

South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework and guide





Acknowledgement and thanks

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which this work was undertaken and the voices of Aboriginal people across South Australia who helped shape this resource.

Thank you to the South Australian Playgroup Reference Group, their associated agencies and representatives for support and input into the development of this resource, including:

- Association of Independent Schools of South Australia
- Catholic Education South Australia
- Department for Education
- Department of Human Services
- Playgroup SA
- Public Library Services SA
- Preventative Health SA.

Thanks also to Jane Lemon, early childhood consultant from Citron Early Childhood, for contributing to the development of this resource.



Playgroup routine

10.00	Inside/Outside play
11.00	Last chance for snack
11.15	Start to pack up inside
11.20	Pack up outside & finalise pack up outside
11.30	Story/songs
11.45	Goodbye

LIKE us on Facebook - Mays Follis and Nango Playgroup OR Learning Together Communities Northern Adelaide

Introduction

The South Australian Government acknowledges families are at the heart of healthy child development and believes engaging with families early in their parenting journey is incredibly important. The government is strengthening universal services and providing strong support for families as their children's first teachers. Playgroups have been identified as a key setting to engage with the parents and carers of children in the early years.

Given the value and importance of playgroups as a universal service platform, the *South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework and guide* has been developed by the Department for Education with support from Preventative Health SA (previously Wellbeing SA) and guidance and advocacy from the South Australian Playgroup Reference Group to support and inform high quality playgroup provision.

A note about language use

Throughout the *South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework and guide* the term 'parents and caregivers' is used to refer to all people likely to attend playgroups with children, including parents, grandparents, family, foster parents and other caregivers.

Why are playgroups important?

A child's first 5 years of life is the most important time for laying the foundations for all future health, wellbeing, and learning. Brains develop over time and more complex skills are built on the foundations of basic skills as children engage in relationships and experiences in their earliest years.

A child's first 3 years of brain development happen the fastest and is the most critical. Parents are children's first and most important teachers and play a crucial role in helping to achieve the best outcomes for a child. Therefore, what families do every day with their young children affects how they develop and learn.

Playgroup participation benefits children across all domains of their development – physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language and communication. Playgroups also provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to socialise, learn parenting skills and seek emotional support from each other (*It takes a village to raise a child: The influence and impact of playgroups across Australia*¹).

What is a playgroup?

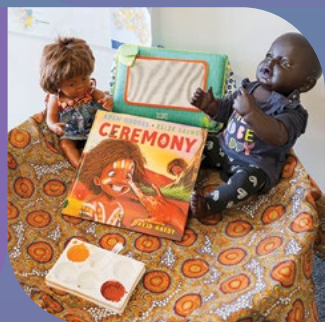
Playgroups are a popular and vital part of our communities, supporting social connections and learning for children and adults. They are an informal way for parents and caregivers to engage outside the home and can often be the first step in building friendships and developing a supportive community. Playgroups are groups of young children under school age and their parents and caregivers who meet regularly and play and socialise together (*Playgroups, child care and preschool*²).

Traditionally playgroups are informal groups of parents and caregivers and their children who meet each week, often in a preschool or a community space such as a hall or library. These community playgroups usually have a parent or caregiver who volunteers for the role and is responsible for operating the playgroup.

These playgroups have been joined by a wide range of playgroup models. Community playgroups, also called parent-led playgroups, are funded by an organisation with a paid facilitator responsible for planning the program and building social connections in the group. Organisations operating supported playgroups include preschools, schools, health and education services, support agencies and libraries. Supported playgroups have specific purposes, such as engaging parents and caregivers in their children's learning, or a focus on physical development. Intergenerational playgroups aim to connect older citizens with families and children. Specific focus playgroups can be for particular groups within a community that individuals identify with, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, multicultural (mixed or specific cultures) and families.

¹ *It takes a village to raise a child: The influence and impact of playgroups across Australia*, Telethon Kids Institute, South Australia, The Kids Research Institute Australia

² *Playgroups, child care and preschool*, Raising Children Network



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• have a high level of interpersonal skills and appropriate expertise to interact well with children, parents and caregivers	
• develop trust with families by listening to children, parents and caregivers	
• provide information to parents and caregivers in a variety of ways	
• organise visits from other community organisations as appropriate	
• arrange visits from health professionals as appropriate, eg maternal and child health nurses, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, dietitians, financial counsellors, etc.	
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The value of playgroups

Playgroups are very valuable for **young children's** social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. Play is a fundamental right for babies and children. Through play, they discover, explore and make sense of the world around them. Playgroups enable children to connect with other children and adults beyond the home and experience various activities that support their learning. Children in playgroups have more opportunities than at home to learn about being with peers by building their social development and interactions as part of the group.

