

Supported Playgroups

A Practice Guide
for Facilitators



Prepared in partnership with the Queensland Department of Education by Queensland University of Technology School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education



Queensland Government

Supported Playgroups: A Practice Guide for Facilitators (2019)

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Before starting

Who is this practice guide for?

How to use this practice guide

What makes this practice guide unique?

Key terms and definitions



Key message

If parents trust me, I can be the person who is their source of information.

Experienced supported playgroup facilitator



Supported Playgroups

A Practice Guide for Facilitators

Supported playgroups are implemented by a range of not-for-profit organisations, community services and government agencies as part of their suite of inclusive early childhood services. They are a unique early learning and development opportunity, bringing together children, parents/carers and community. Shared play is used as the foundation to support children's learning and development, strengthen parenting capacity and build strong family and community relationships.

This practice guide for facilitators and companion resources are grounded in evidence from years of combined experience and a formal review of the supported playgroup model in Queensland.

These resources aim to support families, communities, facilitators, and organisations by:

- encouraging good practice and achievement of outcomes through a consistent, evidence-informed approach
- building the capacity of facilitators and organisations to purposefully achieve child learning and development and parenting outcomes
- supporting engagement with families in diverse contexts and communities.

Who is this practice guide for?

This practice guide is designed for facilitators who coordinate, plan and deliver supported playgroups and the sponsoring organisations that assist and oversee their work. It is intended for use by facilitators who work in a range of settings, to strengthen their capabilities to respond to the needs of diverse families.

How to use this practice guide

This practice guide is a starting point for supported playgroup facilitators. It can be used as the foundation upon which facilitators build and tailor their work with groups based on the needs of families attending playgroup, the communities in which they live, and the specific requirements and expected outcomes of the sponsoring organisations with whom they work.

There will be different entry points to this document for facilitators depending on their experience working with supported playgroups, children and families. While it is recommended that you, as a facilitator, read the entire practice guide to get the 'big picture', the content is divided into five modules for ease of access to topics. Included in each module are sub-sections and relevant tools, templates and links to existing resources. These are provided to make your job easier, and to be used and adapted by your organisation and staff.

What makes this practice guide unique?

It is informed by:

- findings of the Queensland Supported Playgroup Evaluation: Final Report (2016) and the Practice Principles developed as a result of that evaluation
- experiences of past and current supported playgroup facilitators, managers, sponsor organisations and clients
- the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), which acknowledges that early childhood (birth to five years) is a vital period in children's learning and development.

One of the important principles of the EYLF is the value of ongoing learning and reflective practice which is essential for individuals to continue to develop their knowledge of what works, what doesn't and how, as a professional, you might change what you do to achieve a specified aim. The practice guide provides a range of reflective questions to help you to think about your experiences as a facilitator.



The table below provides a quick reference to the modules and their sections in the practice guide.

Module number and title	Section number and title
Module 1: Understanding supported playgroups	Section 1: What are supported playgroups and who runs them? Section 2: What are supported playgroups trying to achieve? Section 3: How do supported playgroups achieve outcomes? – the Practice Principles Section 4: Who attends supported playgroups? Section 5: What do we know about the outcomes of supported playgroups?
Module 2: What does it mean to be a supported playgroup facilitator?	Section 1: Unpacking aspects of the role Section 2: Skills of a facilitator and supports available Section 3: Boundaries of the facilitator role Section 4: Working in a child-safe manner Section 5: Taking your training further
Module 3: How to start and sustain a supported playgroup	Section 1: Recruiting families to your supported playgroup Section 2: Connecting with local networks in your community Section 3: Effectively engaging diverse parents/carers Section 4: Venue, group size and dynamics Section 5: Session routines, activities and resources Section 6: The lifecycle of a playgroup
Module 4: Creating enriching and strengthening supported playgroup sessions	Section 1: Aims for supported playgroup sessions Section 2: Children and play: A primary focus of playgroup sessions Section 3: Interacting with children at playgroup Section 4: Interacting with parents/carers at playgroup
Module 5: Promoting continuous improvement and celebrating success	Section 1: Continuous improvement and why is it important? Section 2: What is involved in continuous improvement? Section 3: What is your role in reviewing and improving supported playgroups? Section 4: What is the value of reflective practice? Section 5: What does celebrating success look like?
Resources toolbox	Useful contacts Templates and tools (to photocopy) Additional resources Bibliography

In this practice guide, as well as written information, you will find icons which will lead you to:



- inspirational **VIDEOS** to watch, filmed with current, experienced supported playgroup facilitators and managers from sponsoring organisations. These learning tools are designed to enhance the content in this practice guide. View the videos online at qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups
- **TEMPLATES AND TOOLS** to download and copy for use at your own playgroup. A full list can be found in the resources toolbox and online at qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups
- **SELF-REFLECTION ACTIVITIES** encouraging you to think about the content and how it might be applied in your context. These can be useful to discuss with your supervisor
- links to other **RESOURCES** are listed within the relevant modules of the practice guide. Additional resources to further extend your learning are listed by module in the resources toolbox.



Key terms and definitions

This section provides a list of key terms and definitions that are used regularly in this practice guide and in your work as a supported playgroup facilitator. It is not intended as a complete list and each term is explored in detail in the relevant module of this practice guide.

Term	Definition
Facilitator	A person engaged to plan, deliver and coordinate supported playgroup sessions. Facilitators support children and families who attend these sessions, enriching children's learning and development, enhancing parental confidence and connecting families with relevant information and services in the community.
Families	Any grouping of an adult(s) with children who may have various living or household arrangements. The term 'families' is inclusive, encompassing cultural and structural diversity.
Parent/carers	Any person or persons providing care to a child. This may include grandparents, parents, kinship carers, aunties/uncles or other persons holding a parenting role.
Parenting messages	Messages based on evidence designed to increase parents/carers knowledge, skill and confidence in raising their children.
Practice principle	Principles informed by evidence to guide practice of facilitators and sponsoring organisations that increase achievement of outcomes of the supported playgroup model.
Self-efficacy	A person's belief in their own ability to succeed in a specific situation or achieve a specific task. Level of self-efficacy affects how a parent/carer might approach a goal, task or challenge.
Social capital	Networks with shared values, understandings, or ways of doing things that enable cooperation within and between groups for positive benefits.
Sponsoring organisation	Organisations with the resources and intent to provide supported playgroups and oversight and supervision of the facilitator. Such organisations range from small community groups to large not-for-profit and government organisations. The companion resources outline some of the benefits and key responsibilities of sponsoring organisations in developing supported playgroup sites and supporting facilitators is also available at qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups
Strengths-based practice	A service approach that shifts away from problem-focused intervention to a positive partnership that recognises and builds on the existing abilities, assets and potential all people bring to the group. This approach focuses on how families create their own positive outcomes.
Theory of change	A set of ideas, about the mechanisms or ways that positive change happens due to the activities of a program.

Understanding supported playgroups

Section 1:

What are supported playgroups and who runs them?

Section 2:

What are supported playgroups trying to achieve?

Section 3:

How do supported playgroups achieve outcomes? The Practice Principles.

Section 4:

Who attends supported playgroups?

Section 5:

What do we know about the outcomes of supported playgroups?



Key message

Supported playgroups are a uniquely Australian model that offers a dual focus on the development and wellbeing of both children and families together. They are a low cost, light touch approach that focuses on the child, while at the same time addressing ongoing family needs to better support sustainable change.

Evaluations of the supported playgroup model find benefits for children's early learning and development; laying the foundations for healthy physical, neural, emotional, and social development and enhanced child-parent attachment. Benefits for parents/carers also include increased self-efficacy, social capital, and more engagement in home learning with their children.

1

MODULE



Section 1:

What are supported playgroups and who runs them?

Playgroups are a long-valued part of family and community life across Australia. A playgroup's strength lies in how the parent/carer and child participate in shared experiences, strengthening their relationship and bringing mutual benefits. Supported playgroups are playgroups which provide an added layer of care by using a trained facilitator to engage families, lead the playgroup program and link families with supports they may need in their community.

Having a trained facilitator helps to ensure that children have opportunities to engage in high quality play-based learning and socialisation activities. Parents/carers may benefit from the modelling of quality adult-child interactions and being able to meet and share experiences with other parents/carers. Facilitators can also help address some of the social, cultural, financial and other barriers that might reduce the ability of families to participate in activities like playgroups.



Key message

Unlike other playgroups, which are parent-led, the distinguishing feature of supported playgroups is the presence of a worker who facilitates the group. In some models this facilitation is ongoing, and in other models it is provided temporarily, with the aim to address a specified need.

A typical supported playgroup meets for two hours each week in a local setting such as a community service, Early Years Place, local library or school. Mobile supported playgroups offer outreach to remote locations, to community events and parks. These mobile playgroups may operate from multiple locations and venues.

Supported playgroups are flexible and do not have a specific curriculum. Instead, they are low-intensity support that blends early education for children and parent/carer support goals with the flexibility of a facilitator who is responsive to the community's needs.

Sponsoring organisations

Many not-for-profits, government organisations and smaller community services run supported playgroups as part of their suite of inclusive services. In the guide we describe these as supported playgroup 'sponsoring organisations'.

All supported playgroups should have organisational-level support, governance and resourcing that provides oversight and active involvement, e.g. in the establishment of new groups, setting the framework for practice, formalising collaborative partnerships, securing venues and insurances, creating child safe environments, resolving issues and supervising and supporting staff.

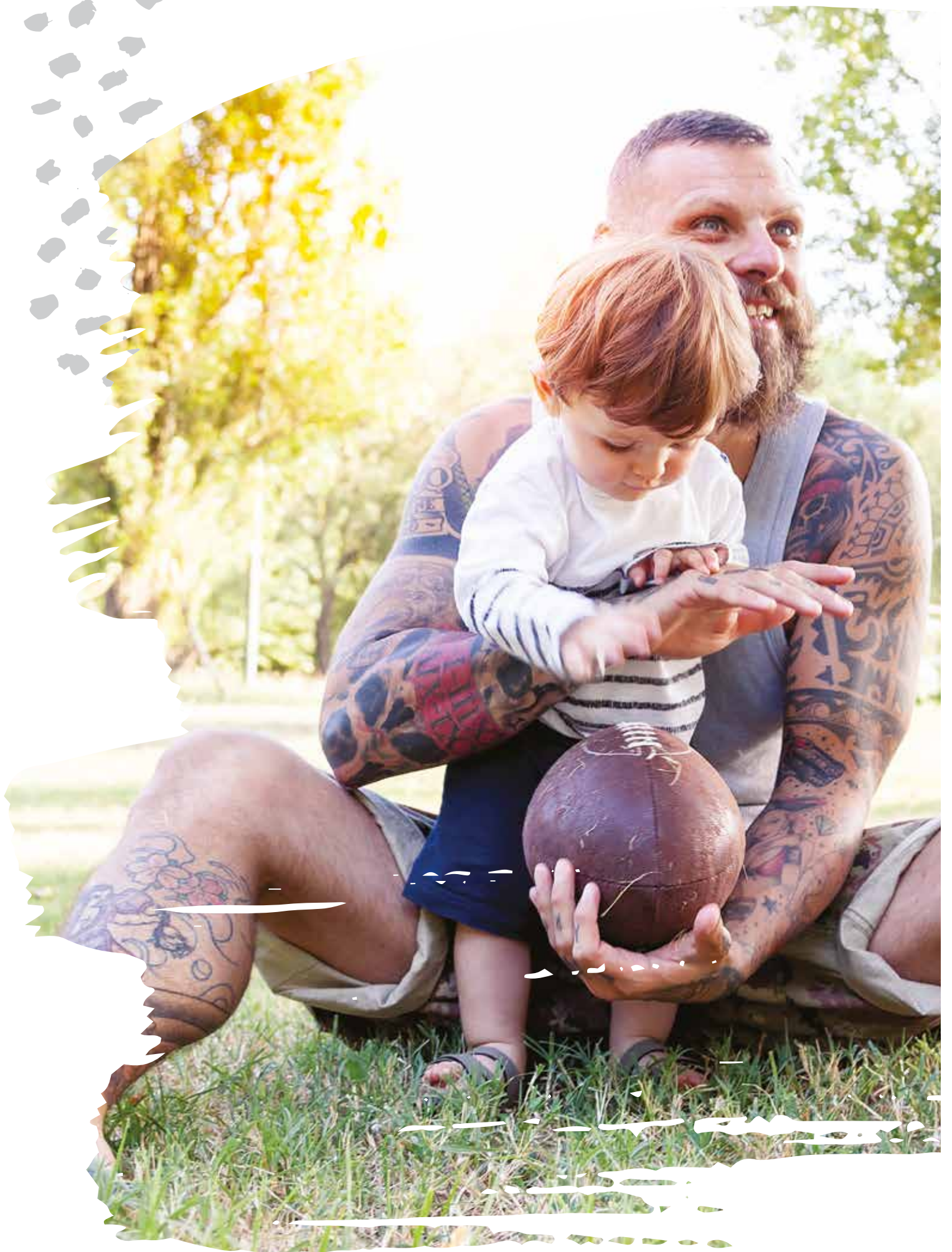
Sponsoring organisations are encouraged to connect with the tools in this guide, the companion resources and with organisations doing similar work. This interaction can create a supportive community of practice and may open up opportunities for collaboration and enriched pathways to additional services for families.

As a facilitator, you will be engaged by a sponsoring organisation to complete a range of key tasks needed to make the supported playgroup a success, including:

- designing stimulating and evidence-based early childhood experiences
- supporting and building parental knowledge on child development, early childhood learning and home learning
- recruiting and engaging families to the group
- connecting families to information and relevant resources or services in their community.

Additionally, you might work with some groups to specifically develop the skills and confidence of parents/carers to take on shared management of the playgroup in the longer term.

More details about what it means to be a supported playgroup facilitator can be found in Module 3 of this practice guide.



Section 2:

What are supported playgroups trying to achieve?

The expected outcome of the Supported Playgroup Model is to bring about positive and sustained change for children and families and the communities they live in.

