



Section Four FRIENDSHIPS & SOCIAL SUPPORTS

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Welcoming Families

Bringing families together

Playgroups provide a friendly meeting place for families of all backgrounds, bringing together mothers, fathers, Family Day Care providers, grandparents, nannies, young parents, older parents, single parents, playgroup volunteers, parents who work and parents who stay at home. Anyone caring for children from birth to school age can attend a local playgroup.

You may be part of a playgroup which is happily chugging along with lots of members. You don't need anyone else, especially not someone who needs more help than usual to fit in.

Remember how good it was when you first came to playgroup to find you didn't need to be home, parenting alone? Keep this in mind when someone who looks, speaks or behaves differently to you bravely walks into your playgroup for the first time.

Welcome new families

Warmly welcome new families. Greet them as they arrive and show them around. Introduce them to other families, particularly those that live close to them. Explain the basic routines and expectations of your playgroup. Ask about their child's interests and guide them to the activities they are most likely to enjoy. Wear name tags until people are familiar with each other.

Have a brochure or welcoming letter prepared for new families (see sample). Be friendly, warm and accepting. Be sure they understand that they will be welcomed back next week.

Welcoming on the first day

Arriving at playgroup for the first time can be daunting for any family.

You could help welcome new families into your playgroup by assigning a 'welcoming person' to make newcomers feel at home.

Possible tasks for a welcoming person include:

- Arranging name tags for children and their parents/caregivers.
- Provide new families with a guided tour and briefly explain your playgroup's routines.
- Introduce new family to other families.
- Encourage the new child to find an activity of interest.

- Take time for a chat and find out about the new family.
- Offer new families a coffee at snack time.
- Make sure the new families are not left alone and unsure about what happens next.
- Provide brochures or written information about your playgroup.
- Highlight upcoming events.
- Farewell them with, "We'll see you next week".
- Follow up with a phone call to see how they enjoyed their first visit.
- Welcome them and their child by name the following week.

Being friendly is everyone's responsibility

Don't let other people sit back and think that because you have a welcoming person they have no part to play.

Welcoming doesn't last for just one week. We all need to be looking out for children or adults who feel left out at playgroup. A friendly smile and chat could make an enormous difference to their playgroup experience.

Including a family into your playgroup

After a family has attended for a few weeks

- Ask if their needs are being met at playgroup.
- Ask if the play activities are appropriate for their child.
- Discuss how they would like to share in the workload.
- Ask if they have any concerns and how they think these could be addressed.
- Chat about the playgroup's written policies.
- Ask if there is anything about the playgroup they would like to change.
- Ask if they have any ideas or contributions to make playgroup more fun for everyone.

Welcoming Other Cultures

Welcoming families from other cultures

Children from all cultural backgrounds require play in order to gain confidence to learn new tasks, make friends and see another's point of view.

Culture, religion, gender, age and background influence how parents raise children. At playgroup it is important for parents to understand that there are many different ways to raise children.

Parents are a child's first and most influential teacher and even very young children pick up on their parents' acceptance or non-acceptance of people. Playgroups give parents an opportunity to positively model acceptance and help their child understand why others look, speak or act differently and how to accept and appreciate diversity.

Give everybody the opportunity to contribute and be part of the playgroup. Children and adults from a different cultural background need to sometimes take the lead and share their expertise.

Be a culturally inclusive playgroup

- Encourage families to discuss their culture.
- Share traditional foods and recipes.
- Share the common language of a smile, body language and hand gestures.
- Display a poster at your playgroup that says 'welcome' in many languages.
- Learn the words for 'hello' in several languages. After a greeting song like, 'What do you think my name is...' you could say, "Let's say hello to Gemma in Indonesian today. Halo Gemma!".
- Have families from different cultures represented on posters and flyers.
- Have a flag day and paint a variety of flags to hang up at playgroup. Explain each country has special colours and patterns on their flag.
- Discuss festivals celebrated by members of your playgroup and talk about how families can share customs and activities.
- Borrow dual language books from your library.
- Share traditional games and toys used by families in your playgroup.
- Purchase dolls with different skin tones.
- Share traditional crafts.

- Ask families that speak languages other than English to teach the group a simple song in their language.
- Use role play, dress up, home play, language games, dance and movement from different cultures.

Remember these facts about people from other cultures

Fact

People from the same region or similar cultural backgrounds will not automatically behave the same way, just as you may not have the same beliefs as your next door neighbour.

Fact

More than 50 percent of people migrating to Australia gained professional qualifications in their own countries and their professional knowledge is comparative to Australian standards.

Fact

Culturally specific playgroups are one way to overcome barriers. Multicultural playgroups are another way for people to learn from other cultures.

Welcoming Families

For additional information on inclusion and diversity

Contact Playgroup SA to speak to our Playgroup Support and Development Officer on (08) 8344 2722 or FREE CALL 1800 171 882 or contact:

Inclusive Directions Inc.

