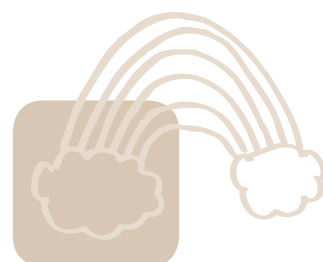


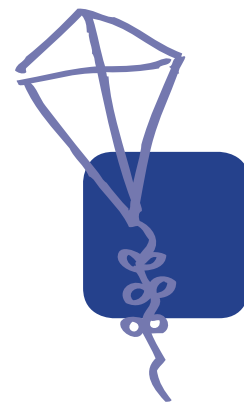
How to Start a Playgroup at your School



When considering a playgroup at your school it is recommended to check if there are any nearby playgroups and make a connection with them in the first instance.

You can check for local playgroups on the Playgroup WA website www.playgroupwa.com.au or phone 1800 171 882.





Step 1

Contact Playgroup WA and discuss with a School Playgroup Development Officer

Playgroup WA has a history of over 40 years of supporting family run and supported playgroups.

They now have an Enhanced Transition to Schools Project aimed at developing relationships with community (family run) playgroups and where possible host playgroups on school sites.

School Playgroup Development Officers are available to work with schools to set up playgroups and build these relationships.

They are able to share information from other schools

who have successfully hosted family run playgroups on school sites.

They also have information on successful transition from school staff run playgroups to family run playgroups at schools.

Contact Playgroup WA on 1800 171 882 to find out more.

Step 2

Decide on a playgroup space to be offered

Playgroups are flexible and can meet in many different places.

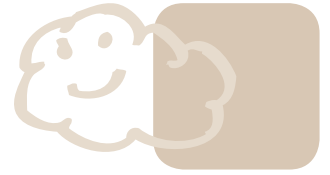
Most schools have some flexibility to make a room, wet area or library space available for a couple of hours each week. Nearby storage for several crates of playgroup equipment would be helpful. Access to early childhood outdoor play areas for a period of time would be wonderful.

Ideally, you will want a place that offers:

- both indoor and outdoor play spaces suitable for small children

- kitchen facilities ie. tea/coffee making
- storage areas for toys and equipment
- car parking
- access to adult and children's toilets





Step 3

Decide on a day and time to start a playgroup trial

Some schools have found offering an initial three week trial of playgroup has been effective in getting early commitment from families to starting up the playgroup.

Playgroups usually meet once a week on a weekday, for about one and a half to two hours. Mornings are usually the best time for playgroup with young children. Starting just after school begins allows families with older siblings to come straight from school drop off and generally improves attendance rates.

Consider when your allocated playgroup space is available.



Step 4

Find families & promote your playgroup trial

To start a playgroup, you need at least three or four interested families.

Develop some simple flyers advertising your playgroup trial (Playgroup WA has some templates which may help with this). These flyers can be printed off and/or distributed electronically. School newsletters are also a place to start. Experience has shown using different promotional methods works best.

The best way to find families is to ask around. Speak to parents of school students who have younger siblings who are at school for drop off or pick up. Speak to the local Child Health Nurse and ask at the local library for families attending Story Time and Rhyme Time sessions.

Connect with your local Early Years Network Group if there is one. Consider putting up a notice at your local shops, church, community or sports centre.

If you have some interested families already, arrange a meeting with them prior to the trial sessions to begin working through the start-up process.

Step 5

Equipment you need

For the initial sessions, only minimal equipment will be necessary including some:

- simple early learning centre toys, books and puzzles;
- toys suitable for babies;
- cups and plates for hot drinks and snack time, and
- a baby change mat may also be useful.

Some schools will have a kettle, plates, bowls, cups and cutlery etc available for playgroup use. If not, the playgroup will need to provide and store their own as the group sets up.



Step 6

Set guidelines for use of venue & equipment

Insurance is essential

The playgroup must be covered by a comprehensive insurance policy right from the start. We offer family membership packages with insurance cover specifically designed to meet playgroups' needs.

It is worth clarifying with your insurer exactly what families are insured for under your existing insurance. Generally speaking most schools have public liability cover for students enrolled at their school. This is not comprehensive insurance cover and may not cover the playgroup which consists of children not enrolled at the school. Public liability insurance does not cover accident and injury when there is no negligence able to be substantiated.

The school will have some guidelines or school rules that apply to use of school facilities. Some of these will be policy and procedure issues with your governing body and some may be specific to your school.

It is important for the school to have thought through their requirements and expectations around use of the school venue and equipment.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the school and the playgroup would be wise to draft from the outset but may need to be finalised after the playgroup trial when the playgroup leadership group is elected (see Step 10).

Try to keep guidelines as simple as possible.

Contact Playgroup WA on 1800 171 882 to find out more.