Supported playgroups are specifically designed to:

- enhance parent/carer-child relationships in a supportive environment
- support children's successful transition to early childhood education and care and/or school
- empower parents with the knowledge, skills and confidence to support their child's wellbeing, learning and development
- enable children to experience the developmental benefits of supported play experiences in a stimulating, safe and creative space
- provide an opportunity for facilitators to model positive and appropriate parenting behaviours and skills
- develop valuable social and family support networks within the community.

Each supported playgroup will have its own focus depending on the needs of the community and the services partnering to deliver it. However, the unifying aims of supported playgroups are to empower families to enhance their children's learning and development, form positive peer support networks and access information and services while building sustainable community capacity.



Video

Aims of Supported Playgroups

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups





Templates and tools

Supported playgroup goals template

This tool provides space where supported playgroup aims, at group, family, parent/carer and child levels, can be documented.

In Module 4, these aims will be linked with session planning for playgroups.

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Playgroups focus on the first five years of life before a child begins school. The evidence is clear that the first five years of a child's life are a critical time for brain development. During this period, the brain is growing more rapidly than at any other time. The positive experiences and interactions that children have with parents/carers, other adults and children will have lasting effects on their cognitive, emotional and physical wellbeing throughout their life.

Want to know more about early brain development?



Video

Brain Builders: How a child's brain develops through early experiences

Link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMyDFYskZSU



Self-reflection activity

In the video, Brain Builders: How a child's brain develops through early experiences, stimulation and challenge are key to supporting brain development in young children.

What do you think stimulation for children looks like in a playgroup setting? What would you as the facilitator be doing to support early brain development? What would parents/carers be doing?

As you start to think more about your role within the supported playgroup, you might question:

- What is the expected outcome for children and their families?
- How will you know that activities are being run to a high quality standard?
- How will you know if children and their parents/carers are benefitting? For example, is there a change in knowledge, skills, attitude, circumstances and/or behaviour?

Theory of change is a method for identifying activities and outcomes and the path between them. The theory of change for the Supported Playgroup Model is being developed so that we can be clearer about how and why desired changes for families happen.

What is most important about this theory of change (Figure 1) is that at the centre of it all is you, the facilitator. It is your relationships with children, parents/carers, families and local community services, and the playgroup activities and routines you design for each playgroup session that make playgroups 'work'.

Section 3:
How do supported playgroups achieve outcomes?

The Practice Principles

An evaluation of supported playgroups in Queensland identified a set of nine key Practice Principles to promote best practice in supported playgroups. These nine principles provide a framework broad enough to be applied in any supported playgroup context yet specific enough to highlight the elements of playgroup practice that need to be considered to ensure good outcomes.

The current Supported playgroup model theory of change, including the nine Practice Principles is illustrated in Figure 1.



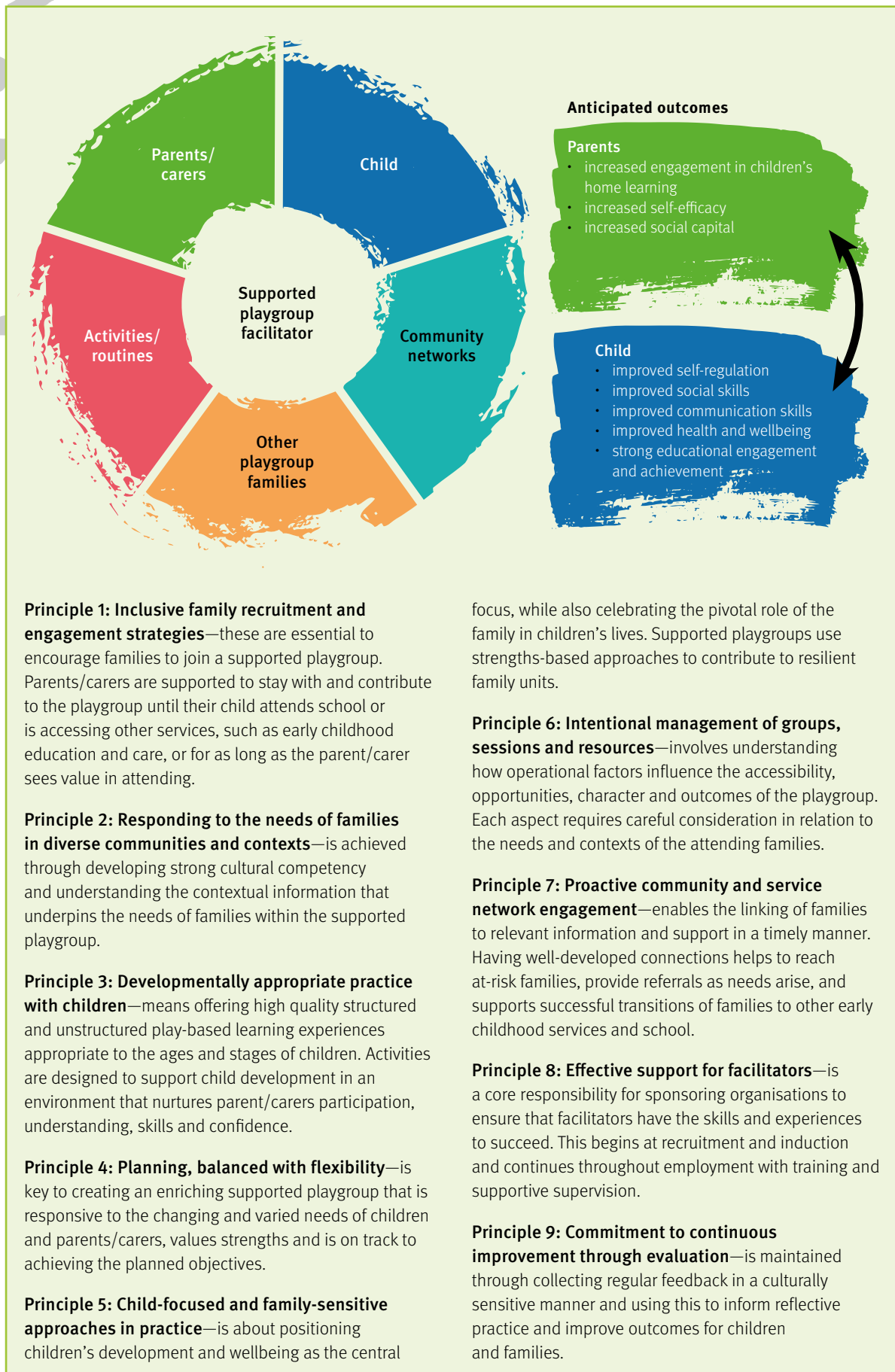


Figure 1. Supported playgroup model theory of change and nine Practice Principles



Self-reflection activity

What are the aims of your supported playgroup?

What are your organisation’s clear goals for establishing a supported playgroup—is it to improve children’s wellbeing, enhance parent-child relationships, improve transitions to school, facilitate parents’/carers’ access to other support services?

Which of the Practice Principles and other parts of the theory of change do you think will be most important to consider in reaching these aims?

What might each of the Practice Principles mean for how you work and how you would run a supported playgroup?

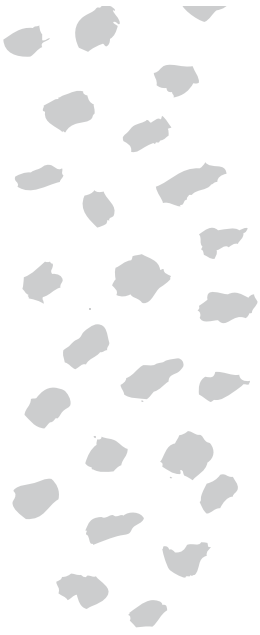
Do you have experiences and strengths in some of the Practice Principles?

Are there areas where you may need some professional development to be able to apply the Practice Principles?

How might you build your skills to practice according to the Practice Principles?

The Practice Principles are explored further in each module in this resource. The following table is a quick guide to where to find out more about each Practice Principle.

Module 1: Understanding supported playgroups	Introduces the nine Practice Principles and their relationship to achieving outcomes
Module 2: What does it mean to be a supported playgroup facilitator?	Principle 8: Effective support for facilitators
Module 3: How to start and sustain a supported playgroup	Principle 1: Inclusive family recruitment and engagement strategies Principle 2: Responding to the needs of families in diverse communities and contexts Principle 4: Planning, balanced with flexibility Principle 6: Intentional management of groups, sessions and resources Principle 7: Proactive community and service network engagement
Module 4: Creating, enriching and strengthening supported playgroup sessions	Principle 3: Developmentally appropriate practice with children Principle 4: Planning, balanced with flexibility Principle 5: Child-focused and family-sensitive approaches in practice
Module 5: Promoting continuous improvement and celebrating success	Principle 9: Commitment to continuous improvement through evaluation



Section 4: Who attends supported playgroups?

Supported playgroups are intended to break down the barriers that prevent many families from accessing early childhood programs and/or community support. The supported playgroup model recognises the interconnected issues that many families experience and works to enhance parental self-efficacy, build connection over barriers and celebrate diversity. What all families have in common is the determination to manage the pressures of daily parenting to achieve the best outcomes for their children.

Many supported playgroups will target and bring together families who belong to particular social or cultural groups with common life experiences. They are intended as an inclusive and non-threatening service for families who may benefit from the added wrap-around elements of a supported playgroup. Families you aim to engage could be those who face language and cultural barriers; those who have family members with complex needs; those who may face isolation or marginalisation and those who may not ordinarily access mainstream services or supports.

These may include, but are not limited to:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (including refugee families)
- families with mental health issues (adult or child)
- families where the parents are young (e.g. under 25 years old)
- families who are socially or geographically isolated or disadvantaged
- families affected by trauma (e.g. violence, bereavement, serious illness or natural disasters)
- families with a child or parent living with disability
- low income families who are under financial stress.

As a facilitator, it is important to remember that families should never be viewed through the narrow lens of belonging to a target group. Identity is multi-faceted and complex. No-one is defined simply by belonging to one group. Likewise, all families bring a unique set of strengths and capabilities which help them to navigate life's challenges with resilience. It is crucial that the ways in which you interact and engage with families does not lead to them feeling judged, disempowered or stigmatised within the supported playgroup.



Self-reflection activity

Who are the target population of your supported playgroup?

Why has this group been targeted for support?

What are the strengths of this group? And how can you celebrate this authentically?

What are some of the barriers you could help address for these families?

Are there any specific needs for children and families in this group?

How are these needs reflected in the aims you have for your group?

Section 5:

What do we know about the outcomes of supported playgroups?

A decade of research into supported playgroups tells us that:

- Supported playgroups are well accepted and enjoyed by many diverse families.
- Participating is linked to children's improved self-regulation skills. Self-regulation means children are learning to manage their own attention, feelings and behaviour. These skills are important as children enter kindergarten and school. They help children learn and develop.
- Participating is also linked with children's improved early social and communication skills. These are also important as children transition to formal kindergarten settings where they will make new friends and need to communicate with different adults and children.
- Participating parents/carers showed an increase in parent engagement with their children in home learning activities, including shared book reading and song singing. Children who have parents who read and play with them regularly find it easier to learn to talk, read, and write.
- Parents/carers have experienced increased social connections and parental self-efficacy through supported playgroup participation. Social connections are important for normalising experiences and parental mental health and wellbeing. Self-efficacy means that parents/carers became more confident in their own parenting skills.
- Playgroups have also been shown to be effective in linking families with other needed services for child development and health or parenting health and support. In remote areas of Queensland, mobile playgroups are providing important family support in areas where there is limited or no access to other early childhood education and care services.



Video

Stories of Success in Playgroups

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Self-reflection activity

Have you heard of any stories of success from supported playgroups?

What do you think contributed to their success?

Want to know more?



Resource

Queensland supported playgroup evaluation 2014–2016: Final report for Queensland Department of Education and Training.

This report, produced by the Queensland University of Technology, presents the final findings of a two-year evaluation of the supported playgroup model in Queensland.

Link: eprints.qut.edu.au/103681/

What does it mean to be a supported playgroup facilitator?

- Section 1: Unpacking aspects of the role
- Section 2: Skills of a facilitator and supports available
- Section 3: Boundaries of the facilitator role
- Section 4: Working in a child-safe manner
- Section 5: Taking your training further

Principle 8: Effective support for facilitators



Key message

The role of a supported playgroup facilitator is multi-faceted. It involves guiding, supporting, connecting and strengthening within the context of your supported playgroup, your community and your sponsoring organisation.

2

MODULE



Section 1: Unpacking aspects of the role

We have already identified you, the facilitator, as the distinguishing feature of supported playgroups. The facilitator role is critical to the success of the supported playgroup. As the facilitator, you will provide targeted support to address the particular barriers experienced by different populations who may benefit from participation in playgroups.



Video **Being a Playgroup Facilitator**

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Key functions of a supported playgroup facilitator are explored in more detail throughout this practice guide. These functions should be built into your position description and include:

Function	Definition
Design playgroup activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A big part of supported playgroups is providing child-focused activities that promote development, and sharing these ideas with parents/carers.• Well-designed activities will help parents/carers to understand development and how play supports it.• Embed routine group activities to foster predictability and safety, and help prepare children for school.• Complement routine activities with flexibility and variety to ensure the responsiveness of the playgroup to children and parent/carer needs. <p>Recommendations on how to design activities are provided in Module 4.</p>
Recruit families	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Together with your sponsoring organisation, you will need to work within the community to recruit families to the supported playgroup. <p>How to recruit families is explored in Module 3.</p>
Engage parents/carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help families to make the most of playgroup by working with parents and ensuring that they are actively engaged in the supported playgroup, rather than just attending.• Being flexible and responsive to the needs and capacity of parents/carers is important to develop their confidence.• Support healthy parent-child attachment by respecting and empowering parents/carers as their child's most important and first teacher.• For some playgroups, the aim will be to empower parents/carers to run their own playgroup in the future and will need to build the capacity of parents/carers to do this. <p>Strategies to engage parents/carers are discussed in Module 3.</p>



Function	Definition
Connect families	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Supported playgroup families can experience vulnerability and isolation.Use a strengths-based approach to recognise the resources that families possess and build on this to support strong and healthy connections between parents/carers and children.Seek opportunities to engage with parents/carers who don't otherwise access services and supports.Ensure you have a well-developed network of early childhood services, community services and schools to assist you to connect families with relevant services and information.Good connections to community and services will help to reach families and provide timely support and referral as needs arise. <p>Some strategies to connect families are outlined in Module 3.</p>
Promote continuous learning and improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Each supported playgroup is a learning opportunity.Engaging in continuous learning and improvement provides a foundation for responsive service delivery and quality practice.As a facilitator you can contribute to this process through your organisation and your professional networks. <p>Tools and approaches to promote continuous learning and improvement of the supported playgroup are discussed in Module 5.</p>
Celebrate success	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Supporting families can be difficult and emotional work.Celebrating and sharing success is an important opportunity to build pride in achievements.By celebrating success of families in achieving their goals you will also be maintaining the strengths-based focus of the model. <p>Some ideas about celebrating success are outlined in Module 5.</p>
Promote child-safe practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Recognise elements of child-safe practice.Know and understand the child-safe policies of your sponsoring organisation, including what to report, when, how and to whom. <p>For more information on child-safe practice and what to do if you have concerns, see Section 4 of this module.</p>



Section 2: Skills of a facilitator and supports available

As a facilitator, your knowledge of early childhood is important as some children may not have access to other early childhood education opportunities. You will also need the skills to:

- facilitate stimulating and engaging play-based learning experiences, targeted at appropriate ages and stages
- create a child-centred play space, with stimulating activities that can also be done at home
- build and maintain strong relationships with families, community leaders and other stakeholders
- organise, prepare, follow-up and manage time and tasks efficiently
- use reflection and observation to create a responsive supported playgroup
- communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, including children, their families, community leaders and other stakeholders
- act as a role model for healthy behaviours and key parenting messages
- plan and carry out activities in consultation with children and families.