Playgroups support **parents and caregivers** in their caregiving roles by maintaining their first language, fostering social connectivity and reducing the isolation that adults raising young children can sometimes feel. Building social networks promotes a sense of belonging and supports mental health and parenting.

Through playgroup involvement parents and caregivers can learn more about supporting children's learning and development through play and simple everyday experiences at home. They see how others engage with children and find new ideas to adopt or adapt. Parents and caregivers can build their confidence and wellbeing through high quality playgroup participation.

Playgroups support **communities** by connecting parents, caregivers and children to services and experiences within the local community. This can lead to earlier access to health or developmental support for parents and caregivers, strengthening children's inclusion and involvement in the community. Parents and caregivers can build their confidence through playgroups and are more likely to be involved in preschool and school governing bodies, or other community groups.

Playgroups enable children to connect with other children and adults beyond the home and experience various activities that support their learning.



Child-related outcomes

- Improved early childhood development
- Improved social and emotional wellbeing
- Improved social skills
- Improved peer relationships
- Reduced behavioural problems
- Improved child temperament

Parent-related outcomes

- Improved family functioning
- Improved parent-child relationship
- Increased parental confidence and capacity
- Improved personal wellbeing
- Increased parental involvement in education
- Improved social support
- Improved responses to child's behaviour

Community-related outcomes

- Increased social participation
- Improved community connectedness
- Improved community capacity building

Adapted from the [Communities for Children outcomes measurement matrix](#), Australian Institute of Family Studies

The playgroup principles

Given the value of playgroups, the Australian Institute for Family Studies has developed a set of **principles for high quality playgroups**³, as follows:

- 1 Playgroups are about play
- 2 Playgroups are child-focused, child-inclusive and developmentally appropriate
- 3 Playgroups are about connection
- 4 Playgroups are safe and welcoming
- 5 Playgroups are culturally safe
- 6 Playgroups are flexible
- 7 Playgroups are both strengths-based and strengthening
- 8 Playgroups have organisational-level support and governance
- 9 Supported playgroups draw on skilled facilitators to engage families and link to local services.

The principles aim to:

- be a starting point for a more consistent understanding and discussion around quality playgroups
- guide consistent, high quality practice; and
- enable a consistent set of core outcomes to be identified that can be evaluated across jurisdictions, organisations and playgroup types, which in turn will build the evidence base for the effectiveness of playgroups.

Facilitators play a crucial role in successful playgroup delivery and are often viewed by parents and caregivers as trusted role models. Therefore, they must receive support, information and guidance to understand the high quality playgroup principles.

South Australia has expanded on these principles by developing the *South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework and guide*.

The *South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework and guide* identifies the core elements for each of the 9 quality principles to support a shared understanding of quality playgroup provision with agencies, volunteers and facilitators for ongoing growth, development and quality improvement.



Facilitators play a crucial role in successful playgroup delivery and are often viewed by parents and caregivers as trusted role models. Therefore, they must receive support, information and guidance to understand the high quality playgroup principles.

³ *Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice*, Child Family Community Australia

How to use this resource

This *South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework and guide* is for all playgroup facilitators, from volunteer facilitators running community parent-led playgroups to paid facilitators running targeted supported playgroups.

This resource aims to assist playgroup facilitators in understanding the principles that develop a quality playgroup. The 9 quality **playgroup principles** are broken down to highlight their **elements**. Each element is described in detail to help facilitators understand what each means and what it could look like in their playgroup.

Playgroup facilitators are encouraged to use any or all of the information in this resource to support their thinking about what currently happens at their playgroup and what they could build on to support the quality elements identified.

For some facilitators, this might mean focusing on the **pullout statements**, images and **short videos** highlighting each section's key messages.

Others may choose to focus on the **This might look like** sections that provide practical examples to use at playgroup, such as activities to offer, spaces to create or ways to support family input and engagement.

Facilitators could use this as a self-assessment opportunity to review and assess their current practice, determine what quality elements are already happening, identify any practice gaps and highlight opportunities for further growth and improvement.

For those interested in delving deeper, the **Think about** section provides questions to support practice reflection and the 'Find out more' section on pages 65–66 provides recommended resources to extend current knowledge.

To support understanding and interpretation, the **glossary** section captures key terms, words and phrases that may need further explanation. These have also been highlighted in purple throughout the resource to help identify them more easily.

