TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKING TOGETHER

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TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKING TOGETHER

Getting everyone involved

Four main features need to be in place when running a playgroup:

1. Systems to get the job done
2. Effective communication
3. Clear decision making
4. Ways to handle complaints

1. Systems to get the job done
Some playgroups work well with little formal organisation; families work harmoniously together to run their playgroup session and share the workload. For most groups, particularly larger groups, basic systems are necessary. There is no right or wrong way to run a playgroup. Each is different and needs its own simple and effective ways to do things. From the start let everyone know they are expected to help. Delegate the workload evenly. Make a list of all the jobs that need doing; every week, once a term and once a year.

Try to avoid the ‘I run the playgroup’ syndrome when one person does everything and makes all the decisions. They often complain no one helps and that they are in danger of burnout.

The more work is shared around, the more skills the group has to draw on. A sense of ownership and empowerment builds within the group as people share the responsibility to make decisions and run the playgroup.

Show your appreciation for what other people have done.

Consider jobs related to:
- building and storage areas – security and keys
- leaving the premises clean
- safety and hygiene
- play equipment – maintenance and purchasing
- administration and finances
- snack time for adults and children.

From this list delegate tasks you might have positions of responsibility or rosters to get the work done.

Regularly check that your systems are working. Talk about whether everyone is satisfied. Be flexible and open to suggestions about better ways to keep your structure as simple and effective as possible.

As new families join your playgroup explain to them how your systems work and how they can help.

Take time at the beginning of each year to revise your systems and make any necessary changes.

Setting up and packing away
Few playgroups have the luxury of a room that is only used by them. Most playgroups have to set up and pack away within their allocated session time.

Systems that work for some playgroups
- Well labelled shelves and containers.
- Adults set up for their own child.
- Each member takes a turn setting up and choosing what to put out.
- The basic set up is the same each week.
- Each adult clears away the play activity their child is using at pack up time.
- Consideration is given to pregnant women.
- Some adults take children for group games or stories while others pack up.
- Children help; it may slow down the process but develops responsibility and ownership.
- Duties are rostered.
- Adults help at a convenient time if they have to leave early or arrive late.

Try to leave your playgroup room as if you had never been there. Provide adequate equipment to make the task easier. Consider how you would like to find the play areas, kitchen, toilets and cupboards. Leave it this way.

Let everyone know what is expected. If necessary make up a ‘before you leave playgroup’ checklist to use until the routines become automatic.

Your checklist may include: chairs stacked, floor swept, carpet vacuumed, dishes washed and put away, toilets flushed, taps off, hand basins wiped, swings packed away, sandpit covered, heaters and lights turned off, tables and bench tops wiped, smocks, tea towels and hand towels taken home for washing.

Rosters
Rosters are a helpful way of getting everyone involved and sharing the workload. Two systems of rosters work well at playgroup.
1. A calendar planner of dates, names and duties usually done for each school term.

2. A set of duty cards – each member is either given or takes a card that indicates their job for that session.

Weekly routines such as opening up, setting up, preparing children’s and adults’ snacks, clearing away equipment, sweeping and vacuuming the room, and taking home the washing can all be included.

Consider:
- who is responsible for making up the roster
- who distributes rosters to each family
- what happens when someone is away
- where to display the roster at playgroup.

Working bees
Working bees can be a fun day when families work together while the children play, then everyone enjoys a barbecue lunch together.

Or, it may be quicker for some adults to mind the children offsite freeing other adults to get the job done.

Your playgroup could have a working bee to:
- clean out the storage area
- give the play area a thorough clean
- clean toys and play equipment
- clean up the playground
- paint the furniture
- put in new equipment.

Before you begin consider:
- how often do you need one
- who arranges them
- what is the most convenient day to schedule
- how much can you reasonably expect to get done on the day and how many hours it will take
- if you will roster each family once a year
- if you will levy a family who doesn’t take their turn
- who draws up a list of tasks
- who provides equipment and materials
- who arranges morning tea or lunch.

