. One of the big hindrances in churches to good relations with non-homeschoolers is the idea that the non-homeschoolers are the 'out' crowd, and not among the 'inner circle' of fellowship. This is usually not deliberate, but happens without us realizing it. We naturally become more friendly with those we feel a kindred spirit with or those with whom we spend more time. A conscious effort sometimes needs to be made to reach out to the non-homeschoolers in our Christian fellowships.

2. Opportunities for Group Discussion

This is a good purpose because you can't get this anywhere else. Your family or church fellowship may not understand your concerns about home education, a local support group will. If the group discussion is focused on general family issues or general Bible studies, this can be found elsewhere in the body of Christ. But, if the group discussion is geared toward teaching writing, or organizing your homeschool day, then it becomes an important thing for the support group. Announcing a topic or focus such as this may attract more parents than a meeting that does not have a specific topic or one that focusses on something much more general.

3. Play Group

This is where many homeschool groups start. In the early dark ages of my own homeschooling, our homeschool group was an outgrowth of a La Leche group and a food coop. In fact, having a play group for preschoolers can be a way to reach out to young mothers who are home with their children and expose them to homeschooling as a viable option for their family. The danger of a play group is that it can be a free-for-all for kids to interact in ways that encourage poor social interaction while Moms blindly socialize. It can be a positive purpose if it helps young mothers to feel connected with other young mothers, and begin their spiritual seeking of the best way to educate their child.

4. Help for New homeschoolers

All groups need to feel an obligation to support others as we hopefully were supported, or how we wish we were supported. This will take conscious effort, but it is also part of the true Christian servant attitude that we should all have. Where else can new

homeschoolers go for support? Yes, there are good on-line communities now, but there is often no substitute for a real live warm body to talk to.

5. Educate or be Representative to Community about Homeschooling

We all represent homeschooling whether we think of it as a purpose or not. This will be a natural outgrowth of an active group. If the group is active, people will know and you will be the representative whether you like it or not. It doesn't hurt once a year to get some good publicity through having the group's activity, play, or competition covered in the newspaper, or have a general meeting advertised to the community, etc. But, you need to be prepared that if meetings are public, then anyone in the public may show up. Advertising through local churches may be safer if you are seeking like minded families.

6. Facilitate Communication between families

In our technological world, communication is a key factor with any group. This can be provided through a paper newsletter (used less and less, but still valid), a Yahoo type discussion group, or an e-mail list. This can be a real help for homeschoolers at any stage, and for older students to communicate with each other as well. All groups should have some methods in place to quickly communicate legal alerts from HSLDA and communications from MassHOPE such as the Midweek News.

7. Co-op for subjects difficult to teach alone

Not all homeschool parents are created equal. Not all have the confidence, experience, background educationally, etc. to teach all subjects. Offering, or being a good referral for other ways to get a subject taught are part of what a healthy group will be involved with. A group that is not a true coop can really just mimic a Christian school, and we need to recognize that. There is a need and a place for coop groups and there are families that would not survive without this added help.

8. Co-op for certain curriculum

This purpose is very helpful with curricula that take sometimes more preparation time and are more project oriented such as KONOS, The Weaver, etc. Many groups have this as their central purpose, and that is fine. Just beware that the homeschool group doesn't become another name for a mini Christian school, and you lose the one-on-one parent-child interactions or the parent-directed nature of homeschooling. Coops can also have the negative aspect of mimicking the age-segregated, classroom mentality. Keeping the coop small, the parents directly involved, and the time spent as minimal as possible will avert some of these dangers.

9. Information clearinghouse- library, workshops

A group can have as one of its purposes, the establishment and maintaining of a physical library or a virtual library (listing of helpful books and curricula and who has it), or just a good list of local library materials and on-line resources.

Many homeschoolers are just looking to be hooked into some kind of information network. Information on workshops, conventions, how-to educational events, educational opportunities, etc. are all things that can be passed through your group's communication system. Hopefully, the Midweek News from MassHOPE is a good forum for your group to get this kind of information and to share it with others in the state.