Focused playgroup principles

Pullout statements

Elements support principles 1–7

PRINCIPLE 1: Playgroups are about play

We know that play is one of the best ways for young children to learn, so it makes sense that playgroups should be about play. Through play, children learn about the world around them and begin to understand how it works. **Play helps children develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually.**

Play looks different as children mature and progress developmentally. Play for very young babies may include eye contact and socialisation as they watch others play (onlooker play). When parents and caregivers play with babies, they begin to interact more and often start to play on their own as well (solitary play). They will progress to playing alongside other children (parallel play) and eventually with other children (cooperative play).

Children need sensory experiences, the opportunity to manipulate materials, the joy of pretend play, creative experiences and construction play. Ideally children will have the opportunity to play indoors and outdoors during playgroup. If this is not possible, climbing and natural materials can be included inside. Playgroups provide activities, experiences and spaces that support play and child development and encourage children to engage and make choices.

How play helps child development Raising Children Network

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1

a Play is the central component of playgroup with a variety of different types of play embedded throughout the session

It is important that playgroup is mostly about play because that is how young children learn and connect with others. Children will play rather than do other things, such as eating or sitting, when play is the central component of a playgroup. There are many **different types of play** that are valuable for young children. Sensory materials like sand, water, mud, slime or glue all allow children to build their **fine motor development** and develop sensory perception. Climbing, balancing and swinging support children's **gross motor development** and strengthen core muscles to later support writing and drawing. Opportunities to draw and paint support children in expressing themselves. Imaginative or pretend play allows children to explore ideas and make meaning of their experiences and the world around them. Dressing up, making a cup of tea, or putting a baby to bed can reflect their home life, while being a butterfly or a train driver builds imagination.

All playgroup children benefit from time to explore with and without adult direction. They learn as they play together with parents, caregivers and playgroup facilitators who encourage them to try again when something goes wrong or use words to help them understand the attributes of what they are playing with. Children learn when they are supported by a parent or caregiver or a more mature peer or sibling who comments, models, makes suggestions or shares a new skill with them.

Embedding play means that almost everything in the session will have a play aspect. For example, 'signing in' to playgroup may include children finding their photo and hanging it on a tree, or 'writing their name' on the attendance list. This is fun and playful. Group time action songs and movement feel playful for children. Even farewelling the children can be playful by singing a song or high-fiving everyone as they leave the mat or go through the gate.

This might look like

- Setting up spaces for all age groups to engage in, including a safe space for babies.
- Providing a mixture of indoor and outdoor play opportunities and resources.
- Including sensory play in each session. You might provide bubbles, water play, shaving cream finger painting, sand and mud play or ice in the water trough.
- Providing inclusive materials and resources so all children can play, including natural and manufactured items, for example, gummy's, leaves, rocks or flowers for sorting and patterning and mud or clay for sensory play.
- Having some experiences that only one or two children and an adult can do at a time and experiences where several children can play together. Small spaces might include sorting objects, a **story table** or **small world play**, or reading together. Group play could include home corner play, sand or water play or building with blocks.

Think about

- Do I have a wide range of play experiences available to children each session, and across a term?
- Do I have experiences that support all aspects of child development in each session?
- Is most of the session spent in playing?
- What experiences do we provide for children to work independently and collaboratively?
- Are the activities provided at playgroup able to be replicated at home?

It is important that playgroup is mostly about play because that is how young children learn and connect with others.

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This might look like examples

Supporting **short video** links from Raising Children Network and/or reference links

Interactive rollover key **glossary** terms

Pullout statements

Think about questions

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The principles in action – case studies section on pages 67–71 captures stories from three different playgroups and is another way for facilitators to understand how the quality elements relate and connect to playgroup practice and delivery.

Principles 1 to 7 are primarily aimed at facilitators, and it is intended that this resource is used over time to reflect on and refine the overall quality of

playgroups. It is best to focus on one or two areas at a time rather than trying to cover every aspect at once.

Principles 8 and 9 are specifically aimed at organisations that run or support playgroup facilitation. Facilitators may find this information useful in understanding what support they can ask for and expect from their supporting organisations.

Kirton Point Nunga playgroup

The Nunga Playgroup at the Kirton Point Children's Centre for Early Childhood Development and Parenting in Port Lincoln has been running for 12 years and is one of 9 playgroups at the centre. The playgroup is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

PRINCIPLE 5, element f: Playgroups can be culturally specific, enabling culturally and linguistically diverse families to connect through play and culturally appropriate learning experiences.

It has a focus on building confidence for children and families to engage in the education system.

PRINCIPLE 7, element c: Playgroup offers an environment for parents and caregivers to build on their strengths, capacities and knowledge through peer support and by sharing other relevant information.

