



## School playgroups: What do families need to know?

School playgroups are great for children, their families, schools and communities. Through opportunities for children's play, families can connect and build relationships with other families and with school-staff, and parents are empowered to support their children's learning through play.

## What is a playgroup?

Playgroups are groups of families and caregivers of young children (birth to 5 years) who gather regularly so their children can play with other children and the adults can socialise with each other. Some groups are known as community playgroups. These playgroups are usually started by a parent or family who invite others to join them and can be held in a family home, in a park or at a local hall. There are also groups called supported playgroups. Supported playgroups are an ideal opportunity for children and families who could benefit from some additional assistance, including those with English as an additional language. These groups have a leader called a facilitator. The facilitator organises the group and helps the children and families participate in activities together.

## What is a school playgroup?

A school playgroup is playgroup that meets on a school-site. Some school playgroups are established by families who then use their local school as a place to meet. Other school playgroups are started by the principal or a member of school-staff who think it is important for children to have opportunities to play and meet other children onsite before they start school. In most cases, children and families are welcome to attend a school playgroup even if they do not have older siblings already attending the school or do not plan to attend the school in the future. School playgroups are for the benefit of the local community.

## Who leads a school playgroup?

Some school playgroups have volunteer families and parents as leaders. Other school playgroups are run by the teachers in the junior school. Sometimes the school principal might lead the group, and in other schools this job might be done by a paid facilitator.



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## What do successful school playgroups have in common?

Successful school playgroups are welcoming places for children and families. This occurs when children, families and school-staff all have strong relationships with each other. Strong relationships between children, families and school-staff can occur through bonding and bridging relationships.

Bonding relationships form between people who have things in common with each other. Parents and caregivers at a playgroup-in-school usually have caring for young children in common. In these groups, adults can share their experiences about parenting and provide each other with tips and advice about looking after young children. Children also create bonding relationships with each other. These are their peer friendships.

Children learn about taking turns and being safe and kind with others through peer relationships.

Bridging relationships are formed between people who have different sets of knowledge and experiences to share with each other. School-staff taking part in a school playgroup can learn about families and their interests, and families can learn from school school-staff about how children learn and develop. Playgroup children can also create bridging relationships at a school playgroup. In some school playgroups, the primary-aged children come and do shared reading sessions with the playgroup children. Playgroup children can also become used to speaking with school-staff members.

Successful school playgroups try to make sure that there are lots of opportunities for bonding and bridging relationships. This is called high bonding and high bridging.



## How do school playgroups promote bonding and bridging?

School playgroups can promote bonding and bridging relationships by making sure there are plenty of opportunities for children, families and school-staff to connect with each other through children's play. There are six main features of school playgroups that support these connections well.

### Material

A range of *materials* are available for children to use

### Facilitator

A paid/volunteer *facilitator* leads the playgroup

### Space

A defined *space* within the school is available for hosting the group

### Location

The school *location* is accessible to families and supports children in becoming familiar with the school environment

### Scheduling

The playgroup is *scheduled* at times suitable for infants and toddlers

### Health and safety

*Health and safety* requirements for children and families are met



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## Features of school playgroup

**Toys and materials:** There are enough toys and materials of different variety for children of ages to enjoy.

**Facilitator:** There is a volunteer or paid person whose job it is to lead the group and organise activities for the children.

**Space:** The school provides a room and outdoor area for the playgroup. This might be a dedicated playgroup room, the school library or a general-purpose room.

**Location:** The school is easy for families to access by walking, public transport or vehicle with parking available.

**Schedule:** The playgroup runs on a set timetable during the week throughout school term and is usually open in the mornings so that younger children can go home in time for lunch and a nap.

**Safety:** The playgroup room, outdoor area, toys and materials are safe for children to use. There are toileting and change facilities for children and families. The facilitator makes all children and families feel welcome.



## What are the benefits of participating in a school playgroup?

Participating in a school playgroup has benefits for children and adults.

Children have the opportunity to play with toys and materials they do not have at home and to meet other children. When children play, they develop speech and language, build social confidence, grow their physical skills and explore how the world works. Language, confidence, physical skills and understanding the world help children have a strong start to school. School playgroup also helps children get used to being in a school setting, such as playing on the school playgroup equipment, meeting older school children, or being comfortable chatting with school-staff.

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Adults have the opportunity to meet other people and make friends. Caring for young children is a rewarding experience, but it can also be challenging and lonely. Meeting other people with young children at a school playgroup means parents and caregivers can share their experiences. This helps people feel less challenged and lonely. In a school playgroup, parents and caregivers also get to meet with school-staff. School-staff can learn more about what children and families enjoy doing at playgroup. When school-staff learn more about children and families they can provide information and advice that helps parents and caregivers support their child's play and learning at home as well in the playgroup.

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## Want to learn more?

Visit [www.playgroup.org.au/school-playgroups/](http://www.playgroup.org.au/school-playgroups/) for videos, infographics and research about school playgroups.