



Policy Brief

Strengthening Child Safety Through Early Childhood Prevention and Community-Based Safeguarding

The Role of Playgroup NSW and The Playgroup Collective in Advancing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

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Contents

Introduction	3
Child Safety Begins in the Earliest Years — A System Responsibility	4
Alignment with the National Child Safe Principles	6
The Playgroup Collective: A Statewide Child Safety Platform	7
Playgroups and Peer Support: Strengthening Safety for Parents, Women and Children	8
The Role of Playgroup NSW as a System Leader	9
Conclusion	11



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Introduction

Keeping children safe requires more than compliance – it requires prevention, early engagement, strong systems, and trusted community environments.

Playgroup NSW, as the peak body in NSW and backbone organisation of The Playgroup Collective in our state, is embedding child safety across governance, workforce, programs, and culture in alignment with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

Through our Child Safety Risk Assessment and Action Plan, Playgroup NSW is progressing from compliance toward safeguarding maturity and system leadership, strengthening prevention, early identification, and continuous improvement across the broader playgroup ecosystem.

Operating statewide across community, supported and targeted playgroups, peer support groups, parent capacity building, leading national sector capacity building projects and working through our Playgroup Collective, Playgroup NSW strengthens child-safe capability across the sector with a focus on NSW – reaching families in the earliest years, before risk escalates and before many families engage with formal services.

Evidence shows early childhood environments such as playgroups, peer support, and parent capacity workshops improve developmental outcomes, strengthen family capability, support early detection of risk, and reduce developmental vulnerability.

This brief outlines how we at Playgroup NSW – and our broader Playgroup Collective launched at NSW Parliament House in October 2025 – are advancing safeguarding leadership, prevention and system-wide child safety.

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The Role of Playgroup NSW and The Playgroup Collective in Advancing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Child Safety Begins in the Earliest Years — A System Responsibility

Child safety cannot sit only within statutory systems. Prevention begins early, within universal, trusted environments where families first connect with community supports. Early childhood development is shaped long before formal education — within the home, relationships, and early community environments.

Without early, protective environments:

- Risk may remain unseen
- Families may not access support early
- Developmental and wellbeing concerns may escalate
- Systems intervene too late

Through our Playgroup Collective, playgroups form a statewide prevention platform — strengthening protective factors, building safe parenting capability, and embedding child safety across community settings.



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Alignment with the National Child Safe Principles

Playgroup NSW aligns with all 10 National Child Safe Principles, embedding safeguarding across governance, workforce and practice — and supporting uplift across the wider playgroup ecosystem.

Importantly, Playgroup NSW supports sector-wide safeguarding capability uplift, ensuring child safe practice extends beyond a single organisation to the broader playgroup system.

From Compliance to System Leadership: Safeguarding Maturity

Playgroup NSW is advancing a Safeguarding Maturity Model not only internally, but soon to present across the Playgroup Collective.

Foundational — Compliance: Policies, screening, training, reporting.

Embedded — Organisation-Wide: Governance, risk monitoring, capability uplift.

Leading — System Leadership

- Safeguarding embedded in program design across playgroup models
- Prevention and early intervention integrated into service delivery
- Continuous learning and improvement
- Sector-wide child safe capability uplift
- Leadership across community-based early childhood environments

Playgroup NSW and our partner organisations are leaders in community-based safeguarding and prevention.



Strengthening Child Safety Through Early Childhood Prevention and Community-Based Safeguarding

The Role of Playgroup NSW and The Playgroup Collective in Advancing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

The Playgroup Collective: A Statewide Child Safety Platform

The Playgroup Collective represents a coordinated, system-level approach to strengthening playgroups across NSW – connecting community, supported and targeted playgroups under a shared framework of quality, safety, and continuous improvement.