10. Educational Opportunities for presenting work done at home

This is one of the most important purposes in my thinking and the one that I based much of my own support group on. Where else are you going to find a group of people who want to see my history subject, who want to listen to my poetry recitation, who want to see my science project? Who wants to have a spelling bee with me?

11. Educational Opportunities - Field Trips

Often a part of a healthy group, but one can homeschool without ever going on a field trip. FRC (The Family Resource Center, www.FRC.info) is a great resource for this type of thing and the planning is all taken care of for you. Many museums have special classes that you need a group to take, so this type of Field Trip can be good. Don't bother planning field trips to locations that people can do on their own just as effectively. Look for unusual field trips or ones that you need a group to arrange. Ask among your group if any fathers work at a local company/organization that might be able to arrange an interesting field trip. These can be good to get students to think about vocational options.

12. Group Testing

Again, a very helpful purpose for your group. Important to have an arena for those needing it for their children to be tested by those they feel comfortable with, and have results kept confidential if desired. Local Christian Schools can sometimes help facilitate this - room, educators, etc., if you don't have your own space or teachers for it. Availability of on-line testing, testing within curricula and school systems not requiring this, may make it unnecessary in some cases. The following organizations have testing services. Rates and rules vary.

Bob Jones University Testing Service - offers several tests and has a registration service for potential test givers. Good option for group testing that is recognized nationally.

On the web: www.bjupress.com/services/testing

e-mail: testing@bjupress.com

Phone: 1-800-845-5731 for questions.

The Sycamore Tree - this company (since 1981) has been selling all kinds of homeschool materials and sells a Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CBS) or individual grade achievement tests. On the web: www.mailordercentral.com/sycamoretree/ to see various grade tests or CTBS, look in the index under TESTING INFORMATION.

Bayside School Services - various do-it-yourself standardized achievement tests. On the web: www.baysideschoolservices.com

Seton Home Study School Do it yourself testing for all grades. Test Prep books also available.

On the web: www.setonhome.org/testing

KidTest - this company offers their own benchmark tests, including some samples. All do it yourself type stuff. Can be helpful for the parent pulling their child out of school to see where their strengths and weaknesses are, or to help them see the progress, or have something for the skeptical family members.

On the web: Kidtest.com (Check HSLDA first - click through for possible discount)

13. Extracurricular Opportunities

Sometimes a Christian Home School Support Group can be the organization to offer extracurricular opportunities for students. This could be such things as a debate or speech club, a chess club, a Lego league, sports, or music groups. Try not to duplicate something that is readily available in the area already. If you are going to offer something like this, take the time to carefully count the cost of time and effort. Be sure you have thought it through carefully enough to offer a quality program or group, because God wants us to do all things as unto Him.

14. Accountability or Umbrella School

This purpose is often an integral part of some support groups in other states where laws are such that a connection to an accountability group is necessary. Some groups that are associated with a particular church or are closely connected with a Christian school may have this as part of their purpose. If a group is church-related, then the group is operating hopefully under the direction of some spiritual leadership in the congregation. There are times, though rare, that accountability is important for home school families. Some Christian Schools offer umbrella programs for homeschools where the parents report work and grades to the school, and sometimes this is the purpose of a group. In other states, homeschool groups may have a certified teacher associated with the group who reviews portfolios and writes reports for the school personnel. Fortunately, this isn't necessary in Massachusetts.

V. THE GROUP MEETINGS

A. Why are you having meetings?

Not all groups have meetings. Not all meetings are necessary. Groups can function without meetings. Groups don't need to be a democratically run institution. Meetings should be planned with a specific agenda in mind. Some people don't like meetings of any kind. Meetings shouldn't happen just because there is a vague idea that there should be a meeting. These are all thoughts that should be considered when planning a group meeting. Ask important questions before you plan - "Who do you want to come to the meeting?" "How will the meeting agenda attract them?" "Why have people not come to past meetings?" The answers to these questions will help you plan an effective meeting that will more likely meet the needs you intend it to.

B. Suggestions to make meetings meaningful and attractive

In my own experience with leading a support group, I had very good attendance at my meetings. Here are some things I deliberately did that may have been part of that success.

