A Short Guide to Running a

# Nature Playgroup



**A nature playgroup brings children and their parents or carers together in an outdoor setting to explore, play and connect in places such as parks, bushland, gardens or beaches.**

**Children of all abilities are welcome to take part in a nature playgroup, in fact, it can often be a great space to bring families of different skills and abilities together to play.Nature playgroups are child-centred and focus on unstructured, imaginative and exploratory play. They allow children to connect with the natural world and learn through hands-on experiences.**

**They offer relaxed, supportive environments where children can build confidence, creativity and resilience while developing a sense of wonder and connection to nature.**

## Playgroup Space

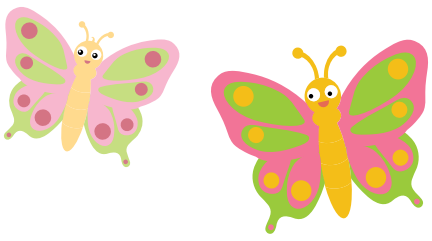
- Look for a location rich in natural features like trees, rocks, logs, mud, water or grassy areas.
- Avoid areas too close to busy roads or dangerous terrain - for example unstable ground or deep water.
- Ensure clear sightlines so caregivers can observe children easily.
- Make sure the area is easily accessible for families with strollers or young children.
- Ensure there's parking and toilets nearby, especially for longer sessions.
- Choose a spot with some natural shade and shelter, for example a rotunda- or consider bringing a tarp or pop-up tent.
- Encourage families to dress for the weather and be prepared with things such as layers, waterproof gear, sun protection.

## Equipment and Resources

- First aid kit – bandages, antiseptic wipes, insect bite and sting cream, sunscreen, and any other basic wound care supplies.
- Portable seating – picnic mats, tarps, and foldable chairs for adults to sit on.
- Water supply – drinking water for children and adults, plus extra water for hand cleaning.
- Weather gear – sun hats, raincoats, and spare clothes in case of mud, or sudden weather changes.
- Backpack or trolley – for transporting all equipment to and from the playgroup site.

## Partnerships and Promotion

- Share photos and highlights (with consent) on local community pages or newsletters.
- Partner with local schools, councils or neighbourhood houses to spread the word.
- Use flyers, posters and word of mouth.
- Join social media and use community pages to let people know who you are.
- Collaborate with local land care or wildlife organisations



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## Activity Ideas

- Create animal leaf pictures or nature collages by gathering leaves, petals, twigs and feathers to make art on cardboard or fabric.
- Decorate rocks or pebbles with non-toxic paint to make rock art.
- Make nature crowns using cardboard bands around wrists or heads, decorated with found natural treasures.
- Enjoy mud play and puddle jumping — make sure everyone brings gumboots!
- Craft a safari hat and binoculars indoors, then head outside to go exploring in the great outdoors.
- Build nature mandalas by collecting leaves, flowers, twigs and other natural materials to create a beautiful artwork on the ground.
- Play nature bingo or go on a scavenger hunt, turning nature into a maths or adventure game.
- Go cloud watching - lie back and look for shapes in the clouds.
- Set up a smell station by collecting herbs, flowers and crushed leaves to explore scent safely.
- Try branch weaving, using wool or fabric to create a special artwork out of small branches or sticks.



## Outdoor Environments to Consider

**Parks and nature reserves** provide diverse natural settings for playgroups, such as forests, grasslands or wetlands. Consider local parks or nature reserves in your community.

**Beaches** offer a unique environment with sand, water and wildlife, promoting sensory experiences and learning opportunities. Ensure safety measures are in place, such as adequate supervision and awareness of water conditions.

**Community gardens or farms** offer a mix of natural and cultivated environments, allowing children to learn about gardening, sustainability and interact with animals or edible plants.

Some **schools** have natural play areas. Community centres or neighbourhood houses may have outdoor spaces or gardens available for playgroup use - just check with them about access.



**Find these activity sheets and loads more in the Playgroup Portal. Become a member today to gain access!**



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## An Important Note

Outdoor play involves managed risk, which supports children's learning and confidence. Encourage exploration while supporting families to supervise and ensure their child is safe from harm.

Please see our Risk Assessment resource for more information and support.

Be mindful that not all families may feel equally confident in outdoor environments. Create a welcoming, flexible atmosphere and invite feedback to ensure the playgroup is inclusive and accessible for everyone.

**For more advice and resources, register your playgroup!**

## More Information

Safety Guideline for Outdoor Playgroups

**Nature Play Australia**

A not-for-profit organisation offering ideas, research and tools for outdoor play.

**Raising Children Network's Nature Play Resource**

A comprehensive guide to outdoor play, safety and child development from Australia's leader in evidence-based early childhood info.

**Parks Victoria**

The Victorian Government's guide to public nature spaces and information on using public land.

**Kids in Nature Network**

Connecting kids with nature through activities, events and resources

Playgroup Victoria

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