Video

Facilitator Skills and Qualities

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Whether you are an existing or new staff member, your sponsoring organisation should provide support for your learning and development through training, role induction and ongoing supportive supervision.

Induction refers to being introduced to the expected work practices of your role and the organisation. Induction processes and content will vary depending on the sponsoring organisation and their induction policy. Initial training could be provided through a number of avenues, including the use of this package of resources.

No one person can work alone without receiving support and guidance, or feeling connected to and supported by their sponsoring organisation. Supervision sessions, whether face-to-face, on the phone or via video link, are a regular opportunity to help you orientate to the role and continue to raise and problem-solve professional issues, and reflect on your work with your key contact in the sponsoring organisation.

Well-rounded supervision should look at: how you are feeling about, and how you are performing in relation to, your responsibilities; what supports you may want or need from the manager, supervisor or others; what you have learnt since the last supervision, and any upcoming training and development opportunities.



Supportive supervision reinforces the idea that the facilitator, the manager and the sponsoring organisation are all part of the same team working toward the same aim.

In some circumstances, you may want to access professional supervision outside of the organisation. Some organisations encourage and provide support for professional supervision if you operate in a clinical environment and deal with mental health, addiction or domestic violence issues; if an issue in the playgroup is complex and requires some specialised guidance; or even if the organisation is small and doesn't have anyone available or skilled who can provide regular supervision.

You are encouraged to reflect on your experiences with the intention of learning from them and continuing to improve practice, and these reflections can be discussed in supervision. For more on reflective practice see Module 5 of this practice guide.

A framework for supportive supervision will likely include:

- a manager trained in supervision skills
- an understanding of the supported playgroup model
- an understanding of the Practice Principles and how to apply these
- recognition of the boundaries of your role
- opportunity for reflection on your practice
- a written supportive supervision plan agreed with your manager
- clear and regular schedule of meetings for supportive supervision.



Templates and tools

Supervision conversation planning tool

This checklist will help you prepare for and gain the most benefit from a supportive supervision session.

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Section 3: **Boundaries of the facilitator role**

Building and maintaining relationships is at the heart of supported playgroups.

In your role you will work closely with children, families and communities to build trust, confidence and respect. Role boundaries are crucial to maintaining positive relationships and may protect both professionals and clients. Clear boundaries reduce the potential for harmful relationships and help to support the achievement of the supported playgroup aims.

What happens when role boundaries are not maintained?

- There may be special preference given to a child or parent/carer to the exclusion of others.
- There may be a blurring of the lines between personal life and professional practice.
- Confidential information may be shared inappropriately.
- The facilitator, rather than the parent/carer, is supervising the child.

Role boundaries can have different personal and cultural interpretations, and may not be as clear and simple as first imagined. Some of you might work in very small communities and may also live in that same community, which might present additional challenges in setting boundaries in your role.

Important considerations in setting role boundaries

- acknowledge that your role may allow you access to the personal information of children, parents/carers and families
- respect privacy—only seek information relevant to the work you do
- uphold confidentiality—do not share information without permission
- ensure you behave in a way that does not expose children or families to the risk of emotional and/or physical harm
- understand that relationships without appropriate boundaries may carry risks:
 - increased demands from a family
 - high stress and potential burnout
 - difficulty setting limits and managing challenging behaviour
- understand your professional limitations; your role is not to provide social work services but to help parents/carers and families to connect to specialist support services.



The following table includes some of the common challenges facilitators might face and suggested approaches for maintaining role boundaries.

Challenges	Suggested approach
<p>Confidentiality: In most small communities people are either connected to or know each other. Depending on your target audience, your families may be experiencing hardship and vulnerability. This may result in reluctance to participate for fear of exposure of personal circumstances.</p>	<p>As the facilitator, you should establish the group rules from the outset. Create a safe environment by engaging with families respectfully, showing discretion and maintaining confidentiality. Read the case study on page 22 to help think through how you might manage confidentiality.</p>
<p>Dominant voices: Some community members may have greater influence over community than others and may present challenges when addressing the needs of quieter voices in your group.</p>	<p>Show that all voices are valued by seeking input from all members of the playgroup and using a range of methods to initiate contributions. Seek help from your supervisor if you are having difficulties and are unsure how to engage with a parent/carer.</p>
<p>Lack of trust: Some families in your group may have had negative experiences with organised services or groups and therefore find it difficult to build trust.</p>	<p>Understand that trust takes time to build. Communicating respectfully, maintaining confidentiality and discretion, and being consistent in your approach will support trust-building.</p>
<p>Friendships: Existing or new friends may attend your playgroup and this could undermine your ability to engage with others if you give your attention exclusively to them.</p>	<p>Think about how you might interact with a friend in the playgroup. Do you favour your friend over new parents/carers? Do they understand your role and when you are working?</p>
<p>Managing your time: Your commitment to supporting children and families may result in you taking on more than you have the time for. This may lead to exhaustion, resentment, and disengagement from your group. Taking on too much or holding all of the responsibility might not encourage others to get involved.</p>	<p>Share the investment and commitment to the group. Think about what is most important for you to do in the time you have to commit, and prioritise these things. Balance facilitation with leadership by empowering parents/carers to take on some tasks. Talk to your manager/supervisor to find ways to get support or discuss priorities.</p>
<p>Child supervision: Your role is not as supervisor of the children. Parents/carers may be disengaged from this aspect of their role and may require some support to re-engage with their children.</p>	<p>Communicate the importance of child-directed play and lead parents/carers to engage in play-based learning with their child/ren. Being clear about expectations for child behaviour and parental engagement from the beginning helps to set the scene for everyone.</p>
<p>The accidental counsellor: Your role is not to provide counselling to parents/carers. However, sometimes a parent/carer will seek your help when upset or distressed and will be in need of immediate support.</p>	<p>Listen and show empathy but be clear about the limits of your role. Explain why you would like to support that person to speak with a trained professional or subject expert, to receive the time and focus they need.</p>



Supported Playgroups

A Practice Guide for Facilitators

There are tools and strategies to assist you to understand and better manage the boundaries of your role, these are:

- clearly written position description and/or project plan
- this practice guide
- your training and induction program
- your organisation's code of conduct
- your organisation's social media policy
- opportunities for regular supervision with your supervisor
- opportunities for ongoing professional development.

CASE STUDY

Jenny is a parent in a supported playgroup. Recently, she shared her history of mental illness with Sam the facilitator. She described how these experiences have affected her ability to interact with her baby, Finn.

Later, Sam, who lives in the same rural town as Jenny, is at a barbeque speaking with another woman who also knows Jenny. He asks her if she could help Jenny out with caring for Finn from time to time because Jenny 'isn't coping.'

Think about the impact of this conversation on Sam's future relationship with Jenny and Finn. Consider other ways that you might find support for Jenny and Finn.

How will you manage questions about children and families in your playgroup from people with whom you should not share confidential information?

The relationships that you develop with children in a supported playgroup are critical as they will assist them to feel safe, confident, and, in doing so, promote their learning and development.

If you have any questions or concerns about role boundaries, speak to your manager/supervisor.





Section 4: Working in a child-safe manner

Child-safe practice is at the centre of any service or program that works with children—including supported playgroups.

The first step to keeping children safe is to understand your responsibilities and what you are required to do. Your sponsoring organisation should have a written child-safe policy and a code of conduct that together define the expectations of appropriate behaviour with children. You should ask for this as part of your initial induction and training.

Because supported playgroups target vulnerable families experiencing multiple stressors, staff should be prepared to facilitate wrap-around support and create an environment where participants feel empowered/supported to report or disclose incidents that make them feel unsafe or concerned.

Check your sponsoring organisation's written child-safe policy for your obligations with respect to reporting concerns for a child. The child-safe policy should detail:

- what to do if you have concerns about a child or family
- what can be reported
- what must be reported
- when to report
- what type of report is required
- how to report and to whom
- what support you can expect from your organisation.

Ideally there will be regular (at least annual) training provided by your sponsoring organisation on how to recognise and report child abuse and neglect.

Reporting your concerns may enable families to get help.

Reporting your concerns may stop abuse, reduce its harmful effects, and ensure a child has the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

Want to know more?



Resource

A Guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisation Version 4.0, June 2018, Commission for Children and Young People, Victoria State Government.

This resource provides general information intended to help a wide range of organisations become more child safe.

Link: ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/resources/CSSGuideFinalV4-Web-New.pdf

The Council of Australian Governments National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Link: childsafe.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-02/National_Principles_for_Child_Safe_Organisations2019.pdf

What is child abuse & neglect? Child, Family, Community Australia (CFCA) Resource Sheet—September 2018 Australian Institute of Family Studies.

This online resource sheet provides an overview of child maltreatment, including definitions of types of maltreatment and the relationships between them.

Link: aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/what-child-abuse-and-neglect/

Reporting child abuse and neglect: State and territory departments responsible for protecting children. CFCA Resource Sheet—December 2018, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

This online resource sheet provides information on reporting child abuse and neglect including contact details of the State and Territory departments responsible for protecting children.

Link: aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/cfca-resource-sheet/reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect



Section 5:
Taking your training further

Being a supported playgroup facilitator can be very rewarding work that helps you to use your skills to achieve important outcomes for children, parents/carers and communities. If you don't already have an early childhood or a family support qualification, you might find you become interested in undertaking more study in one of these areas.

Figure 2 below provides some possible pathways for further study in the areas of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and community services (CS). Potential jobs that arise from obtaining a qualification are also included, though there are many other possibilities.

For example, any on-the-job training received as a supported playgroup facilitator, and resulting work experience, can contribute to a process known as recognition of prior learning, which may reduce the number of courses needed to complete a qualification.

Talk to a vocational education and training institution or a university for further information.

Entry	School leaver or new to the industry	New to the industry or current employee	New to industry but with relevant experience or current employee	School leaver, new to industry but with relevant experience or current employee
	↓	↓	↓	↓
Access	Certificate III ECEC	Certificate IV ECEC	Diploma ECEC	Bachelor of Education (ECEC)
	OR	OR	OR	OR
	Certificate III CS	Certificate IV CS	Diploma CS	Bachelor of CS Bachelor of Psychology Bachelor of Social Work
	↓	↓	↓	↓
Potential jobs	Childcare worker working under supervision	Childcare Group Leader ECEC Educator	ECEC Team Leader	0-8 years ECEC teacher
	Community support worker, working under supervision	Senior support worker Support coordinator	Community services team leader	Community services manager Psychologist Social worker

Figure 2: Training pathways for supported playgroup facilitators.



Video
Becoming a Facilitator: Mikayla's Story

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

How to start and sustain a supported playgroup

Section 1: Recruiting families to your supported playgroup

Section 2: Connecting with local networks in your community

Section 3: Effectively engaging diverse parents/carers

Section 4: Venue, group size and dynamics

Section 5: Session routines, activities and resources

Section 6: The lifecycle of a playgroup

Principle 1: Inclusive family recruitment and engagement strategies

Principle 2: Responding to the needs of families in diverse communities and contexts

Principle 4: Planning, balanced with flexibility

Principle 6: Intentional management of groups, sessions and resources

Principle 7: Proactive community and service network engagement



Key message

Remember that it is important not to rush or 'push' things and not to expect immediate engagement of any family. Gentle and regular strategies to stay in touch with families are important.

3

MODULE



Section 1: **Recruiting families to your supported playgroup**

This section relates to Practice Principle 1: Family recruitment and engagement strategies, which are inclusive strategies to encourage families to join and stay engaged with a supported playgroup.

Sponsoring organisations usually begin a supported playgroup to address an identified gap in services. As a facilitator, you may not have a role in where or when to begin a supported playgroup. However, if you do need to make these decisions, take a look at our companion resources for more information about choosing a playgroup site.

Both you, as the facilitator, and the sponsoring organisation have a role to play in recruiting families to the playgroup. Before recruitment begins, it is important to discuss whether or not the aim of the group is to target a particular group of parents/carers or whether it is to be a more open process to all parents/carers of young children in the community. These decisions will influence the kind of recruitment strategies that you choose. For example, if the target group is women within a domestic violence shelter, the group might be closed to other participants not accessing the shelter.

It is unlikely that just one recruitment strategy will be enough to attract parents/carers to the playgroup. You may need to try many different strategies over a period of time to build attendance at your group.


Working with sponsoring organisations to recruit families to playgroups

Consider, with your sponsoring organisation, whether they have:

- an existing client list that could be invited to the playgroup through a newsletter, email or phone calls—one contact is unlikely to be enough; gentle but regular contact might be appropriate
- team members working with families with young children in associated services who could refer these families to the playgroup—it is important that all staff are aware of the playgroup, are given leaflets and enough knowledge to be able to promote the playgroup to families
- a centre or venue where posters advertising the playgroup could be displayed
- strong networks with other service providers who will help spread the word across the community about the availability of the playgroup
- a website or social media page that could feature the playgroup.

