

Finding YOUR Tribe At L.A. Private School

Description



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It can look intimidating at first. You're at a new school and you look around. The other moms all look richer, more confident and more involved in the school than you'll ever be. On top of that, they already seem to know each other. It's hard to imagine you'll ever fit in.

Every time I started a new school, or even a new class within the school, I felt that way â€” destined to be left out. For my family, paying for private schools was a struggle and we sacrificed things to make it happen. Fancy cars and a big house and swank vacations were among the things that we didn't have. At first glance, you believe you're the only one without. You also get the sense that either everyone is a stay-at-home mom and you're not, or that everyone has a job and you don't. (I've been on both sides of that coin).

The funny thing is I can say eighteen years into the L.A. private school scenes, my worst fears were never realized. I always found my people. [It's not always easy](#), but in fact I would say that of every class of all three of my kids I not only found my place, but took away really good friendships, many of which endured long after the kids stopped hanging out.

If you just drop your kid and run and never get involved at all it's harder than if you find some committee to join. I mostly worked and couldn't be one of those rabid PTA moms. There is always a group of moms at every school that seem to run the place. God bless them. They are generally extremely hard working and efficient and way over qualified to serve as much food as they do. They are at every event, befriend each other and it's not a bad idea to be nice to them, because they know everything that's going on and sometimes it's good information.

The flip side of this group is that I've seen women nearly go to fisticuffs over whether or not to put the fork in the cake or have people take their own fork. My personal preference is never to get involved with committees that involve food. All the real problems go down there. The battle over healthy food versus sugar snacks alone is enough to send me running to the hills. But they also get into it over serving in a earth friendly way or how to handle food in a totally germ free manner. These things don't interest me, but I'm always nice to those women because they also know who is about to leave or get fired and what things you need to do to get your kid in certain classes or on certain teams. They are an invaluable resource for those with no opinion on snack food.

I know for women with full-time jobs it's impossible to dream of adding some committee or serving a lunch, but there are a few committees worth popping in on. The fundraising ones usually get you invited to the best parties even if you aren't a big donor. Generally they involve a couple after hours meetings and making four or five phone calls. Easy breezy and you'll meet people and be thanked for your service. Or show up at some of the weekend events, even if only one or two in the year to see who's there that might be fun to meet. It will be worth your while.

The very best source of friends at your school of course is your kid. My kids had surprisingly good taste. They gravitated towards kids from families not dissimilar to ours and usually from that playdate structure a friend would emerge. (This is of course much more difficult in high school where the kids try and prevent you from meeting their friends much less the friend's mom.)

That does mean however when your kid says they want to play with someone, you have to try and help them make it happen. No eye rolling, postponing, or shoving it off on your husband or a nanny. Every play date is a possibility not just for your kid but for you and maybe even your family as well. You might even discover a family vacation with. In my son's current class, two families are going to India together next year for two weeks. They aren't even that close and their kids are not particular friends, but the mom's hit it off and an amazing trip is in the offing.

A play date that ends with a glass of wine is often the start of something fun. Most schools say they offer "community" and while not required, finding your place in that community generally adds to your experience and that of your child.

Mother of three, Alice attended east coast private schools as a child and has been in the private school world as a parent for nearly twenty years. Her kids attended Mirman for elementary, then Harvard-Westlake and Brentwood for high school, with one still to go. She is a writer working in film, TV and for various magazines such as Family Fun, Wondertime, Glamour and Brides.

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Date Created

June 24, 2015

Author

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