The playgroup, which runs weekly, is for children from both units they go to preschool along with a wide selection of family members, including aunts, grandparents, parents and more. The group averages 25–30 people a week although some sessions have had up to 95 people attending.

PRINCIPLE 3, element f: Playgroups facilitate opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to connect with their local community in social, cultural and physical ways.

There is a strong sense of connection, community and belonging at the playgroup. A non-Aboriginal facilitator runs the playgroups alongside an Aboriginal early childhood worker who was also a parent participant. An Elder also regularly visits the playgroup.

PRINCIPLE 5, element g: For culturally specific playgroups not facilitated by a member of the cultural group, facilitators engage with people from those cultural groups (who can draw on their own cultural insights and experiences to both create a welcoming and inclusive environment and be a trusted source of information for participants and facilitator).

Learning about and sharing culture is an important aspect of the playgroup, as is the support and development of child and adult wellbeing. For example, a recent art exhibition was put on by the participants of the playgroup. Parents and caregivers painted alongside children and each other, sharing stories and language as they learned from each other. One person said that she had found her passion for painting again through the project.

PRINCIPLE 5, element e: Playgroups encourage interaction between diverse cultural groups through the sharing of stories that highlight their experiences in caring for children.

The playgroup and the children's centre staff believe that adult wellbeing supports child and family wellbeing.

PRINCIPLE 7, element c: Playgroup offers an environment for parents and caregivers to build on their strengths, capacities and knowledge through peer support and by sharing other relevant information.

Connections with the community are valued and the Aboriginal Health Service, Child Maternal Health team and midwives are regular visitors, along with other allied health practitioners. A recent session was based around creating fresh pureed food for babies. Baby massage and first aid awareness sessions occur regularly.

PRINCIPLE 3, element g: Playgroup provides opportunities for connection to local resources and services.

The atmosphere is deliberately casual and relaxed, so adults can opt in and out of offered sessions and relationships can build over time. Staff will include the benefits of play as they chat with families and link the play to children's learning. There is a strong emphasis on literacy, with songs and stories featuring in each session. There are plenty of book giveaways funded through the Indigenous Literacy Foundation.

PRINCIPLE 1, element d: Playgroup highlights the value and importance of play for children's development and learning.

PRINCIPLE 4, element e: Playgroup builds parent and caregiver confidence and capacity to engage in play with their children every day.

PRINCIPLE 6, element a: Playgroup is flexible and tailors the structure, format and activities to the needs and interests of the children, parents and caregivers and local community.

The program for the playgroup includes fine and gross motor play, music and links to the children's centre goals and priorities. Whenever possible children's play and learning possibilities are spread throughout indoor and outdoor settings so children have a choice of where they are most comfortable.

PRINCIPLE 2, element a: Playgroup provides children with access to developmentally appropriate activities and environments that reflect children's interests, cultural backgrounds, physical and developmental needs.

Attendance at the Nunga Playgroup has connected many families to other playgroups and programs offered at the local school and in the children's centre. Sharing information and supporting family connection to other early childhood services is a feature of the program.

PRINCIPLE 3, element g: Playgroup provides opportunities for connection to local resources and services.

In 2023, the Nunga Playgroup was awarded the Outstanding Reconciliation Initiative Award in the South Australian Public Education Awards.



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South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework

PRINCIPLE 1: Playgroups are about play

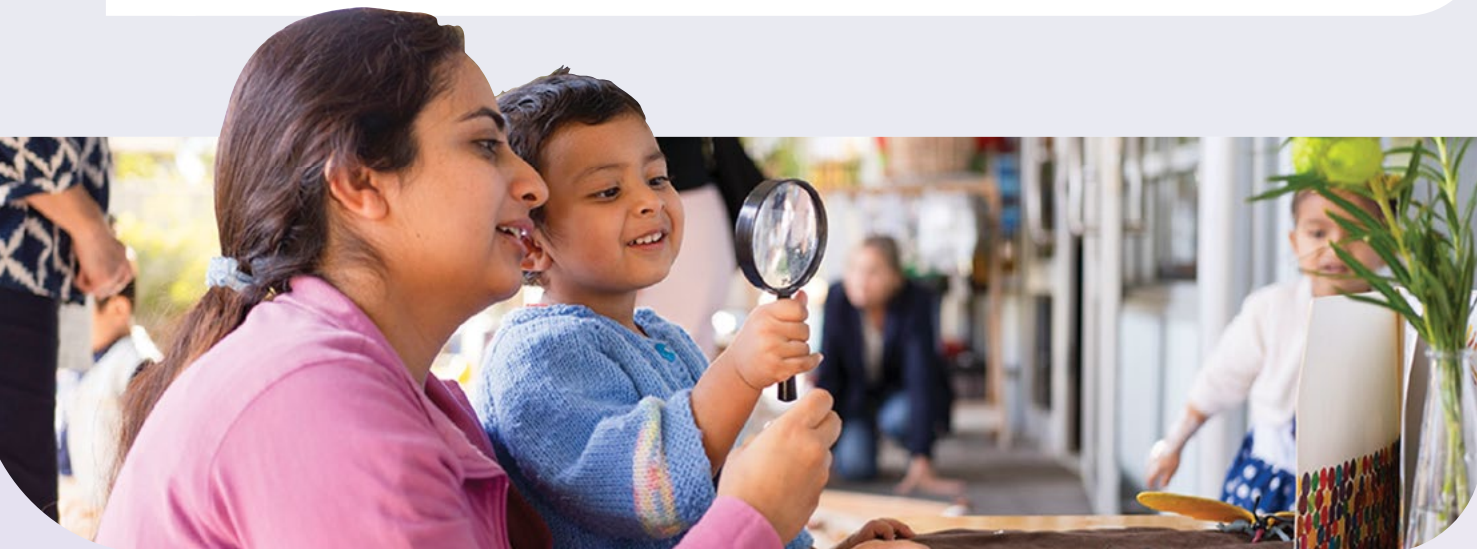
- a | Play is the central component of playgroup with a variety of different types of play embedded throughout the session
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- e | Playgroup builds parent and caregiver confidence and capacity to engage in play with their children every day

PRINCIPLE 2: Playgroups are child-focused, child-inclusive and developmentally appropriate

- a | Playgroup provides children with access to developmentally appropriate activities and environments that reflect children's interests, cultural backgrounds, physical and developmental needs
- b | Playgroup takes into account individual needs, strengths, abilities, differences and preferences
- c | Playgroup is a collaborative environment that creates opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to share their interests and abilities and tailors activities to meet these
- d | Playgroup works in partnership with families by encouraging parents and caregivers to participate and contribute to the group and learn about engaging in their child's play

PRINCIPLE 3: Playgroups are about connection

- a | Playgroup provides opportunities for relationship building and supporting a sense of belonging
- b | Playgroup provides opportunities for connection and relationship building between children, families and playgroup facilitators
- c | Playgroup creates opportunities for connection between children and their parents and caregivers
- d | Playgroup provides opportunities for connection between children
- e | Playgroup provides opportunities for connection between parents and caregivers
- f | Playgroups facilitate opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to connect with their local community in social, cultural and physical ways
- g | Playgroup provides opportunities for connection to local resources and services



PRINCIPLE 4: Playgroups are safe and welcoming

- a | Playgroup is a suitable environment that is physically safe (allowing children to play safely and parents and caregivers to supervise and interact with them)
 - b | Playgroup is a positive learning environment where children, parents, caregivers and facilitators feel safe to try new things while feeling supported and accepted in their efforts
 - c | Playgroup is an inclusive environment that is safe and welcoming for all cultures, family types, carer or child gender identity and sexual orientation, and physical and intellectual abilities
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 - b | Playgroups are responsive to the needs of all cultural identities (honour cultural heritage and the needs of children to be respected and supported in their culture)
 - c | Playgroups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as part of their practices
 - d | Playgroup facilitators model acceptance and take an interest in all families, acknowledging and incorporating local cultural knowledge
 - e | Playgroups encourage interaction between diverse cultural groups through the sharing of stories that highlight their experiences in caring for children
 - f | Playgroups can be culturally specific, enabling culturally and linguistically diverse families to connect through play and culturally appropriate learning experiences
 - g | For culturally specific playgroups not facilitated by a member of the cultural group: facilitators engage with people from these cultural groups (who can draw on their own cultural insights and experiences to both create a welcoming and inclusive environment and be a trusted source of information for participants and facilitator)
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PRINCIPLE 6: Playgroups are flexible

- a | Playgroup is flexible and tailors the structure, format and activities to the needs and interests of the children, parents and caregivers and local community
 - b | Playgroup is adaptable and tailors to the changes and structure of the playgroup location
 - c | Playgroup is dynamic and ready to change as the needs of the children and families change
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PRINCIPLE 7: Playgroups are both strengths-based and strengthening

