multiples OF AMERICA
CONNECTING + SUPPORTING MULTIPLE BIRTH FAMILIES
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CLUB TIPS for Tough Issues Clubs Face

Club members come together for meetings. Food and conversation are plentiful as members arrive. Some members with multiples of similar ages form small discussion circles to talk about common concerns and challenges. When the meeting is called to order, all members gather around a large table. Open discussion continues as the agenda moves through items concerning club business and social functions. **Does this sound like a usual club meeting?**

Try a different scenario. *The meeting has adjourned. The program chair introduces a parent educator as the featured speaker for the evening. The parent addresses the topic of potty training. She weaves in information and personal stories in order to engage the interest of club members. Still, halfway through the presentation a group of five members stands up, announcing as they leave that they are tired of having club programs that don't apply to them.* **Does this sound like a usual club meeting?**

Examine one more scene. *Three months following elections, a few members are concerned that the current club vice president is not completing the duties of her office. They phone and email other club members expressing their disapproval. During the next general club meeting, one of the group makes a motion that the vice president be removed from office.* **Does this sound like a usual club meeting?**

As these scenarios show, there is no "one size fits all" formula for a club. Clubs are as varied as the individuals that belong to them. Size, geography, and club history: all play a part in putting a stamp of individuality on a club. As with any organization, though, most clubs also experience a share of discontent. Disagreements occur. Problems arise and the search for solutions leads to argument and division.

This Club Tips sheet provides suggestions to help address some of the "tough issues" clubs can face. Ideas presented were gathered through input from member clubs, members, and National Workers (volunteers for our national organization).

Solving Problems: What Works Well

What works well for a club facing divisions? Here are some common "norms" or guidelines shared by successful clubs.

1. ***Mission Statement*** – This is the goal and objective for your club. It's the foundation upon which you build your programs and determine the course your club will take. Once composed, try maintaining awareness of the statement by printing it periodically in your club newsletter. Examples of a mission statement include:

   Our club aims to provide support for parents of multiples and others having direct responsibility for the care of multiple birth children and to protect the special needs of multiples and of singleton children who are siblings of multiples.
   OR
   This club works to offer support and fellowship to parents of multiple birth children and to offer education to parents and the public concerning topics specific to the parenting of multiple birth children.
2. ***Guidelines*** – These usually take the form of bylaws and standing rules. Expectations for members and officers should be outlined within. Also, the club needs someone, such as a Parliamentarian or an

Advisor, who will make sure these guidelines are followed. The guidelines can be fairly simple and don't need to be overwhelming. However, a procedure for handling differences on issues needs to be in place. If they are not in place and a problem occurs, the situation is usually handled emotionally rather than rationally. Multiples of America has a Parliamentarian, parliamentarian@multiplesofamerica.org, who will assist clubs in drafting bylaws. The Multiples of America booklet, *"How to Organize a Parents of Multiples Club,"* also includes sample bylaws. Once approved, a copy of the bylaws should be distributed to all members, perhaps through publication in the club newsletter, as an email attachment or on the club website, through new member packets, and/or through inclusion in a club directory.

3. ***Commitment -*** Officers and members adhere to the written guidelines and are committed to the objectives of the club.

4. ***Interest In the Ideas of Each Member –*** In any discussion, allow all parties to have a say on the issue, perhaps even to the point of recording in writing the main points of each person's input. In some instances, it may be necessary to limit the amount of time for each person to speak. Try to have a neutral party mediate or facilitate this process with the intent of maintaining "fairness" and keeping discussion moving in a positive direction. If the situation becomes too "heated," have the leader table the discussion to a later date, set that date, and then close the meeting. Perhaps a committee can be formed to further investigate the issue, gather input from members, then report back to the membership.

   When all have voiced their opinions, vote on the issue and enact the decision of the majority. As a step beyond discussion at meetings, some clubs have created a member liaison position as on-going evidence of their commitment to ensuring the interests of each member are addressed. Here's a five-step mediation process sometimes used by clubs for addressing problems:
   - Provide uninterrupted time for discussion,
   - Allow for restatement of problem,
   - Brainstorm possible solutions,
   - Reach agreement,
   - Revisit the issue after a time in order to assess whether the solution is working.

