

Ten Steps to starting a playgroup

Step 1: Finding a team

Start with a committed Christian leader who has a vision for evangelism through playgroup and a passion to care for families with young children

Before you start, make sure you choose at least two Christian assistants, preferably one who is child-free. Meaningful relationships develop when a significant number of Christians including child-free adults are involved in the group.

Invite any church families with preschool children to consider being part of the playgroup, and help them to see their involvement as part of their Christian ministry.

Step 2: Developing playgroup vision and mission/purpose

Develop your Playgroup Vision and Mission. Align it to the vision of your church; the church leadership must be involved in this process, along with the playgroup team. Join Christian Playgroup Network!

Step 3: Choosing the time

Mornings are usually the most popular time for playgroups to meet. Choose the day of the week when the church is available and best suits the Christian leaders. Be aware of other programs running at the church to ensure that there is not a clash or problems with noise, parking or doors left open. Particular care needs to be taken with one-off events, e.g., a funeral.

Playgroups should meet weekly for no longer than 2 hours. Babies and small children find it hard to cope with more than two hours. You may choose to start off at one hour and build up to two hours. It is easier to increase the time at playgroup than to reduce the time. If moving from one to two playgroup sessions, consider running two sessions on the same morning, one after another, e.g., the first one could meet from 9:30am – 11:00am sharing morning tea together. The second group could meet 11:30am – 1:00pm sharing lunch together.

Step 4: Choosing the place to meet

Usually there will be a space in your church that you can use. Most likely it is a space that will also be used for other purposes at different times through the week, so there may need to be some negotiation on how to make sure it is safe and suitable for playgroup. Do a safety audit of your venue.

Wherever you choose your venue, make sure that you leave the venue as you found it. Establish a cleaning roster and a “before you leave” checklist.

Step 5: Choosing activities

When choosing Christian play activities, it is important to note that friendship evangelism is proving to be more effective in outreach than a Christian curriculum model. Relationships are the key, not the program. However, a quality play program is very important. If you choose to include Christian content in your program, remember that concepts must be simple and adaptable to a little child’s development. Design a flexible program that allows plenty of time for relationships to form. Place special emphasis on Christian celebrations at Easter and Christmas time. Remember that you are doing playgroup for the adults too.



Step 6: Equipment

Provide toddler-size tables and chairs. This is a health and safety issue as toddlers can hurt themselves by falling off adult-size chairs and tables.

Keep an inventory of all equipment for insurance purposes.

If other ministries in the church share the equipment, make sure everyone knows who owns the equipment and reach an agreement on where and how equipment is stored.

Step 7: Adult responsibilities

Christian playgroups are leader led. This means that Christians from the church take on the role of leadership within the playgroup. These leaders make decisions concerning the running of the playgroup and plan the program. Overall responsibility of the playgroup rests with the playgroup leaders and the church, however each family attending playgroup should feel welcome and part of the group. It is important everyone feel a sense of ownership of the playgroup for the success of playgroup. It may be helpful to delegate tasks and draw up a roster so people will feel more involved in playgroup.

Remember playgroup is a time for children and parents to bond. Do not let cleaning and packing away interfere with the bonding experience.

Church leaders are not responsible for the supervision of children at playgroup. It should be made clear that children are the responsibility of the person who brings the child.

Step 8: Insurance

In most cases, your church will have insurance that will cover the playgroup. Remember, for insurance purposes, it is important to keep an inventory of all equipment such as tables, chairs and play equipment. It is also important to keep a record of accidents and incidents.

Step 9: What will it cost?

Some churches allocate a budget to their playgroup. This is determined during the initial set-up period. Playgroup leaders need to determine the fees for families attending playgroup.

Some Christian playgroups charge an additional annual registration fee. A budget needs to be put into place to regulate how the playgroup money is spent. Some of the payment options currently being used by playgroups are:

- families pay a set amount weekly
- families pay a set amount each term
- families pay a yearly fee

Step 10: Ready to start

Send out invitations to any young families your church has had contact with in the past year. Ask your church people to invite families they know that live locally. Advertise through the local council, Maternal and Child Health Centre, your state Playgroup Association (join them for great playgroup information and to be on their playgroup list).

Ask your church to provide prayer support. Step out and get started!

