



girl gang

B A B Y , I ' M

B O R E D



The mum group
 REVOLUTION – a hip
 new school of
 SISTERLY SUPPORT

WORDS: EMMA HOWARTH

Bad coffee, rice cake chat and the chance to rock out to *Old MacDonald*? Where do I sign up? Said. No. One. Ever. Of motherhood's numerous 'how did I end up here?' moments, it's the ones that feature church halls and plastic maracas that hit the hardest. We know and you know, we've all been there.

For Jenny Scott, those chewed-on instruments sparked a personal crusade to up the ante that led to the launch of London mothers' collective Mothers Meeting. Her idea was a hit. Just a handful of people attended the first meeting in 2010, but word soon spread and today Mothers Meeting has 30k members and a growing online community (26k followers on Instagram at the last count).

"I was totally unprepared for how lonely I'd feel when I became a mother," says Scott. "I remember going to one baby group and feeling totally out of my depth – everyone but me seemed to have revised the words to *Wind the Bobbin Up!* It inspired me to set up a different kind of group – I wanted to create a network of like-minded people that felt a bit more creative and stimulating."

It's not just London mothers sticking two fingers up to rhyme time and daytime telly, either. In the past 12 months, a host of similar, creatively minded groups have popped up across the country. In Sheffield, Mama Social hosts weekly meet-ups, craft workshops and fun evening In' sessions, and Scottish Mothers

'Mums' Night
 Glasgow's
 Collective runs





events on style, nutrition and wellness, as well as business networking meets. In the Cotswolds, Cheltenham Maman hosts its inaugural event next month. In Kent, Tunbridge Wells-based Mum's the Word puts on monthly meet-ups, 'Wild Child' family discos and toddler-friendly networking events, while Manchester's Mamas Collective hosts comedy coffee mornings and talks from the likes of Mother Pukka Anna Whitehouse and hypnobirthing/positive affirmation guru Hollie de Cruz. The locations might be different, but the heart of all these initiatives is the same: inspiring, motivating events, meet-ups and support for women who happen to be mothers.

"It's about retaining some of your former self," says Mama Social's Tomasin Keep. "We get in brilliant speakers to talk about aspects of child development and psychology, but that's just part of a bigger picture. We want women to leave our events feeling lighter, refreshed and inspired. It's a modern mum group for modern mothers."

There's no phrase more loaded in the modern mother lexicon than work-life balance, which is why many of the sessions run by these groups have a business focus. Mothers Meeting hosts a business club, Mum's the Word has an offshoot for mums running businesses, and there's a networking element to some Scottish Mothers Collective's events.

Steph Douglas, founder of gift company Don't Buy Her Flowers, went to her first Mothers Meeting the week after she launched her business: "I'd seen it on Instagram and it looked a bit cool, so I was really nervous, but they all clapped and cheered and really got what a big deal it was to me. It felt so supportive, a place where everyone understands the challenges of being a mother and working. I think the sisterhood is so crucial for women of our generation."

It's this sense of camaraderie, support and building each other up that sets the tone for the new wave of mum groups. There are no rights, no wrongs and how long you breastfed for is so far down the agenda it has dropped into an abyss with debates about working/stay-at-home mums. The modern sisterhood is much more interested in a kid-friendly cocktail class with manicures on the side, net-walking the Bugaboo round the park and making sure those church hall memories are erased for good.

"Finding interesting spaces to hold our events is a priority," says Mum's the Word's Laura Swann. "That doesn't stop well-meaning types suggesting we use soft-play cafés or village halls. It makes me want to cry; just because you've got a few kids in tow doesn't mean you don't want to hang out somewhere nice or drink decent coffee."

Mothers have long sought out their own to share sleep deprivation woes and caffeine, but this focus shift is refreshing, putting mothers and their needs unashamedly at the top of the pile. It's a celebration of motherhood as an exciting new chapter of life. Yes, children are welcome and yes, there'll be plenty to keep them entertained, but the conversation has moved on from nap schedules and carrot purée.

Cocktail in hand on a Friday at one of Mum's the Word's kid-friendly stylist sessions and never has the phrase 'happy mother, happy child' been more apt. There's definitely no need to lose your cool just because you've got a baby on board.

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ABOVE Cocktails for mum, entertainment for kids at Mum's the Word
RIGHT Steph Douglas talks at Mamas Collective





Mamas Collective

MANCHESTER
@mamasmcr
mamas-collective.com

Cheltenham Maman

**CHELTHENHAM
& THE COTSWOLDS**
@cheltenhammaman
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Mothers Meeting

**LONDON &
NATIONWIDE EVENTS**
@mothersmeetings
mothers-meeting.com

Mama Social

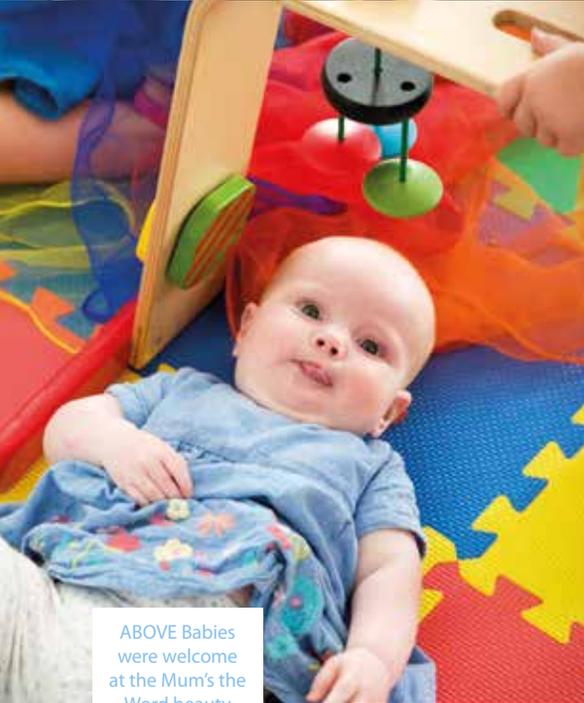
SHEFFIELD
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Mum's the Word

TUNBRIDGE WELLS
@mumstheword.online
mumstheword.online

Scottish Mothers Collective

GLASGOW & EDINBURGH
@scottishmotherscollective



ABOVE Babies were welcome at the Mum's the Word beauty and cocktails event BELOW AND RIGHT The ladies glam up for a Scottish Mothers Collective do



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A Mamas Collective meet-up; the Mum's the Word fashion event; there's lots for the kids at a Mum's the Word gathering