Through the Collective, Playgroup NSW:

- Strengthens safeguarding capability across the playgroup sector
- Embeds consistent child-safe standards and practice
- Supports workforce and volunteer safeguarding capability
- Enables shared learning, improvement and risk monitoring
- Creates a unified, trusted platform for families and communities

This system-level approach ensures child safety is consistent, scalable and embedded across the broader playgroup ecosystem.

Evidence-Based Prevention and Child Safety Impact

Playgroups strengthen protective factors through safe, inclusive early childhood environments.

Evidence demonstrates playgroups contribute to:

- Improved emotional regulation and resilience
- Stronger social and communication capability
- Early identification of developmental and wellbeing concerns
- Improved transitions to early learning settings
- Reduced developmental vulnerability at school entry

These outcomes strengthen child safety through prevention and early support.

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Playgroups and Peer Support: Strengthening Safety for Parents, Women and Children

Playgroups and peer support strengthen protective factors for both parents and children by building safe, connected and supportive early parenting environments.

Evidence demonstrates playgroups and peer support contribute to:

- Stronger parent-child attachment, bonding and responsive parenting
- Increased parent confidence, capability and knowledge of child development and safety
- Reduced isolation and stronger social connection, particularly for women in the early years
- Safe, trusted environments that support early help-seeking and disclosure of concerns
- Earlier identification of family stress, wellbeing challenges and safety risks
- Stronger protective factors for children through stable, nurturing and responsive caregiving

These outcomes strengthen safety for parents — particularly women — and in turn support safer, more secure environments for children through prevention, connection and early support.



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The Role of Playgroup NSW as a System Leader

Playgroup NSW operates as:

- Service Delivery Provider: Delivering safe, high-quality, child-centred playgroup programs directly to children and families across community, supported and targeted models in NSW and the ACT.
- Service Delivery Subcontractor and Partner: Working in partnership with government and sector organisations to deliver playgroup services, strengthen safeguarding practice, and extend reach to priority children, families and communities.
- Peak Body: Setting standards, strengthening safeguarding capability, and supporting sector quality and safety.
- Backbone Organisation for The Playgroup Collective: Coordinating system-level alignment, quality and safeguarding maturity.
- Prevention Platform: Reaching families early, strengthening protective factors, and reducing risk before crisis.
- Safeguarding Leader: Embedding child safety across governance, workforce, programs and culture – and supporting sector uplift.

Strategic Safeguarding and System Focus

Playgroup NSW and the Collective are strengthening:

- Child participation and voice
- Safeguarding data, monitoring and insights
- Workforce and volunteer capability
- Integrated child safety across programs and settings
- Safeguarding maturity across the sector
- Prevention and early intervention pathways
- System leadership and continuous improvement

Strengthening Child Safety Through Early Childhood Prevention and Community-Based Safeguarding

The Role of Playgroup NSW and The Playgroup Collective in Advancing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Policy Implications — Strengthening Child Safety at System Level

Effective child safety requires:

- Investment in prevention and early childhood environments
- Strengthening trusted, community-based safeguarding platforms
- Embedding child safety beyond statutory systems
- Supporting sector-wide safeguarding capability uplift
- Enabling coordinated, system-level early childhood responses

The Playgroup Collective demonstrates how safeguarding can be embedded at scale across a statewide community platform.



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Conclusion

Child safety requires prevention, strong systems, trusted environments, and continuous improvement.

Through alignment with the National Child Safe Principles, a strong safeguarding maturity model, and leadership through the Playgroup Collective, Playgroup NSW is strengthening child safety across governance, workforce, programs and the broader playgroup ecosystem in NSW.

This system-level approach ensures safeguarding is not isolated — but embedded across communities — supporting safer outcomes for children from the earliest years in our state.

Playgroup NSW stands ready to continue partnering with government to strengthen prevention, safeguarding and child safety across the early childhood system.








Emily Caska
Chief Executive Officer
ecaska@playgroupnsw.org.au


 02 9684 9500

 admin@playgroupnsw.org.au

 www.playgroupnsw.org.au

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