

# THURSDAY AT PLAY } CHICAGOLAND'S BEST GUIDE TO DINING & LEISURE

## IT'S SHOWTIME!

5 fall museum exhibits you need to see.

PAGE 11

## CITY SLICKERS

A campsite grows in Washington Park, and Barbara Brotman joins newbie campers. PAGE 5



## GET YOUR SOX ON

It's the home stretch, so gear up with White Sox garb (tranquilizers not included). PAGE 4



## A CALMING FORCE

New moms find that group time is not just for the kids. PAGE 10



## FAMILY

# Moms need playdates too

Group's success depends on location, child's age

By Emilie Le Beau  
Special to the Tribune

**A**fter her son was born, Beth Sloat had a lot of questions and many childless friends. "I didn't know any other new moms in the city," said Sloat, 33, of the Gold Coast.

Searching for support, Sloat joined a new moms' group, Transitions to Motherhood Series, at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. This program hosts about 15-20 new moms for six weekly sessions, in which an expert answers questions and leads group discussions about child care and adjusting to motherhood.

Once the program ended, the women continued meeting at the same time and organized a weekly play group. "We all say we look forward to Wednesdays," said Sloat. "When our kids are sick and we can't go, it's a sad week."

Her son is now 13 months and old enough for Sloat to slip away for the moms' nights out she enjoys with her new mom friends.

"We talk about other things besides the children," she said.

Finding support group success like Sloat's comes down to location, group type and the child's age, said Karen Benson, a senior infant specialist with the Erikson Institute, a graduate school in Chicago for child development.

New moms groups range from one-time events to weekly sessions that span months. (New dads are welcome in many groups too—look for ones for "parents.")

Benson recommends that new moms looking for practical information join a group that meets for at least six weeks.

"Four weeks is too short, as you find out when you have a baby," she said.

Your baby's age also can affect the experience, and Benson suggests the best time to start is around 3 months. "It's chaotic in the beginning," she said.

Some groups cater to working moms, whose maternity leaves and other work issues can make attending meetings tough.

Through the North Side Parents Network, Ellen Robbins, a Gold Coast attorney with a 9-month-old daughter, specified that she wanted a group for working moms rather than stay-at-home moms.

The group met for three hourlong discussions at a volunteer's house. "People could raise topics like sleep issues or feeding issues. The last week, we discussed transitioning back to work," said Robbins.

Meeting with other working moms also meant fewer scheduling conflicts for future play dates.



At a recent gathering of the New City Moms, Josh and Steph Degodny (left) join Aden Botchway in choosing rhythm sticks for a child-parent music class at Musical Magic in Chicago.



New City Mom Kara Haravon watches as son Jack tackles a rhythm stick at Musical Magic.



Young Stella Brown readies her scarf for the popular peek-a-boo song.

Six women from her support group formed a play group, meeting the first Sunday of every month. "I definitely look forward to it," said Robbins. "A month goes by and it's so nice to see how the other kids are growing and developing."

Jennifer Piton, 29, of River West, mother of a 13-month-old boy, also joined a NPN new moms group that turned into a regular play group. Through the play group, she learned about New City Moms, a Chicago organization that hosts seminars around the city. For \$20-\$30 a seminar, moms can enjoy lunch, mingle with other new

moms and hear a seminar from an expert.

She went to several seminars about sleeping, homemade baby food, baby-proofing your house and taking cool pictures of your kids.

Piton said having a newborn "was really scary" in the beginning and she turned to other new moms for answers. "I had never really held a newborn before, I worried, am I feeding him enough? Is he getting enough sleep?" she said. "I wanted to hear other people's experiences. It was reassuring."

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Photo for the Tribune by Michael Walker  
How much fun is it to take mom to Musical Magic? Ask little Finn Hughes.

## Finding support groups

Oh, baby! Last year, more than 4 million babies were born in the U.S. New moms needing support can find help all around Chicagoland:

**Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital:** New Mothers Group in Downers Grove. Free. 800-323-8622

**Family Network Inc.:** Highland Park group hosts "Rock-a-Bye My Baby," a new mothers group focused on soothing and calming fussy babies. Meets five consecutive weeks. \$45. 847-433-0377 or www.highlandpark.org/fmnetwork

**Learning Together Parent Education Center:** Offers a parent-infant program in Palatine. Meets one morning a week and also includes a weekly evening parent discussion group. \$200. 847-567-5873 or www.ltpec.org

**New City Moms:** Workshops about baby care, \$20-\$30 per event. 773-486-3952 or www.newcitymoms.com

**North Side Parents Network:** Organizes play groups and social events. New moms group meets for three consecutive weeks. \$40 annual membership fee, moms group costs additional \$15. 312-409-2233 or www.northsideparent-s.org

**Palos Community Hospital:** Offers a free Nursing Moms Network, ongoing support for moms and babies up to 1 year old. Meetings are run by a lactation consultant. 708-226-2300

**Parent and Child Education and Support Organization:** Group has six suburban regions and offers a New Motherhood Seminar. Meets weekly for six weeks, \$32 membership fee, includes monthly parent education meetings, social events, play groups, outings and a meal program for new moms. 630-835-4111 or www.pacesmoms.org

**Parenthesis:** Parent-child center in Oak Park offers a New Moms Group that meets for six consecutive weeks and caters to older first-time moms. Also offers other programs and a postpartum support group. \$120. 708-848-2227 or www.parenthesis-info.org

**Parents Who Care:** Social and support group for northwest suburban families. Hosts new moms play group and moms night out events. \$25 membership fee. 847-604-4582 or www.parentswhocare.org

**Support Groups at Northwestern Memorial Hospital:** Six-week "Transitions to Motherhood" workshop led by clinical experts, \$75. 312-926-8400.