

Transitions and Routines at Playgroup

Community playgroups come in all shapes and sizes—and that's the beauty of them! Each one is as unique as the families who attend.

Some playgroups are more structured, following a regular routine with planned activities each week. Others are more relaxed, with free play guiding the session. There's no right or wrong way to run a playgroup—they're all wonderful in their own way!

For some children, having more structure and routine can:

- Reduce anxiety
- Help them feel safe and secure
- Make it easier to understand what is happening next



For others, too much structure can feel overwhelming, and a more relaxed, free-play style is a better fit. If your playgroup includes children who thrive with more routine, here are some simple tips for weaving it into your session:

Create a visual schedule

A picture-based or written schedule showing the day's flow helps children understand what to expect—even if they're not yet using words.

Example routine:

- Arrival & free play
- Mat time (songs, stories, etc.)
- Snack time
- Structured activity (e.g. playdough, craft etc.)
- More free play
- Goodbye song

Keeping the structure consistent each session - while changing up the activities - helps build familiarity.



Give transition warnings

Moving on from a fun activity can be tough especially when children are deeply engaged. Try giving clear, gentle warnings:

- “5 more minutes of playdough...”
- The a “1-minute warning...”
- Then can count to 10 before packing away



These small warnings give children time to process and prepare for the next thing. Also, if you have visual timers like sand timers, these can be really helpful in aiding transitions!

Use songs, visuals or auditory cues

Many children respond well to song and auditory cues. For example, you can try:

- A clean-up song to support packing away: “Everybody pack away, pack away, pack away”
- A transition song: “If you’re ready to eat snack, clap your hands”
- Instruments like a bell or a shaker to signal change

Get creative! You can use any familiar nursery tune and make up your own words. (Bonus: when parents join in, it makes it even more fun!)



End with a goodbye song

Leaving can be tricky when playgroup is so much fun! A goodbye song can help children understand that the session is ending and it's time to go home. Get creative and make one up that suits your group!

A few gentle reminders:

- Not all children will want to join every activity – and that’s ok! Let them engage at their own pace.
- Adjust the routine based on what works best for your group. It’s ok to change things up.
- Parents and carers are powerful role models. Simple things like joining in, sitting on the mat, or washing hands help guide children’s behaviour.

Whether your playgroup runs like clockwork or flows freely with the energy of the day, what matters most is that children and families feel welcome, safe, and connected. Every playgroup is different, and that’s what makes our community so special.