

Enhanced Transition to Schools Project: Playgroup and School

What is Playgroup?

A playgroup is a group of parents, caregivers and extended family who meet together (typically once a week) with their babies and young children for interaction, socialisation, support and shared learning through play. Most sessions run for 1-2 hours, with parents and caregivers staying with children as part of the group throughout the session.

Important note: Playgroups are different to childcare and pre-kindergarten programs. At playgroup, parents and caregivers attend with their children and retain responsibility for supervision of their children throughout the session.

Playgroups are not subject to any specific government legislation, quality frameworks or workforce standards. Each playgroup is in essence an independent, local community group.

What happens at playgroup?

Each playgroup is different but generally there is:

- **First and foremost PLAY!**
- **Free play and planned activities**
- **Indoor and outdoor play**
- **Art and craft**
- **Music and movement**
- **Story time, songs and rhymes**
- **Conversation and support**
- **Tea and snack break**



Different Playgroup Models

There are different playgroup models that can be roughly divided into 2 categories:

Supported / Facilitated	Community / Family run
Paid or volunteer, play leader or coordinator runs the group	Playgroup members share tasks/roles
Targeted	Universal (may have special interests)
Engages families who are not likely to otherwise participate	Promotes family/community capacity building
Improved early identification of needs	Promotes strong sense of ownership/belonging
Financial sustainability risk	Financially sustainable

Benefits of Playgroup:

For children

A growing research base has confirmed that a child's relationships and experiences in the years before they start schooling, lays the foundations for all future learning, development and function.

Playgroup provides children with opportunities for a range of different play experiences and play partners vital for optimal development across all developmental domains. Playgroups provide a place for belonging, being and becoming. Through play at playgroup the children have opportunities to explore and learn to understand the world around them. They have opportunities to communicate with peers and adults, to discover, to create and to imagine.

As the children's parents or caregivers are always at playgroup with them, children tend to feel more emotionally secure to be able to learn the skills and understandings they need to interact positively with other children and adults and to become more independent. This all allows children to build their sense of identity, connections with their world and a strong sense of wellbeing, which builds their confidence and makes them more available for further learning.

Children get to build friendships at playgroup and to learn to resolve conflicts, negotiate with peers, to take turns and share. This provides opportunities to learn to self regulate and develop resilience.

For families

Playgroups provide a community based space for families to build social networks and develop long term friendships with other families with whom their children are likely to move through school. Playgroup provides a place where parents and caregivers can support each other through sharing ideas, information, parenting experiences and issues. Playgroup provides an opportunity for families to build a sense of belonging and connectedness to their community.

Playgroups offer a regular and affordable opportunity for families to share an activity outside the immediate

household. They are also a cost effective focal point for engaging families with other community services.

Community/family run playgroups provide parents with opportunities to utilise their knowledge, skills and interests and to develop new knowledge and skills in sharing playgroup tasks and roles. This helps build their confidence and self esteem, making them feel of value. This contributes to positive mental health. This volunteer experience can lead to other employment opportunities.

For school communities

Playgroups assist the development of social capital by promoting supportive relationships within and between families, and within the community. Community/ family run playgroups offer opportunities for active citizenship through the emphasis on volunteering and peer support.

Playgroups connected with a school provide opportunities for families to build a sense of belonging, identity, social inclusion, and commitment to the school prior to the children formally starting at the school. These families are more likely to become active members of the school community and Parents and Friends groups.

Attending playgroup at a school site allows both parents and children to become familiar with the school prior to transition to formal schooling. It provides opportunities for the families to develop relationships within the school and for the school to get to know families who will be coming into the school. Research indicates that children who have friendships at school tend to transition more positively and to cope better with the academic, social, emotional and physical requirements of school life. Playgroup provides the opportunity to develop those friendships before they enter formal school.

Playgroup provides an avenue to increase family awareness and access to information





about the school, child development, school readiness skills and school transition issues. It also provides a “soft entry point” to introduce other services and supports to families with young children.

What do playgroups need?

Playgroups can be flexible. Ideally a playgroup needs a venue with a safe environment to play indoors and outside, toilet facilities close by, access to basic kitchen facilities and some secure storage space for toys and equipment.

Community/family run playgroups are in the main self funding. Each group will have their own membership fees to cover their costs and Playgroup WA membership if applicable. Each Community playgroup decides what is right for their group and then establishes procedures for collection and accounting. Many groups will also generate income through fundraising events or applying for funding grants. Community playgroups are their own entity so they can apply for grants from places like Lotterywest. Playgroup WA can assist community playgroups with grant applications.

Playgroups need a contact or links person from the school staff. Clear negotiation and a written Memorandum of Understanding are important to clarify expectations and use of the school space. These should be revisited at least annually or when anything in the arrangement changes.

Insurance: For schools hosting playgroups it is important to have a full understanding of insurance as it relates to community groups using school facilities. It is strongly recommended that playgroups have insurance that covers liability on all playgroup related assets and participants, not just public liability cover. The school may have public liability cover but may not cover personal accident, loss or damage to assets and equipment, loss of monies in transit, or cover persons or equipment when they have excursions.



Playgroup WA family membership benefits

- Comprehensive insurance cover including personal accident, loss or damage to assets or equipment, loss of monies in transit, and cover of persons and equipment when away from usual playgroup site.
- Access to playgroup information/ support via hotline and playgroup development officers
- Discounts and special offers at affiliated services and businesses
- Monthly eNewsletters
- Playdays and workshops
- Special Events
- Access to member's gateway on Playgroup WA website, including access to a comprehensive playgroup manual
- Fundraising support

Playgroup WA membership is \$30 per year per family (\$15 per year for Health Care card holders). This family membership is transferable with the family so they may attend several Playgroup WA playgroups with the same membership.





‘It’s important to clarify from the beginning “why” you are having a playgroup at the school. There are wide ranging benefits from playgroup at school. We don’t need to schoolify playgroup.’

PRINCIPAL, SCHOOL HOSTING COMMUNITY PLAYGROUPS

How can schools connect with playgroup families?

Schools can connect with already existing playgroups or host a playgroup on the school site.

Before a school starts setting up a new playgroup check to see if there is a local community playgroup.

To find a playgroup near you go to the Playgroup WA website and type in your postcode or suburb name.

School staff informally visiting a local playgroup or inviting a local playgroup to have a play day at the school are simple ways to start connections between the school and the playgroup families. Playgroup families visiting the school library and having the school librarian read them a story builds connection and interest in what is available at school. This can happen with either playgroups located near the school or with playgroups hosted at the school.

How to start a playgroup

Details on how to start a playgroup at your school can be found on the Playgroup WA website www.playgroupwa.com.au or phone 1800 171 882.

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