



## A Guide for Gathering

*I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wish to make them better.*

– George Frideric Handel –

Gatherings are the heart of the Family Education Center Group and Branch. Gatherings extend and apply learning in meaningful ways with other families and students who are participating in any mutual curriculum. For an AHS Family Education Center Group, families come together to showcase, demonstrate, apply, produce, compete, serve, and Celebrate around their at-home learning with Family School or LiftEd. Gatherings can occur daily, weekly, bi-weekly, and at the end of each unit of study (Celebrations). Gatherings will add an increase of joy, focus, motivation, and social outcomes for your child(ren). To that end, we offer this guide to support your in-person Group gatherings and to complement and enrich the online and/or at-home learning experience.

The following key elements will help you plan, host, and execute a successful Group gathering. This is a suggested basic format with room for you to personalize according to the needs and interests of your Group.

- 1) Engaging Arrival
- 2) Opening
- 3) Sharing
- 4) Activity
- 5) Closing

**ENGAGING ARRIVAL:** Have a plan for people the **MOMENT** they arrive. You will most likely have some early arrivers and necessary wait time. It can be awkward and uncomfortable (even among friends) to stand around waiting for the event to begin. Give your guests a meaningful activity to engage them from the minute they walk in the door. Think beyond “free play” in the basement. Think: **SMILE** (Simple, Meaningful, Inclusive, Length, Energy).

- **Simple:** The activity needs to be one that doesn’t require a lot from you or your guests. For example, think easy explanation and not a lot of pieces, directions, or props.
- **Meaningful:** Not just something to keep people busy. Have a purpose behind every gathering, even if the purpose is simply to get to know one another. An activity that compliments the main activity of the gathering can be powerful.
- **Inclusive:** Provide activities that support students of all ages and abilities. If not one activity, consider having a few to meet this need.
- **Length:** The activity should have an adjustable component according to your needs—if the guest speaker is late, if the person bringing the materials and supplies is late, if the internet



connection is unavailable. You'll need to be able to vary the length of your activity to take into account the variability of the start time.

- **Energy:** The Engaging Arrival activity should produce the right kind of energy and feeling for the rest of the gathering. For example, if your gathering is a talent show, running around and playing tag as your Engaging Activity before you start might wind kids up; on the other hand, it might be exactly what you need to get out their wiggles. Just be aware that the activity will affect the energy of the event.

— Transition from the “Engaging Arrival” to the “Opening.” —

Think through clean-up and transition from the Engaging Arrival activity to the Opening. What will the kids need to do to make that transition? Help clean up? Walk quietly to another room? Sit down where they are? Thinking through this step, and all other transitions, will make your guests more comfortable and help you feel more confident in your ability to manage the group.

**OPENING:** The opening portion of your gathering kindly lets guests know the event has started, and walks them through a series of actions designed to unite hearts and minds before jumping into the main activity. Keep in mind that although each week's learning activity will vary based on the LiftEd topic, this opening part of the group time will be routinely predictable. Ponder what you want this time to look and feel like. Consider the following actions as you plan our Opening time:

- **Welcome:** Warm welcome by the person conducting the gathering-something that communicates gratitude for each person in attendance. You may try one of the following: shaking hands, eye contact, compliments, naming each attendee, having guests welcome one another, etc.
- **Pledge of Allegiance:** This communicates to your group the importance of liberty and law as a foundational part of your group's values.
- **Opening Song:** Not many activities unite people like singing does! Singing a song together is a good way to bring a positive feeling and energy to the start of your gathering, not to mention a tangible feeling of unity. It's also a great way to learn a new song.
- **Opening Prayer:** This invites the spirit into the activity, unites the group and brings a peaceful feeling of love and reverence to the gathering.
- **Foundations:** The first few times you gather as a group, it's helpful to walk through and teach the group about boundaries, rules, and expectations (and bathroom locations!). This can be a simple verbal announcement or a more detailed explanation with practice and walk-through modeling and examples. Whichever way you decide to do this, we strongly encourage you to take time during your first gathering to help set students up for success by clearly explaining the following:
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- Location of the bathrooms
- Off-limit areas of the gathering facility
- Where to put shoes, coats, backpacks, etc.
- House rules (ex. no shoes in the house, no food in the living room, use the garage door to go outside, water is available in the kitchen, no jumping on the trampoline without an adult present, etc.) You may find it helpful to briefly remind guests of these expectations at the start of your first few gatherings. This could be as simple as asking, “Who remembers where you put your backpacks?”, or “Who can tell me which door we use to go to the backyard?”
- **Schedule:** This part of opening is where you verbally walk your guests through the events of the gathering. For example, you might say, “After we share about what we learned this week at home, we will all go outside for a science experiment. After the experiment, we will come back to the house/building and hear from a real scientist! After that, we will go to the basement and have a snack and play in the playroom. Any questions about what we’re doing today?” This will go a long way to help those kids (and adults!) that struggle with transitions and/or surprises.