As a facilitator, you can attract families to your group by:

- Making strong connections with the local networks and services in your community (see further detail below). These networks can help spread the word about your playgroup and might refer specific families to the group.
- Talking about your work as a playgroup facilitator in many different community conversations every day—even informal ones.
- Placing printed flyers and posters at local childcare centres, schools, libraries, parent/carer rooms, transport hubs and community centres. Parents/carers will want to know a little about what to expect in terms of what happens in playgroups, so you could include play and fun activities with children. You might also offer to be a guest speaker at community workshops held by different organisations.

- 
- Having a table or stall at local community events or in the local shopping centre, or having a 'playgroup in the park' session. These can offer something fun for young children to do that might happen at playgroup (playdough, drawing etc.). They can also give you a chance to talk with parents/carers about the playgroup.
 - Ask local organisations with websites, social media pages and newsletters (schools, libraries etc.) to feature items about the activities happening in your playgroup.
 - Word-of-mouth is a very strong and effective means of recruitment. Ask families who attend your group if they would like to 'bring a friend' in the future and invite families to tell others about the playgroup.



Self-reflection activity

What recruitment strategies will you use for your supported playgroup? Who can you discuss this with within your sponsoring organisation?

Who can help you to design printed material, posters and website notices? What information needs to go in these materials?



Video

Starting and Maintaining a Playgroup

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups





Section 2: **Connecting with local networks in your community**

This section relates to Practice Principle 7: Proactive community and service network engagement. Connecting families to relevant services and information requires well-developed community and service networks. Good local networks may help by:

- promoting successful transition of families to and from supported playgroup and childcare, kindergarten or school
- providing contacts with expertise in early childhood or parenting support that you can call on to support your work with families
- providing options for families to be referred to other services as needs arise
- providing options for families to find out about the supported playgroup
- providing information about other services that are being implemented in the community and helping to identify barriers that will need to be addressed to achieve success in your supported playgroup.

Strategies to connect with your local service network

- Discuss with your sponsoring organisation what existing networks the organisation is a part of and how information about the supported playgroup can be communicated with these services.
- Ask to accompany your manager to local network meetings once a year.
- Contact local schools and early childhood education and care services (childcare, family day care, kindergarten).
- Contact local maternal child health services.
- Contact the local library, Early Years Places, community centre or other relevant family support services (e.g. Indigenous support, domestic violence support, young parent/carer supports).

Once you have established key contacts in your local area, the following suggestions might guide your discussions.

- Is it appropriate for the contact to refer families to the supported playgroup? If so, what kind of families would they refer and how will this happen?
- Is it appropriate for you to refer playgroup families to your contact? If so, how will this happen?
- Is it appropriate for you to call the contact for professional advice on early childhood and parenting support, and how often could this happen?
- Is it appropriate for the contact to be invited to the playgroup to speak with parents/carers to share information and join in with activities? If so, when and how often should this happen? How does this relate to the goals you have for the group?
- What networks is your contact able to introduce you to that are local and relevant?
- How will you maintain a working relationship with your key contact and what happens if they leave their current position?



Video

Connecting Playgroups with Community

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Templates and tools

Network management tool

This tool helps you to keep a record of your networks in the community, and to consider the best ways to stay in touch and work with those networks to achieve the best outcomes for playgroup families.

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups





Section 3: **Effectively engaging diverse parents/carers**

Once there are families attending your group, it is important to consider how you will maintain their engagement over time.

If parents/carers attend a playgroup and do not know anyone else, it can be an awkward and anxious experience. If families do not feel welcome at playgroup they are unlikely to return. As the facilitator, a key role is to support all families to feel comfortable during playgroup sessions. Some of the ways this can be done include:

Welcoming and expectations

Welcoming individual families as they arrive at playgroup. Making this important one-on-one time with each family, even if it is only for a minute or two, will make people feel welcome. 'Jane, good to see you. How has your morning been so far?' and kneeling down to child height, 'Hello Tom, what would you like to play with today?'

Learning parent/carer and child names as quickly as you can so you can address them as individuals.

Letting new parents/carers know about the routine of the playgroup and what they can expect. It can be helpful to let all parents/carers know about the routine for the day and any new or different activities and the reasons that they are being offered.

Including

Introducing people who don't know each other. You might make a particular effort to pair a newly attending playgroup member with another parent/carer who 'knows the ropes' so there is at least one person they can come to know.

Spending time with parents who seem to have no one else to talk to at the group and drawing other parents/carers into conversations about playgroup activities or children's interests.

Organise a basic morning tea or encourage shared eating times. Shared food can make all the difference in terms of socialising, helping parents/carers feel a part of a group. If you don't have a food budget, seek the sponsorship of a local grocer or ask families to bring their own food or contribute one piece of fruit towards a shared platter.

Telling parents/carers that you are looking forward to seeing them next week and you hope to see them then. Let them know about what is happening next week so they feel a part of the group plans in the longer term.

Collaborating

Ask parents/carers about what they and their children enjoyed at playgroup and what they would like to do more of, or differently, next week. By valuing and incorporating parents/carers ideas, you will be helping to create a sense of shared ownership of the group. Fostering collaboration is also part of strengths-based practice and can help to build parents'/carers' self-efficacy and parenting capability.

Supporting

Checking in with families on issues they might have discussed with you in previous weeks. 'Last week you were saying how difficult bedtime was at your house, how is it going this week?' This shows parents/carers that you have listened to them and cared about their experiences. Showing that you have listened and are willing to listen again is more important than offering specific parenting advice about issues.

Connecting

For parents/carers who have attended two or three sessions but then stopped coming, checking in by email, phone or through a friend still attending the playgroup is important. Checking in shows that you noticed their absence, care about their wellbeing and indicates that they are welcome to return any time.



Stories from experienced facilitators

'There's a mother that comes along and she suffers from depression ... She has a support worker with her daughter ... It's a time for her to have some positive time with her child. At first, I would say hello to her ... but nothing [no response]. Then, over time you could see her starting to become a part of the group. It took her a long time to feel comfortable, to open up, but eventually ... probably over a six-month period... and she kept coming.'

Here are some of the key challenges and approaches to be aware of when working with diverse families, as identified by experienced facilitators:

Issue	Approach
Families experiencing financial stress	<p>How can the activities provided at playgroup be translated to no cost or low-cost options that parents/carers can use at home?</p> <p>Can the local library be called on to donate old books to families or to visit the playgroup to organise library membership and promote library benefits to families?</p> <p>Can the playgroup provide morning tea or lunch to families or encourage families to eat together during the session? This approach may also help to build relationships between the families at playgroup.</p> <p>Would the whole group benefit from discussions on managing household finances? What services can be called on to support this?</p>
Socially isolated families	<p>If you have isolated families in your supported playgroup, consider providing them with information on other free or low-cost family activities that can be accessed in your local community.</p> <p>You can also support parents/carers with limited social networks by asking a more experienced playgroup member to 'buddy' the family for a short time to help them settle into the group.</p> <p>In getting to know families, some great first questions to ask are, whether there are many family members or friends living in the local area, and whether these have young children too, or what is the best time to offer support.</p> <p>Some families may take a long time to develop relationships, become engaged in the group, and develop trust in the facilitator. You can warmly and calmly persist in welcoming parents/carers to the group while not pushing them to engage in any particular way.</p>
Connecting families to needed services	<p>It is important to build networks with professionals and community services that have particular expertise in supporting diverse families in the community, as these can be an excellent resource.</p> <p>If your organisation is working to use playgroup as a way to engage with families because they have complex needs, it is important to be ready to connect and refer them to services or support when they are ready to access them or ask for help.</p>

Issue	Approach
Disempowered parents/carers	What are the opportunities within playgroup and your organisation to build capacity and confidence in parents/carers to pursue further training and employment opportunities where appropriate? (As seen in the video, Becoming a Facilitator: Mikayla's story in Module 2.)
Culturally and linguistically diverse families	<p>Language barriers might mean there are difficulties in terms of the 'paperwork' and managing communications. It can be useful to use smiles and gestures and to wait a number of weeks before asking parents/carers to complete any paperwork. Investigate interpreters within your community who may be able to support with important conversations.</p> <p>Be aware that all families will bring their own perspectives on child rearing, early learning, play and attachment that are grounded in culture. Asking parents/carers to share some of their cultural practices and knowledge with the group can make them feel valued and can help to cultivate cultural safety. This could be done through song, dance, craft or cooking. There might also be early childhood games from particular cultures that can be shared with the group.</p>



Self-reflection activity

You might consider how the diverse cultures of Australian communities are represented in playgroup resources.

Do the dolls represent cultural diversity or are they all white, blonde and blue eyed?

Are all of the musical instruments Western instruments?

Are the posters and artworks displayed at the playgroup from only one culture?

Have you considered the dietary needs and preferences of culturally and linguistically diverse families within your playgroup?

Do you observe special days or events and the appropriate cultural protocols? For example, Sorry business and Ramadan.

How else might you work with families to ensure that their cultures are represented and honoured in your playgroup?



Key message

Sometimes direct questions over the phone or in person (privately) can be useful when working with parents/carers who seem unwell or distressed.

Are you looking after yourself? Are you okay?

Is there somebody else that you might like to confide in or to talk to?



Video

Working with Diverse Families

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Section 4: Venue, group size and dynamics

The appropriate venue

For some supported playgroups the venue is clear and fixed. It could be the group space at your service, a classroom at your school or even a park in your community. For other supported playgroups, the space will need to be hired, borrowed or mobile. This might be a neighbourhood hall, a room at the local library or a specially equipped van. No matter which venue is chosen, there are factors for sponsoring organisations and facilitators to consider that will determine the appropriateness of the space and its impact on the character and culture of the group you aim to achieve.

The following questions may be useful in assessing the appropriateness and potential of the venue:

- Is it accessible to families? (e.g. close to public transport, easy to find and signposted)
- Is it child/family friendly? (e.g. secure indoor and outdoor spaces, close to nappy change and toileting facilities, ample space for floor play, quiet play and feeding)
- Does it conform to child-safe and occupational health and safety (OH&S) standards? (e.g. lockable gates, climb-proof fences, contained spaces away from unknown adults)
- Is it the right size for the type and number of families attending? Will the room be vast and echo, contained and intimate, or crowded and noisy?
- Are there possible sensory issues? (e.g. loud road noises, bright lighting, cold hard surfaces, too much echo, too much visual clutter, no quiet or conversation spaces)
- Is the venue co-located with other allied services or staff? This may be helpful to enable partnerships, provide easy access to information and support, or bridge a family's connection for referral/specialist intervention, create familiarity to aid transition to kindergarten, school or other community activities.
- Will the venue be available and affordable for regular sessions?
- Who else uses the venue, is it likely to cause a conflict of purpose? (e.g. playground mowing or sensitive counselling sessions being held at the same time as playgroup)

The ideal supported playgroup venue is one that provides dedicated spaces for both indoor and outdoor play and also conforms to child safe and OH&S requirements. Even better is an appropriately furnished space that can remain setup between sessions and decorated with art and homewares to reflect the identity of the children and families in the playgroup. Co-location with allied health, early childhood or family support services is also beneficial. The perfect venue may not be possible for many supported playgroups. However, what is possible and important to achieve is an environment of consistency and intimacy that fosters familiarity, belonging and a sense of comfort and safety for children and their parent/carers.



Managing group size and dynamics

Practice Principle 6: Intentional management of groups, sessions and resources encourages you to consider the size of your playgroup, and how this will significantly impact on group dynamics and safety. The size of your supported playgroup will have a notable effect on how the group functions, what level of time and attention the facilitator can give to each individual, what can be achieved for each child, and how the children and parents/carers interact.

There isn't a particular number or formula for the 'perfect size' to suit every supported playgroup and large participant numbers don't necessarily equal quality and success. It is important for you to understand both the benefits and challenges of different group sizes. Use this to plan and manage your group size with the needs of your targeted families, the capacity of your resources and the goals of your supported playgroup in mind.

It is also important to consider the risks and safety issues that increase along with the size of the supported playgroup. If the group size becomes very large, a supported playgroup might not be the right model for your community. Hosting a regular family fun day or event may achieve the same outcomes with more appropriate preparation, resources, expectation, and safety measures in place.

Consider these questions with your sponsoring organisation:

- Who are the families you want to have participate and how intensive are their support needs?
- Does the group share a common issue that would be better supported in a more personal, discreet or small group environment? (e.g. parents experiencing post-partum depression/anxiety; children who have Autism)
- In that context, what will be an appropriate ratio of staff to children/parent/carers in your supported playgroup? If the ideal ratio isn't met, how will quality and safety be compromised?
- Will the group stay together and grow? Or are the families' transient and participating at a distinct point in time? (e.g. children in hospital, mothers living in domestic and family violence refuges, a transition to prep playgroup, a young parents playgroup)
- What resources are available now and in the future if you need to adjust to a changing group size? (e.g. staffing, equipment, budget, venue, time)
- Is a supported playgroup the right model at this time or is the community telling you something different? Very large participant numbers might be better served by an event, family fun day or meet your community day rather than a supported playgroup.



The following table identifies just some of the benefits and challenges of group size reported by experienced facilitators:

Group size	Benefits	Challenges
Smaller group i.e. less than eight families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time and space for small group activities, in-depth discussion and responding to individual needs. • Children and families get to know each other quickly and build close relationships. • May feel more welcoming and less intimidating for families to join. • The level of noise, the children's play experiences and resources can be managed. • Parent-child attachment and bonding can be readily built on. • A sense of belonging, increased investment and responsibility in the group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families may feel there is too much attention on them. • Fewer families to connect with and risk of the group becoming cliquey and inaccessible to new members. • Venue may feel too vast and deserted. • Group activities and optimum socialisation through play may be difficult with low numbers. • Participating children may not be at similar ages or stages to play together. • Parents/carers may feel tempted to talk with playgroup peers rather than engage in their children's play. • Absences or families leaving may have significant impact.
Larger group i.e. more than 15 families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lively playgroup sessions with an opportunity to run multiple activity zones. • Many new families and friends to meet and connect with. Children are likely to be teamed with others of similar ages and stages. • Potential to share playgroup tasks and responsibilities across the group, increasing personal investment and value. • Greater community reach. • Opportunity to grow the program, add more sessions and attract more families to the partner programs. • Increased opportunity to attract and refer families to the other services or opportunities available within your networks. • Less noticeable impact when families leave or move away. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less time for in-depth discussion, responding to individual needs or small group activities. • Risk that families may feel lost in the crowd and challenged to build meaningful connections. • Potential for families to leave tasks and responsibilities to others, feeling that their help is not needed. • Resource intensive, requiring more hours, employment of more facilitators/helpers, more consumable supplies and/or establishment of waiting lists. • Level of audible and visual noise is intimidating to some adults and children, especially those with sensory or anxiety issues or stressful life circumstances. • Group activities and optimum socialisation through play may be difficult with high numbers. • Higher risk and safety issues if there are too few staff to actively manage children's activities, movements, interactions and safety.



