



As families prepare for the uncertainty of the school year, many are looking to learning pods.

How to Create a Homeschool Pod or School Pod: Top Things to Consider

8/9/20 - By [Katie Nave Freeman](#)

As September approaches, many parents are navigating the idea of sending their children back to school with great trepidation and anxiety.

With virus case numbers continuing to rise across the country, a number of America's school districts are turning to full remote learning or hybrid schooling that combines online learning with part-time in-person classes. The news has many parents scrambling for ways to avoid the distance learning disasters that were experienced in the spring. Enter homeschooling pods and micro schools.

If you're considering setting up or participating in a schooling pod or [homeschool learning](#) for your child and maybe a few classmates this school year, there are a few key things to consider. The emotional labor, the calculated risks, and the inequity of it all are far too real. We talked to community members about how they are navigating this complicated time and gathered helpful tips, resources, and advice from dedicated experts.



Pods can help children remain on track academically, collaborate on activities and socialize with one another.

Types of School Pods

An unease with the idea of physically sending children back to school this year, along with the dissatisfaction of distance learning, has led many parents to form **pandemic school pods**. It may sound simple, but there are many factors to take into consideration before electing to form or join an educational pod. When weighing all of your options, it's helpful to know what types of educational opportunities exist.

Homeschool co-op establishments are typically pods that are formed when several families come together to share a facility and **hire an educator or tutor to lead their children** in a hybrid, in-person school. Other **pods are being led by parents**, trading "teacher" duties with each other.

Micro schools are oftentimes organized by professional establishments, like [School House](#) or [Whiz Kidz](#), and more closely mimic schools with a smaller staff and student-base.

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There is plenty of room for customization, as some families are choosing to hire professional educators, while others are dividing up teaching duties amongst parents. Many are opting to keep their children enrolled in school remotely and using the pod as a space to teach the public school curriculum. Some will withdraw their children from the school system completely, registering them as home-schoolers and submitting their academic plans to their district for approval.

"I've made the decision to start a learning pod for my three children," shares Anna Levy-Warren, PhD, a Brooklyn mom, licensed clinical psychologist, and co-founder of [Dwellness](#) and [Organizational Tutors](#). "There is a level of uncertainty surrounding this school year that is exhausting for parents. There are so many logistics and there is a strain on relationships that have already been tested."

"I made the decision to not be as collaborative in setting up my pod," adds Levy-Warren. "I found a teacher on [Sittercity](#) that can meet my child's special education needs. We created a daily schedule and mapped out the entire school year together."

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Establish Guiding Principles for the Pod

When it comes to setting up your own learning pod, experts and parents agree that communication and establishing guiding principles upfront are key. Families are encouraged to consider everything from different learning styles to virus-exposure risks when deciding who they will best blend with in a pod. It is recommended that pod participants draw up thorough agreements outlining all decisions that will guide students, teachers, and families.

"I've been clear from the start that I'm not starting a new school and I am not a principal," says Levy-Warren. Social and emotional well-being is number one. We're focusing on having fun and being creative, with education as the backdrop. It feels most important that the kids are being curious and engaged and connecting with one another."

"There is a certain level of trust that we're establishing with the other families. We don't want to police, but we ask for transparency," she adds. "We've created a school statement, agreed on daily temperature checks, and are aiming to keep our pod to six families."

"We're trying to be as safe as possible with a huge emphasis on hand-washing and keeping things outdoors as much as possible. I would advise really taking time to interview the families that you plan to include and make sure everyone is on the same page in regards to safety. If you are a highly conservative family when it comes to exposure and you include a family that isn't taking the same precautions, you're greatly increasing your risk."

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Spending a good amount of time outside can cut down on the risk of spreading or contracting Covid-19.

Safety Factors to Consider in a Pod

"If you're considering setting up a learning pod, there are many safety recommendations to keep in mind," says [Dr. Leann Poston](#), who has practiced pediatric medicine. "The recommended number of people to include in your pod is no more than 10, but remember that isn't simply 10 students. That number should include the instructor and any participants that will be sharing the space. Obviously, the fewer people involved, the less risk you will be taking."

"Spending time outdoors is best," she adds. "We can't say there is zero risk outside, but it is much lower. It's important to have good ventilation and HEPA filters in indoor spaces."

Good Ground Rules for Pods:

- Give children plenty of breaks to wash their hands and make sure that soap and water are readily available.
- Determine who will have the responsibility of cleaning the space and verify that all high-touch areas will be sanitized on a regular basis.
- Encourage everyone who enters the space to wear masks and maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet.
- Spend as much time outdoors as possible.
- Make sure that you have proper ventilation indoors with HEPA filters.
- Each child should have a designated set of school supplies.
- No sharing of food, snacks, or drinks.

Health Considerations for Pods:

- Monitor any symptoms that arise, but keep in mind, not everyone with coronavirus shows symptoms, or the typical symptoms, such as a fever and a cough.
- If your child seems sick at all, keep them home, with fever or without.
- Do not punish students (or teachers!) for staying home.

- If someone exhibits symptoms of COVID-19, ask that they contact their healthcare provider, get a test, and follow isolation protocols.
- Participants should take COVID tests at the beginning of the year and after all breaks from school before returning, or two weeks of quarantine.
- Review [CDC coronavirus guidelines](#) on symptoms, quarantines, and school guidance.

The Issue of Equity and Pods

One of the main problems with the sudden formation of school pods or homeschool pods is the lack of inclusion. Having the option to form or join a learning pod is a choice of great privilege, as costs are prohibitively high for many.

"We want to make sure that students who don't have access to these types of pods aren't just left behind," shares Garri Rivkin, Executive Director at [The City Tutors](#). "Our organization is identifying places around the community that need support and are bringing in assistance. One concrete thing schools can do is partner with support organizations like ours."

Some pod organizers are electing to operate on a sliding scale or offer scholarships for children whose families cannot afford the high fee.

"We're all grappling with how to be more equitable and inclusive," says Levy-Warren. "We've made the decision to operate our pod on a sliding scale so that those who can't contribute are still welcome. We're also opening up certain outdoor components to additional kids in the area at no cost. Anyone can attend as long as we stay safe, distant, and wear masks."

Public school educators fear that continued remote learning will come at a higher cost to those who lack the proper resources.

"One of the main issues that we're seeing right now is that even if parents do have the option to keep their children at home, many students lack access to consistent internet and technology," says Katie Burke, an instructional coach at a public high school in the Bronx. "We are all working to close the achievement opportunity gap. One of the best things that parents can do is to advocate for small class sizes and for schools to allow other spaces to host pods. Parks, libraries, and other facilities allow for exposure numbers to drop and for children to spread out as much as possible."

Many non-profit organizations are advocating for education justice and rely heavily on donations. Consider supporting a group like [The Alliance for Quality Education](#) or [The Learning Accelerator](#). You can also contribute directly to the [public school system](#).

A Gentle Reminder

As we approach the new school year, it's important to remember that none of us have ever faced these types of challenges before. We're all navigating uncharted territory and attempting to do the best for our families. During times of great uncertainty, we all need love, safety, and a sense of community. Check in on those around you, create a support system for yourself, and continue to advocate for the well-being of all children during this time.

If you're considering a learning pod for your child, consult your pediatrician on how to keep families as safe as possible. Check back in with us as we approach the school year for more updates and resources. As parents ourselves, we know this is an oftentimes overwhelming process, and we are here for you.