Email: info@directions.org.au

Metropolitan

339 Payneham Road
Marden SA 5070
P: (08) 8165 2900
F: (08) 8362 0763

Riverland

1 Crush Terrace
Waikerie SA 5330
P: (08) 8541 2691
F: (08) 8541 2691

South East

71 Suttontown Road
Mount Gambier SA 5290
P: (08) 8725 0211
F: (08) 8725 0216

Department of Education and Child Development (DECD)

Education Centre (State Office)
31 Flinders Street, Adelaide 5000
GPO Box 1152, Adelaide 5001
Ph: (08) 8226 1527 or FREE CALL 1800 088 158

Web: www.decd.sa.gov.au/
Email: decscustomers@saugov.sa.gov.au

Office of People and Culture

Reception
Ph: (08) 8226 1397

Other useful DECS departments:

Special Education Resource Unit (SERU)

72a Marlborough St, Henley Beach 5022
Ph: (08) 8235 2871

Social Inclusion

Ph: (08) 8226 3215

Special Needs Education Helpline

FREE CALL 1800 222 696

Languages and Multicultural Resource Centre

12 Robson Rd, Hectorville 5073
Ph: (08) 8366 8533

Welcoming Families with Disability

Welcoming a family with a child or adult with a disability

It's hard to imagine how difficult it is to walk into a room full of strangers wondering if your child with a disability will be accepted by the group. Children expect others to behave in certain ways and when they don't, they may have questions or concerns.

Answer questions simply, honestly and correctly. If you don't know, ask the parent or caregiver. Don't say the child with a disability is sick. They could have a physical or medical condition but they are not sick unless they have an illness.

Explore how everyone in your playgroup is different – who's big, little, old, young, has blonde or black hair, who likes or dislikes swings. Help children see that everyone is different and unique but stress the things we have in common. For example, "Kate can't talk yet but does like to hold your hand while you sing Ring a Ring a Rosie".

To help a child with a physical disability develop independence, choose activities they can join in with, like singing and story time. Be ready to explain and intervene if other children are making unrealistic demands.

Encourage children when they interact well. Acknowledge a child's attempts to socialise by giving them a starting point for involvement. Suggest they sit and share a toy with the new child.

Suggestions

- Use books and stories to help adults and children to understand disability.
- Ask the parent to write a simple real-life story to read at playgroup.
- Put dolls in callipers and wheelchairs.
- Use simple sign language in greetings, songs and rhymes.

If you have never played, worked or lived with a person with a disability you may be unaware of what language to use to not cause offence.

- Take your lead from the parent or person. Focus on the person, not the communication difficulties.

You might be uncomfortable with the person because you don't know what to expect.

- It's important not to convey your hesitation by avoiding eye contact or avoiding the person. You'll overcome your uneasiness quickly if you talk naturally with the person (or parent of the child) and get to know them.

Remember:

Fact

People with disabilities are people first and will all develop and experience life differently.

Fact

People with disabilities do have feelings and the same right to respect and to explore their abilities as everyone else.

Fact

Children with disabilities are NO more likely to have behavioural problems than other children.

Fact

Children may have questions about a child's disabilities, but rarely make fun. Children view a child with disabilities as 'just another kid'.

Understanding Groups

Playgroups, like all groups, go through five major stages: forming, norming, storming, performing and mourning.

Forming

When relationships are new, everyone needs to be welcomed, valued for who they are and given an opportunity to participate and contribute. Keep the program simple and flexible to allow plenty of time for everyone to get to know each other. Arrange group activities to bring the group together.

Norming

This is the period when the playgroup's culture is developed. Expectations and guidelines are discussed and agreed. There is equality and respect. The playgroup settles into routines.

Storming

Inevitably conflict arises. It may be in relation to child or adult behaviour. Confront the issue early before it divides loyalties. Open communication is essential. Make decisions for the good of the group after each person has been listened to and their opinions heard. Conflict worked through positively adds to the group's strength. Unresolved conflict, gossiping and cliques destroy playgroups.

Performing

This is when the group works together. Respect and trust is established. Families participate cooperatively, contribute and take ownership of the playgroup. A community spirit grows as people feel connected. Social networks develop, breaking down the isolation often experienced by parents and caregivers of babies and small children.

Mourning

At the end of the playgroup year families move on and some children go on to kindergarten. Some playgroups close at this time but the friendships made at playgroup can last a lifetime. Playgroups that remain open need to accept new members and form a new playgroup - and so the playgroup continues to evolve.