5. ***Speak When It Counts –*** If you want to truly address a problem/issue or offer your ideas, do it in the appropriate forum. Just "griping" about a problem rarely leads to productive answers. The best forum is at board meetings which should be open to all members. If a member is unable to attend a board meeting, another option would be to write a letter to club officers.

Club Challenges

Even with these "norms" or guidelines in place, clubs encounter difficulties. Four of the most prevalent "tough" issues clubs face include:

- Non-performing officers,
- Lack of participation (volunteerism),
- Attracting new members, and
- Loss of members, especially members with older multiples.

Other issues that frequently cause division include:

- Financial problems,
- Personality conflicts,
- Fundraising conflicts,
- Tradition versus new ideas,
- Selectivity,
- Lack of respect for differing religions, racial, cultural or lifestyle differences, and
- Club officers who try to do everything by themselves.

Below is a variety of specific ideas noted by clubs and National Worker volunteers. Naturally, not every suggestion will meet the needs of every club. Instead, these ideas present options clubs can consider when faced with one of these tough issues. Remember, there is no formula to magically "problem-proof" a club.

Non-Performing Officers

When considering officer performance, remember:

- Refer to job procedures for officers as defined in your club bylaws.
- Look at the ultimate goal rather than the step-by-step journey. Every person brings her/his own talents and experiences to a task. The task may be handled differently than in the past, but that's not cause for concern as long as the main goal is met.
- Remember communication is key. Let an officer know when her/his job performance is in question.
- Set in place a specific plan and timetable for evaluation of officers. The board can use this evaluation time to assess their performance as a whole group in meeting the needs of the membership. This evaluation also could include a chance for an individual officer to advise if she/he is having difficulty in a position or needs assistance.
- Know leadership involves many factors: organization, politics, human relations, vision. Every leader has strengths and weaknesses.
- Trust everyone does the best she/he can under the circumstances.
- Don't postpone non-performance issues that are harmful to the club hoping they'll go away. Ask for help from your state officers or Multiples of America.
- If a specific problem concerning an officer's performance needs to be addressed, work together to find a way to resolve the issue, then determine the best way to move on. Ask yourself two things:
    - "What can we do to resolve this issue and put it in the past?"
    - "What is best for the club?"
- As one MOM noted, *"If we foster each member's talents, the best comes out in all of us! If we belittle each other, the worst in us will come out."*

Lack of Participation

Lack of participation can cripple a club. It not only limits activities, but also affects the club's ability to accomplish goals. When this problem occurs, consider the following:

- Allow for leadership at many levels, not just reserved for members of the executive board.
- Encourage members to attend board meetings as a means of voicing their opinions.
- Try to invite a few specific members to attend each board meeting, perhaps through a personal phone call. Rotate the invitation so that all members are invited in the course of a year.
- Try to make a place for everyone who wants to volunteer. For instance, adding a co-chair makes room for another volunteer as well as encourages collaboration and spreads duties among more members.
- Following an election, reach out to involve members who were not voted into office.
- Determine certain tasks that can be broken down into smaller commitments. For instance, a member could acquire a speaker for one meeting rather than planning events for the entire year.
- In order to have a varied overview of the activity, have committees include two veteran members, two newer members (1-3 years with the club), and one or two members who recently joined.
- Encourage officers and others to mentor new volunteers and to share the benefits of volunteering.
- Reward participation at all levels. For instance, some clubs hold periodic raffles, and anyone in attendance may win the prize.
- Handle only necessary business during general meetings.
- Remember support is a primary mission of most clubs. As one club member explains, *"Don't get so focused on selling T-shirts and workshop planning that meetings are dull and non-supportive to prospective members who visit."*
- Alternate speakers and discussions to include issues for all ages and stages of parenting, as well as self-care.
- Encourage reciprocity among members. For example, when taking a meal to a new MOM, prepare her to do the same for another new MOM in the future.
- Work to bring all members into discussion, not just the officers and/or veteran members.
- Give everyone a voice by allowing time for brainstorming. This is when some of the best ideas emerge.