— Transition to “Sharing.” —

It can be helpful to change locations/scenery for different parts of the gathering. It is not necessary, but it becomes a mental cue for your guests to know what to expect-AND gives people a chance to stand, move, and re-engage. Think through what you need your guests to do and where you need them to be following the “Opening” time. You may decide to do the next part of your gathering outside, so you may say something like this: “Now we’re going to go to the backyard for a science experiment. We are going to gather on the patio. We aren’t going to play on the swingset or trampoline right now. Make sure you stay on the cement patio next to the rocket launcher. Don’t touch anything yet! I will explain when we all get out there.” (As an added reinforcement, you may choose to thank/acknowledge guests by name for following instructions exactly as you requested.)

**SHARING:** This is the time of the gathering where the students share what they have been learning and working on at home (LiftEd or otherwise). This could be a book they’re reading, a violin piece they are working on, a diorama they created for LiftEd, a picture they colored, etc. We recommend allowing time for each student to share something, even if this means dividing the group into smaller groups for this portion, keeping in mind that children are invited, but not required, to share. This portion can be as formal or as informal as you desire, as long as it meets the needs of inspiring and motivating your group.

Depending on the dynamics of your group, you may need to encourage and/or model sharing the first few times you meet, or until the group is more comfortable with one another and used to this portion of your gatherings. Here are some helpful suggestions for your “Sharing” time. Use what you need; ignore the rest.



- Prepare your children to share BEFORE arriving at your group gathering. This simple habit will make their experience sharing more positive and interesting for the others in your group.
- If no one is sharing, consider calling on individual students by name and asking if they want to share something they learned this week or share about something they are working on.
- Avoid saying: “Who wants to share something?” This phrase can seem too vague for some children. Giving them more specific language, such as, “What did you learn about Volcanoes this week?” is sometimes easier to process than saying, “What did you learn?” Even “What did you learn about Geology?” may not be specific enough for some children.
- Clapping/finger snapping after each presenter can be a confidence booster to some children. This may be helpful for some in your group.

**ACTIVITY:** This portion of the gathering is set aside for enriching and extending the LiftEd unit studies. Your creativity is the only limit here! As a suggestion, here are some meaningful types of activities:

- Experiments
- Guest Speakers
- Role Play/Dramatics
- Movement (dancing, sporting activity, games)
- Discussions
- Simulations
- Cooking/Food/Eating
- Presentations

Things to keep in mind when planning this portion of the gathering are, 1) How does this activity connect with and enrich the learning from the LiftEd Unit Studies; and 2) What can be done most effectively in a group setting? Using these two questions as your guide, and the list above, your gathering can be a powerful and meaningful experience for your families.

**CLOSING:** This portion of the gathering lets your guests know the gathering is over and provides a moment of commemoration, gratitude and closure for the time you had together. This could include:

- A quick survey to see what they liked or remembered from the gathering.
- Snack
- Clean up
- Song/chant
- Closing prayer



**EXTRA:** Depending on the goals and needs of the families you gather with, your group may decide to add one of the following items as a regular part of your gatherings. These extra activities could happen before or after the closing.

- Life Skills-cooking, service, etiquette, outdoor skills, etc.
- Free play or PE
- Art or Music
- Nature exploring
- Literature circle

Gatherings can be a powerful extension to the LiftEd learning experience. By following the principles and guidance in this document, we know you will be successful in your attempts to gather and lift families in your community.



EXAMPLE: FIRST GATHERING (using 3 moms to help execute)

