

## DADS AT PLAYGROUP

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An interview with Sonya Dyer (Kilsyth South Baptist)  
& Robyn Bartlett (Moorolbark Baptist)

*We often think of Playgroups as being a space for Mums, and most of the time that's true but things are changing and men are increasingly having a stronger presence in mid-week family life. We asked two Playgroup leaders who see Dads regularly joining in at Playgroup to reflect on this.*

### How did you start having Dads coming along to Playgroup?

**Sonya:** The number of dads coming along to Honeybears playgroup has really increased this year. We have always had two or three dads involved but this year in our Friday group especially the mums are almost outnumbered! It started with just one dad who came regularly and then because of some mums having to go back to work we had a couple more dads come. Dads attract dads!

**Robyn:** Dads have just come when mum or grandparents have been unable to. But we do have a male grandparent on Wednesday's team – I think it helps to have male support as well as female.

### What does it look like for your group to have Dads there?

**Robyn:** Dads play different games with their children (and others join in). Dads offer that little bit extra help with gadgets and difficult locks etc! Dad are an example to other parents about how men can be involved with young children in a positive way.

**Sonya:** We are loving having dads at playgroup. It's great to see them interacting with their children and doing some serious playing!! They are easy to chat with and some of them are great bakers! (We have one dad who makes the best chocolate chip cookies!) It's awesome to know that the dads that come feel that playgroup is just as much for them as it is for the mums.

### How has it impacted the way you think about mission and connecting with these families? Has it impacted the non-Playgroup time activities you offer?

**Sonya:** We have always encouraged our leaders to organize a 'mums night out' each term. The purpose of this is to build on friendships and be able to chat with mums without the distraction of kids.

This year we have had to rethink this, particularly for our Friday group as it really doesn't cater for the dads. We are in the process of coming up with some different social events that are not just for the mums but for the dads too. We are tossing up whether something for the whole family might be better, a picnic maybe, a BBQ, or a morning at a playground.. (still thinking about this!) We have one church dad who comes regularly but also feel the need to have a male 'carer' (who is aware of our mission and part of our church) to be at playgroup each week just to get alongside the dads that are there.

**Robyn:** When Dads are involved it often means they are in support of playgroup and therefore willing to be part of the whole discussion about what happens at playgroup. I have decided that as we do have Dads and extended families involved then we should have opportunities outside playgroup hours so they can come. I have booked a farm of baby animals to come and visit in November for both groups and all the families for a Saturday morning.



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What's the best thing about having Dads in Playgroup?

**Robyn:** The best thing is knowing that that family rates playgroup as worthy of 'family' attention, not just something to keep little "Joey" happy and gets Mum out of the house! When a parent hears God's Word also, it will affect all of the family, not just one partner or grandparent!

**Sonya:** The best thing about having dads at playgroup is that they can fix the broken toys and assemble the new toys!! The other thing is, they love to PLAY!

Are there any struggles and how could we pray for you with this particular ministry?

**Sonya:** At this stage we don't have any male 'carers' in our groups. Each group has a female carer who comes in and helps with morning tea and is there just to support the leader and mums and dads in the group. We would love to have a male from the church come along on Friday just to get to know the dads, to be an encouragement and support. This is a real prayer point.

In one of our groups we have just one dad come each week. This is definitely harder and sometimes I think he finds it quite difficult, he keeps to himself but still enjoys playing with his children.

We need to make a special effort to talk to this dad and help him feel part of the group and not the 'odd one out'. It is hard if there is only one dad in the group and no other males.

We are very thankful for the support of our pastors who often drop in and have a cuppa and chat with our playgroup families.

**Robyn:** Most Dads do not have the flexibility to come during normal working hours, so I would ask that you pray that the Dads will come to activities on weekends, or Friday nights, that we run so they can see and meet us and recognise we are not spiritual 'geeks', but just ordinary everyday loving people. Also that when we have Christmas and Easter discussion it will reach home – most likely through the children.



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