Why families don't go to playgroups

- Don't know about playgroups or where to find them
- Find the cost too high
- Too shy to come to playgroup alone
- Have had or heard of someone with a negative playgroup experience or were not eager to attend based on initial phone contact
- Find playgroups cliquey
- Felt excluded due to language or culture differences

Families seldom return to playgroup if they feel excluded on their first visit. If you want more people to have a positive playgroup experience be sure you help families fit in and feel comfortable quickly.

Entertainment and Excursions

Playgroup friendships thrive when families have fun together.

Incursions

There are many special occasions you may want to celebrate, such as the end of a term or the end of a year when playgroup families are moving on. Your playgroup may want to welcome a new season, celebrate a special event, fundraiser or have a family fun day or open day to attract new families.

For such occasions you may consider paid entertainment.

Inviting entertainers to your playgroup

Providing entertainment for small children's parties is a flourishing business. Entertainers can adapt their shows to playgroups.

Clowns, jumping castles, dancers, play equipment, musicians, magicians, storytellers, mobile animal farms, fairies or puppet shows can be hired.

Many children's entertainers are listed under 'E' in the Yellow Pages phone book or online at www.yellowpages.com.au. Ask if they offer discounts to playgroups. Be sure to ask the price as some can be quite expensive.

To meet the costs you could consider:

- having an entrance fee
- including the cost in the term/annual fee
- getting other playgroups in the area to join you.

Tips for having an entertainer

- Be clear about the purpose as this will guide your planning.
- Be sure the entertainer involves the children and the program is age appropriate for your playgroup.
- Make sure all parents and caregivers are comfortable with the type and content of the entertainment.
- Speak to someone who has previously used this entertainment.
- Check that they have current insurance cover.

Contact your local police, they may have a public relations program that allows police with a police car or bike to visit. Your local fire brigade or ambulance station may have a similar service.

Excursions

Giving children new experiences increases their learning opportunities.

Build anticipation before the excursion. Chat about where you are going and how you will get there. Borrow related books from the library to build expectation before the excursion.

During the excursion, encourage children to talk about what they see. Increase their knowledge and vocabulary by pointing out things of interest and making comparisons eg "What kind of tail does this animal have?" or "Does this animal have feathers, fur or fins?" Engage all the senses. Talk about the sounds, sights, smells, tastes and feel of different textures.

Visits away from playgroup

Plan the outing well in advance. Consider:

- have you submitted an Excursion Notification Form to Playgroup SA for insurance purposes?
- recruitment of volunteers to maintain a one to one child/adult ratio
- who decides where and when you will go
- if the cost is within reach of all families
- how will families without transport get there?
- whether a bus would add to the experience
- whether it should be arranged for playgroup time or as a family day on the weekend
- a contingency plan if it is very hot or rains

Playgroup SA events

Check www.playgroupaustralia.com.au/sa, State of Play magazine and ePlayNews for details of events hosted by Playgroup SA.

Include these events in your yearly planner:

- Special events during Playgroup Week and Children's Week
- Local outings
- Parks
- Library – discover what they may be able to offer your playgroup
- Fire stations
- Play centres or pet shops at shopping centres
- Leisure centres or gymnasiums may have rooms to hire for an indoor fun day
- Train, tram or bus ride

Places to Visit in SA

Look for places that offer special programs for preschool children. Ask for group discounts.

Excursion ideas for playgroup

- Children's farms.
- Local parks.
- Local libraries.
- Shopping centres.
- Pet shops.
- Fire stations and police stations.
- Play cafes.
- Beaches.
- Swimming pools.
- Museums.
- Science displays.

Extend the experience at playgroup

- Talk about the experience with the children.
- Plan play activities relevant to the excursion.
- Sing related songs.
- Have books and story telling connected to the experience.
- Add appropriate props to the sandpit or home corner.
- Put out related puzzles.
- Consider how the theme can be extended through drawing, painting and playdough.
- Put out related toys.
- Take photographs, make a photograph album and use it often to chat with children.

Local Government

Australia has a three-tier system of government.

The federal government makes decisions concerning Australia. Our state government decides on issues concerning SA. Local councils decide on local issues.

Municipalities

Councillors form the governing body of each municipality and appoint a mayor or shire president. The mayor is the first citizen and chairperson of the municipality.

Each municipality functions independently. Broadly speaking, SA local councils are responsible for local issues relating to the environment, health, housing and property, roads, inspection and licensing, recreation and culture, regulations, sanitation, town planning, trade undertakings, transport, animal pounds, children and youth, communications, and community and emergency services.

Contact with local government

Families with young children often have contact with local government through:

- health centres, immunisation, infectious disease control or a baby capsule program
- sporting clubs, community halls or other community venues
- libraries, parks and gardens, swimming pools
- community child care centres, child and youth health centres, kindergartens, Family Day Care services or neighbourhood houses.

Local government provides an infrastructure to meet the needs of the people within their community.

To find out what services your local council provides look in the White Pages phone book under the name of your municipality. Call your local council to ask what services or assistance they can give to playgroups. Each local council also has a website.