1st hour	1) Engaging Arrival  Mom 1 Mom 3	<p>Mom #1: As families come in, welcome them. Show them where to put their shoes. Direct them to the kitchen for name tags and an art activity.</p> <p>Mom #3: lead the art activity. (Draw a picture of themselves doing a favorite activity. If they finish earlier, have them draw a second one on the back. Save pictures for the opening. If they finish and still have more time, have play doh available for free play).</p>
	Transition	Direct kids to “put play doh in containers and pencils in the pencil box, take their pictures, and go sit by their family in the living room.”
	2) Opening  Mom 1 Mom 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mom #1. Welcome</li> <li>● Briefly explain Opening time (purpose and what will happen)</li> <li>● Opening Song-You’re a Grand Old Flag</li> <li>● Opening Prayer-Kelsey</li> <li>● Foundations-walking tour: bathroom, shoes, coats, off limits, and House Rules</li> <li>● Mom #2. Get to Know You Game-Everyone stands in a circle. Think of an activity you really like to do. Now think of how you could act that out with a simple hand gesture (read a book, swim, draw, etc.). Starting at the head of the circle and moving clockwise around the circle, each person says their name and shows/says what they like to do. As a group, we repeat each persons name and activity, always working our way back to the person at the head of the circle each round until the whole circle has been introduced. When done, everyone sit down again.</li> <li>● Schedule-Review the day's schedule and ask if anyone has questions.</li> </ul>
Transition (movement)  Mom 1	<p>Mom #1. Teach “Shoo Fly” circle dance to get people up and moving and physically connected to each other. Everybody stand up, hold hands, and make a big circle. Slowly explain the steps and walk it all the way through. Take 4 steps into the center of the circle. Take 4 steps back out. Repeat. Choose two people to make a bridge and the person across the circle from the bridge starts walking towards the bridge while still holding hands.</p>	



		<p>Repeat from the beginning only you are facing backwards. Step into the center of the circle for 4 steps. Step back out. Repeat. The couple makes the bridge and the person opposite the bridge “back into” the bridge while holding everyone's hands. All follow. End up in the circle the right way holding hands. Try it with the music. Do it again 2-3 times. (source: thesingingclassroom.com)</p> <p>“Sit down where you are and get ready to share your picture you drew at the beginning or what you brought from home.”</p>
2nd hour	6) Sharing Mom 2	Mom #2. Depending on the size of our group, share as a large group or break into smaller groups. Everyone share either the picture from the beginning, something they brought from home, or other.
	Transition (change rooms)	“Go put your things in your backpack, get your business plans, and meet me in the basement in 2 minutes.”
	7) LiftEd Activity	Mom #3. See Entrepreneur Activity Lesson Plan
	8) Optional “Add Ons”	No add ons this week
	9) Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Turn and tell your friend what your favorite part of our group was today</li> <li>● Explain clean up procedures (trash, vacuum, wipes, sweep, etc)</li> <li>● Closing prayer</li> <li>● Clean up. Hand out snack after all clean. Eat outside. Families can stay and visit.</li> </ul>

EXAMPLE: SECOND GATHERING (using 3 moms to help execute)

1st hour	3) Engaging Arrival Mom 1 Mom 3	<p>Mom #1: As families come in, welcome them and direct them to the living room for Swedish Drills/Physical challenges/Yoga.</p> <p>Mom #3: lead the Movement activity. (see <a href="https://simplycharlottemason.com/blog/the-swedish-drill-teacher/">https://simplycharlottemason.com/blog/the-swedish-drill-teacher/</a> for ideas)</p>
	Transition	Direct kids to “get a drink of water if they need it, then sit in a big circle in the living room.”



	<p>4) Opening</p> <p>Mom 1 Mom 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Mom #1. Welcome</li> <li>● Opening Song-You're a Grand Old Flag</li> <li>● Opening Prayer-Ryan</li> <li>● Foundations-quick review (who remembers where we put our shoes, find the vacuum to clean up, eat food, etc).</li> <li>● Schedule-Review the day's schedule and ask if anyone has questions.</li> </ul>
	<p>Transition</p> <p>Mom 1</p>	<p>Mom #3. Direct group to get in a line from youngest to oldest without talking." After they successfully do it, double check to make sure the ages are right. Instruct them to "look at the people standing next to you on both sides. If you don't know their name and ask them to tell you one thing they are grateful for." Pause for discussion. After a minute, invite them to "Sit back down in a circle and get ready to share. If you need to grab something from your bag, go get it now."</p>
	<p>10) Sharing</p> <p>Mom 2</p>	<p>Mom #2. Depending on the size of our group, share as a large group or break into smaller groups. If one large group, start at one point of the circle and go around the room in order. If a child doesn't want to share, they can pass.</p>
	<p>Transition (change rooms)</p>	<p>"Go put your things in your backpack, and meet me in the backyard in 2 minutes."</p>
2nd Hour	<p>11) LiftEd Activity</p>	<p>Mom #3. See LiftEd Activity Lesson Plan</p>
	<p>12) "Add Ons"</p> <p>Mom 2</p>	<p>Mom #2. Service project (tying fleece quilts or pick up trash), Followed by Free play.</p>
	<p>13) Closing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Turn and tell your friend what your favorite part of our group was today</li> <li>● Review/remind about clean up procedures (trash, vacuum, wipes, sweep, etc)</li> <li>● Closing prayer</li> <li>● Clean up. Families can stay and visit.</li> </ul>