Key message

There is no ideal group size for all supported playgroups. Consider these potential impacts of group size on how the group functions and discuss the ideal size for your context with your supervisor.



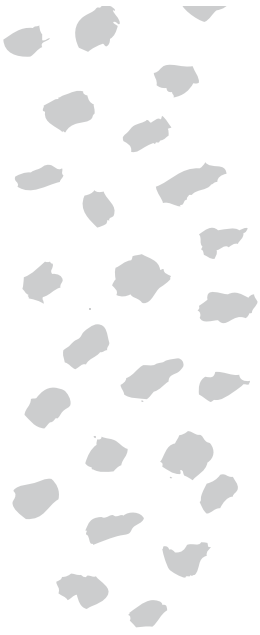
Self-reflection activity

What is the optimal size of the group for the particular goals you have for families and the community?

- Is there a limit to the number of families that the group can accept because of the nature of the venue and resources available?
- What strategies will you put in place to cap/manage the group size?
- Will you implement a waiting list for new families and/or a transition plan to support older families to move on from the group?
- What impact will those strategies have on the unique needs of your targeted families?
- Will families be involved in the development and implementation of these strategies?
- How will families know about these planning processes?

What tactics could your supported playgroup use to address the common challenges that large and small groups face?

- Will you have a welcoming strategy to foster meaningful connections?
- Will you employ more than one facilitator to allow children's activities and family support to happen simultaneously?
- Will a playgroup session still operate if only one family is present one day?
- How will you support play experience and optimise socialisation if children in very different ages and stages attend?
- What positive or negative impacts might that have on the families?
- What are the risks and what safety measures must be employed?



Section 5: **Session routines, activities and resources**

Session days and times

Supported playgroups usually meet for approximately two hours on a weekly basis during school terms. As they are designed to support families of children aged 0-5 years, many facilitators find that the frequency of sessions, time of day they are held, length and routine of the sessions have a significant impact on both the accessibility and experience for families.

As an example, a two-hour morning session is optimal because children can experience a range of developmental activities, participate in a shared morning tea and finish with a positive group experience before they head home for a well-deserved nap. Any longer or later in the day and there are risks of the children becoming overtired and the parents/carers becoming stressed by their child's behaviour. When planning the timing and structure of the sessions, you can involve your targeted families and consider the following things:

- What is the best time for your supported playgroup to reach targeted families? (e.g. a pre-prep playgroup might start 20 minutes after school drop-off so families with older siblings at the school can still make it, and families with younger children avoid the traffic at drop off time)
- What is the best day for your playgroup families? (e.g. more dads seem to access playgroups on a Saturday)
- Is there a day that another complementary service is available that the playgroup could support families to access? (e.g. a child health nurse might come to the centre each Wednesday)
- Will the facilitator have a chance to remind families to attend, make follow-up phone calls and referrals after the group meets? (e.g. a Friday playgroup leaves little time for follow-up if the family needs essential support, while Monday playgroups may not give time to remind the families about special events or promote attendance)
- Will the consistency of routine and reliability benefit the group? Are there any external factors that might affect the routine? (e.g. public holidays will impact Monday playgroups more than a Thursday group, while fortnightly and monthly playgroups can be challenging for families to remember which week they are on)

Playgroups routines, activities and resources

When planning your supported playgroup's activities, routine and resources, it is important to remember that familiar, enjoyable and meaningful routines can have benefits for young children and parents/carers. In particular, when children have an understanding of what to expect and can predict some of the activities and toys that will be available at playgroup, it builds a sense of belonging, safety and comfort.

Routine

Having a basic routine will help in both the planning and running of each supported playgroup session. As children grow more familiar and confident with the routine, you may find that they will take on the role of timekeeper, reminding you when it is time to pack up craft and move onto the next activity. Parents/carers also derive security from the routine and having specific opening and closing activities may help to ensure that they will not want to turn up late or leave too early.

You can support children and families to know and understand the routine by displaying a copy of it at each session and providing opportunities for them to take the lead on transitions between activities. Many facilitators find it useful to use pictorial representations of activities, pinned onto a routine format so that young children and families with limited literacy or proficiency in English can see and understand what will happen at the session and when.

Having a routine is also beneficial to you as the facilitator. It can help you:

- plan what activities will be delivered
- identify what supplies and resources are needed
- decide how long each component of the session should take
- reflect on and document how children's participation in activities is evolving
- evaluate what is working in your supported playgroup and what might need changing.

There are many ways that you can plan your supported playgroup routine. Below is a typical routine that might be useful to consider when planning how you will run your supported playgroup. As always, what is most important is that you find a routine that fits the needs of the families who are attending your supported playgroup.





Playgroup routine

9.30 am	Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As families start to arrive, ensure you have one or two indoor activities setup for children to explore. • Model and facilitate connection by greeting parents/ carers and encourage them to do the same. • Involve children and families in setting out the equipment according to what the group likes to do (indoors/ outdoors etc.). • As the last of the families arrive, come together for a welcome song or rhyme which greets every individual and helps families to learn each other's names. • Consider including an Acknowledgment of Country and/ or other culturally appropriate rituals to demonstrate respect for all in your group.
9.45 am	Indoor play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check that all indoor activities and materials are completely setup for playgroup. • Model for the parents/carers how they might support their child and work on the activities together. • Allow children to choose and move between activity stations freely. • Consider inviting parents/carers to have a turn at taking the lead on the creative, art or sensory activities each week.
10.15 am	Morning tea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities cease so that all children and parents/carers can join together for a healthy snack and conversation. • Invite a guest to join you for morning tea and talk about a service or issue that is of interest to the families.
10.30 am	Outdoor play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now is a good time for outdoor play activities. Consider a wide range of activities such as sand play, baskets and balls, and water play.
11.00 am	Tidy up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All parents/carers and children are encouraged to join in with tidy-up time. You might use a 'tidy-up song' to cue families that it's time to clean up.
11.10 am	Group time and goodbye ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring everyone together for final group time. • Include a story, song or parachute play to conclude the playgroup. • Talk about the day's activities, what went well, what did people enjoy best, celebrate achievements and let people know what will happen at next week's session. • Finish with a goodbye song. This ritual is important to communicate to children and parents/carers that they are transitioning out of playgroup and back to their outside world.
11.30 am	Finish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families leave.

To prepare for a playgroup session, you will find it useful to develop a brief written plan listing the activities and resources needed. Use this plan to write down your reflection after the playgroup session.



Templates and tools

Session planning and reflection tool

This tool offers one way to keep records of session planning, and to reflect on how each session went and what could be planned for next time.

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Activities

Don't make the mistake of thinking you need to present a new suite of activities for children every week. Instead, give children the opportunity to explore, repeat and master activities they enjoy. Build on familiar activities by introducing new elements that expand the children's experiences and foster new thinking or sensory experiences. For example, you can turn water play into an experience of cold and warm, full and empty, float or sink. When working with playdough, you can increase the tactile and/or sensory experience by adding fragrant oils or elements from nature. You can encourage children's imagination by turning sand play into a treasure hunt or an imaginative excavation for dinosaur toys.

Include a range of activities in every session by incorporating indoor play, outdoor play, messy and tranquil experiences, individual and group experiences.

Supported playgroups are a great place to include a range of activities that engage children and cater for the range of different age groups. Here is a list of just some of the activities your supported playgroup might want to deliver:





Activity	How and why you can support the play activity
Creative art and craft	<p>Creative art and craft can be a great experience to encourage parents/carers and children in joint play.</p> <p>Model how to support children's exploration of art, how to prompt their creativity and use low-cost/no-cost household products to create. Talk with parents about how cutting, holding paintbrushes and manipulating feathers of glitter is helping their child's fine motor development.</p> <p>Encourage children to show, engage and draw their parents into the activities. Make food collages on paper plates as a way to talk about healthy eating and portion sizes.</p> <p>Many families lack the confidence to do messy activities at home, so art and craft at playgroup can introduce both children and families to how enjoyable, simple and rewarding creative art and craft can be.</p>
Musical activities	<p>Most children love music and songs. Joining in with shakers, bells and drums or voices is something that almost every child can do. Encourage the children to hand out the instruments and get everyone participating.</p>
Puzzles	<p>Puzzles can be done repeatedly. They often encourage the parent/ carer and child to join together in problem solving, talking about shapes and colours, developing the child's fine motor skills, and achieving the puzzle outcome together.</p>
Outdoor activity	<p>Outdoor activities are a great opportunity to explore and encourage gross motor skills through big movements, throwing and catching, using balance, strength and speed. Water and sand play are also popular activities with most children as they offer a cool-down in hot weather and a relaxing sensory experience.</p>
Science experiments and cooking activities	<p>If the facilities are available at your venue, consider running simple science experiments and assembling or cooking food together. These experiences are fun, require cooperation, focus and problem solving, as well as provide good opportunities to discuss food and healthy choices.</p>
Treasure hunts	<p>Help children to find a 'short list' of natural items outside, or some hidden items inside, to encourage curiosity and contributions to a group treasure hunt.</p>
Baby massage	<p>This tranquil and considered activity can help parents/carers of infants to build attachment and calming skills, increase eye contact and enjoy special time together that can be easily recreated at home.</p>
Group activities/ circle time	<p>In group activities, children can learn a number of social interaction and concentration skills, such as learning to share experiences, settle and listen, focus and engage, participate, take turns and see how others are behaving and reacting. These are important skills for all children, especially those who are moving toward starting kindergarten or school. Group activities are often a great way to open and close a playgroup session.</p>
Planning time	<p>Involve parents/carers and children in the running of their supported playgroup. Set small periods of time to talk about what children or parents/carers would like to do at next week's group or in the weeks ahead. Remind people about special activities or visitors that will be coming to the group soon. Discuss how playgroup activities can be replicated or expanded at home.</p>



Video

Playgroup Routines

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Resources

Supported playgroup resources should be age appropriate, invite exploration and include a range of play experiences for learning and development. Investment in good quality materials can be more economical in the long term and may be more conducive to ensuring compliance with child safety standards. It is also important to use products and materials that are low-cost/no-cost and can be easily found around the house or garden, to encourage families to easily reproduce the activities at home.

Catering for children of different age groups

Any playgroup may need to cater for a wide age range of children and many activities can be adapted for children aged up to five years. Circle and group activities are times when the whole group can be involved, regardless of age.

Playgroup facilitators describe how they cater for different age groups

We set up activities especially for the babies, such as a special basket with baby books.

Activities set for each week are parent/carer-designed or influenced, and are therefore appropriate for the age group currently attending.

Parents/carers are given opportunities to share their ideas and make suggestions for the group about activities and what they would like to do at the playgroup. Doing this helps to take account of children's ages.

Each activity is 'scaffolded' so that a toddler through to a five-year-old can take part.

For example, if we have collage, we will encourage ripping for the young children and have different plastic scissors available (easy plastic scissors to use through to metal round-ended scissors).

We make available different puzzles and books, ranging from very easy for children aged two to three years, to more difficult puzzles for the older children.

We have a wide variety of toys, ranging from wooden yards, complete with farm animals and zoo animals, to rescue centres that children of different ages can use.



Self-reflection activity

How will you involve or consult families in identifying the best day, time and place for your supported playgroup?

What routine will your supported playgroup use and how will you communicate it to families and children?

How can you support parents/carers to understand and value play activities and reproduce these opportunities in the home?

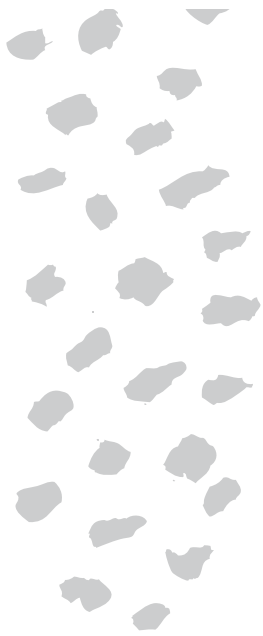
Is there more you would like to learn about how play supports learning and development?



Video

Planning a Playgroup Session

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Section 6: The lifecycle of a playgroup

Each supported playgroup is unique in the way it begins, develops over time and perhaps ends at some point, for example:

- Ongoing—run on a weekly basis for years, in the same venue with the same families attending with different children over time, while other families move in and out of the playgroup and new families join.
- Naturally closing—begins and develops over time but then comes to a natural close because a core group of families move on, or there is a change in the needs of the local community.
- Discrete—designed to meet a particular need over a shorter period of time and may have a particular end date that is known from the beginning. This should be clearly communicated to the families and the community and may relate to organisational goals or funding models. For these playgroups, consider whether support for families could continue in some way through a transitioning model (see below).
- Transitioning—designed to have the support of a facilitator for a period of time (e.g. nine to 12 months) before transitioning to a parent/carer-run playgroup. This requires particular strategies for capacity building of parents/carers that should be designed and considered from the outset of the playgroup.

Regardless of the lifespan of the playgroup, there are some typical stages of playgroup development that can be useful to consider.