How councils help playgroups

Councils can provide buildings to meet in and may:

- have rules that playgroups must follow if they hire their premises
- require that you have Playgroup SA insurance
- require incorporation of the playgroup
- set maintenance requirements
- offer their council premises free to community groups
- charge a nominal amount to cover upkeep
- have a standard set fee for use of all their buildings.
- employ a playgroup worker or children's services officer who can assist playgroups.
- provide playgroup information – this may be given over the phone or listed in the council's child or family services booklet. Assist your council by keeping details of your playgroup up to date.

Local government grants for playgroups

- Councils may offer small grants to playgroups. These are often advertised in the local papers and give details as to how to apply.
- Some small grants are open all year round. Simply look on their website or call the council offices.
- If your playgroup is not incorporated Playgroup SA can provide you with an auspice letter to support you in the grant application. This service is free to members. Contact Playgroup SA on 1800 171 882 to find out more.

Valuable resources in your municipality

Child & Youth Health

Contact your local Child & Youth Health Centre to invite a nurse to visit your playgroup to link families to local support services. The nurse can talk to the families about:

- parenting
- child behaviour management
- dental health
- developmental concerns
- infant feeding and sleeping problems
- women's health such as postnatal depression or incontinence.

Local Government

Kindergarten support officer

Contact council to invite this worker to talk to parents on the importance of preschools and how to enrol their child.

Local libraries

Contact Libraries SA to find out what services they offer to playgroups in your local area. They may visit your playgroup or have a story time session at the library for your playgroup.

Ask if you can open a playgroup membership with the library. This gives your playgroup families' access to good quality children's books. Some libraries have bilingual or dual language books to help parents and children from a diverse range of cultures. Most libraries have internet access.

Some libraries offer English support to parents who speak other languages and help with job-seeking, preparing a resume or accessing employment related training.

Linking with your council

Consider asking the mayor or councillors to your National Playgroup Week event. They may enjoy a healthy snack while playing with the children. It would make a great photo opportunity for your local newspaper.

Lobbying your council

Situations may arise where you want to lobby your council on a certain issue, such as upgrading a building or playground or steep increases in rents.

Try telephoning the council for referral to the appropriate department to talk through the issue. You may want to follow this up with letters to the mayor and councillors outlining your concerns.

Only use the local newspapers or radio to air your concerns if you are sure of your facts.

When applying for grants or lobbying, reiterate that playgroups:

- are self-help groups
- bring local families together
- build community capacity in the following ways:
 - Families work together to meet the need for play opportunities and social interaction.
- Playgroups are a community group that help local government provide a service to families with young children.
- Playgroups are cost effective.
- Playgroups provide families with organisational skills and expertise in running self help groups.
- Parents get ideas for home-based learning.
- Playgroups provide social interactions for children under five.
- Playgroups break down isolation for parents.

Contact your council

You will need to contact your council to:

- hold a fun day in one of their parks
- fundraise, eg to hold a cake stall on a pathway or other council property.

Checklist

Answer the following to assess whether your playgroup is structured to encourage children and adults to build friendships.

- Adults and children create a pleasant playgroup atmosphere.
- Adult interactions with children are warm and friendly.
- All children are treated equally and their individual needs are met.
- Diversity of background is respected.
- Both genders are treated without bias.
- Parents/caregivers use a positive approach to behaviour guidance and discipline.
- Parents/caregivers are responsive to the children's needs and feelings.
- Parents/caregivers initiate and maintain communication with children and other adults, and their communications convey respect.
- Parents/caregivers show respect for each child's developing competence and foster their self esteem and independence.
- Parents/caregivers interact with children to stimulate their curiosity and thinking.
- All families are kept well-informed about the playgroup, both verbally and in writing.
- Parents/caregivers communicate well with each other.
- There is an active exchange of information between adults.
- A welcoming process for new families is in place
(contact Playgroup SA for resources such as 'Setting up a Welcome Station')
- Families are informed about the philosophy and goals of the playgroup.
- An induction process is in place to welcome new families and help them understand playgroup routines.
- Playgroup routines allow time for parents to chat and friendships to develop.
- Family activities such as barbecues, outings or working bees are considered.
- Spouses, partners, grandparents and other significant people in a child's life are encouraged to visit playgroup.
- Parents/caregivers organise time out together.
- Opportunities to use council services such as parks, library, gardens or swimming pools have been considered.
- There is an awareness of antidiscrimination laws regarding the exclusion of a child or family.
- Conflict is viewed as a positive opportunity to learn and grow into a stronger group.
- Excursions are considered to give families time to socialise away from the routine of playgroup.
- Excursions/entertainers are preceded and followed up with special activities to extend the children's learning experience.
- Playgroup families are linked into local council services.