

HOW TO START A POE GROUP

WHAT'S A POE GROUP?

POE (Parents of Every school) support groups help parents crowdsource solutions to common home-based tech problems. They are parent-led and school-based.

WHY ARE POE GROUPS SCHOOL-BASED?

It takes a village to raise tech-healthy kids! We believe that collaboration between parents and educators can make all the difference.

WHAT IS DIGITAL WELLNESS?

Digital wellness is an intentional state of engagement with the digital world that does not interfere—but instead supports—mental, physical, and social health.

WHO CAN START A POE GROUP?

Any parent of any school. POE groups should serve one school (similar to the PTA or PTO) and can be run by one or two parents. Some POE groups might find it useful to designate a small board comprised of a President, Vice President, and Secretary.

THE MISSION OF EVERY POE GROUP

We are parents who want happier, healthier, smarter kids. We share the challenges and solutions we face living in a digital world to raise awareness and empower others. We are all in this together.

MEETING FREQUENCY & LOCATION

Most POE groups meet **monthly** 9 times a year (September–May), but you can structure your group however you like. We recommend meeting in the **school cafeteria or library** and publishing meeting dates in the school newsletter.

IMPROVISING

This is your POE group, and you decide how you'd like to run the structure of meetings. We've provided a simple structure below, but feel free to improvise and do what works for you and your members. For example, this might include breaking into small groups while discussing a few questions, etc.

INTERACTING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

We suggest your POE group interacts with the larger school community in some way. First, consider partnering with a school staff member or administrator such as a Principal or Superintendent. You can encourage them to attend a meeting, or you might update them on group news. In addition, your group might consider hosting an event that attracts more than its regular attendees, such as a speaking event or a workshop.

GENERAL MEETING STRUCTURE

POE groups keep it real by keeping it simple.
We suggest the structure below for most meetings.

- **Introduction: (5-10 minutes):** Opening Announcements followed by a recitation of the POE Mission Statement and Rules (yes, read them every time!).
 - Opening Announcements: Discuss the meeting's theme or resource (if there are any), any important upcoming dates, or any group leadership needs, etc.
 - Mission Statement: "We are parents who want happier, healthier, smarter kids. We share the challenges and solutions we face living in a digital world to raise awareness and empower others. We are all in this together."
 - Rules:
 - **1. Speak for Yourself:** Use statements about how you feel and what your struggles are instead of blaming or shaming the practices of other parents. Ex: "I worry constantly about my kids at sleepovers with access to other kids' devices," vs. "Other parents really should get their act together and put filters and limits on their kids devices."
 - **2. Respect the Privacy of Others:** Do not use identifying information when referring to other children or parents. Ex: "A child from our school in an upper grade sent a video to a large group chat of other students," vs. "Lucy Wilson in 6th grade sent an inappropriate video to a group chat full of 21 other 6th graders."
- **Problem Sharing (20 minutes):** Share general or theme-based problems with tech (see themes below).
- **Solution Sharing (20 minutes):** Share general or theme-based solutions (see themes below).
- **Resource Sharing (5-10 minutes):** Discuss the monthly resource provided by EverySchool.org (see below), and announce the resource that members can check out before the next meeting.

Monthly Themes: A list of monthly meeting themes below to help ignite discussion. These are optional themes; only use them if you like! If you stick to the monthly progression as listed, keep a lookout for more themed meeting resources via our newsletter that match this schedule (sign up for our newsletter at www.everyschool.org). Each meeting also has a themed resource, which can be suggested to group members to check out before, during, or after the meeting.

Spicing it Up: Building community often means adding fun to the mix. Although it's nice to have some meetings in a neutral location such as the school library, you might also consider holding some meetings at a member's house or at a local gathering place such as a park or wine bar.

MONTHLY MEETING THEME LIST

General Meeting (September): A great opening meeting to air out parent struggles and solutions. Consider breaking into small groups for Problem Sharing and then gathering back as a single group for Solution Sharing. *Everyschool.org Resource:* [Childhood 2.0](#), a documentary on YouTube

Screen Time Struggles (October): Explore and discuss the problems and solutions related to how much time our kids spend in the digital world. How much screen time should our kids get? How do we monitor or regulate their screen time? *Everyschool.org Resource:* [Apple Screen Time](#) and "[12 Ingenious Screen Time Hacks](#)," by Protect Young Eyes

Cell Phones (November): Discuss the problems and solutions surrounding our kids' cell phones. When should we allow them? What kind should they receive? How do we monitor and regulate their usage? *Everyschool.org Resource:* [WaitUntil8th.org](#) and [Gabb Wireless](#)

Gaming (December): Discuss the problems and solutions related to gaming concerns. What games do we allow or disallow, and why? How do we monitor gaming? How is the social experience games offer different from in-person interactions? *Everyschool.org Resource:* [AskAboutGames.com](#)

Social Media (January): Discuss the problems and solutions surrounding our kids' social media use. When is it ok to let kids have a social media account? How do we monitor it? What are the risks? What social media apps are better or worse than others? *Everyschool.org Resource:* [Bark](#)

Porn (February): Discuss the problems and solutions surrounding our kids being exposed to porn. How can we prevent our kids from accessing inappropriate content online? What are the risks? What are the outcomes of early porn exposure? *Everyschool.org Resource:* [DefendYoungMinds.com](#)

