

By Jessica Harvey

MOPS Australia is a non-denominational Christian organisation that reaches mothers of preschool children in the name of Jesus Christ.

MOPS groups operate in local churches, offering a caring, accepting place where mums from church and community can develop friendships, learn about mothering, share concerns, explore areas of creativity and have opportunity for meaningful conversation.

I'm not sure who's more excited about going to MOPS – me or my daughter.

Every second Wednesday, we go along to our local MOPS group where the mums talk, eat and craft, and the kids do the same – separately!

On hearing it's a "MOPS day", my daughter claps her hands and lists her favourite activities at MOPPETS, including the very important act of "cuggling" her friends.

I've been going to my local MOPS group for nearly two years now, and while I could rave about it all day, here are the top five things I love:

1. An insight into the lives of other mothers

There is no one 'type' of MOPS Mum – we are as diverse as the children we mother. Some mums have experience raising a large family, other mums offer wisdom on working outside the home. When I take the time to listen and get to know the mothers in my group, I come away from each MOPS morning feeling like I have gained a new perspective on life.

2. A source of practical advice

If I had a dollar for every time I said to my husband, "I'll have to ask the MOPS ladies about that", I'd have... about 25 dollars. As a young Mum, still fairly new to the parenting gig, it has been so valuable to me accessing the minds of those a few steps ahead of me. A parenting issue that has me tearing out my hair in frustration is swept away by the sage words "it's just a phase" from my MOPS friends.

3. A (guilt free) break from the kids

Honestly, I could get a break from my kids by putting on a movie and locking myself in the bathroom with a good book. But I would know that I wasn't doing the best thing by my kids. When I go to MOPS, my kids get to spend time with other kids their age, being looked after by carers (in name and in nature) and learning about Jesus. I am being refreshed and encouraged by spending time with other Mums, and my kids are being nurtured and stimulated.

4. Time to get creative

I can't deny that one of my favourite parts of MOPS is the craft time. Think less homemade cards and knitting, more handmade earrings and artisan tea bags. Craft time provides just enough options for the crafty among us, and just enough direction for those who aren't. Even if I don't get to make anything else that week, I know I will come away from MOPS with something special, made with my own hands.

5. A place to just be

As Mums, we tend to be switched on 24/7 and this can be so exhausting. Sometimes I long for MOPS morning to arrive sooner just so I can sit down, cup of tea in hand, and switch off. At MOPS, there is no need to put on a brave face or keep up appearances; I am free to simply be myself.

Is your church looking for a proven and effective way to minister young mums in your community? A MOPS group may be your answer. MOPS groups operate fortnightly with a program that includes hospitality, teaching, discussion, creative activity and opportunity for meaningful conversation. Children are cared for in MOPPETS. There are MOPS groups in over 100 churches around Australia, currently reaching over 3500 mums, including more than 1300 who have no other church connections. Many groups have waiting lists.

For more information on MOPS or how to start a group in your church, visit: mops.org.au or contact office@mops.org.au 0413 693 274.

*Jess Harvey attends the Tuggeranong Presbyterian Church.