Beginning	Developing	Thriving
Attendance is sporadic, there may be sessions when no families attend.	A small number of families attend almost every session. Word-of-mouth from parents/carers and services mean there are new families attending regularly—some may come back, others will not.	The group has settled into a strong and regular pattern of attendance. Families will make contact if they are not able to attend a session.
Most families attending do not know anyone else in the group.	Families converse about general topics with the facilitator and each other.	Most families have a strong relationship with the facilitator. Families are observed to converse with each other and the facilitator about children and parenting.
Few community services know about the supported playgroup.	Local community services are referring families to the playgroup and communicating with the facilitator	The playgroup is well embedded in local community networks with services sometimes visiting the group and the group invited to local events.
Most session planning and organising is undertaken by the facilitator alone.	Families begin to help with set-up and pack-up and might offer ideas for activities.	Families have an active role in providing feedback, planning, and organising group activities. One or more parents/carers may have developed the confidence to take on a leadership role in the group.



Self-reflection activity

Think about the stage that your playgroup is at.

What does this stage mean for the way you recruit families, engage parents/carers, and connect with the local community and service networks?

What support would you expect from the sponsoring organisation to help you with playgroups at different stages?



Creating enriching and strengthening supported playgroup sessions

Section 1: Aims for supported playgroup sessions

Section 2: Children and play: A primary focus of playgroup sessions

Section 3: Interacting with children at playgroup

Section 4: Interacting with parents/carers at playgroup

Principle 3: Developmentally appropriate practice with children

Principle 4: Planning, balanced with flexibility

Principle 5: Child-focused and family-sensitive approaches in practice



Key message

'Our playgroup is very much driven by the interests of the children and families. We try to always provide a balance of sensory, creative and pretend play, along with a music activity, play with words, physical play, and some focus on appreciating the environment around us.'

Facilitator of a supported playgroup

4

MODULE



Section 1:

Aims for supported playgroup sessions

Your planning of playgroup sessions can contribute to the following outcomes for children and families:

1. Age-appropriate activities for children—to develop physical and motor skills, communication and language skills, and social-emotional skills.
2. Child confidence through giving play choices—when children make their own choices about how to play and what to play they are more engaged and can develop skills in independence and persistence.
3. Parental understanding about how children learn through play—by sharing observations about how children engage with activities and what they are learning, and what they do well.
4. Parents/carers engaged in children's play and learning at home—when parents/carers play with, talk with, and read to their children, important learning is happening.

There may also be specific expectations for the playgroup held by the sponsoring organisation. In Module 1 the overall aims of the model were discussed and you were encouraged to consider the specific objectives for your group.



Video

Aims of Supported Playgroups

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Templates and tools

Supported playgroup goals template

This tool provides space where supported playgroup aims, at group, family, parent/carer and child levels, can be documented.

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Personal planning aims identified by experienced playgroup facilitators

- Provide an environment that is safe, non-threatening, and inclusive.
- Always be respectful and culturally aware.
- Provide a regular routine with input from families regarding activities.
- Have a craft roster in which parents/carers can assist.
- Offer developmentally appropriate activities.
- Offer cultural and traditional experiences.
- Provide information about other community services.
- Encourage parents/carers to help set up the playgroup activities.
- Embrace all ideas for activities and experiences so we learn from each other.
- Job share with playgroup parents/carers for food preparation, setting up, and packing away activities.
- Value contribution by working to your own and others' strengths but remember to respect boundaries.
- Share the load.



Section 2:

Children and play: A primary focus of playgroup sessions

'Learning through play' is at the heart of early childhood programming. There are a number of play types that evolve across early childhood and therefore should be catered for in early childhood programming. These include exploratory play, object play, construction play, physical play, sensorimotor play, rough-and-tumble play and pretend play.

As a playgroup facilitator, an important part of your role is to create the environment and space for a wide range of stimulating play experiences. When you do this, you will be able to observe the unique benefits that derive from play. The benefits of play are far-reaching, but include allowing children to develop their imagination, problem-solving skills and independence. Social play opportunities help children to learn about social cooperation, negotiation and compromise. Most importantly, play benefits children by supporting and enhancing their overall development.

Play is also essential for the relationship between parent/carer and child. You can observe how children respond when a parent/carer engages in their play activities. This engagement signals to the child that the parent/carer is interested in them and is paying attention. The shared experience of play and connection is a valuable tool for supporting brain development and strengthening attachment between parent/carer and the child.



Self-reflection activity

How do you know when play is valuable for a child and their parent/carer?

What kind of play spaces and activities do you most enjoy creating for children?

Are there any forms of play that you feel less confident in creating?

What could you do to address this?

Understanding development in early childhood

Early childhood development describes how a child grows and learns during the period from pre-birth to the age of eight. As you will know, children grow and change in a variety of areas. These developmental areas may be referred to by a number of names. However, most commonly they are called the language, social-emotional, cognitive and physical domains. Descriptions for each of these are provided in the table below:

Developmental domain	Description
Language	How the child takes in communication from others and communicates meaning to others. The way a child communicates changes over time, from crying and babbling as infants to spoken sounds and words as they grow.
Social-emotional	How the child learns key social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviours, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• recognising and managing emotions• showing care and concern for others• making responsible decisions• forming positive relationships• handling challenging situations effectively.
Cognitive	This is about the child's mind, including their ability to think and understand the world. It is the building of thought processes including remembering, problem solving and decision making.
Physical	This is both gross (big movements) and fine (small movements) motor skills, as well as physical growth (balance and coordination).



Supported Playgroups

A Practice Guide for Facilitators

Developmental domains are broad areas of growth and learning, wherein you can observe children gaining new skills and behaviours. Rather than separate areas, it is most useful to think of the domains as interconnected and working together. Children develop their multiple abilities through the many activities they experience daily. By understanding how children develop across these domains, you can support parents/carers to:

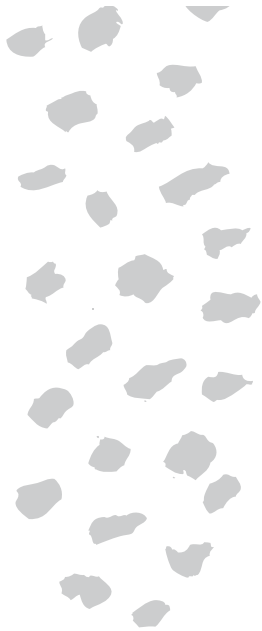
- see how the child is progressing along their developmental path
- celebrate their achievements
- support further learning and development.

As a rule, skills build skills. Many of the skills children learn come about in similar ways, even if at different stages. Skills tend to build on each other, starting with the most simple and getting more difficult over time. In your facilitation role, you can keep children engaged and stimulated by observing which skills they are developing and providing play activities which allow them to build on those skills and progress further.

Sometimes, developmental milestones are used to set activities by 'age and stage' in early childhood programs. While developmental milestones are a useful tool, it is also important to understand that each child grows and develops at their own pace. This means each child will have a unique developmental pathway. As you observe children's growth and development, you should take into account the individual differences in the pace and ways children develop their abilities. Each child will also have their own interests, temperament, style of interacting and ways of learning, which shapes how they develop. When working with parents/carers, you can consider the milestones as useful in guiding conversations but remember that each child will be different.

If a child does not seem to be progressing in one or more areas, it may be useful to bring this up with parents/carers, in a sensitive manner. Some strategies for these types of conversations are provided in Section 4 of this module.





Learning through play

Knowing the specific interests of each child in the playgroup is a good place to start when planning play activities. However, it is also important to keep in mind how each activity will provide opportunities to learn new skills and try to provide a range of activities within each session. Some suggestions to get you started are:

Developmental domain	Description
Language	Include a range of storytelling and book reading opportunities. Teach nursery rhymes, music and songs to children and their parents/carers. Use finger plays, puppets and other role-plays to engage children in developing communication skills. With many of these activities, children will enjoy repetition as they have more opportunities to master new sounds and language.
Social-emotional	Provide a range of group activities that involve children in social and peer interactions. Consider activities which allow children to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• have opportunities to watch and copy peers• develop social skills like sharing and taking turns.
Cognitive	Support children's cognitive development with activities that will extend their problem solving, memory and thinking skills. This could involve colour and shape games, moving and sorting objects, filling and emptying containers and cooking activities.
Physical	Facilitate activities that involve gross motor skills, fine motor skills and/or balance and coordination. This could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• play with playdough• water and sand play• balls and basket play• shake and stacking toys• puzzles with knobbed pieces for easy manipulation.

Support learning by involving parents/carers in children's play. However, it is important that the parental involvement is not too intrusive with too many instructions or directions. Adults require a great deal of self-control to allow children to take the lead and step in only when needed. Model this skill to parents/carers and remind them that children benefit a great deal more when they get to self-direct and lead the play experience.



Key message

Support children's development by providing a wide range of play-based learning opportunities and engaging as a co-player who encourages but does not lead their play experience.



The role of observations in session planning

You can make brief observations about children's activities and then make notes about these after a playgroup session. This process will help with planning for the next playgroup as you consider, from your notes, what children did and who they played with.

These brief observations, made over time, allow you to see the development of children's skills. Many developmental changes occur, even across a few weeks. When a child joins the playgroup, they may just watch and observe other children and what they do. After a few weeks, most children develop enough confidence to participate in activities and make their own choices about what they want to do.

Asking parents/carers about their own observations of their child, and sharing your own, can start conversations and help with planning.

Examples of possible ideas to discuss with parents/carers about their child

What makes your child smile or laugh?

What are your child's favourite activities at home?

What activities hold your child's attention for a reasonably long period?

What places have you been with your child that they particularly enjoyed and remembered?

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

Most people working with young children will have heard of *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF, 2009)*. This valuable resource is Australia's first national framework to guide the practices that enrich children's learning experiences from birth to five years of age, and through the transition to school.

The EYLF has been designed for early childhood educators, working in partnership with families at regulated early childhood services. It draws on conclusive international evidence about play-based learning in the formative years. The intent of the EYLF is to inspire conversations and provide a common language about young children's learning among children themselves, their families, the broader community, early childhood educators and other professionals. Although the EYLF isn't required as a quality standard in supported playgroups, it is an informative tool that can help to shape best practice, assisting you to plan and deliver playgroup sessions to achieve great outcomes for children.

Playgroup is often the first learning experience of children and parents/carers on the continuum of early learning, educational services and programs. As a facilitator, understanding the EYLF and being able to use and incorporate its language and principles into your work is invaluable. By doing this, you can build parents'/carers' capacity to engage in the learning experience of play and to bridge the connection between their child's development at playgroup and their transition to early childhood education and care services and school.

The EYLF describes childhood as a time of belonging, being and becoming.

Belonging	Being	Becoming
Children feel they belong because of the relationships they have with their parents/carers and the community, and the places in which they live.	Children need time to just 'be'—time to play, try new things and have fun.	From an early age, children start to form a sense of 'who they are' and that sense of self is the basis of who they will become.



The EYLF describes five learning outcomes (see Figure 3) that are important for children’s successful transition to school, as well as being goals for lifelong learning. These are:



Figure 3: EYLF learning outcomes

From your observations and the understandings that you develop about each child in the playgroup, it is possible to imagine what you can do to support each child to build on skills they already hold.

Children’s activities and actions in playgroups provide the first steps, through their interactions with others, to achieving the EYLF learning outcomes over time.



Self-reflection activity

How do you tell when you observe a child that they are really enjoying a play activity?

What emotional and thinking processes do you detect in their facial expressions and by their actions that shows interest and engagement (or not)?

What behaviours show attention, concentration, and persistence?

Can you recall any observations of a child at playgroup that has really stayed with you that help you to understand the child or inform your learning about children?



Using the EYLF in planning

Learning Stories are a technique to document children's learning that originated in early childhood education in New Zealand. You can build a Learning Story from your written observations about a child through their play activities.

A Learning Story requires:

- Narrative description: What was the child doing—actions and reactions?
- Interpretation from the child's perspective: What might be the child's perspective on the situation—their thoughts and feelings?
- Reflection: Use your knowledge about the child's learning, their learning style and disposition and consider how to extend this child's learning in a future playgroup activity.

Using Learning Stories and planning: a mobile supported playgroup example

Facilitators of mobile playgroups who travel to rural and remote locations often travel in pairs, and may only see children and families every one to two months.

During each playgroup session, one facilitator has a camera and photos are taken of children. After each playgroup, usually while facilitators are driving to the next destination, they reflect on the morning's session and swap observations about the children who participated. Once the facilitators return to their office, photos and reflections are written up for each child into a Learning Story.

This Learning Story, along with suggestions and an activity pack, will be mailed out to families. This package will help communicate to parents/carers why activities are being delivered, and how they can recreate and extend their child's interests and continue to enhance the child's development between playgroup visits. Parents/carers can also reflect on the playgroup and the experiences that the child and parent/carer shared.

Families are provided with a portfolio for each child and encouraged to add Learning Stories of their own and any photos or experiences that the child has had between playgroup visits. Facilitators maintain contact via email or telephone and a quarterly newsletter about the children's activities and interests.

Want to know more about the EYLF?

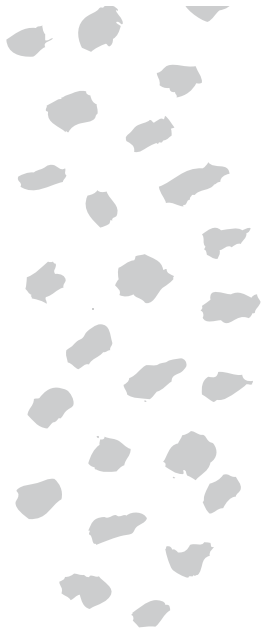


Resource

Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

This framework was produced by the Commonwealth of Australia (Department of Education and Training) in 2009 and is now the guiding document for all early childhood settings across Australia.

Link: www.docs.education.gov.au/node/2632



Section 3: Interacting with children at playgroup

As children and their parents/carers become familiar with the playgroup routine, you have an important role to interact with children and support their play, as well as to model supportive ways to engage with children for parents/carers.

Welcoming and saying goodbye to children every week is a good way to help you to get to know them.

Welcoming children at playgroup

On arrival to playgroup:

'Hi [child's name], it's good to see you today.' 'Wow, I like your ... [positive comment].'

At departure from playgroup:

'[child's name], it was good to see you at playgroup today.'

'You really enjoyed ... [positive comment].'

Some ways you can join in with children at playgroup include:

- showing your interest in what children are doing
- using the child's name
- speaking to them with enthusiasm
- allowing time for children to respond.

While one or two questions can be useful to start conversations with children, too many questions from adults are intrusive.