- a | Playgroup focuses on parent and caregiver capacities and resources, recognising and valuing their strengths, skills and knowledge as children's first and most influential teachers
 - b | Playgroup facilitators work in partnership with parents and caregivers to contribute to the design and delivery of the playgroup
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- a | Playgroups are provided with some organisational-level support and governance, either through their host organisation or their state or territory playgroup association
- b | Playgroups are supported to implement the quality principles and elements of the *South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework*
- c | Where possible, playgroups are adequately resourced so that families can access them at low or no cost
- d | Playgroups are provided with:
 - i access to a playgroup manual
 - ii tools (such as forms, signs, policies or reports)
 - iii assistance to find suitable venues and negotiate a lease
 - iv promotional material to attract new members
 - v training and support to playgroup committees
 - vi starter kits, including toys and resources
 - vii ideas for play activities and playgroup structure
- e | Playgroups facilitators are provided with support, access to mentoring, role modelling and professional development opportunities

Principle 9 relates to quality in the context of supported playgroups. These are relevant for **organisations providing supported playgroups**.

PRINCIPLE 9: Supported playgroups draw on skilled facilitators to engage families and link to local services

Playgroup facilitators:

- are culturally responsive (as defined by the *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*⁴)
- have a high level of interpersonal skills and appropriate expertise to interact well with children, parents and caregivers
- develop trust with families by listening to children, parents and caregivers
- provide information to parents and caregivers in a variety of ways
- organise visits from other community organisations as appropriate
- arrange visits from health professionals as appropriate, eg maternal and child health nurses, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, dietitians, financial counsellors, etc.
- collaborate with other services or agencies to bring new participants into the playgroup
- provide 'warm referrals' to other services such as family violence or mental health support

Playgroup facilitators develop trust with families by listening to children, parents and caregivers.



⁴*Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*, Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council

The guide to the South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework

This guide breaks down each principle and details its elements to support facilitators' understanding. It includes ideas and examples of what each element could look like in practice and provides questions to support reflection and self-assessment.



PRINCIPLE 1: Playgroups are about play

We know that play is one of the best ways for young children to learn, so it makes sense that playgroups should be about play! Through play, children learn about the world around them and begin to understand how it works. Play helps children develop⁵ socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually.

Play looks different as children mature and progress developmentally. Play for very young babies may include eye contact and vocalisations as they watch others play (onlooker play). When parents and caregivers play with babies, they begin to interact more and often start to play on their own as well (solitary play). They will progress to playing alongside other children (parallel play) and eventually with other children (cooperative play).

Children need sensory experiences, the opportunity to manipulate materials, the joy of pretend play, creative experiences and construction play. Ideally children will have the opportunity to play indoors and outdoors during playgroup. If this is not possible, climbing and natural materials can be included inside. Playgroups provide activities, experiences and spaces that support play and child development and encourage children to engage and make choices.

Through play, children learn about the world around them and begin to understand how it works. Play helps children develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually.



⁵ [How play helps child development](#), Raising Children Network

a | Play is the central component of playgroup with a variety of different types of play embedded throughout the session

It is important that playgroup is mostly about play because that is how young children learn and connect with others. Children will play rather than do other things, such as eating or sitting, when play is the central component of a playgroup. There are many **different types of play** that are valuable for young children. Sensory materials like sand, water, mud, slime or gloop all allow children to build their perception. Climbing, balancing and swinging support children's core muscles to later support writing and drawing. Opportunities to draw and paint support children in expressing themselves. Imaginative or pretend play allows children to explore ideas and make meaning of their experiences and the world around them. Dressing up, making a cup of tea, or putting a baby to bed can reflect their home life, while being a butterfly or a train driver builds imagination.

At playgroup children benefit from time to explore with and without adult direction. They learn as they play together with parents, caregivers and playgroup facilitators who encourage them to try again when something goes wrong or use words to help them understand the attributes of what they are playing with. Children learn when they are supported by a parent or caregiver or a more mature peer or sibling who comments, models, makes suggestions or shares a new skill with them.

Embedding play means that almost everything in the session will have a play aspect. For example, 'signing in' to playgroup may include children finding their photo and hanging it on a tree, or 'writing' their name on the attendance list. This is fun and playful. Group time action songs and movement feel playful for children. Even farewelling the children can be playful by singing a song or high fiving everyone as they leave the mat or go through the gate.



This might look like

- Setting up spaces for all age groups to engage in, including a safe space for babies.
- Providing a mixture of indoor and outdoor play opportunities and resources.
- Including sensory play in each session. You might provide bubbles, water play, shaving cream finger painting, sand and mud play or ice in the water trough.
- Providing inclusive materials and resources so all children can play, including natural and manufactured items, for example, gumnuts, leaves, rocks or flowers for sorting and patterning and mud or clay for sensory play.
- Having some experiences that only one or two children and an adult can do at a time and experiences where several children can play together. Small spaces might include sorting objects, a , or reading together. Group play could include home corner play, sand or water play or building with blocks.