There once was a playgroup called ‘Everyone’s cause everyone got everyone involved.
Everyone took their share of the work and the care and a great time was had by everyone.

2. Effective communication
Good communication is about everyone knowing what’s expected and what’s happening at playgroup. Members need to be able to share their ideas and be part of the decision making. They also need to know how to express their concerns.

It is essential for a playgroup to have effective systems in place for making decisions and communicating them effectively. Good communication is clear, concise and on time. Everyone needs to know what is going on and be confident that if any changes are made they will be given the opportunity to contribute to the final decision.

Many problems in playgroups can be traced back to poor communication. The more sessions a playgroup has the more organisation it takes to allow everyone to contribute to the decision making process. Everyone must be included.

Playgroups that operate as a single session can share information, discuss issues and make decisions at playgroup by:
- discussing issues while children are having snack time
- sharing information over a coffee
- distributing a newsletter
- putting news items on a notice board
- putting notices in a family pocket or pigeon hole system
- telephoning or text messaging members between sessions
- email or post.

3. Clear decision making processes
When making minor or major decisions make sure all members:
- are able to raise an issue, idea or concern
- take part in discussions
- understand the final decision and how that decision was reached
- know who will put the decision into action.

The final decision may be made through a democratic process of:
- consensus decision making
- voting – an expression of choice usually by a show of hands
- ballot – a written vote given anonymously.
Consensus decision making

Consensus decision making is a process by which all members finally agree to the decision. Consensus values and gives equal rights to everyone. The discussion will work through any weaknesses people may see in the decision and any areas of disagreement. At the end of the process everyone owns the decision, is in agreement and is willing to commit to making the decision work. No one feels alienated or disempowered because their views were different to the rest of the group.

Many playgroups make their decisions by an informal consensus process. For further information on this style of decision making see *Life’s Little Tips for Better Meetings*, Marji O’Connell, Published by Australian Parent Group, Maryborough, Victoria.

4. Ways to handle complaints

Good communication allows members to voice their concerns. When people do, ask how the problem can be addressed.

When handling grievances focus on your playgroup philosophy and behaviour statement. Conflict worked through positively will strengthen the group. Unresolved conflict has the potential to continue and create ongoing disputes between families in the community for many years.

See ‘Conflict resolution’ on page 105.

Grievance policy

Write a grievance policy for your playgroup so everyone is clear about how to make a formal complaint, who to make it to and how it will be handled.

Develop simple strategies that encourage families to share their concerns and have suggested solutions.

Sample grievance policy for behaviour causing distress to other members

- All complaints to be made to session leader.
- The session leader, or delegated person, talks to the relevant parent/caregiver and together they discuss solutions and how the playgroup can be supportive.
- If the situation is not resolved the grievance can be put in writing and put on the agenda of the next committee meeting.
- The committee will make a decision and respond in writing outlining suggestions for resolving the grievance.
- If no resolution a letter of warning is written.

If there is still no change the family will be asked not to return. Any unused fees should be reimbursed.
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKING TOGETHER

Working with volunteers

Understanding volunteers
Ideally, volunteering is a choice and not a pressure created because no one else will do the job.

Some people choose to take roles and responsibilities at playgroup for personal satisfaction or to:

- make friends
- help out
- share their skills and develop new ones
- get experience and confidence
- set direction and be in control
- make a significant contribution
- extend their interests
- give back to the playgroup community
- make a better playgroup for their children’s benefit.

Value volunteers
Volunteers are the backbone of any playgroup so value and appreciate each volunteer for his or her uniqueness and regularly thank them for their contribution to the success of your playgroup.

Make their time productive and enjoyable.
Respect and support each other, share the work and have realistic expectations.
Work towards an effective team that is a source of learning, friendship, care and positive playgroup experiences.

Find the right person
As families chat and work together the interests, training and skills of each person will become obvious.

As the need arises, these people can be asked by the coordinator or group to volunteer in their area of expertise.

People who volunteer in the area of their passion and abilities usually last longer and are more committed than someone who volunteers just because no one else will do the job.

