

Truly, all homeschool co-ops have negative aspects to them, but we want to avoid or prevent as many problems at Academy Days as we can. As a Christian co-op, we try to keep our focus on what the Lord wants for our children. We are also respectful of the fact that our families are homeschoolers first and foremost. Our goal is to go along side the parent and enrich what they already do at home.

Here are specific ways we try to prevent the most common co-op complaints.



### **Too much like school**

Co-op is not a school! The primary teacher is always the child's parent, not the co-op teacher. Unlike some local co-ops, we do not administer tests or assign grades. Our weekly classes are spent on discussions, debates, simulations, re-enactments, experiments, educational games and hands-on activities that enrich studies at home, *such as the science experiment pictured at left*. Since co-op meets only once a week, the majority of coursework is completed at home, so really only the parent knows the full extent of her child's knowledge in a subject. It stands to reason that the parent, then, would be the one to assign grades.

### **Too much homework**

Only high school classes and a few junior high classes actually have homework. All kindergarten and elementary classes are enrichment only. Co-op lifts our burdens, rather than increases them, so co-op is all about experiments and activities that can be completed during class time. We do not want elementary students and their parents stressing over homework in

addition to regular studies at home. Co-op should not interfere or restrict family time. Plus, only the parents know how their child learns, and that child should be free to learn that way without pressure to conform to the majority. As a result, the responsibility for homework is placed on teenagers, who are earning high school credits and should be learning how to adapt to other teaching styles and manage their time anyway, particularly in preparation for college. Nevertheless, because some families use a different curriculum at home, we try to be reasonable regarding homework even for high schoolers.

### **Too many illnesses**

We do not want co-op to be a source of illness for any family. A standing rule is to stay home if you or your children are sick or even just recovering from an illness. We have a substitutes list and a list of illnesses, and we expect members to be symptom-free for 24 hours before they return to co-op. Otherwise, we send you home! As a result, we do have a lot of absences, but we much prefer filling in for an absent parent than catching a cold from a sick child or teacher.



### **Too many unsupervised children**

Co-op is not a drop-off service, so we do not have children running around without supervision. If your child is at co-op, then you must be, too. As a Christian co-op, we lovingly correct and encourage our children and try to channel their energies into positive directions. Plus, we intentionally keep classes small to prevent a "crowd-control" situation. Except for PE, classes are limited to 12 students, although the number usually ranges between 4 and 10, *as pictured in this 5th-6th grade creative writing class*

### **Too much work for parents**

Many hands make light work! You do *not* have to teach, but all parents at least commit to helping in a class. Everyone gets one break period in the four-period day, and usually two. Additionally, most classes have two or even three teachers, what we call "team" teaching, so teaching each week does not fall on just one person. Furthermore, instruction is limited to lessons and activities during class time, so teachers do not have to correct homework or

prepare and grade tests.

### **Too expensive**

We aim to keep co-op affordable. Just like most other co-ops, our teachers are parents with a degree, special knowledge or passion for the subjects they teach. However, unlike many other local co-ops, no one at co-op gets paid; all our expert teachers are volunteers. Class fees, which range from \$2 to \$15 for the entire 14 weeks, pay for materials only. Because many of us homeschool on a budget, we diligently search for the cheapest copier in town and research the Internet for the lowest prices on books, so we can pass those savings on to our members.

### **Too disorganized**

A group cannot function efficiently without some organization. Written guidelines help everyone understand expectations, prepare us for certain situations in advance, ensure our safety, and help us manage the use of the facilities that the Lord has provided for us. We try to provide structure while at the same time maintain flexibility. As a result, our co-op runs very smoothly; indeed, many of our members who previously participated in other co-ops have stated that our co-op runs more efficiently than any others they have attended.

### **Too much conflict**

Personality conflicts and misunderstandings may be inevitable in a group environment, but we aim to manage them by proactive means. We have written procedures which help everyone understand expectations. Also, to prevent becoming a "mega co-op," we limit membership by keeping classes small. In addition, we advocate extending grace to fellow members and addressing misunderstandings early on so that minor misunderstandings will not escalate into major conflicts.

### **Too Large**

A large co-op can overwhelm anyone, so we actually limit our membership. We have access to a certain number of classrooms, which limits the number of classes we can offer at each period. Additionally, we want the classes to stay small, so we limit their size to 12 students, sometimes less depending on the subject. As a result, our membership floats around 40 families each semester. This provides a pool for teachers as well as helpers, and yet we can easily remember each other's names! Additionally, a small co-op reduces the chances for many of the common co-op problems listed here, such as conflicts, disorganization, and discipline.

We started Academy Days co-op in fall 2006, so we are still a young co-op. Each semester we address a new issue and smooth out fewer and fewer kinks. As we do individually in our own lives, we are working on perfection. And we give the Lord the credit!



### **About the Author:**

Carren W. Joye is the author of *Homeschooling More Than One Child: A Practical Guide for Families Curriculum* (ISBN 0-595-34259-0), *Alabama State History* for grades K-9,

and

A

*Stay-at-Home Mom's Complete Guide to Playgroups*

(ISBN 0-595-14684-8). A homeschooling mom of four children, she has founded four successful playgroups, a homeschool support group, homeschool covering, and homeschool co-op. For more information on her books and state history curriculum, visit her web site at

[www.carrenjoye.com](http://www.carrenjoye.com)

Read more:

[12 Benefits of a Homeschool Co-op](#)

[15 Reasons You Should Not Join Our Co-op](#)

[10 Ways To Make Co-op Work for You](#)