how to start your own moms' group

Ready to meet some moms? Here, Lisa Spiegel, codirector of Soho Parenting, a New York City family counseling center, and coauthor of *A Mother's Circle*, offers help for getting a group going:

- **figure out what kind of group you'd like to form.** Will it be a support system for mothers only? A big playdate for the kids? Or a mixture of both, like this moms' group in Wisconsin?

- **do you want a group leader or facilitator?** Understand that if you're the one who forms the group, you'll likely be at its helm. Don't want that responsibility? Consider starting your group with a friend.

- **target moms with babies who are close in age to your own (an age gap of six months or less is ideal).** This can lead to more helpful conversations and closer friendships, since you'll all be going through the same stages and milestones around the same time and will be able to compare notes.

- **if this is your first child, invite first-time moms only.** Sure, second-time moms have great advice to share, but they have a completely different perspective and are usually a lot more confident, which can throw off the group dynamic.

- **six to eight moms is the ideal number.** Fewer than that may lead to poor turnout; more than that can make it hard for everyone to get to know one another and have a chance to talk.

- **but don't be afraid to start small.** Your group—and your friendships—will grow with time as you meet other moms at the park or baby classes.

- **e-mail an invite or post a flier at your obstetrician's and pediatrician's offices.** Try to be specific about what you're looking for, including who you're hoping will join, the time your group will meet, and the place (will it be at someone's home, a playground, or a coffee shop?).

- **at your first meeting, set some ground rules.** It may sound obvious, but members need to understand that they shouldn't criticize, monopolize the conversation, or make rude comments. New motherhood is a vulnerable time, and you want to create a safe place where everyone feels comfortable. >