How to get volunteers

- Identify jobs that need doing.
- Write a simple job description or a list of tasks to get the job done.
- Look at the background, skills, talents, abilities and experiences of each member.
- Discuss with people which tasks they would most like to do to help out at playgroup.
- Match people to tasks.
  - Invite the person to take on the role.
  - Go to the person.
  - Explain that everyone needs to contribute.
  - Affirm their abilities.
  - Ask them to take on the role.
  - Be very clear about the role and all it entails.
  - Talk about how their contribution will benefit the playgroup.
  - Offer them assistance or training as they take on the role.
  - When they take on the role give them feedback about how well they are doing.
  - Acknowledge their contribution to the group and thank them for what they do.

Why people don’t volunteer

- Too shy to offer or put their hand up
- Feel inadequate
- Think the previous person did such a good job that they can’t see themselves doing as well
- Hope someone else will do it
- Fear failure or making mistakes
- Don’t want to commit themselves
- Don’t have the time
- Unsure of their commitment to attending playgroup regularly
- Planning another baby
- Pregnant

Once you have identified why some people don’t volunteer you can work out simple strategies to fit tasks to their specific needs and overcome their resistance.
**TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKING TOGETHER**

**Keeping records and planning**

**Record keeping**

Good documentation the key to a well run playgroup. Someone needs to take responsibility for having the following current and available to all members:

1. Attendance records and enrolment forms. See ‘Playgroup forms’ on pages 128 and 129.
3. Accident, incident or injury records. See page 130.

Contact Playgroup Victoria to purchase these record books or download from behind the Member login at www.playgroup.org.au.

**Inventory**

An inventory is a detailed list of all your equipment and furniture and is a necessary record in case of theft or damage that results in an insurance claim or if the group folds and equipment is distributed to other playgroups. Keep a copy in the storage area. The purchasing officer, coordinator or treasurer may also need a copy. A photograph of large items could be included.

To make an inventory list:

- item
- date acquired (indicate items already at the playgroup)
- on loan from
- donated by
- purchase cost
- if deleted or discarded, why and when the item of equipment ceased to be used by the playgroup e.g. broken, caused accident etc.

**Yearly planner**

On a calendar mark term dates, all public holidays and playgroup days including:

- a local or playgroup cultural or religious events relevant to your playgroup families
- Playgroup Victoria events
- entertainment

- excursions (See ‘Entertainment and excursions’ on page 56 and ‘Places to visit’ on page 57)
- adult nights out
- celebrations of birthdays, new babies, end of term, end of year, special days such as Mother’s Day or Father’s Day.

Be sure everyone receives a copy of the yearly planner and a copy is on display at playgroup.

One of the common mistakes made at playgroup is for one person to choose and plan all events then complain that no one helps or attends. Getting more people involved in planning means more ownership and participation. Respect that, for a variety of reasons, some families may not want to be involved.

**Finish the year well**

Discuss together what needs to be done to ensure an effective start to the next year.

**Suggestions**

- Clean out the playgroup cupboard.
- Discard broken toys, old playdough or other perishables.
- Update equipment inventory (keep one at playgroup, one at president’s home).
- Wash paint smocks, dress ups, tea towels, hand towels and soft toys.
- Disinfect baby toys.
- Re-label shelves and equipment as necessary.
- Top up supplies.
- List items to be bought next year.
- Arrange a working bee for the outdoor area and allocate funds for a top up of the sandpit and tan bark early in the New Year.
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKING TOGETHER

Playgroup policies

Playgroup philosophy
Brainstorm all the reasons why families attend playgroup to develop an overall philosophy for your playgroup. Consider both children and adults. Remember a brainstorm means everyone’s contribution is welcome and accepted; there are no right or wrong responses. No comments are allowed about anyone else’s contribution.

Ask each adult to indicate three to five points they feel most strongly about. Collate responses and make a few strong, overall statements from the results.

Be sure all families are comfortable with the final statements before formally adopting them at a committee meeting.

Make playgroup rules
Formal written playgroup statements agreed to by all members can be called guidelines, agreement, expectations, constitution, rules, philosophies, policies or code of conduct.