Think about

- Do I have a wide range of play experiences available to children each session, and across a term?
- Do I have experiences that support all aspects of child development in each session?
- Is most of the session spent playing?
- What experiences do we provide for children to work independently and collaboratively?
- Are the activities provided at playgroup able to be replicated at home?



It is important that playgroup is mostly about play because that is how young children learn and connect with others.

b | Playgroup prioritises open-ended, child-led, play-based learning

Open-ended play has no specific and predetermined outcomes. Block building, dramatic play, sand and water play all offer open-ended experiences. Children can use their imaginations, as a block becomes a car, gumnuts are money or leaves become food. Playing with natural materials can also lead to open-ended play. For example, children might use a basket of flowers to sort, make patterns, or create a flower shop. It is important that children experience a variety of activities and have opportunities to make decisions about how and what they play with. This helps them to follow their interests, make discoveries, make choices and problem solve. Children will often become more engaged and spend more time at an experience they have chosen and which they can influence.

It is important to **prioritise** open-ended play opportunities that children can engage in without predetermined outcomes. Overly structured craft activities with specific end products in mind frequently lead to frustration for children, with parents and caregivers often completing the craft instead of the children. Children are seldom motivated to make these products, so they don't get the opportunity to develop the skills they might have if they chose to cut, paste and create by themselves.

Child-led play⁶ means that children can decide how the play might evolve. They might give an adult a role to play, eg 'you be the baby', or choose what to do next, eg 'now we are going shopping'. When children can make choices and decisions about their play they develop a sense of confidence and self-belief. When adults follow their child's lead, children learn they are capable and competent and are likely to explore more freely and grow their creativity and curiosity.

Play-based learning supports children to learn through play. By following children's play and providing commentary and conversation, adults can create language-rich learning environments. When adults comment, question or wonder while children play, they scaffold their learning. For example, as a child is building a tower the adult might comment on how tall it is getting and compare the tower's height to the child's height. They could introduce words like taller and shorter or count how many blocks are equal to the child's height.

As children play with water, or pour sand from a container, adults can comment by counting the cups or using numerical language like empty, quarter full, half full and full. This introduces words and phrases for counting and supports children in developing language to describe their experiences.



This might look like

- Having collections of loose parts with multiple uses available in baskets for children to access, such as shells, fabric pieces and various sized blocks.
- Giving parents and caregivers ideas about commenting on children's play to extend it. For example, 'I wonder what else your building needs?' or 'May I have a biscuit with my cup of tea please?'.



Think about

- Are the majority of the playgroup experiences open-ended and able to be child-led?
- Are the playgroup experiences displayed in ways that invite children to play?
- Does the playgroup have plenty of open-ended and flexible resources?

Block building, dramatic play, sand and water play all offer open-ended experiences. Children can use their imaginations, as a block becomes a car, gumnuts are money or leaves become food.



⁶ [Stepping back from children's play: why it's good](#), Raising Children Network

c | Playgroup has a combination of structured and unstructured activity to support predictability and familiarity

Unstructured activity in a playgroup means that children can choose what and who they play with and for how long. Most of the playgroup time should be unstructured with children playing with open-ended resources and making their own choices about what, where and who they play with.

Structured activity in playgroup is adult-led and includes routines and rituals like washing hands and eating, along with song time and stories. A playgroup routine will include unstructured and structured activities like; welcome, free play, a snack, more play, singing, reading, and a farewell. Snack time can be relaxed and flexible but will have some structure, such as a specific place to sit, washing hands before and after and putting rubbish in the recycling, compost or waste bin.

Group time is another structured activity. Singing together is important for language learning and can be supported with a or lyric sheets. Reading together can be a group experience where one person reads to the group, or families read individually to their children. Farewell is an important routine to signal that it is time to go and might include a special song or another regular activity like playing a parachute game.

Young children benefit from and a playgroup routine supports this. Knowing what to expect at playgroup each week helps children feel safe. When children feel safe, they are more likely to feel confident to explore, supporting their developing agency and independence. When a session follows a consistent pattern, it helps children and adults to predict what comes next and join in more easily and confidently. Routines help children transition from one thing to the next, making it easier to move from play to group time, or to feel more comfortable when it is time to leave.



This might look like

- Displaying a timetable or routine that gives parents and caregivers an indication of what will be happening next.
- Sharing fruit as a snack time together allows children, and parents and caregivers to connect.