1. Meetings had a strict starting and ending time.

Homeschool parents have children. Someone needs to be watching those children usually, so time is important to these parents! Discuss starting time with the group - what is best? For your group, depending on ages of children, distance to travel, or other factors, parents may prefer a 6:30, 7:00 or 7:30 starting time. An ending time that is strict is also a comfort for parents wanting to be home to be a part of a bedtime routine, or for a spouse to know when to expect them. Leaders should be sensitive to this. If the agenda is expected to be long, say so in the meeting announcement. I always ended my meetings promptly at 9:00 p.m. No matter what was being discussed, I stopped and briefly said "It is 9:00 and we are going to have a closing prayer now. You are welcome to leave, or if you would like to stay and visit with me or each other, I'm fine with that." There were always some who left, and some who stayed, and everyone was happy with that!

2. Meetings were in a central location in a home.

Fortunately my home was large enough for a group meeting and fairly centrally located. If your group is large geographically, I would advise moving the meeting location to make it easier for those traveling a distance periodically. The meeting does not have to be at the leader's home. Some people who are not leaders, are great at hospitality. If it is easier for you to lead in another location, ask for others to volunteer to host a meeting. The meetings can also rotate around a few homes during the year. Personally, I like going to people's homes, so I'm more apt to attend a function if it is at someone's house!

3. Meetings had a definite format and plan

I always had announcements and business items at the beginning of a meeting. Meetings were times to make announcements, not recruit workers. If meetings are where you get hooked into jobs you hadn't planned on, attendance will drop quickly!! The rest of the meeting had a clear subject for discussion. This was known ahead of time and may or may not have meant people bringing items or ideas. This allowed people to be prepared to enter a discussion, and since people knew there was always a planned agenda, if they had areas of concern, they suggested topics for parent meetings. Most topics were planned in June at our yearly Praise and Planning Meeting. I always chose topics for Parent Meetings that were geared specifically to homeschool situations. General ladies Bible classes should be something left to church groups. Christian family life topics are fine and if it is something for both spouses to be a part of, be sure to make it clear that husbands are encouraged to come. If the topic specifically includes the father's role, be sure to have a father in charge of the discussion. See the list of Parent Meeting Ideas for suggestions.

4. Meetings did not offer refreshments, unless it was a men-only night

This may come as a surprise to leaders that I made this choice for my group meetings. It's almost the "Christian" thing to do when we get together - eat! I chose not to do it for several reasons.

- I hate coffee and this is usually expected if you have food.
- I don't need sugar, and it's hard to have regular refreshments without it.
- I respected those women who were on diets and didn't need the temptation of snacks.
- It turned the meeting into a social time rather than a business/educational session.
- I wanted people to come for the meeting, not for the food.
- It took up valuable time.
- It was just one more thing to either do myself or find someone else to do. If it rotated, it was one more reason for someone not to come.

I did make an exception to the refreshments rule when we planned a Fathers-only night. Then, I suggested that the wives send a snack with the Dad!

VI. IDEAS FOR HOME SCHOOL PARENT GROUP MEETINGS

*Introductory Meeting - Good in the summer for those interested in starting in the fall. Ask members to bring prospective homeschoolers, particularly those with preschoolers to start thinking about home education early. HSLDA has a good introduction to home education DVD.

*Books to read - ask members to come with books or lists of good books that their families have enjoyed.

*Curriculum Sharing - ask parents to bring texts, supplementary materials or equipment to talk about. I usually planned this meeting for the month before the MassHOPE convention. That gave people a chance to see some things before they went to the exhibit hall. I usually started this meeting a little earlier to allow more time.

*Fathers Night - have Dads get together alone for prayer and sharing. Send manly snacks!

*Math Night - discuss teaching basics, share manipulatives, how to teach facts tables, successes/failures

*Writing Night - talk about how to motivate, curriculum choices, importance, editing ideas, ways to encourage creativity, etc.

