



Setting up a PTA - Four easy stages

Why have a PTA?

A PTA is a very good way of bringing together parents, teachers and others who are interested so that they can support the school. It provides an opportunity for everyone to work together with a common goal. All parents and teachers can be involved if they want to be.

What does a PTA do?

The support provided by a PTA can take many forms and will vary from school to school.

- | Almost all PTAs do some fundraising to enable the school to provide "extras" for the pupils.
- | Many provide helpers for outings and special events.
- | An increasing number run clubs for sport, music and drama where there's an enthusiasm which isn't otherwise being met.
- | Some PTAs organise meetings to inform parents about their children's curriculum, especially when there are changes taking place.
- | Most PTAs also run social events for parents and children, and this gives parents an extra opportunity to meet and get to know each another.

It's a good idea to try to have a range of activities so that you have a better chance of involving more people.

Getting Started: Stage 1 - Informal Discussions

You need to begin by finding out if there is support for forming a PTA. Talk to parents you know and try to enlist a few who will commit themselves to helping get it off the ground. Speak to the headteacher and teachers once you feel that you have enough parental support. Stress the benefits that you feel will follow and try to find particular goals which will appeal to both the teachers and the parents whether this is setting up extracurricular clubs, fundraising, social events or a newsletter. Success in a one-off project will increase confidence and can help to get a PTA off the ground. Once there is a proposal put forward - and a definite purpose - you may well find that there are others who are also willing to play a part.

Try and find out if there has ever been a PTA at the school and, if so, why it failed. This may help you avoid any similar pitfalls!

Stage 2 - An Open Meeting

Once you have the support of enough others you can have an open meeting of all those interested and outline your plans. Don't be too disappointed if only a few parents turn up. Even if you do not get as much initial support as you expected, don't give up. People are often reluctant to be involved in something new. If you and a few others are committed to the idea you may find that enthusiasm will increase once you start carrying out your plans and here it helps if you have a well planned programme of events.

Stage 3 - A Constitution?

There's no legal requirement for you to have a constitution and it is probably sensible to get started without one and work with an "acting" committee at first. There is also no need to be too formal about your meetings but it is a good idea to keep a record of the decisions made on each occasion.

However, a constitution is a good idea in the long term. It can help ensure continuity and might avoid future squabbles about how things are done. You could enlist the help of the school staff in drawing up a constitution which should simply describe what your association is like and how it will operate.

A constitution should help and not hinder the Association so it is important to draw it up bearing in mind how circumstances might change. For example, though you may start with a committee of ten, it would be wiser to specify a range such as eight to twelve so that if more or less people put themselves forward the constitution could stand unaltered.

More help on constitutions is available in our leaflet *Constitutions made Easy* and we have a model constitution which can be adapted to suit your school.

Please note: all PTAs can become members of SPTC and take advantage of our low cost public liability insurance, regardless of whether or not they have a constitution.

Stage 4 - Finance

PTAs will need a little bit of money for running costs and it is particularly important to think about how the funds of the Association are looked after and how decisions are made about spending any money which has been raised for the school.

The organisation should preferably have its own bank account. Some banks and building societies have charge-free Treasurer's accounts specifically for small organisations like PTAs.

Some people may be reluctant to become involved if they think they will be out of pocket so it is best to be open about the finances and make sure that any expenses, eg stamps, are paid out of PTA funds.

What if you already have a School Board?

Having a School Board does not lessen the need for PTAs - indeed, one of the Board's duties is to encourage their formation. Except in the case of the very smallest schools there will always be more interested and active parents than there are places on a School Board. A PTA allows all parents the opportunity to be involved whether by serving on the committee, supporting fund-raising, helping on outings or attending meetings - in fact in whatever way they wish.

There are no hard and fast rules about what each body should do but the School Board (being a statutory body) has some particular responsibilities such as approving the headteacher's spending plans and being involved in the appointment of senior staff.

Although in some cases there is a division of responsibility between the two groups, with the PTA's role often being seen more as fundraising, it's important that, if parents want the PTA to have a wider role, there should be enough flexibility in the constitution to allow them to discuss any issue of importance to parents. In our 1994 members' survey a third of those who responded organised meetings on educational topics and half were involved in consulting/liasing with the school board.

GOOD LUCK!

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