- Listen to everyone's point of view. Everyone should have the opportunity to fully understand the scope of an issue and how it effects different parts of the club.
- Make sure decisions reflect the majority of the club's situation. When possible, offer choices.
- Offer time at each general meeting for members to address any immediate concerns.
- Be open to new ideas and objections. These lead to growth.
- Ask members who offer ideas for specific change to investigate their idea further and report back.
- Provide a year-end survey related to social events, programs, etc., then use the responses as a base for planning.
- As one MOM said, *"Try to involve the most members in the littlest ways for the greatest results."*

Attracting New Members

Each club has a unique story about challenges attracting new members. Perhaps most club members have older children, so prospective members with youngsters are reluctant to join. Perhaps a club is puzzled how to appeal to prospective members who say they are primarily looking for financial help. Whatever the dilemma, consider the following ideas for attracting new members:

- Offer a trial membership for a few months to expectant or new moms. During that time, assign a mentor or sister member to draw the new mom in, invite (or bring) her to meetings, make her feel comfortable, ask what topics she would like to know more about.
- Hold a quarterly tea or other gathering where prospective members can come, meet other parents, and learn more about the club.
- Offer a one-time, private preview shopping time for prospective members prior to the opening of your club's resale (sometimes also called a garage sale or consignment sale).
- Ask prospective members which messaging platform works best for them to stay informed about club meetings and gatherings (i.e., texting, email, club newsletter, phone call).
- Prepare care baskets to have hospitals distribute to parents who have multiples with a way to contact your club.
- Place materials (postcards, brochures, etc.) about the club in local doctors' offices, clinics, and hospital labor and delivery units.
- Allow members to Zoom into a meeting/program time, if they are unable to attend in person.
- Provide babysitting during meetings if that seems to be an obstacle to attendance or getting involved.
- Suggest parents with younger children, work together to form a babysitting co-op or plan group playdates as a way to get out with their children and get to know one another better.

Loss Of Members

If club membership becomes stagnant or begins to decrease, remember:

- Good communication is essential. Use the newsletter, email, texting, or social media. Have the President and/or Advisor send out special emails when extraordinary issues arise.
- Use social media as a means of sharing news in-between meetings. Encourage members to post questions on social media, such as "I'm having trouble getting both babies to sleep on the same schedule. I can barely stay awake. Any ideas?"
- Keep meetings positive. An air of negativity at general meetings discourages members.
- Keep meetings organized. Have an agenda. List activities months in advance so members can make any needed arrangements.
- If members aren't renewingdue to disagreements within the club, try having a general meeting with a speaker on communication. Perhaps, the speaker could even address strategies on how people in group settings can resolve conflicts.
- Reach out to members who need some added support. For instance, try setting up a telephone list for calling or texting pregnant MOMs on bed rest.
- Find other ways to support members who are in the midst of family crisis. Consider referring members to appropriate service providers within the community, setting up meal trains, etc.
- Make time to celebrate together.
- Put variety into socials. Sponsor social outings in a variety of settings several times a year. Plan for a variety of age groups. Some clubs have a different member sign up each month to plan the social outing. In that way, all members get a chance to have the club join them at their favorite locale or in their favorite group activity.
- Hold several "Parents' Night Out" activities during the year. This allows parents to be friends as well as club members.

- Know that you can't please everyone at every club meeting, function, and activity.
- Reach out to members who let their membership lapse, perhaps through a phone call. Try to discover why they did not renew membership.
- As one MOM explained, remember above all *"we are here to help each other."*

A specific situation involving loss of members occurs when ***two clubs serve the same geographic area, competing for the same members.*** When this occurs, remember to:

- Always speak positively about your club when in public. Sell your club's strong points.
- Allow prospective members to pick the club that best suits their needs.
- Realize this choice is not yours, and the decision of the prospective member should not be taken personally.
- Be open about informing prospective members concerning available options with other clubs.
- Network with other clubs to delineate boundaries, if you choose.
- Don't speak poorly about other clubs. These words may come back to haunt you.