*Time Management - share ideas, books, organizational tools, successes and failures

*Money Management - budgets, cost-cutting ideas. Home school parents are usually one-income families and this is an important issue to continuing home education.

*Library Usage - might get a talk or tour at local library, especially on what is available for 'teachers'.

*After Convention Sharing - this can be a great way to help the overwhelmed new homeschooler, or to share what was learned at workshops. A workshop tape could be shared at a meeting. A good way to encourage those who didn't go to think about going next year!

*Family Devotions - Share experiences, materials. Could even open up to non-homeschoolers - might be a way to attract them to thinking about home education.

*Art / Music Night - Share tapes, talk about ways to include music in the home school, share art and craft ideas or curriculum usage.

*Book Exchange - have members bring books they no longer need for an exchange. Bring two, take two, etc. Or, have an informal sale - Bring materials with prices, have

envelopes for people to leave money, etc. This could work for children's books too - bring the children's books you've finished and exchange for others. Could be a sale to benefit the support group also!

*Special Speaker - Use veteran homeschoolers, especially those who have graduated students to talk about their experiences. You may be surprised how many will show up to hear a real live veteran! Carol Arnold is willing to come to support group meetings to talk about homeschooling issues, her own experience, or group dynamics.

*Movie Night - not just any movie, but a video related to home education. The Network Director for MassHOPE has videos on TeenPact, The Home School Foundation, etc. Or, it could be special videos on creation science or such topic that may be of interest for whole families.

VII. GROUP ACTIVITY IDEAS FOR HOME SCHOOL STUDENTS

The following list is not exhaustive, but hopefully serves to get the creative juices going! Many activities can be repeated yearly if successful. Activities that are centered around the opportunity for presentation to the group are easy to plan and are excellent ways to allow students the chance to talk in front of others in a non-threatening environment. When planning an activity, ask yourself, "Is this something we need a Christian Homeschool Support Group to do?". If you concentrate your efforts on these types of activities, it will help you focus on the most important ways to use the time and resources you have available.

*Introduction Day - have students tell about their families and their homeschool. Good first activity day, and allows families to get to know each other a little better.

*Summer Show-n-Tell - Another good first activity. We often did this at an opening picnic. Students were encouraged to tell about something they did special over the summer, or bring pictures or souvenirs from a vacation or trip.

*Diorama Day - Can fit into any curriculum. Students are asked to create a scene in a shoe box or other box that shows something related to their curriculum. It could be a battle scene, an historic event or landmark, a scene from nature, etc.

*Character Day - This is most fun as a dress-up event. Students are asked to dress-up (if desired) as a character from history or literature. They are to be prepared to tell about themselves. This can be a 'guess who I am' format also. In that case, have students prepared to give 'clues' about themselves and have students guess who they are.

*Creative Writing Day - students read or recite something they have written. Can be prose or poetry.

*Memory Day - Students recite something that they have memorized. It could be literature, Bible, or an historic document such as part of the Constitution.

*Science Project Fair - this is a good one for evenings as Dads often get involved in this. Have projects setup for people to see, but if group is small enough, have each student tell about or demonstrate their project to the group.

*Fine Arts Day - Nice around Christmas time. Have where there is a piano available for playing, and some easel space for art. Can be done nicely at a nursing home where you get a built in audience.

*Hobby Day - Have students bring something or tell about a hobby. Could be stamp collecting or bird watching.

*Skit or Puppet Show Day - this can be families or groups of families that prepare to offer short skits or puppet shows for the group. Might be helpful to have some skit books ahead of time for ideas. Lots of ideas available on-line. Good precursor to a larger drama production.

*Father's Outing - have some Dads plan a field day, or hike, etc. with Dads in charge!

*Grandparents Day - Grandparents are invited guests. Great history sharing day. Have questions prepared for them to answer about life in their growing up years. Good public relations for the skeptical family members. Take pictures. Be organized!

*International Fair - Have students pick a country to focus on. They can prepare food, make posters, show dioramas, play music etc. related to that country. Also a great evening activity where fathers and other family members or friends can be invited.