Key points for interacting with young children.

- Engage with the child in their favourite activity and talk with them about what you are doing.
- Wait for children to respond when you make a comment to a child—pause and wait for a response.
- Respond to children's comments by staying on topic and with comments that encourage further conversation.
- Expand on a child's comments by repeating back their words but add some extra information with different words to help children learn new vocabulary.
- Praise often—children learn from specific praise and this makes interactions more positive.
- Give simple, short instructions—children respond best when instructions are at their language level and require only one action.
- Minimise use of instruction—give instructions only once for 'important' behaviours. Do not repeat an instruction but wait for the action to be completed. This increases child compliance.
- When an instruction is very important or a 'must do', do not phrase it as a question: SAY 'You need to wash your hands now, please' NOT 'Would you like to come and wash your hands now?'



Managing challenging behaviours in playgroups

Factors that can have a big influence on children's behaviour at playgroup include:

- family and home stress
- children's tiredness or hunger
- anxiety associated with being in a large group
- children's lack of experience in being with other children in a group.

Some strategies for preventing behaviours that might disrupt the group include:

- If problems occur in peer play (or look like they might occur), use distraction or redirection to divert children's attention to a different play object or activity. This might prevent the issue becoming a bigger problem.
- In group times, explain your expectations to parents/carers. For example, at the beginning of group time, let them know that children do not need to sit and 'pay attention' for the whole time. Let them know that children are encouraged to sit and listen to a story but it is also okay for them to leave, especially when group situations are a new experience or when a child is very young.

If disruptive behaviour does happen in any activities during the playgroup:

- Parents/carers should be respected as the 'experts' on their own children and supported to manage behaviour in a way that suits their family. You can ask parents/carers, 'What usually works at home when Sam is upset?'
- The behaviour of some children in a playgroup, and the way it is managed by their parents/carers, can sometimes be of concern to other families. This can create tensions in the group. You can diffuse or prevent this tension by talking about children as 'still learning' how to interact with others. It might be that the playgroup needs to come up with plans about what to do when children's behaviour is a regular concern.



Video

Engaging with Families & Children in Playgroups

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Self-reflection activity

It is a relatively common experience when young children are playing to have a disagreement over 'ownership' of a toy or a play prop.

What words and actions have you used in such conflict situations to help two children negotiate a resolution?

How successful was the strategy you used?

On reflection, is there anything that you might now do differently?



Section 4: Interacting with parents/carers at playgroup

As part of a strengths-based approach, your interactions with parents/carers should demonstrate that you value their parenting skills and are invested in supporting them to develop further. As the facilitator, you also have the opportunity to develop strong partnerships with parents/carers by involving them as co-creators of the playgroup. You can facilitate strengthening interactions with parents/carers by:

- inviting input from parents/carers about their preferences for playgroup activities, as they know best what their child might enjoy
- providing ideas for parent-child play times at home
- providing parents/carers with information about children's development
- modelling ways to interact with children that support engagement in activities
- discussing parenting issues and any concerns about children's development.



Self-reflection activity

Think of a time when you had a conversation with someone where you felt they were really listening to what you had to say.

What was the other person doing or saying that made you feel so positive?

What conversational skills do you use to find common ground with people you have just met and who may have a different culture or gender from you, for example?

Key parenting messages for playgroups

Playgroups provide important opportunities for facilitators to discuss parenting practices that enhance children's early learning. This can be done through regular conversations with parents/carers.

Responsive parenting is about affectionate parent-child interactions with lots of talking with children, which is important to children's language development. Parents introduce new words to the child and the child tries them out in conversations.

Here are three specific parenting messages to highlight with parents/carers.





The importance of these key parenting messages and ways to support parents to understand how to put these into practice is described in the following table:

Key parenting message	Approach
1. Everyday adult-child conversations	<p>Find as many opportunities as you can every day to give your child your full attention and have conversations. Be ready to respond when children initiate conversations—remember for infants this might begin with a facial expression, a gurgle or a coo! To initiate conversation, open with a comment or question and wait for your child to respond.</p> <p>Such conversational turn-taking with children is called ‘serve and return’ and is crucial for language, social-emotional and cognitive development. These ‘chats’ can happen at any time of day, like meal-time, bath-time, daily chores or shopping. When you encourage children’s efforts to speak, they learn that conversations are fun and they will become better communicators.</p> <p>Introduce new words to build children’s vocabulary and knowledge about the world. Conversation is fun for parents/carers and children alike. Children love to practice their new sounds and words, and both parents/carers and children benefit from the enhanced attachment provided by serve and return.</p>
2. Understand and support children’s feelings	<p>Young children often have difficulty in learning to understand and manage their feelings.</p> <p>When you use words to describe your children’s feelings (e.g. happy, sad, angry, scared), children learn to understand their emotions.</p> <p>You can let your child know you understand their feelings: ‘You are sad right now because...’</p> <p>If parents/carers stay calm and soothe young children when they are upset, children feel safe. This helps your child regain self-control.</p> <p>As children gradually learn to label their emotions, they learn self-control—to wait, take turns, persevere and share.</p>
3. Shared reading as an everyday routine	<p>When you read a picture book with your child, they become familiar with new words and learn about the connections between the sounds of words, the printed words on the page, and the meaning of words through the pictures.</p> <p>Reading picture books can be a shared bedtime routine but also at any time of day.</p> <p>While some young children can only concentrate for very short periods of time, these regular reading routines also help children to build their attention skills.</p>

Do you want to know more about serve and return interactions with children?



Resource

5 steps for brain-building serve and return, Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University 2017

This online resource provides links to a short video and a two-page practical guide to serve and return interactions between adults and children.

Link: www.developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-return



Self-reflection activity

Not all families understand how important it is to talk with very young children, or they may not have grown up with such experiences themselves.

How could you introduce parents/carers to the importance of talking to infants and toddlers?

Do you want to find more resources to support the parenting messages?

Resource

Not all information on the internet is high quality and based on evidence. Facilitators and parents/carers should use evidence-based advice.

Raising Children Network

This website is sponsored by the Australian Government and provides reliable information on a large range of parenting topics, and information about children's development.

Information on the website can help you provide brief advice to parents/carers about particular topics. Looking at it with parents/carers to find answers to questions about parenting could start useful conversations with the playgroup.

Link: raisingchildren.net.au

Talking with parents/carers about developmental concerns

You might, at times, develop concerns about a child's development and wish to discuss those concerns with the parent/carer. Some useful strategies are provided below to guide you through these conversations.

Before the conversation:

Take the time to understand your concerns and how you will approach the conversation with parents/carers.

- Make sure you are well prepared with observational examples to support the conversation.
- Plan an appropriate time and setting to initiate the conversation so that parents/carers feel safe and respected.
- Be sensitive to cultural issues or biases. Remember that not all cultures place the same emphasis on particular developmental milestones.
- Be prepared with information on referral pathways to other relevant services.

During the conversation:

It may be useful to put yourself in the position of parents/carers and consider how these concerns may be received by them. Choose your words and thoughts carefully so that your messages communicate support rather than judgement. Be sure to:

- Use a strengths-based approach. Highlight what the child does well and any areas where you have observed growth and development. In the same way, affirm the parent/carer as the child's first teacher and discuss areas of strength that you have observed in their parenting.
- Encourage an open conversation with questions rather than direct statements. For example, try questions that begin with an observation, for example, 'Have you noticed that Ruby has trouble with....?' rather than 'Ruby isn't doing....'
- Ask parents/carers if they have observed similar things at home or have any concerns of their own. When parents/carers engage in the conversation, use good listening skills and show that you are being attentive to their point of view.



Supported Playgroups

A Practice Guide for Facilitators

- Keep the conversation positive and emphasise the benefits of gathering more information or support to help with their child's wellbeing and development. Avoid jargon, labels and loaded terminology by remaining focused on what you and they have observed.
- Encourage parents/carers to share any concerns with a health professional. If they are ready, provide them with information on referral pathways. Understand if parents/carers need time to reflect on or consider what you have discussed.

After the conversation:

Conversations such as these can bring up a variety of emotional responses. After the conversation, it is important to show that you are there to support parents/carers and their child/ren.

- Follow-up with the family to show that you are engaged and will continue to support them with any actions they need to take.
- Continue to provide a consistent and safe supported playgroup experience to parents/carers and their child/ren.

Remember, it may require more than one conversation before parents/carers are in the right place to take action. If this is the case, continue building their self-efficacy and confidence with a strengths-based approach. As parents/carers feel more empowered, they will feel better resourced to support their child's wellbeing and development. If parents/carers are not ready for these conversations, respect their wishes and continue to support them as valued members of the playgroup.



Resource

Developmental Milestones and the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards

This EYLF guide contains information about developmental milestones for children of different ages that might be of help. For example, when is it a concern that a child isn't crawling or walking as of yet?

Link: acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-02/DevelopmentalMilestonesEYLFandNQS.pdf



Video

Managing Challenges in Playgroup

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Promoting continuous improvement and celebrating success

Section 1: Continuous improvement—why is it important?

Section 2: What is involved in continuous improvement?

Section 3: What is your role in reviewing and improving supported playgroups?

Section 4: What is the value of reflective practice?

Section 5: What does celebrating success look like?

Principle 9: Commitment to continuous improvement through evaluation



Key message

Thinking critically about your practice and the ways in which the playgroup works and does not work is the first step to improving your practice, improving the service and enhancing the supported playgroup model.

5

MODULE

Section 1:
Continuous improvement—why is it important?

Supported playgroups are planned and delivered by organisations and communities wanting to achieve a positive change in the circumstance and wellbeing of a group of children and their parents/carers.

Positive intention alone won't achieve those goals so it is important that you:

- are clear on who your clients are
- know the results and outcomes that you want to achieve with them
- inform your work and decisions with information and evidence about how you are doing and what could work to do better
- identify partners who could help
- develop a continuous improvement plan.

Continuous improvement means making an ongoing effort to monitor how the supported playgroup is progressing and improving on the strategies and processes used. By engaging in continuous improvement, you can help to ensure that you are delivering a quality program that is reaching the right people and meeting or progressing towards improving the lives of children and the families who are participating.





Performance evaluation is the process we use to measure and examine the success of the program, to understand the factors that are contributing to or challenging those results, and to inform future planning. Performance evaluation involves the systematic collection and interpretation of evidence (data) to answer three key questions:

1. How much are we doing?
2. How well are we doing it?
3. Is anyone better off?

Continuous improvement may be one of the key goals of evaluation. However, evaluation can take place for different purposes, at different times and on different scales. Some of the reasons your organisation may conduct evaluation includes:

- **Fostering participation and engagement**—ensuring participating children and families have regular and meaningful opportunities to have a say and input into the decisions, activities and services that affect them.
- **Informing internal decision-making for continuous improvement**—monitoring and reviewing progress against goals, to support learning and decision-making on an ongoing basis.
- **Accountability**—reporting to sponsors, funders and other stakeholders about whether the activity is achieving what you said it would achieve, and meeting the agreed standards and benchmarks in performance.
- **Contributing to a broader evidence base**—establishing a causal linkage between program activities and outcomes for participating children and families, sharing critical findings that will inform community change-makers and creating the tools needed for others to replicate the success of the program in their own community.
- **Advocacy**—encouraging others to adopt what has been proven and increasing the reach of the work. Influencing the actions of community leaders can help to achieve positive changes for children’s lives based on your experience and knowledge of working with children and families.

Section 2: What is involved in continuous improvement?

You may be feeling that you lack the time, resources and expertise to evaluate/review your supported playgroup for continuous improvement. However, with a well-planned approach, this can be simple and offers benefits to all stakeholders that cannot be achieved with a hastily thrown together and retrospective report.

Aspire to start your supported playgroup planning with a clear understanding of who it will aim to support. Also know the improvement in circumstance and wellbeing that you are hoping to achieve. Next, understand the performance measures that will tell you how the group is progressing, and whether anyone is better off as a result. Finally, think about how you will gather the information in a way that is meaningful, consistent and ethical.

To help your supported playgroup achieve quality outcomes for children and families, there are some essential features common to all high quality evaluations/reviews:

- The purpose and audience for the evaluation/review is clearly identified.
- Day-to-day routines and procedures are embedded with reflection opportunities.
- There is strong stakeholder involvement and engagement.
- A culture of learning exists and there is an ongoing commitment to improve practices and outcomes.
- The culture of learning acknowledges that improvements can always be made and achievements should be recognised and celebrated.
- Resources are made available for quality evaluation/review, including professional development and adequate time allocated for the planning, collection and analysis of data.

The Queensland Department of Education has adopted the Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework to measure and improve outcomes for children and their families. RBA is a simple, common sense approach that emphasises the achievement of results from the perspective of the child and the family. It is a disciplined way of thinking and taking action that communities can use to improve the lives of children, parents/carers and the community as a whole. The RBA framework provides a process to improve the quality and effectiveness of programs, policies and services by starting with the results you want to achieve and working backward, step by step, to determine the means (activities) you will use to get there.





The Key Features of RBA (performance accountability)

- The first step is to identify who the client/s (children and families) are for the supported playgroup.
- The second step is to identify the performance measures focusing on:
 - How much did we do? – how many parents/ carers attend the playgroup during a specific period e.g. a month/ a quarter
 - How well was the playgroup delivered?
 - Did children and parents/carers benefit from attending?
- The third step is to look at any current performance data you have and think about how the playgroup is going. For example, what is working and not working and why? Try to understand the root causes. Is the venue accessible? Are the activities culturally appropriate?
- Next, find out who your partners in the community are and how they can help address the root causes or improve performance.
- Then think about all of the ways that the playgroup could be improved. What does the evidence/ research say?
- Develop a plan and implement.
- Regularly review.

Acknowledgement

The RBA and trade; concepts used by the department are derived from the book Trying Hard is Not Good Enough, and Turning Curves: An Accountability Companion Reader, by Mark Friedman.

Want to know more?



Resource

For more information on RBA visit these websites

Fiscal Policy Studies Institute

Information about RBA, resources, tools and workshops on Mark Friedman, the US-based developer of RBA.

Link: resultsaccountability.com

Implementation Guide

Results-Based Accountability—a comprehensive resource for the RBA community organised around questions people typically ask.

