



## Insights Article



# Insights from the Australian Institute of Family Studies Practice Guide by Kristel Alla: What supports participation in playgroups?

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**Playgroups are a cornerstone of early childhood development and family wellbeing.**

Yet, participation in playgroups across Australia has been declining. A recent practice guide from the Australian Institute of Family Studies sheds light on what supports—and what hinders—playgroup engagement.

## **Why Playgroups Matter**

Playgroups offer more than just play. They:

- Support children's development and learning
- Strengthen parent-child relationships
- Reduce isolation and build community connections
- Provide access to parenting support and local services

## **Barriers to Participation**

Despite their benefits, many families face challenges including:

- Lack of awareness or understanding of the value of playgroups
- Financial constraints, transport issues, work commitments and competing time demands
- Language barriers and past negative experiences with services
- Environments that feel exclusive or judgmental

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## What Helps Families Engage

The evidence points to several key enablers:

- Welcoming, culturally safe environments
- Skilled, empathetic facilitators with child development knowledge
- Consistent routines and engaging, age-appropriate activities
- Strong community links and service integration

## Practical Strategies for Playgroup Organisers

To boost participation and impact:

- Offer a mix of structured and free play, including music, nature and art/craft
- Choose locations that are accessible consider offering flexible session times, including weekends
- Provide playgroups for free whenever possible
- Promote playgroups through community channels
- Train facilitators in cultural safety and inclusive practices
- Build relationships with local services and follow up with families who disengage

By focusing on inclusion, accessibility, and meaningful engagement, playgroups can continue to be a powerful support for children and families.

# Insights from the Practice Guide: What supports participation in playgroups?

## About Jennifer Kemp

Jenny has extensive experience spanning disability and child and family services, where she has worked in senior roles over the past three decades. Jenny has always been an advocate for children, specifically those with a disability, evidenced in her 21 year tenure with Lifestart, an organisation focused on inclusion for children and young people living with disability.

With valued experience across many of our portfolios and programs and with experience in evaluation and learning frameworks and social impact measurement, Jenny brings a wealth of knowledge to the team. Jenny's experience aligns well with our strategic priority to ensure every child and family has a place in their community to connect, learn and belong.



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