*Quiz Night - This can be geography questions, history questions, etc. in a game show format. A Dad might be a good organizer for this. Can be specific each year - North American Geography, US History 1800's, etc. Can also have levels of questions to include various ages. Teams make a good approach for this. Can be done as family teams also.

*Christmas Cookie Exchange - Our group did this many years. Not particularly educationally oriented but was usually tacked onto a Presentation Day. It was optional. People are instructed to bring X dozen cookies and then they are exchanged around plates so that everyone goes home with a variety of cookies. Copy recipes to share. Helps make holiday baking easy. We usually made a couple of plates of cookies that members delivered to the police/fire stations near Christmas. Nice PR.

*Drama Production

An extracurricular activity that was always a memorable part of my support group was our annual dramatic production. Choosing a musical drama made it easy to include younger children in the chorus. We enjoyed doing several Patch the Pirate productions (Majestymusic.com) and some programs geared for schools through Bob Jones Press. This was a major effort to plan, but the results were always worth the effort. Planning was many months in advance, picking a production, planning the workload necessary, etc. If your child was involved in this activity, it was required that parents be a part of the team. Jobs included refreshments, setup/cleanup, props or costumes, nursery supervision during rehearsals, planning/printing the program, etc. I would be glad to advise a group who wanted to do something like this. It is wonderful PR for family members to come and see children as part of a quality production. The program can also be a witness for unsaved friends and relatives. Some years we also did straight drama for older students, usually at the same time period. This experience of speaking well in front of others is something the students in the group did well partly because they had grown up in the group participating in plays every year. Drama is a winning activity because it allows students to enjoy the results of hard work over a period of time. Unlike sports, no one goes home a loser.

VIII. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

A. HSLDA

Membership in the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) is always recommended. This organization has, since 1983, been defending homeschooling rights before school boards, legislatures, and in the courts. You may not have the freedom to homeschool today if it were not for God leading HSLDA and member families willing to stand up for their rights over the years. It only takes reading their web site to realize that problems are still popping up all over the country that make this legal coverage a wise use of funds. They deal with school board issues, college admission issues, social worker at your door issues, and are active in working with state leaders to continue to protect our freedom to homeschool. They represent us nationally on Capitol Hill. They are also supportive of State homeschooling organizations in leadership training, legal consultation, and advice. Membership guarantees that you will have legal advice and support should you have an issue related to your home education rights. You MUST be a member BEFORE you have a legal issue to be covered by their free protection. It is possible for a couple of smaller groups to combine to form a group large enough to count as a discount group. Someone needs to be assigned to keep track of the new combined 'group' so that paperwork can be filed yearly for this. Group Discount Numbers should not be given out to any homeschooler who is not connected with a support group of some kind. MassHOPE has an HSLDA Discount group to cover families in support groups that do not have a large enough group to have their own discount group. Families must be a member of an affiliated support group to qualify for the MassHOPE group.

B. Insurance

In 2005, HSLDA introduced liability insurance coverage as an option for HSLDA Discount Groups. This is made possible through a national insurance company and does not benefit HSLDA in any way. You must first have an HSLDA Discount Group. See their web site for information on this program. (www2.hsllda.org/groupservices/cms/ - or just search for 'group insurance' on the site) It is expensive, but may be an important option for some groups who are doing large activities, using rented facilities, etc.

C. Prevention of liability issues

This is a legally sick world, and liability issues are a consideration if you are alive. The old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" applies here. When you have a group activity with children involved, you must be wise, and cautious. It is always a good idea to have parents responsible at all times for their own children. Do not have drop-off activities. Parents should attend field trips with their own children, or they are responsible for someone else's children that they bring. Put these things in writing in group rules. Do not have a parent alone with someone else's children at any time. This is for safety of the children as well as safety for the parent who could be

falsely accused of wrong. My own group had a liability form for parents to fill out with emergency information, but I'm not sure how much it would have helped in a real tragedy. It was helpful sometimes as a leader to know health concerns such as allergies so that there was a general awareness of some health issues.

