

# Making Group work for young families

by **Abi Harvey**

I know what you're thinking... Now there's a title for an interesting blog post! If you've not got kids maybe you're tempted to skip past this post in favour of something more 'your life stage'. Or maybe you have got kids and you're thinking 'I'd like to think about something a bit more interesting right now'. But please read on... I'll try not to bore you.

See here's the thing... the wrestle if you like. How on earth do us new parents integrate into the church community in the midst of changing nappies, waking at all hours and attempting to feed toddlers anything other than crisps? Where do we get the time and energy to engage in meaningful conversations with our brothers and sisters in Christ and meditate on deep spiritual matters when in the back of our minds we are watching the clock wondering whether our little cherubs are making our babysitters really work for their money!

It's tricky, but if we are willing - totally do-able. In fact, in what I have found to be one of the most challenging stages of life in terms of free time, I have found my LIFE group to be one of the major sources of encouragement to me, driving me to a deeper relationship with Jesus.

When my husband and I moved to Norwich 2 and a half years ago with our 6 month old baby, we had very few friends here. We were isolated, going through some difficult family circumstances and very cold (having moved from a hot climate!!). Looking back I probably had some form of SAD disorder... don't worry I'm ok now. Just invested in some warmer clothes. But I digress.

We had been attending church for a few months but didn't seem to be building relationships very easily. Our baby was young... we were first time parents... we never seemed to have time to linger and chat to people on a Sunday. Then a kind person at church invited us to their LIFE group.

We went along hoping to meet with Jesus and meet with our brothers and sisters. Well we certainly met both! We had found community. We had found a place to engage with people, delve into the bible and share our ups and downs, praying for each other.

The bible talks about the early church meeting in homes. I like that. Not so I can check out my friends' latest home decor or the quality of their coffee but so that I can really get to know them. I don't believe church buildings existed in the early church and as much as I like to attend a

Sunday service there is something so great about meeting together at home. It's family. It's where we can honestly share and pray for one another. It's where we can discuss the bible and ask the questions we really want the answers to.

I now have 2 small children and I love that our LIFE group includes them once a month. When we meet as families it's chaotic but beautiful and I love that. This is family life within church family.

I suppose I should add something practical in here... so here we are a few things that might help young families integrate into LIFE groups:

### **1. Mix up the rota**

Think about how often your group meets and whether parents can get to LIFE group without a babysitter. Would it be beneficial to change your structure so families may be more included? For example, Our group's structure is boys night, girls night, everyone together, family morning.

### **2. Make use of the Word Sheets**

These are fantastic resources which enable LIFE Groups to follow up from the talks that the leaders give on Sunday's. They are simple, easy to follow and give space for your group to really focus on how they are learning to be more like Jesus.

### **3. Set up a whatsapp group.**

So that when you need prayer on top of calpol in the middle of the night you've got a group of willing folk one ping away.

### **4. Include your kids!**

Having small children is a lot of fun! Share the good times and let the park trips roll.

### **5. Keep Jesus at the centre.**

Family is a great gift but a terrible God. Let's encourage each other to keep Jesus on the throne of our hearts amid the busyness of life. May we worship him through every season whether married, single, with kids or without.