School Device Use (March): Discuss the problems and solutions surrounding device use in school. What is your school's cell phone policy? Are school-issued devices taken home? How do you manage school-issued devices when they're at home? *Everyschool.org Resource:* [The EdTech Triangle](#)

Sleepovers & Playdates (April): Discuss how social situations or even social groups affect our kids' digital lives. How do we talk to other parents about our own digital rules? How do we keep our kids safe at sleepovers or playdates when devices are present? *Everyschool.org Resource:* "[Managing Technology on Playdates and Sleepovers](#)," by Dr. Kristy Goodwin

Book Discussion (May):* This is the only meeting that will break from the meeting structure outlined above. Use any meeting structure that you find works for a book discussion. *Everyschool.org Resource:* [The Collapse of Parenting](#) by Sax or [Creating a Tech-Healthy Family](#) by Davis

*We ask that all registered groups complete a short [Year's-End Survey](#) at this time, to be taken by one or more members. This helps us measure our impact and better serve future groups.

PRINCIPAL'S LETTER

You may or may not want to reach out to your school Principal or another administrator to let them know about your new POE group!

Dear Principal Smith,

My name is Iris Stone, and I have 2 kids in grades 3rd and 5th here at Example Elementary School. I struggle personally with learning how to parent well in the digital age, and I know many of my friends do as well.

I also know technology issues from home can often spill into the school day and create behavioral issues or incidents that are tough for teachers and administrators to deal with. And, I know that kids today struggle incredibly with mental health issues that can often be exacerbated by devices.

I wish parents—myself included—had more support and resources learning to parent well in the digital age. I believe parents, teachers, admins, and students would all be happier. Our school community would be more peaceful, focused, and supportive.

Because of all of these things, I'd like to start a digital wellness support group for parents here at Example Elementary School that helps parents discuss their concerns and crowdsource solutions to common issues such as when to get their child a cell phone or how to monitor devices at home. I want this group to be safe, nonjudgemental, and enriching to all who attend. A nonprofit called EverySchool, whose mission is happier, healthier, smarter school communities, has created a simple formula for this group that I'd like to follow and implement. You can learn more about these Parents of EverySchool (POE) support groups here.

Please let me know if you'd support this idea. I imagine that the group will meet once a month or so in the library or cafeteria, if possible. Also, I would love to have an administrator to support this effort and attend a meeting or two (whether that's you or someone else). If that's not possible, I'm happy to reach out with our group's happenings and meeting minutes as the year moves on.

Last, if you'd like to meet to discuss this more or if you have any questions, please reach out!

Kindly,
Iris Stone

P.S. I have included a newsletter blurb below so you can get a sense for how I imagine this can be presented to parents.

NEWSLETTER BLURB

Example Blurb:

A new Parents of EverySchool (POE) group has formed at our school!

When should I get my child a cell phone? What parental monitoring app is best? How can I help my kids handle online bullying or porn exposure? We all want to parent well in the digital age, and we all deal with stress around this issue. POE groups are digital wellness support groups sponsored by EverySchool.org, a digital wellness nonprofit. They bring parents together to help each other by talking about our tech-related problems and solutions.

Our POE group will be supportive, safe, and nonjudgemental. Our first meeting will be on September 30th at 7pm in the cafeteria, and we will be discussing, among other things, MEETING THEME or RESOURCE (if applicable). All are welcome!

ADDING MAGIC

"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." - Maya Angelou

Be a Beacon of True Support: The magic of POE groups is that they take a generally uncomfortable, difficult topic, and make it approachable and manageable. Providing a space for parents to truly discuss their tech struggles in an open and nonjudgemental way will transform your community. POE groups should not be stages for parental disagreement or conflict. Although opposing ideas among parents might arise, the group leader should work as a facilitator to make sure everyone feels heard and valued.

Unite with Educators: POE groups should not be stages for conflict between parents and school staff. Moreover, POE groups that seek to continuously change school policies around tech will not be sustainable or as valuable for spreading digital wellness in your school community, which should be the ultimate goal of every group. EverySchool.org believes that true change will come from honest, open conversation and awareness raising; as such, your POE group might find it valuable to inform teachers and admins about meeting topics or common struggles among parents, or invite them to attend one or more meetings.

Plan Fun Events: Besides a general meeting, go for a hike, plan a playground meet-up (screen-free, yay!), or host a happy hour. You're building a community, and communities need fun and lightheartedness.

Host a Speaker: There are so many interesting, engaging, and exciting digital wellness speakers available today. Hosting one might encourage new parents to come out and see what all the fuss is about. EverySchool.org will provide you with suggestions for speakers via the POE newsletter--if you registered your group, you're all signed up!

Host a Giveaway: Spread the word about your group by giving away a digital-wellness-inspired gift basket or gift certificate (this could be literally anything from a book basket to a bowling gift card to a Bark subscription or a Gabb phone, anything that encourages family time, physical activities, or a healthy relationship to tech).

Remember the Endgame: You want digital wellness for your school community! You want your school community to be happier, smarter, and healthier. You can do this by demystifying the problem, providing a safe space for conversation, raising awareness about problems and solutions, and making your group a fun, vital part of the larger school community. You've got this!