One special note: **The loss of members who have belonged to the club for a number of years** is a special challenge for many clubs. Without these members, clubs lose an abundance of wisdom and experience. The problems clubs face are often repetitive. These veteran members can share their perspectives as to what worked in the past and what did not. Consider these tips for help in keeping members with older multiples:

- Allow for an alternate meeting night occasionally. As members children get older, there are more and more demands on the time of the members. Moving the meeting to a different night may increase attendance for a month.
- Try to plan program and social activities to interest parents with children at varied ages.
- Try an online book club.
- Ask these long-time members to occasionally serve as guest speakers, perhaps as part of a panel of parents who have "been there, done that."
- Consider having parents with older multiples meet for a social function once a month. This may help keep them involved in other club activities.
- Try making a personal phone call to long-time members who choose not to rejoin. Ask how the club could better serve them, and invite them to return.
- Consider having a reunion night for former members. Allowing members to meet with friends they made during their years of membership may rekindle an interest in club membership.

Selectivity

It some ways, it's natural that members who have children around the same age develop the strongest bonds with each other. Some clubs even have age-specific programs and support groups. However, cliques can develop and lead to challenges if members begin wanting to only work with or attend events with one specific group of friends. If this occurs, a few ideas to consider:

- Look for opportunities to build relationships across age groups and celebrate as an entire club. For big club events, some clubs ask if parents with one age group (such as school age multiples) can plan and manage events for another age group (such as preschoolers). For instance, for a fall fair, school-age multiples and their parents might create games or crafts for preschool multiples. Then later in the event, thinking that parents with preschoolers may need to head back home earlier, the club also has a time (as a thanks) specific to the school-age multiples, perhaps special snacks, a special movie, games, or hayride with Halloween stories.
- Offer big sister or mentor programs to help build relationships across ages. Each member with newborns or young multiples is matched with a mentor who has older multiples (elementary age, teens, adult). The mentor finds ways to reach out, answer questions, encourage her to attend meetings or events (perhaps even picks her up to drive her there).
- Ask your board members and other leaders to spread out to different tables so they don't appear as a clique, and they can ensure that visitors and new members are introduced and greeted with a warm welcome and good conversation.
- Create a secret sister program where two members gift each other throughout a year, revealing their identity at a special event once a year.

- Establish "families" within the club composed of members who have multiples of varying ages. The "families" could sit together at meetings, work together on craft or cooking projects, etc.
- Consider creating table tents to encourage assigned seats in a way that matches the time of year or meeting theme. For example, in the fall each table supports a different football team, each table represents different ages or gender of multiples, or each table tent lists a common challenge to be discussed during the meeting (breastfeeding, school challenges, sharing responsibilities with a spouse/partner). The idea is to mix up the cliques who normally sit together.

Keys To Long-Term Success

Yes, clubs can be one of the greatest gifts our multiples give to us. But our experiences as a member also largely depend on our actions, reactions and willingness to grow within the club framework.

- Begin with an awareness that problems can occur.
- Prepare for potential difficulties and you will have fewer.
- Respond to your problems by looking to your guidelines.
- Remember that help from Multiples of America or your state organization is only an email away, info@multiplesofamerica.org

Above all, treat each other with the special care that we deserve as parents of multiples, and always remember the basic reason for being a parents of multiples club – we're about supporting each other and future parents of multiple birth children. Everything else is secondary.

Brief Words of Wisdom from Clubs Around the Country

"United we stand."
"Don't be selfish. Be selfless."

"Together, we will grow."
"Join our circle of support."

When disagreements occur, remember,
"It's like raising twins. This too shall pass."

"If you can parent multiples, you can solve any problem within a club!"
"There's always room for compromise."

"Don't sweat the small stuff."
"Remember, the club should be FUN."

"Everyone agrees to disagree."
"Don't take it personally."

"All parts make a whole."
"Keep talking. Get involved."

"Mothers of multiples face tough issues on a daily basis. Compared to that, working together with other MOMs who share the same blessing should be a breeze…"

"Most of the issues that seem tough are only temporary. Hang in there!"