Informal agreements may be as simple as a sign, ‘Please keep children out of the kitchen’ or an agreement reached by a show of hands over a cup of tea at children’s snack time.

Rules are best made at the beginning of the year. To change rules midway takes a lot of care and sensitivity to be sure that all families have contributed to the process and are committed to the results.

Rules are of little value unless people know and understand why they were made. Communicate and publish rules often, especially to new members.

Policy development
A playgroup policy is made up of the governing principles and plan of action. It should show the values and priorities of a playgroup and give a pre-planned uniform approach to an issue.

The greatest value in setting playgroup policies or guidelines lies in the process.

Formal or informal, the process of developing a policy is the same:
1. Determine if a policy is necessary.
2. Give all families the opportunity to contribute.
3. Write out your draft policy in simple positive language and distribute to all members for comment.
4. Formalise the policy at a committee or playgroup meeting.
5. Familiarise new members with the content.
6. Review and revise the policy regularly to keep it relevant.
7. Make sure that what you do at playgroup is consistent with your policy.

Make other arrangements for adults not skilled in reading English.

When to develop a playgroup policy
It is time to develop a policy when a playgroup has identified issues of concern regarding the safety of members or smooth running of their playgroup.

A policy should include:
- a definition of the issue
- principles it raises
- the playgroup's commitment to the issue
- strategies and actions to minimise risks or concerns
- responsibilities of parents and caregivers
- responsibilities of playgroup management.

When making policies, be aware of all current laws, particularly those relating to discrimination. See page 9. Playgroup is about including all families.

You may consider making policies for:
- behaviour guidance
- supervision of children
- grievance (see page 88)
- fees (see page 99)
- shared equipment (see page 16)
- immunisation and infectious disease
- snack time
- privacy
- food handling.
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKING TOGETHER

Duty of care

A responsible playgroup needs all parents and caregivers to work together to consider their individual and collective duty of care. Playgroups have an obligation to take reasonable care to avoid harm or injury.

Reasonable care covers both the things you do and the things you don’t do. For example, if there are broken toys, someone may report that to the coordinator. This is a positive action to take. It is an omission and a breach of duty of care not to take action.

Duty of care requires a person to act as a cautious, observant and prudent person would in the situation. Playgroup members are obliged to be careful and avoid or minimise the risk of liability.

Parents and caregivers are obliged to be alert to the dangers to young children and daily guard them from these dangers. At playgroup we need to be more diligent as the potential for danger is greater due to the group situation. Small children learn by copying other children and taking risks. This may lead to a child trying an activity beyond their ability to remain safe and in control.

Duty of care requires parents and caregivers at playgroup to plan and supervise the child/ren they bring to playgroup in a responsible manner. It is everyone’s responsibility to be sensible and proactive in relation to keeping children and adults at playgroup safe from possible injury.

Duty of care not only protects children and adults from physical danger, it needs to protect each person from words or actions that may cause emotional hurt. Criticisms, gossiping, name calling, bullying, and cliques are a few of the behaviours that are unacceptable at playgroup. Playgroup should encourage respect, consideration, appreciation and tolerance of differences while ensuring all adults and children feel welcome and able to fully participate.

Encourage each adult at playgroup to understand their responsibility to participate in a responsible and careful manner at all times and to ensure that their child is also encouraged to consider others.

Duty of care checklist

- Parents/caregivers are aware of their duty of care to supervise the child/ren they bring to playgroup.
- The playgroup plans activities that are safe for children that attend its sessions.
- The playgroup maintains a safe play space indoors and outdoors.
- When playgroups share premises all play areas are checked before each session by the first family to arrive at playgroup.
- All toys and equipment are regularly checked and maintained at a safe standard.
- There is a system in place for parents or caregivers to report or talk freely about concerns.
- All concerns are treated in a responsible manner and solutions discussed and carried out.
- The number of children attending playgroup is kept at a manageable size to avoid problems that occur with overcrowding.
- There is a regular review of the playgroup using the safety section in this manual.
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKING TOGETHER

Legal and moral responsibilities

There are no statutory regulations governing playgroups. Playgroups are not regulated by the Children’s Services Regulations when the parent or caregiver attends and takes responsibility for their child/ren.

