

# Finding the Group for you

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So you've just turned off the TV after watching this week's episode of Ghost Hunters. "What a show!" you scream as you jump out of your chair, "I wanna do THAT!". Well guess what? This CAN be you. You CAN do that. With the popularity of "Ghost Hunters" there are new paranormal groups popping up all over the country. So where do you get started? How do you find the right group for you? Worried about the amount of time you have to commit to a group? Well don't worry; I'm here to help guide you through the process of finding a paranormal group that will be perfect for you. Trust me, there is one out there. So let's go ahead and start you on your way:

First, let's go over a few things you'll need to have ready before beginning your search. You'll want to take some time to develop an idea of what you believe in with the paranormal. If you're skeptical that paranormal activity even exists, this is ok too! Just have an idea of what you believe in. You'll probably already know but if not this will help you in your search. When your asked what your views are in this field you'll already have an idea instead of saying something like "uh...ummm..well". That probably wouldn't give a good impression.

Along with your beliefs, you'll need to have an idea of how much time you're planning to dedicate to your new group. Some groups are extremely active, and could require a good amount of time for things like research, and evidence review. If you know you have that kind of time to give then great! If your not looking for that type of time commitment though that's ok too. Some groups plan open investigations for people who only like to investigate now and then. Many paranormal 'societies' work this way. Its just a matter of how much time you have to give. Also keep in mind; some groups operate under the mind-set that what they are doing is a hobby. While others are diligently working in their 'bat caves' creating new inventions and hypothesis in a never ending quest for the truth. For them it's more of a passion. What it comes down to is that its up to you how serious you want to be towards investigating. There are options out there for you in whichever direction you decide to go.

You'll find pretty quickly if your new to this that there are a million and one gadgets out there that are used in ghost hunting. One question that is sure to come up when you start meeting people in this field is, "What kind of equipment do you have?" Don't let this intimidate you if you're new to this. Just understand that most groups have very little money. Eventually you'll need to get some your own equipment. The sooner the better. Most seasoned investigators would agree a "newbie" could purchase the basic tools needed for investigating (voice recorder, flashlight, camera, etc.) for \$100 or less. These will be your personal investigation tools of the trade. You'll find additional costs that will come up like traveling expenses, group dues if necessary, and investigation fees. This will fluctuate depending on the group, location, etc. but be ready to 'contribute to the cause'. Its unfortunate that this field can be so pricey, but just keep in mind you'll be gaining valuable experience and having a good time too. It ends up being worth it in the end I promise. So let's start looking for a group shall we? If your with me and have done everything you've needed to up to this point you should be ready to go.

There are a few different avenues you can take when you start your search. Although I'm going to focus mostly on the internet, there are a few places you can check if your not internet friendly yet. Start by checking your local classifieds. You could even post and add and see what happens. If this doesn't work for you, you could also check a local historical society. Often times, they will have already been contacted by a paranormal group doing research for an investigation. Give it a try. Someone there may be able to get you in contact with a group. You could also search the yellow pages. Sometimes groups will list themselves in with the private investigators. There are often newspaper articles as well that you can find around Halloween normally. In the end, your greatest chance of getting in contact with a paranormal group is the internet. If you don't have access try heading to the local library. They normally have computers for public use.

Ok, back to the online search. There are a handful of really good places to check for paranormal groups in your area. I would suggest shooting right for the top. By that I mean go to the TAPS (The Atlantic Paranormal Society) website and search for the list of TAPS family

members. You will find the most well run and respected organizations in your area here. If you don't see any listed for your state don't fret. You can try searching with your favorite search engine like Yahoo! or Google. You can also try a classified website like Craig's list. Or a networking website like Myspace. All of these sites will have the most popular and well known paranormal groups listed. Start searching and see what you find. Comprise a list of groups in your area and get ready to dive into the details of each one.

Now that you have your list of groups, let's start looking at the areas we'll need to focus on to see which one will be right for you. Normally, a well run group will have a mission statement somewhere on the home page. For example, here are some statements from SMP's home page:

"Welcome to Southern Maryland Paranormal (SMP). Our goal is to research and investigate the ghost stories, folklore & hauntings of Maryland and in states beyond. Although we focus our activities to supporting the community of Calvert, St. Mary's, Charles, Prince George's (PG), & Anne Arundel Counties, we investigate sites throughout the state of Maryland. Sometimes we are called to locations outside Maryland.....Our business is the truth. We are discrete, professional and here to help you find answers and the truth...."