Know about sex offenders. Educate yourself on this issue. There is a web site where you can find sex offenders in your community. It is good to know if there are people in your area that might be in the neighborhood of a group activity, etc. It shows with a map where registered sex offenders in your community live. Check it out at: www.familywatchdog.us .

IX. PROBLEMS

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you that in me you might have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But take courage, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NASB). Problems are therefore expected. It is our reaction to problems that is usually the bigger problem. Prayer is your first line of defense. (I Thess 5:17) Advice from those who we can respect for their spiritual perspective. (Proverbs 11:14). Discuss and pray about problems first as a leader couple. The husband should take any problems seriously in prayer and in being available if necessary to be involved in any action that needs to take place. (Matthew 5:24) A national peacemaking organization, Peacemakers Ministries has a special counselor for homeschool issues. It is their mission to help Christians deal with conflict Biblically. MassHOPE has recommended them in the past to Support Group leaders in difficult relational conflicts in their groups. They have wonderful materials as well, which could serve as good curriculum for a homeschool class. The principles they teach apply to families as well as groups and churches.

X. Suggested Calendar for Homeschool Support Group Leader

June

Get together with leadership team or group and talk about what activities the group wants to commit to next year. Enlist volunteers for ALL activities that are planned.

July

Print calendar of events for next year with names of those who have volunteered to help coordinate - mail a tentative calendar along with membership guidelines to mailing list. Hold a meeting for those interested in discussing starting homeschooling. This can be the basis of new members coming into your group. Have group membership materials available, assign someone to speak about the group and what it does, plan to show something like the DVD from Considering Homeschooling or one from HSLDA. Be prepared for questions from the inquirers.

August

Request that membership materials be returned so that you can start making an accurate name/address list for the group. Do a newsletter which includes a finalized calendar for the year.

September

Have a kick-off meeting with some real meaning - a Dad speaker? A prayer time? Be sure the meeting sets the tone of a spiritual beginning of the year.

October

People should be up and running - check with people as events come up so that you know a month ahead if things aren't being planned properly.

November/December

Go easy on activities around the holidays - many people are busy with family and church activities and don't have time to fit in homeschool group things also.

January

Have a meeting to jump start the new year. Remember that this can be a discouraging time, especially if school has had some lapses during the holidays. Have an experienced homeschooler talk about their own times of discouragement and remind people of their goals. Start promoting the state homeschool convention as something to look forward to. Suggest people carpool, share hotel rooms if they are going alone, make it a couple weekend if that is possible, etc. This is a good time to suggest magazine articles and books to people as an encouragement also.

February

Winter is a good time to have rehearsals for a play - if you miss one for snow, it's not too serious. Drama has many fine opportunities for stretching students - memorizing, working as a group, projecting voices and earning confidence in front of people, etc, etc. It doesn't have to be a full-blown long musical or play, it could be several short

skits, or one short skit and a 'talent show' of other musical or oratory numbers. This is also a good time for things like a debate group, or other special interest group like a chess club to have indoor meetings.

March

Remind people to send in registrations for homeschool convention. Assign money for a leader to choose tapes for a group library. This is a good time of year for an event like a Spelling Bee, Geography Bee, etc.

April

Easter time. Some churches have extra activities that make this busy for some families, so be sensitive to it being a busy month. If you are planning a leadership change in the group, start thinking and talking about it now so that new leaders can be trained and presented to the group by June.

May

This is often a convention month. Encourage members who are seeing more things to do than school days left. Suggest how to streamline some coursework, what to skip, how to make up time by doubling up on one subject a day, etc. Suggest they consider planning next year to start a week early to get a head start. Celebrate and praise God at your meeting this month for the good year the children and support group have had. Plan some good outdoor field trips or physical education days. Some groups participate in multi-group events like field days.

This manual was written by Carol Arnold. She takes full blame for anything here, but hopes that her thoughts from experience are a help to other leaders. Carol is a 'retired' homeschooler, having completed 25 years of homeschooling four children through high school. She led a support group for 16 years and continues to work with homeschoolers locally in support groups and through MassHOPE as the Networking Director. Her husband of 31 years is retired from the Post Office and they live in Lunenburg, Massachusetts.