If your playgroup is part of a larger organisation's program e.g. neighbourhood house, church, not-for-profit organisation or agency, check your status regarding the following laws and regulations.

Privacy laws and confidentiality

Playgroups generally are not legislated under the Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000 unless they are operated by a business or not-for-profit organisation with an annual turnover of over $3M.

Enrolment forms

When collecting information about children or adults on an enrolment form state in writing:

- the playgroup name and contact details
- that people know they can access their own information
- why information is being collected
- who has access to the information
- where and how the information is kept
- how information will be used.

Do not disclose any family details or personal information without a family’s written consent. Get written permission before taking, displaying or publishing personal photographs.

Health information

The Victorian Health Records Act 2001 applies to any organisation handling information regarding:

- immunisation status (see page 72)
- ability/disability
- allergies.

If collecting any health information playgroups must declare in writing:

- why they are collecting the information
- what it will be used for
- where it will be kept
- who will have access to it
- under what circumstances it will be used.

Playgroups must take reasonable steps to destroy information no longer needed e.g. when a family leaves the playgroup.

Food handler’s guidelines

Playgroups are not required to meet food handlers’ regulations because they do not provide a main meal. However they are required to meet regulations if they are part of the conditions for using premises or they are preparing food for a fundraising or community event.

Antidiscrimination

See page 9.

Incorporation

See page 124.

Insurance

Playgroup Victoria provides an insurance cover through the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority (VMIA) and Austral Anglo, call 9791 3688 or email insure@austral-anglo.com.au. It is a comprehensive cover for playgroups and includes through VMIA:

- personal liability (when engaging in playgroup activities on behalf of the playgroup)
- public liability (including members to member liability)
- personal accident for volunteers
- incidental costs related to personal accident
- directors and officers liability
- death
- permanent injury
- breaks
- burns
- playgroup cash (volunteers)

And through Austral-Anglo:

- property
- fire and specified perils
- burglary

An insurance summary can be found behind the Member login at www.playgroup.org.au or call Playgroup Victoria on 1800 171 882 to get it posted to you.

A generic Certificate of Currency is provided upon request. For details call 1800 171 882.
TAKING RESPONSIBILITY AND WORKING TOGETHER

Checklist

To ensure all families have equal opportunities to participate and know their responsibilities at playgroup check the following issues. Some may not be applicable to your playgroup.

☐ All parents/caregivers clearly understand they are totally responsible for the child/ren they bring to playgroup.
☐ Parents/caregivers are aware of their duty of care.
☐ Parents/caregivers know they are expected to share the work and responsibility of running the playgroup.
☐ Each person has a ‘job’ to do or a role they are responsible for.

A system or roster is in place to:

☐ ensure all families are insured
☐ have keys to open and close the building
☐ check the area before all families arrive and attend to any hazards
☐ set up activities
☐ clean up at the end of the session
☐ maintain play equipment
☐ keep the storage area functional and safe
☐ prepare and clean up after snack time
☐ take home washing weekly i.e. smocks, tea towels, hand towels
☐ liaise with the premises owners
☐ welcome new families
☐ make decisions that actively involve everyone
☐ allow concerns or complaints to be heard

☐ acknowledge and thank members for the voluntary contribution they make
☐ collect fees and handle money issues responsibly
☐ meet monetary responsibilities on time
☐ collect enrolment information
☐ keep attendance, accident and injury records
☐ organise what to bring for morning tea
☐ organise help to set up play activities
☐ meet all incorporation responsibilities (incorporated playgroups only)
☐ ensure a play equipment inventory is regularly updated and new items added.

Photocopy this checklist. Tick items that your playgroup is achieving and cross ones that need attention. Encourage families to discuss results and voice any suggestions or concerns. Develop future plans and put them into action as soon as possible. Revisit this checklist annually.

Assessment date:

__________________________

Person responsible to follow through:

__________________________