With these two examples, we've learned a lot about SMP. The entire area they investigate, what areas they focus on, how they approach investigations and how they approach paranormal activity. This is the type of information you want to be looking for when going over the websites of groups in your area. Compare statements like this to what you're looking for. Also, check for updates to the site. This is a great way to gauge how active the group your interested in is. Many times, past investigation locations and sometimes reports will be posted. This will show you often they investigate and how detailed they are with investigations. This will also give you an idea of how they perform their investigations. If you're lucky enough to find a group that hosts a message board or some type of forum, register and introduce yourself. Participate in discussions. This is a great opportunity to let the people in the group get to know you. It will also give you a chance to learn about them and see if your view towards paranormal activity is comparable. See if the group will provide training for someone who is new. This is something that's going to be important for you. Hopefully you'll have a chance to go through this process if you've found a group near you that you think you like. If the group your interested in does not host a forum of some type, there should be a link to e-mail members of the group. Send them an e-mail and ask for more information about the group. You'll learn a lot from the response you get. Just keep in mind there are no real "experts" in this field. There are people who are more experienced yes but if someone tries to tell you they are an expert of any kind, move to the next group. One more thing to keep in mind, no group is better than the next. Every group has something about it that makes it perfect for the people in it. And as I mentioned earlier, you're just trying to find the perfect one for you. If you like what you hear back from the group members, if it sounds like a good group of people, go ahead and see if they have any openings. This is what you've been waiting for anyway right? If the group you're interested in is not looking for new members, don't worry. There is more than likely other groups out there that would be thrilled to have you. However, if you think you've found the place you want to be and don't want to look elsewhere...don't. I had to do this myself. Sometimes it's best just to wait for an opening to come. This is where participating in forum discussions comes in handy because, as I said before, members in the group will get to know you. When the opening comes up they'll be familiar with you already and it will put you at the top of the list if there is one.

Coming across a group that is full is one potential road block when searching for a group, let me talk you through a few more while we're on the subject. Most paranormal groups are like families. Shoot, many of them ARE families. I'm bringing this up to let you know that with the bond that these groups form sometimes is pretty special. They may never take on new members. You'll probably find that out pretty quickly.

Some groups have very odd beliefs and investigation techniques. When you talk to the people who run the group you're interested in, ask them how they do things. How do they investigate? What techniques and equipment do they use? Sometimes you'll get some pretty wacky answers. You don't want to walk into an investigation and end up dancing around a picture of Liberace with a bra on your head. Make sure to find this out before you commit to the group.

Another MAJOR issue that I've seen with other groups is that they tend to "create" more paranormal activity then find it. You'll have to gauge this for yourself when you talk to the people who run the group your interested in. Do they get amazed at pictures of orbs? Do they make a decent effort at debunking? If you're looking for real paranormal activity these questions along with many others like it will need to be answered.

Ok, this has been a lot of info to this point. Let's say you've found your group, and YOUR IN! Well, congratulations! Here are a few things to help you in getting started and having a great experience. If you can contribute to the team in any way, do it. Don't feel shy, these groups are usually between five and fifteen members and normally everyone plays an important role. You will too! Just don't feel like you'll need to know everything right off the bat. Everyone has been a newbie at one point or another. Do the best sponge impression you can and soak up as much info as possible. Find the member of the group who has the most experience and shadow him or her as much as possible. It's amazing the amount of information these people have. When you can, jump in and give a hand. Whatever it may be; research, loading up equipment, debunking, all of these things will show great initiative to your fellow group members. These types of things help the group as a whole run better and make a more enjoyable experience for everyone involved. Speaking of enjoyable experiences, HAVE A GOOD TIME! This is what you've been waiting for. Your going to find that being in a paranormal group is a very rewarding experience. You'll get to do things as a group that you never could by yourself, and you'll probably end up making some great friends along the way.

I hope this article can help you in some way if you're looking for a new group to join. If you have any questions I'm here for ya.

Don

Links:

TAPS - [www.the-atlantic-paranormal-society.com](http://www.the-atlantic-paranormal-society.com)

Yahoo - [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)

Google - [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

Craigslist - [www.Craigslist.org](http://www.Craigslist.org)

Myspace - [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)