

LOCAL NETWORK START UP TIPS



Christian Playgroup Network
connect • belong • grow

So you are interested in starting a local Christian Playgroup leader's network in your area. Fantastic! Networks such as this can offer support, encouragement, wisdom and solidarity. We trust that this kit will empower you in setting up your own local network so that you may gain encouragement and support in your ministry with children and families.

This kit has been developed to help you establish a local Playgroup leader's network. It offers some specific strategies and processes on which to build a network, and offers some ideas of how such a network can operate and what it can achieve. We are eager to assist if you need our help and we would like to learn from you, so please keep in touch with us at www.cpn.org.au or admin@cpn.org.au

WHAT DOES A LOCAL NETWORK LOOK LIKE?

This question is most difficult to answer for you because we do not know how you will shape it. We do not know your needs in your local area. The first thing to remember is that there are no rules! Whatever shape the network will work in your area is the shape it should take!

These are some of the factors that seem to ensure that groups last:

- The establishment of a **small steering group** who plan meeting dates, agendas, identify needs and organise training opportunities and special events.
- **Meeting for a specific purpose** rather than just for the sake of it – always making sure there is something to talk about and a reason to come. Appendix A has a list of suggestions you might consider as topics to talk about at a network meeting.
- The group needs to **show respect for each other's backgrounds, theologies, traditions and perspectives**. There needs to be a common understanding that this is not the forum to impose individual beliefs, but one where people listen, share and enjoy the unity and diversity of the group. Also be conscious of group dynamics and remember the differences between the big picture people and the detail people who will make up your group.
- **Good communication** between members about why they are meeting and being prepared to name the differences between the members' organisations as well as the commonalities
- **Flexibility** – thinking "outside the box" about meeting times and formats
- A **less formal** (but still well organised) meeting style
- **Shared leadership**

HOW TO START A LOCAL PLAYGROUP LEADERS NETWORK

- Pray
- Contact other local networks that are already up and running and learn from their experiences. A good starting point is your state denominational organisation.
- Gather a small group of interested Playgroup leaders. Get to know each other. Build trust. Pray and support each other.
- Brainstorm about what a local group could look like. Formulate your ideas making use of resources in this kit.
- Make a list of every Christian Playgroup in your area that you are acquainted with. Survey local churches for potential churches interested in starting a Playgroup or becoming more intentional in their Playgroup ministry. Contact existing networks for help in making contacts, e.g. your local minister's association.
- Set a date and time to get together informally with the Playgroup leaders that you have identified
- Contact churches in your area with an introductory email. Tell them about your meeting
- Decide the logistics – best timing, place, format and goals for your group
- Send your contact details to the Christian Playgroup Network so we can advertise your group, be aware of your group and can keep you informed of news and events. Email admin@cpn.org.au
- Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate – learn and listen from the past and present

SETTING DIRECTION FOR YOUR LOCAL NETWORK

It will be important to take some intentional time in your first few meetings as a group to explore **“what you can do together better than you can do alone?”** Consensus and shared vision are important foundations for a long future together as a network. Your most important task is to facilitate a time of clear, relaxed, unrestricted communication.

1. The easy questions to work through are:

- When will we meet? Lunch? Breakfast? Coffee? Saturday morning?
- How often will we meet? Monthly? Quarterly?
- Where will we meet? A restaurant? Homes? A central location? Rotate to each other's churches and see how ideas are enacted in unique ways? Hosting arrangements also need to be considered – e.g. who will arrange the room and provide refreshments?
- Who will we include/invite? Playgroup leaders only? Other playgroup team volunteers?

2. The most important questions, though, are Why and What.

To begin to answer these questions, start with an open discussion of:

a) What challenges do we face as we engage in children's ministry? Identify these as individuals, in pairs or in a small group. Then compile the results as a whole group to determine which challenges are common to everyone present. Help the group gauge the importance, priority level and urgency of addressing these challenges.

b) What is your vision for children's ministry? What do you want to do differently? Again, facilitate an opportunity for individuals to identify these in pairs or small groups, and then gather this information to identify the common interest base of the entire group. Ascertain what the most important, pressing, exciting and urgent issues are.

c) Identify the resources the group has available: What do we bring to this group? What do we not have that we wish we did?

3. Now you can begin to discuss the What.

Given what the group has in common with respect to visions, needs and challenges, brainstorm as to “What can we do together better than we can do alone?” Ask questions such as: What can we do together? What is achievable, feasible and/or necessary in light of our discussion? Who will do what? By when? What are our goals?

The beginning of a local network needs to be one of relationship-building and prayer. Spend as long as is necessary getting to know each other and building trust in the group before launching into projects who may want to do together.

Don't rush this process of setting direction for your network. Laying this foundation will benefit the group with a clear understanding of expectations and goals for a great networking relationship. The Victoria Children's Ministry Network website can help you make connections with others who share your ministry calling. Use it to pass along ideas and programs that will benefit others.

Refer to Appendix 1 for a list of topics you could choose from in thinking of discussion topics for your meetings

HOW THE CPN CAN HELP YOU

The Christian Playgroup Network will not direct how your network functions or demand any accountability or reporting from you. We are simply here to encourage and support local networking of playgroup leaders and promote playgroup ministry at a local level.

Here are some ways we can support you:

1. Assist you in establishing a local network. In addition to these start-up tips, we can provide you with individual advice and suggestions for getting a local network up and running. Contact your denominational representative on the network or email admin@cpn.org.au.
2. List your contact details on our website so other people in your area can find out more about your network.
3. Provide curriculum and other resource information on our website.
4. Provide a calendar of events on our website.

5. Inform you of upcoming events, such as training, children's and families outreaches and new resources.
6. Promote children's and families ministry events you are organising on our website.

For further information about the Christian Playgroup Network contact:

www.cpn.org.au; admin@cpn.org.au

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR GATHERINGS

- How to listen to children • Mentoring children • Children and missions • Children and divorce • Children and grief • Children and worship • Children and prayer • Child abuse • Children and art • Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder • Learning styles •
- Family ministries • Parent enrichment • Helping parents in the spiritual nurture of this children • Connecting home and church • Pastoring children and their families • Single parent families • Church's role in sex education
- Programming – Sunday programs, midweek programs, holiday programs, seasonal events... • Helping children transition into youth ministry • Special events – Christmas, Easter • Classroom atmosphere • Creating theme days • Puppetry • Clowning • Storytelling • Group management/discipline • Children's spirituality
- Administration • Leadership development • Working as a team • Communication • Volunteer recruitment • Safety policies and legal issues • Screening of volunteers • Teacher training ideas • Promotion and advertising • Resources (e.g. curriculum, new resources) • Support and encouragement of volunteers