

How to start your playgroup



Starting your playgroup
– steps 1 to 9

The first few sessions

Sample playgroup routine

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How to start your playgroup

The idea of starting a new playgroup can seem daunting, particularly for someone who hasn't been involved in playgroups before. People decide to start a new playgroup for many reasons. They include:

- There are no playgroups nearby
- A new parent group at the early childhood centre wants to continue to meet and develop into a playgroup
- Local playgroups are full and have waiting lists
- A neighbourhood house, church or other family service wants to offer playgroups as part of their program
- A group of people have a particular interest to start a special playgroup e.g. fathers, nannies, home educators, culturally diverse, Saturday or Montessori playgroups
- Meeting in homes usually works well for several months until babies become mobile. The next step is moving into a playgroup venue. Playgroup NSW is able to assist in locating suitable venues

Don't feel daunted by the overall project of starting a new playgroup, as there are many people within Playgroup NSW who will give you assistance.

Follow the nine steps listed below as a guide.

1 Finding families

The first thing you need to start a playgroup is at least three interested families. Talk to everyone you can think of who may be interested in a playgroup. Surveys show that most people join a playgroup because a friend asked them. You can approach your local Early Childhood Clinic or advertise in a local shop window. Contact Playgroup NSW for information, and assistance.

If you have too many people initially, you may encourage some to start a separate group, or make a waiting list and contact those on the list when you are ready to enlarge or start another session.

Once you have found some interested families arrange a time to sit down and talk. This works best without the children, so consider a meeting at night.

2 The playgroup's purpose

Start the meeting by asking everyone what they want out of playgroup for themselves and their children. List everyone's reasons and highlight the key words that you all agree are most important.

3 Choosing the time

Generally playgroups meet once a week for two hours. The time of day the group meets can be dictated by availability of the venue and what suits the adults. Playgroups often work in with kindergarten or school times.

The day of the week you hold your playgroup will be determined by the times most families are available.

Choose a few days and times. This gives you more options when looking for a place to hold your playgroup. Decide whether you will meet in the school holidays.

4 Choosing a place to meet

Basic requirements are an indoor and outdoor play space that is safe and easy to supervise (note – outdoor space may not always be available). A separate kitchen, suitable toilet facilities and storage space are also necessary. Consider parking facilities and public transport.

Existing playgroups could tell you whether or not you could hold your new playgroup at their venue on another day. This way all the equipment can be shared, making it much easier for you to get started.

If you can't find a venue this way, look at a road map and note all the school halls, churches, neighbourhood houses, community centres, early childhood centres, and scout or guide halls. Be creative. List any local, affordable place that might have space suitable for your children to play. Ask someone to volunteer to follow up the most suitable and convenient venues.

DO NOT sign leases / agreements before referring these documents to Playgroup NSW for advice.

5 Insurance

It is essential that your playgroup is covered by a comprehensive insurance policy. Playgroup NSW offers a membership package that includes an insurance cover specially designed to meet all playgroup needs.

6 Toys/equipment

Start simple. Children do not need hundreds of toys to play with, but will enjoy the interaction with you, the other children and adults.

The play equipment you need depends on the ages and interests of the children. Sets of toys are preferable to one-off toys that will cause contention between the children. Blocks, balls, sandpit toys, musical instruments, dolls, pushers, baby toys, playdough equipment and books can be shared by all.

Consider the crockery and cutlery for both adults and children. Most venues have a kettle, plates, cups and bowls for snack time. If not, you may need to provide your own.

Once you have made a list of the equipment you need, ask for a volunteer to be responsible for the list. Can anyone get things donated?

You don't have to go out and buy expensive toys and equipment. Search through opportunity shops, fetes or garage sales. Try to use materials that are readily available and inexpensive.

7 Adult responsibilities

Decision making – Our experience has shown that a playgroup succeeds if it belongs to everyone. Everyone shares in the decision making and everyone helps with the workload.

Supervision – Be sure adults bringing a child to playgroup know that they are responsible for their child's behaviour and safety, and that it is every child's right to be supervised for safe and fair play.

8 What will it cost?

Costs will vary from group to group and the number of families in a playgroup will affect the amount and also other costs such as:

- The recurring costs – rent, administration
- Setting an amount to spend on play equipment
- The cost of perishable materials – glue, paint, milk and stationery
- Adding an amount for unforeseen costs
- Determining how members will pay their session fee – weekly, monthly or by the term
- Payment of Playgroup NSW annual membership fee for each member. Note – annual membership fee includes member benefits and insurance coverage

Fundraising can be considered if it is felt there is a need.

9 Ready to start?

Set a playgroup starting date in a few weeks time. If all the planning is not done by then, meet instead in someone's home or at a local park.

Before leaving the meeting swap names and telephone numbers so families can keep in touch.

Encourage everyone to get his or her allocated tasks done quickly while enthusiasm is high.

Planning some simple activities for the first few sessions will ensure a playgroup session which has value and is enjoyable.



The first few sessions

- Don't have too high expectations on the first day as it is a new experience for everyone.
- Be flexible.
- Wear name tags if you don't know each other. Include your child(ren)'s names on adults name tags.
- Have a few toys available for the children, preferably those which are easily shared.
- Keep activities simple and plan just a few each session.
- Allow plenty of time for the adults to relax and get to know each other.
- A tea/coffee break gives the adults time to discuss plans for the group and to share their ideas, experiences and problems. The children might like to share fruit at the same time.
- A simple time-table can be useful. Be flexible but most people feel comfortable with a relaxed routine.

This example may be used as a guide but use one which suits you all.

Keep it simple – Be flexible – Don't have too high expectations!

Sample Playgroup routine

TIME	ACTIVITY
9.30am	Hello time, welcome new members, set up, arrange indoor and outdoor play areas and a few activities
9.30am – 10.00am	Free play, outside and inside
10.00am	An activity such as painting, gluing, threading, etc
10.30am	Morning tea – children have fruit at small tables, adults have tea/coffee, discuss happenings, planning, concerns, etc
10.45am – 11.15am	Free play, outside and inside
11.15am	Story/music time
11.30am	Pack up, clean up, goodbyes



Where can we get help and information?

Playgroup NSW website: playgroupnsw.org.au

The “Playgroups” section of the website includes excellent:

- Play activities
- Tools to help you run and promote your playgroup

The website also includes articles about child development, Playgroup NSW events, competitions, membership and more.

Call or email Playgroup NSW

Once your group is affiliated with Playgroup NSW, we can provide you with more tools, resources and information you need to run a successful community playgroup.

Our membership services and program support team can offer further suggestions and answer your questions. Contact us at:

- Free call: 1800 171 882
- Email: admin@playgroupnsw.org.au

Local libraries

Local libraries can be a good resource for simple activity ideas, home-made toys, story books, songs and rhymes.



Playgroup NSW

1800 171 882 • playgroupnsw.org.au • admin@playgroupnsw.org.au

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