

PARENT GROUPS ON FACEBOOK

If the parents of a class are going to create a parent group on social media, here are some guidelines and advice that may help to manage such a group.

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Worth considering:

- Who should be the admin of the group – the class representative (parents) or someone else? And should the parents take turns in having this role?
- What information can and cannot be shared in the group?
- What privacy settings should be used for the group? The group must be set as "private" so that only the members can see the content.
- How does one ensure equal participation from all parents/members of the group?
- How can the group be used to better facilitate cooperation between the school and the home?
- Clarify the group rules for what is ok and what is not ok to share or write in such a group.
- Should the teacher be able to join the group, or is it "more correct" and more appropriate that the group is only for the parents? And if the teacher is part of the group, what role should he or she have? (*More about this further on in this article*)

As an admin of a Facebook group, you can use a setting that requires all posts from members to be approved by one of the moderators before they are published.

When children start school, some parents and schools choose to create Facebook groups to facilitate information between parents in a class, grade, or the entire school, possibly through the use of social media. Such forums might be useful. However, you may want to clarify the purpose of the group and set some boundaries and rules in advance.

First and foremost, such groups should not be a substitute for the platforms that the school already use to communicate with parents.

How to include everyone

It is important to establish good routines to ensure that all parents are offered the opportunity to join the group. Also, it is important to remember to invite the parents of newly joined students and remove members of the group if a child moves to another class or changes schools. In addition, take into consideration how parents who are not on Facebook or who have a native language other than Norwegian can be

included and informed. For example:

- Make an individual phone/SMS/e-mail to parents with minority language backgrounds and ensure that they receive important information. This also applies to parents who are not on Facebook.
- Consult with the school about how they communicate with minority language parents. Among other things, Udir recommends that schools should facilitate the use of translators, if needed. Perhaps some of these meetings between school and parents with minority language backgrounds can be used where translators are present to provide key information.

Teacher participation in the group

Should the teachers be part of the Facebook group? There are different opinions, experiences, and practices around this, and not all are positive about mixing teachers and parents in such a group.

Many school employees and parents argue that communication

Group rules:

- Group rules may help clarify what is expected of parents in the Facebook group.
- You can often use the parent meetings to discuss what kind of group rules should apply.
- The rules should be clear and not too many. Perhaps they could be formulated as a reminder/to-do list of what is expected of the members.
- In some municipalities, parents' committee formulates group rules that apply to all the parent groups in the school.
- Provide contact information for the class representatives and other relevant contacts at the school.
- The group rules should be clearly visible in the group. For example, these could be stated in the "about us" field.

Examples of the use of such groups:

- Schedule playtime.
- Birthday invitations.
- General information.
- Information to and from the class representatives.
- Information about social activities both with and without children (e.g., Halloween meetings, or parents/mom/dad get togethers).
- Homework or questions about a weekly schedule that must be clarified between parents outside the teacher's working hours.
- Sharing useful links related to students' everyday school life.
- Information from the parents' committee or the school.

All important information from class representatives/parents' committee/school must firstly and foremost be sent through the email/school platform, not by using the Facebook group as the primary channel. Of course, in addition to this, general information can also be shared in the Facebook group.

between teachers and guardians should take place on other channels than Facebook. This is to create as good a premise as possible for a constructive cooperation between school and home.

Moreover, teachers who are members of such Facebook groups may feel that their working hours are extended (always on the clock) – and there may be uncertainty about what times and channels parents should use to contact the teacher/school (send a message on Messenger or make a phone call during office hours?).

And last but not least, be aware of the difference between Facebook and the school's platforms for communicating with parents. Schools have their own platforms that have in-app features for sending text messages, emails, and notifications to parents. These solutions are often framed by data processing agreements, where privacy is safeguarded as per

Norwegian law. The school may expect all parents to be available through these solutions. Facebook, on the other hand, is a commercial party that makes a living from users' data, and for that reason, it is also more "appropriate" for schools to make their communication with parents through channels other than Facebook. Nor can one expect or demand that all guardians be on Facebook.

Safeguarding the child's best interests

Parents may enjoy sharing photos from birthdays, May 17th, school performances, and other occasions. However, other parents or their children may not want to be exposed in such a way. One should be careful about all kinds of image sharing – and remember that the law requires the consent of parents as long as the children portrayed in the pictures or videos are under the age of 15.

And remember:
A good parenting culture is built not only online, but also by parents meeting and getting to know each other and each other's children in-person.



Sometimes school/teachers also share pictures in such groups. However, this is not the best place for the school to share moments from everyday school life. The rules for photo-sharing within public parties are even stricter than when parents do this as private individuals.

Among other things:

- Consent must be obtained from guardians even before taking the photo. In a consent form, it should be clearly stated what the parents actually consent to.
- Parents should receive information about what the image will be used for and where it may be published.
- There should be routines for regularly deleting pictures especially when the child no longer attends the same school.

Read more about this here (in Norwegian): barnevakten.no/skoletema/sjekk-liste-for-deling-av-bilder-i-barnehaege-og-skole/



Photo sharing tips:

You can easily share photos from the student's everyday school life without actually having students in the picture. You can show photos of what the students have created, hiking areas, classroom arrangements – and more, without showing students faces.

Examples of what should not be shared:

- Sensitive (private) information about children, parents, and staff at the school.
- Conflicts and issues concerning individual students/parents.
- Discussions that speak negatively about other parents, children, schools, and teachers in an unconstructive way.
- Photos and videos taken without consent of students and their parents.
- Remember: Even if the group is set as "private", discussions, photos, and content could potentially be shared outside of the group.

Keep in mind that adults are role models for children in the way they behave – even online! The goal of everything that is shared should also be solution-oriented.

Equal participation

If a member is very prominent, one can try to open up for other opinions by writing in the comments section: Does anyone have other thoughts/experiences about this matter?

In addition to allowing everyone to participate, it may also be a good idea to inform that those who are not comfortable communicating in the comments field can express their thoughts to the parent representative through a message in Messenger, SMS, or via a phone call. Otherwise, the Facebook group may become a tool that confirms/amplifies differences in the parent group.

And if someone writes or shares something that is not ok in the comments section, one can try contacting them directly to hear more about the thought behind the post

or encourage him or her to delete it. Replying in the comments section could sometimes be perceived as overstepping his or her boundaries and may escalate the discussion. Selecting the group setting to require all posts to be approved before they are published can also reduce unwanted posts.

And remember: A good parenting culture is built not only online, but also by parents meeting and getting to know each other and each other's children in-person. It might be positive for the class environment too.

This article has been prepared and inspired by elements from Pållogga's resource "Gonline". Barnevakten is currently collaborating with Pållogga. We have also received valuable input from FUG, and teachers and parents themselves. ■