What is playgroup?
Playgroup is a group of parents/carers and their children birth to five meeting together to play and socialise. Most playgroups meet once a week for a couple of hours, in a venue such as a maternal and child health centre, kindergarten, hall, community centre, or school. Playgroups are different from other Early Childhood services, as parents/carers stay and play with their child and socialise with others. Because adults attend with their child, playgroups are not required to meet Children’s Services Regulations. Community playgroups are parent run groups; run by and for the parents/carers who attend. Supported playgroups are facilitated by a paid or volunteer leader.

What is a supported playgroup?
Supported playgroups provide low intensity family support and target vulnerable families who may benefit from additional parenting support. Supported playgroups have common goals to enhance children’s early learning and parental wellbeing and are effective platforms for engaging and working with children and families who might not normally access a community playgroup. A family support agency may establish a supported playgroup and employ a facilitator to run the group and support families with issues such as parenting confidence and capacity, child development and community connection. Target groups may include: families from CALD backgrounds, Indigenous families, teenage parents, parents experiencing various forms of broader social exclusion or families with a parent experiencing mental health or substance use issues.

Why are playgroups important?
The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth [ARACY] identified that parents are the strongest influence in determining their child’s life chances. Parents are the child’s first and most enduring teacher. It is through a parent’s relationship with their child that they learn and grow. Families can attend playgroup until their child goes to school and children can attend playgroup as well as kindergarten and/or childcare. Playgroup remains the only place where families meet with other families in their local community to learn and grow through play. The supported playgroup setting also provides a unique platform to support parental engagement and socialisation, thus strengthening community connections and building social capacity.

Playgroup Victoria
Playgroup Victoria is an incorporated association committed to helping all Victorian families discover the benefits of playgroup and is a not for profit organisation funded by membership, fundraising and government grants. As the peak body for playgroups in Victoria, Playgroup Victoria empowers families to support each other and advance their child’s development. Our hard working, dedicated team provide advice and support for Victorian families with membership services, learning opportunities, programs, events and advocacy work with all levels of government.
Playgroup Victoria has identified a number of elements that can be used to identify best practice in supported playgroups. Whilst the objectives of supported playgroups vary slightly according to the particular needs of the target community, this guide provides a summary of common elements of best practice in supported playgroups.

**About the guide**

Playgroup Victoria has identified a number of elements that can be used to identify best practice in supported playgroups. Whilst the objectives of supported playgroups vary slightly according to the particular needs of the target community, this guide provides a summary of common elements of best practice in supported playgroups.

### Minimum Standards for Good Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Enrolment, family details, attendance and accident/injury records are kept up to date and securely stored to protect privacy. Sound financial practices are in place. A safe and supportive environment for adults and children is maintained. A safety check of the venue is conducted before every session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>A range of activities that allow children to play according to their age and stage of development is provided every session. Activities are open-ended with a focus on process, not product. Children are provided with opportunities to play: - by themselves - with other children - in partnership with their parents, carers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Parents/carers are present and actively supervising their children. Facilitators model appropriate positive parenting approaches. Parents/carers feel supported in their parenting role. Parents/carers are made to feel welcome and a sense of connection between families is consciously fostered. Families receive and give support to each other. Parents are aware of the process for feedback/complaints to inform and guide future planning and the playgroup program. Staff are culturally competent and the playgroup respects and values each family’s culture and approach to parenting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Playgroup values diversity and equity and provides an inclusive environment. Strong linkages exist between playgroup participants and the broader community, including relevant partnerships and appropriate networks. At playgroup family exchange valuable community information. The playgroup is promoted through networks relevant to the target group, to ensure it continues to engage new families.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>The number of families and children in the group matches the venue size. For playgroups that meet in a hall, 10-15 families is recommended, or approximately 3.3 square metres per child. The playgroup venue is appropriate and safe for use by children, and includes: toilets, nappy change area, kitchen and child-sized tables and chairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>One supported playgroup facilitator is employed. The supported playgroup facilitator holds relevant qualifications, such as Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, Certificate III in Community Services Work or equivalent. All playgroup staff and/or volunteers hold a current working with children and/or criminal history check. Playgroup staff hold a current first aid certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Playgroup staff are supported by management, particularly when working with families with complex needs. Staff are offered professional development at least once annually. The playgroup has Playgroup Victoria membership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Playgroup staff are offered regular supervision sessions. Staff are linked into relevant professional networks and attend Playgroup Victoria’s professional development opportunities several times annually. A comprehensive practice governance framework is in place to guide playgroup practice, that covers how to meet quality practice standards, risk management, consumer participation practices and effective work places. Policies and procedures cover critical incident management, responding to mental health issues, family violence, substance abuse, child protection concerns and aggression.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Features of a High Quality Supported Playgroup**

All elements of minimum standards plus:

- Regular attendance is encouraged and absences are followed up.
- The playgroup utilises a number of methods to monitor the satisfaction of its members and evaluate outcomes.
- The playgroup has a risk management plan.
- The play activities are underpinned by the Victorian Early Years Learning Framework (VEYLDF). Playgroup staff recognise the value and importance of play in the early years and impact this knowledge to parents.
- Play activities and the playgroup routine are planned in advance, and include: time for indoor/outdoor play, snack time and song/story group time.
- The play curriculum is displayed at playgroup.
- Activities reflect the children’s interests.
- The playgroup is promoted through networks including relevant partnerships and local community services to parent/carer.
- Playgroup staff respect and value community input and experiences.
- Playgroup staff use strategies to empower parents in their role as their child’s first teacher.
- Playgroup staff consciously and actively work to build parental capacity and confidence.
- Parents/carers are encouraged to engage with their child through play and group activities.
- Parents/carers are involved and encouraged to contribute to the planning and set up of play experiences.
- Playgroup staff work with local authorities to ensure the playgroup is accessible to all families, including: CALD families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and children and adults with additional needs.
- The playgroup provides current information on local community services to parent/carers.
- Key family service agencies are invited to visit the playgroup to connect with families, i.e. local librarian, Maternal and Child Health nurse and Kindergarten teacher.
- Linkages with relevant services have been developed in order to build referral pathways into and out of the playgroup.