Step 7

What to do for the first three trial sessions

When starting up a family run playgroup, someone needs to take responsibility for setting up the initial session and guiding families through the start up decision making process. The group may need some level of support in the first few weeks of the trial but the aim should be to have the families themselves take on the responsibility for their playgroup. Playgroup WA's School Playgroup Development Officers may be available to assist with these sessions.

When deciding on what play activities to include for the first one or two trial sessions, allow for plenty of free time or unstructured play. Playgroup aged children are not ready for lots of rules and structure. They need lots of uninterrupted time to make choices, experiment, explore and interact. Often playdough and a few simple books and early childhood toys are all that are needed.

For the initial session some fruit and tea/coffee supplies may need to be provided. The group themselves can decide how they will provide this in subsequent sessions. Often each family is asked to bring a piece of fruit to be cut up to share.

It's important to establish upfront that this playgroup belongs to everyone. So everyone in the group is responsible for making decisions and everyone is expected to share the workload. The group will need to decide how decisions will be made and how the workload will be shared. Gain agreement on identifying and appointing playgroup leaders within these first few sessions.

How the playgroup is structured will ultimately be up to the families involved. At the end of the day, it's what

works best for the children and the adults involved. Some playgroups offer organised activities and lots of stimulation, others are less formal and operate on more spontaneous lines. Some playgroups elect a formal committee others operate on a less formal process.

For ease of communication it is recommended to establish a contact person at the school for the playgroup to liaise with when needed and an agreed contact person from the playgroup for the school to liaise with as needed.

Playgroup WA can provide guidance and support on playgroup structure, suitable activity ideas and playgroup organisational functions/leadership. Contact Playgroup WA on 1800 171 882 for assistance.



Step 8

Playgroup to decide on their playgroup guidelines

Most playgroups find it helpful to write up some simple guidelines for the children and the adults in their playgroup. This way, everyone knows what's expected of them and what's appropriate and acceptable.

This can help make playgroup a more relaxed, comfortable and enjoyable experience for all.

Guidelines could include some or all of the following:

- Adults are responsible for the safety and supervision of the children they bring.
- Every child has a right to safe and fair play.
- Playgroup is a “no hurting” zone.

- Playgroup is a smoke free environment.
- All members are valued and respected.
- All families are welcome.
- We are a SunSmart playgroup.
- Everyone helps with the workload and is involved in the planning and organising of playgroup.

Step 9

Playgroup to decide on their equipment needs

Over the first few playgroup sessions the families could be encouraged to make a list of what equipment they will need for both adults and children in their playgroup.

Start with toys, books, play equipment, art and craft materials.

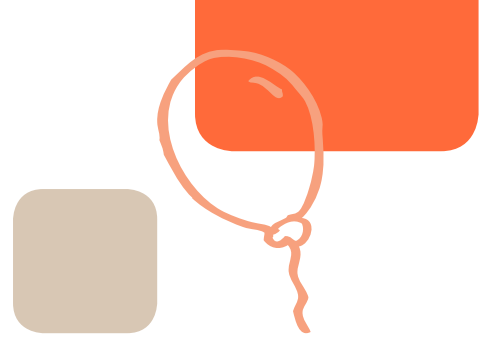
They don't have to go out and buy new or expensive items. Perhaps a couple of families could take on the task of searching through second hand and charity shops, fetes, garage sales, and the local classifieds or on eBay. Local families or businesses might be happy to donate items.

They could even make some toys from recycled materials such as cling wrap rolls, cardboard boxes, milk cartons and plastic water bottles.



Playgroup WA may be able to assist with accessing baby toys and with simple toy making activities.

Contact Playgroup WA on 1800 171 882 to find out more.



Step 10

Playgroup leadership group and school representative meet to clarify MOU, including membership and insurance

Aim to achieve the following within a couple of weeks of the playgroup setting up:

- Decide on playgroup guidelines and leadership positions.
- Have a meeting between the school representative and the playgroup leadership group to clarify and agree to a documented Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

The MOU should be for a specified time period and reviewed at least annually. Revisit the MOU whenever there is a change to personnel or requirements.

Schools have found potential pitfalls are avoided by clear negotiation with all occupants who may be sharing the same space, including negotiation of time for outside play space.

Cost considerations

One of the benefits of playgroups is that they are low cost.

For the school

Schools who have successfully hosted playgroups have found the cost negligible. Access to already existing equipment is no real additional cost and covering utilities for a group who only meets for about two hours per week is negligible.

For playgroup families

Most playgroups charge their members a small fee each term to cover consumables such as art and craft materials and/or snack time supplies.

Playgroup WA annual family membership is recommended. This membership fee for each family

should be taken into account when considering playgroup costs. Families should be informed of the benefits of being a Playgroup WA member.

Some playgroups are able to cover their costs from a gold coin donation each week.

The group might decide to do some fundraising to cover costs or to purchase equipment. Once established they may be eligible to apply for funding grants.

Contact Playgroup WA on 1800 171 882 for help with fundraising opportunities or visit www.playgroupwa.com.au

Enjoy the many benefits of playgroup for children, families and the school!