Link: raguide.org/

Playgroups Evaluation Guide

This evaluation guide by the Australian Institute of Family Studies outlines the key steps and considerations in planning a playgroup evaluation.

Link: www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/playgroups-evaluation-guide



Supported Playgroups

A Practice Guide for Facilitators

An important element of reflective practice is willingness on the part of facilitators and sponsoring organisations to examine challenges and issues that arise. Sometimes approaches don't work as well as intended or the results are not as positive as the initial expectations. In these instances, rather than placing blame, reflective practitioners and organisations use these as critical opportunities for learning and adaptation.

Openly addressing things that don't work may also provide a great opportunity to model this approach for children and families.



Templates and tools

Reflective practice tool

This tool provides ways to think about and address reflective practice in your work.

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Want to know more?



Resource

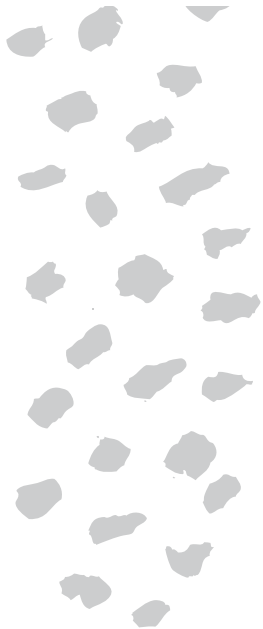
Thinking about practice: Working with the Early Years Learning Framework

The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program, (2012),
Early Childhood Australia

This guide can assist you to reflect on your practice, to improve understanding of the EYLF and to improve learning outcomes for children.

Link: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/EYLFPLP_Thinking_about_practice_Planner_Screen.pdf





Section 3:

What is your role in reviewing and improving supported playgroups?

Review and evaluation is in everyone's best interest and should engage all people involved in supported playgroups. Make sure you have the time to plan with your organisation and understand how the supported playgroup fits into the bigger plan. Also understand what your roles and responsibilities are in achieving Practice Principle 9.

Experienced facilitators tell us their contributions to review/evaluation often include:

1. **Regular data collection**—this might include documenting attendance records, collecting information about the age, location and cultural background/context of participants, facilitating group discussions, and undertaking family satisfaction and feedback surveys in creative ways, recording child observations and stories of change (sometimes known as case studies) according to your sponsoring organisation's requirements.
2. **Analysing the data and making sense of what it tells you**—reviewing what the measures say and how those findings might be used to enhance your practice with children, families and other community networks.
3. **Ongoing learning through reflective practice.**

Whatever your role, the principles of engagement with children, families and community still apply to any review/evaluation functions you may have:

- Be respectful and communicate transparently.
- Remember strong relationships are central to positive engagement.
- Demonstrate cultural awareness and sensitivity. This is particularly important as some families may have a high level of mistrust; they need to be informed about how information might be used.
- Provide feedback in a timely manner.
- Create meaningful partnerships between your organisation, community networks and the parents/carers in your playgroup.



Video

Measuring & Celebrating Playgroup Outcomes

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Section 4:

What is the value of reflective practice?

You will have noticed that self-reflective questions are embedded throughout this practice guide. These questions are designed to encourage you to ask questions, challenge your understandings and examine what is occurring or changing in your supported playgroup. Reflective practice has a key role to play in continuous improvement.



Key message

The Early Years Learning Framework defines reflective practice as:

An ongoing, dynamic process of thinking honestly, deeply and critically about all aspects of professional practice with children and families. It occurs spontaneously as well as in essential planned reflection time. Most importantly, reflective practice leads to action.

People who reflect on their professional practice are more likely to:

- have awareness of their own values and beliefs
- challenge what doesn't work and make improvements
- consider how to apply their knowledge and experience to particular issues
- create inclusive environments as they seek to see the perspectives of others
- share knowledge and experiences for the benefit of others
- seek knowledge from others about what may improve practice.

Common tools for reflective practice

- Keep a journal to document your thinking about situations, issues and interactions.
- Engage in supportive supervision—discussed in Module 2.
- Identify a mentor—someone you can trust who can provide alternative perspectives to support, guide and inspire you in your practice.
- Participate in professional development opportunities.
- Talk to other supported playgroup facilitators.



Section 5:

What does celebrating success look like?

There is more to review/evaluation than continuous improvement. It is also about celebrating success by acknowledging the effort and achievements of a child, parent/carer, family or the group. Celebrating success in supported playgroups not only generates positive energy, it also helps build momentum. Knowing that your supported playgroup and/or its children and families have improved a situation, reached a milestone, or broken a record suggests that it is headed in the right direction. If at times those wins seem few and far between, recognising them when they occur can relieve anxiety about meeting the next goal down the line.

Communicating and celebrating success can have a range of benefits including:

- Increasing motivation and pride in the group and in learning or performance.
- Reminding families and staff that success is possible.
- Changing routines and reinvigorating families and staff with energy and attention for the future work of the playgroup.
- Promoting the playgroup or sponsoring organisation.
- Attracting new families to playgroup.
- Highlighting the needs of your target population to other potential partners.

Talk to the children and families in your specific playgroup and see what types of celebration will be meaningful for them. Also think about how the celebration could include other staff from the sponsoring organisation, volunteers or community networks.



Video

Stories of Success in Playgroups

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups



Templates and tools

A checklist for celebrating success in your playgroup

This checklist will help you think through the purpose, people and administration for celebrating success in your playgroup.

Link: qld.gov.au/supportedplaygroups

Further detail of how organisations can achieve Practice Principle 9: Commitment to continuous improvement through evaluation, is provided in the companion tools.



Reflection activity

Think	Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why are you delivering a supported playgroup and what conditions of wellbeing are you trying to achieve for children and families? • How will focusing on continuous improvement help you achieve those results? • Who will be the audience for the results of your evaluation/review? • What resources and timeline are in place for this evaluation/review? • What privacy, cultural or ethical issues may be relevant to the participant families that will influence how data will be collected and shared? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specific activities and outcomes should be measured to demonstrate progress and the reach of your supported playgroup? • What questions can be asked to measure those results? • What other information will be collected to tell the narrative (qualitative) information behind the data you collect? • Develop a written evaluation plan and data collection method.
Collect	Communicate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect data which will answer the questions about your activities: How much are we doing? How well are we doing it? Is anyone better off as a result of the activity? • Consider any privacy or ethical issues that may have emerged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure any data/analysis is used. • Consider how the results can be used to improve the practice in your playgroup and influence decision making. • Examine the results before they go out to a broader audience and understand/document the narrative behind what the data tells us. • Share the results with participants and celebrate the achievements and/or problem solve together on ways to move forward.



Resources toolbox

[Useful contacts](#)

[Templates and tools](#)

[Useful resources](#)

[Bibliography](#)



Useful contacts

Service	Phone	Web	Email
Playgroup Queensland	1800 171 882	www.playgroupqld.com.au	info@playgroupqld.com.au
Playgroup Australia	02 6103 0173	www.playgroupaustralia.org.au	info@playgroupaustralia.com.au
Queensland Children's Services Library (QCSL)	07 3861 9610	www.qcsl.com.au	info@qcsl.com.au
Australian Nutrition Foundation (Qld Division) Inc.	07 3257 4393	www.naqld.org	info@naqld.org
Early Years Places		earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/funding-and-support/rural-remote-and-indigenous-programs/early-years-places	
The Early Years Count		www.qld.gov.au/earlyyearscount	
Queensland Local Government directory		www.dlgrma.qld.gov.au/local-government/local-government-directory/search-the-local-government-directory.html	
Australian Institute of Family Studies		aifs.gov.au/cfca/playgroups	





Templates and tools

Module 1:

Supported playgroup goals template

This tool provides space where supported playgroup aims, at group, family, parent/carer and child levels, can be documented. These aims are linked with playgroup session planning in Module 4.

Module 2:

Supervision conversation planning tool

This checklist will help you prepare for and gain the most benefit from a supportive supervision session.

Module 3:

Network management tool

This tool helps you to keep a record of your networks in the community, and to consider the best ways to stay in touch and work with those networks to achieve the best outcomes for playgroup families.

Playgroup session planning and reflection tool

This tool offers one way to keep records of session planning, and to reflect on how each session went and what could be planned for next time.

Module 4:

Supported playgroup goals template

This tool provides space where supported playgroup aims, at group, family, parent/carer and child levels, can be documented.

Module 5:

Reflective practice tool

This tool provides ways to think about and address reflective practice in your work.

A checklist for celebrating success in your playgroup

This checklist will help you think through the purpose, people and administration for celebrating success in your playgroup.



Supported playgroup goals template

Overall group aims

Parents/carers

Community

Playgroup: _____

Individual family goals

Family

Playgroup goals

Facilitator: _____

Supervision conversation planning tool

The frequency of and manner (i.e. by phone or face-to-face) in which you will have supportive supervision should be agreed with your manager at your induction, and documented.

To help prepare you for these supportive supervision conversations, think through the following questions and jot down your responses. You may have other questions; you can use this tool to write them down so that they stay in your mind during the conversation.

What is working well?

What isn't working well?

Why might that be the case?

This is what I am planning on doing, does that sound right for the situation?

I'm struggling with ... I need ... from you in order to manage this situation better.

When ... happens, it feels ... and this is difficult to manage because ...

I think we need to celebrate the success of ...

I find ... 's behaviour really challenging and I am not sure why.

Last time we met we agreed I would ... This is what happened as a result ...

I feel that I need to develop my skills in doing ...



Network management tool

Playgroup: _____ **Community:** _____

Schools		
Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		

Childcare centres		
Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		

Kindergartens		
Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		

Child health services		
Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		

General practitioners

Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		

Family/parenting services

Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		

Early years/community centres

Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		

Library/special needs library

Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		



Supported Playgroups

A Practice Guide for Facilitators

Other		
Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		

Other		
Organisation name	Contact person and position	Contact details
Contact maintenance <input type="checkbox"/> As needed <input type="checkbox"/> Attend regular meetings <input type="checkbox"/> Send email updates <input type="checkbox"/> Other		Referral pathways <input type="checkbox"/> Will refer families to playgroup <input type="checkbox"/> Will accept referrals from playgroup
Notes		



Playgroup session planning and reflection tool

Timeframe	Activities description Arrival/greeting	Detail Materials and procedural steps	Reflection What went well for children, families and you? What could have improved the outcomes for the activity?



Reflective practice tool

Reflective practice is a deliberate way of thinking about your professional experiences, to learn from them, and develop actions for change.

Use this tool to think about your practice and to identify ways to improve it. This tool is based on the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) inquiry process.

	Key questions	Your responses
Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have made a regular time to reflect on what is happening in playgroup. • I have an approach to help me with this, e.g. journal, voice recording, etc. • I try to consider what else may be affecting my thoughts and feelings about a particular issue. • I talk to trusted friends about my experiences and practice. • I find ways to build my knowledge as well as practice through continuous learning opportunities. 	
Reframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might the other person see the situation I am reflecting on? • I have considered other approaches or points of view. • If I have yet to consider other points of view, how might I do this? 	
Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will you do to change practice? • This could be big or small. • This could be targeted to children, parents/ carers or the local community network. 	
Revisit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are changes you have made to your practice impacting children, parents/carers and families? • Can I find more people with whom to discuss, question, consider issues and identify possible approaches to changing my practice (this is known as your circle of inquiry)? Your circle of inquiry could include other facilitators, staff in your organisation and mentors. 	

A checklist for celebrating success in your playgroup

Think about	Your response
How will you celebrate success?	
Have you discussed how parents/carers and children would like to celebrate?	
Will success be publicly or privately recognised, or both?	
What sort of funds and resources are there to support any celebration?	
What will be the specific approach? Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a shared meal for staff, volunteers, children and families • a private or public awards ceremony • a sharing of stories in an organisation's newsletter or in local media. 	
What kinds of success will you celebrate? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children achieving a learning objective, or transition to school or kindergarten • parents/carers attendance at playgroup or contributions to playgroup sessions for which they have taken responsibility • staff and volunteers' work anniversaries, promotion, or success in study. 	
Have you considered who you will include?	
Internal participants could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children, parents and families • staff members directly engaged with the supported playgroup • volunteers. 	
External participants could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community officials • specific community leaders, depending upon the event • other community members who contributed to the effort • the general public • the media. 	
Do you have approval from your organisation to invite these participants?	

Celebrate your successes as close to their achievement as possible.



Useful resources

Suggested resource	Content of resource
Module 1: Understanding supported playgroups	
Systematic literature review: Research on supported playgroups eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Williams,_Kate.html	This is a recent systematic literature review of international evidence for the role of supported playgroups in improving parent/carer, child and community outcomes.
Supported playgroups for parents and children: The evidence of their benefits. aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/supported-playgroups-parents-and-children	This paper discusses the various ways supported playgroups are implemented in Australia and examines the evidence for their effectiveness, and some important components of the practice.
Module 2: What does it mean to be a supported playgroup facilitator?	
Early Childhood Australia Learning Hub learninghub.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au	Short online courses and webinars available on various early childhood topics that might assist supported playgroup facilitators.
Module 3: How to start and sustain a supported playgroup	
Early childhood resource hub www.ecrh.edu.au/home	This is designed for those working in early childhood education and care settings, but there are many useful ideas for playgroup facilitators here, including ways to engage with families.
Foundations for Success www.foundationforsuccess.qld.edu.au	A resource to help deliver a quality early learning program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Provides additional guidance to the Early Years Learning Framework.
Module 4: Creating, enriching and strengthening supported playgroup sessions	
Guide: Belonging, Being and Becoming—Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) www.education.gov.au/early-years-learning-framework-0	Describes the principles, practices and outcomes that support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school. In addition to the EYLF document, there are many resources for facilitators available.
Playgroup SA Playgroup Guide Module: Learning & Developing Through Play playgroupsa.com.au/services-playgroup-guide.html	This guide has some ideas for indoor, outdoor, and baby play, and some recipes for playdough, gloop, and bubble mixture.
Module 5: Promoting continuous improvement and celebrating success	
Community Toolbox ctb.ku.edu/en	This webpage provides access to a range of resources about evaluation and celebrating success, including practical examples, checklists, and tools.
Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Practice Principle Guide 8: reflective practice www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/pracguidereflectivepractice2017.pdf	This comprehensive guide is designed to assist early childhood practitioners to reflect on their work.



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