

Find your parenting tribe

Does it really take a village to raise a child?

Maybe.

But sometimes it doesn't really feel like the "village" even exists anymore. With nearly a half million people in the Quad Cities, it can be hard to connect. And all of the new experiences that come with parenting can be overwhelming.

Birth. Eating. Walking. Talking. The list of "firsts" goes on and on.

"Having a child is completely different than what you think it will be," says Randi Rockwell of Rock Island. "When my daughter was born, I had to seek help and reinforcement."

And Randi isn't alone. Research has shown that the support of friends, family and the community can make parents more effective.

So, go beyond the village. Instead, build your own tribe.

A parenting tribe is a group of other parents who you can count on for support in your parenting journey. This means you can rely on your tribe to listen, give advice, support and celebrate.

In prehistoric times, you'd be born into a tribe. This tribe would protect you, support you, and be with you through thick and thin.

In the 21st century, it's just as important to build your own tribe. It may be easy to "connect" online or get information from websites or forums. But it's even more important to have true, in-person support. Because Google isn't always the best listener. And Google doesn't always give you the most relevant advice.

But your tribe can.

Here are a few tips for developing your own network of other parents.

Make it a priority.

Life can get busy, and many parents put off the task of building a network. But, it's something that is worth the time and effort.

"As a working parent, my tribe is incredibly important to me," says Abbie Kiebler of Bettendorf.

Sara White, Eldridge, agrees. "It helps me remember that I'm not alone. Others have gone through what I'm going through."



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And just like tribes around the globe, your tribe may be with you for years to come. Sheri Zeck of Milan connected with her support group when all of their kids were babies. "Now many of us have teenagers," she says.

Start with who you know.

Maybe you already have friends or acquaintances who you feel comfortable confiding in. Start by rekindling these friendships.

A great place to begin is Facebook - where you may realize your high school friend is now in the area and a parent, too.

Be vulnerable.

You may not feel comfortable approaching a stranger and asking, "Will you be my friend?" (And it may not be the best approach.) But that doesn't mean you cannot be honest about your need to develop a support network.

When Sara moved to the Quad Cities, she didn't know anyone. So she joined her local MOPs group.

"It's hard to break out of your comfort zone," she says. "You can just say, 'I'm here to meet a few friends and have a few hours of 'me' time.'"

Connect with those at a similar life stage.

You may already have friends in the area, but may not have other friends with kids. If you really want to find other parents who can relate to your current stage of life, try trying out local groups that cater to parents.

This includes classes at the museum, library storytime, or preschool groups.

Don't discount those at a different life stage.

Remember that parents with older (or grown) children may have a really great perspective, too.

"My mother-in-law is a retired school teacher," says Randi. "So I rely on her for a lot of support and information about child development."

Abbie agrees. "With both grandmas living locally, I rely on their help with my children when they are sick and can't make it to school."

Think outside of just parenting groups.

But don't only limit yourself to playgroups and storytimes. Remember that you have interests and hobbies, and other moms will, too.

Randi is very close to people she has met at the gym. Abbie has also found support as a parent through church and running clubs.

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Give and take.

With any good relationship, it's all about give and take. Be willing to provide the type of support and encouragement that your friends in your tribe need. It may just be a listening ear.

And as you build these relationships, your tribe will reciprocate.

Members of Sheri's tribe have been there for each other for over a decade - from potty training and sleeping through the night to a breast cancer diagnosis and miscarriage.

"When you go through a difficult time, you have friends to help support you and lift you up," Sheri explains. "When you go through good times, they are there to celebrate with you."

Be patient.

It can take time to build a strong tribe. Put your efforts into meeting other parents and supporting them in their journey. Soon, you'll realize you have a support network, too.

"My friendships have happened organically," Randi explains. "I haven't searched for this, but it still happened."

Sheri agrees. Her group started out of a formal group of moms, but has grown to be a core tribe of about eight people. "If one group isn't a good fit for you, try another. Or you can always form a group yourself! It's so worth the time and effort."

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KEEP CONNECTING.

Being a parent can be lonely. It's important to build a network of support - family, friends and the community. If you don't already have a tribe, begin seeking out new friends who you can count on and lean on.

This tribe may not be something you were born into - but it's something you can build. And it will be worth your effort

Originally posted on the Now What? Blog on 9.17.14 The Now What? Blog served for nearly 7 years to

1. Normalize parents seeking support and help as a manner of child abuse prevention
2. Engage community in how they can work to prevent child abuse
3. Work to build resiliency in families through promotion of the 5 protective factors

Maybe you coach a baseball team or you help care for the neighbor kids from time to time. You are investing in the safety and security of the children in our community. Because it truly does take a village to raise our children, we want to offer the tools needed to bring awareness and education to preventing child abuse.

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