Think about

- Does the playgroup program have unstructured times?
- Does the playgroup program have structured times?
- Is the balance between structured and unstructured time suitable for the children and families attending?
- Is there a program or routine displayed for families?



A playgroup routine will include unstructured and structured activities like; welcome, free play, a snack, more play, singing, reading, and a farewell.



e | Playgroup builds parent and caregiver confidence and capacity to engage in play with their children every day

We know that children are learning from everything that happens around them. How families, parents and caregivers interact with their children significantly influences their learning and development. Playgroup can help **build parent and caregiver confidence and capacity** to engage in play with their children by highlighting its value, informing and supporting parent play and relationship skills, and providing ideas for **low or no cost**⁷ play experiences and resources. Facilitators can support families to understand how they can extend play at home. For example, giving parents and caregivers a playdough recipe to make at home, or setting a challenge like following their child's lead in play or going for a walk to look for numbers, letters and patterns.

Having dedicated time with their child while also connecting with other adults is one of the most valuable aspects of playgroup for parents and caregivers. Facilitators can set up small activities that require an adult and child to be together, like a story table or an art activity. They could provide written verbal prompts at the activity that adults might use or provocations to stimulate children's thinking.

Parents and caregivers learn a great deal from watching other adults at playgroup. A climate of discussion can be encouraged by the playgroup facilitator to build a supportive community focused on the joys and complexities of raising young children.

How families, parents and caregivers interact with their children significantly influences their learning and development.



This might look like

- Photos of play experiences with explanations about what learning is occurring and how it can be replicated or adapted for home.
- Prompts at activities and experiences with ways adults might engage verbally with their child to extend the play.
- Opportunities for parents and caregivers to share stories about their own and their children's play experiences.




Think about

- How do I help parents and caregivers to understand how to support children's learning through play?
- How do I support parents and caregivers to understand the importance of relationship skills when playing with children?
- How do I celebrate the joy of play with children and families during playgroup?
- How do I support parents and caregivers to identify and share ideas about how to adapt playgroup experiences at home? For example, one playgroup facilitator described parents suggesting the use of a paint brush and a bucket with water for their child to paint outside with when they were worried about their child using paint around a rented home.

⁷Low-cost play ideas, Raising Children Network

PRINCIPLE 2: Playgroups are child-focused, child-inclusive and developmentally appropriate

Playgroups are all about children having opportunities to grow and learn alongside other children and adults. The environment should be **child-focused** and set up to be easily accessed by all children to help them become independent and confident. Being child-inclusive means that various activities are accessible to every child of every ability. **Developmentally appropriate** experiences will include something for the youngest to the oldest child in playgroup. There should be activities that babies can safely explore and other experiences that can stretch older children's learning. Children need to go back multiple times to practise activities to master them, so it is helpful if activities are offered over several weeks so children can revisit them. Adding adjuncts or other materials to well-loved activities will help provide new challenges for children who may have mastered these.



Being child-inclusive means that various activities are accessible to every child of every ability.

a | Playgroup provides children with access to developmentally appropriate activities and environments that reflect children’s interests, cultural backgrounds, physical and developmental needs

Playgroup is an ideal environment to play and learn. Developmentally appropriate activities mean that all children, from babies to five-year-olds, can play in ways that challenge them and allow them to succeed.

A **developmentally appropriate environment** will have spaces and activities that are safe and appropriate for children to use. If others use the playgroup space, it is important to ensure that unsafe resources, such as small parts or sharp edges, are removed or put out of reach when playgroup is in operation.

Creating a specific, safe space on the floor for babies, especially those not yet on the move, enables them to engage in play. Babies often enjoy mirrors, discovery bottles, **treasure baskets**⁸ and board books. Toddlers frequently explore their physical skills, so climbing, balancing and pushing and pulling are important. Preschool children might be ready for more complex tasks such as puzzles, creative arts activities and group games. All children benefit from a rich language environment so reading and singing are essential in every playgroup.

Playgroup should reflect the community. Playgroup facilitators should talk with each family about their **child’s interests** and provide experiences to match. For example, a child who loves animals might enjoy making a farm or pretending to be a vet. Children’s **cultural backgrounds** should be reflected through displays, books, music, play materials and other resources.

Some children may have additional **physical or developmental needs** so consider these as you set up your playgroup. Is there room to manoeuvre a wheelchair? Are there quiet spaces where a child can settle and prepare for play? Talk with parents and caregivers about their child’s needs so they can be considered and provided for. This is particularly important for parents and caregivers of children with a disability. Some children need to expend energy if they are anxious or overwhelmed, while others may need a quieter environment to engage.



This might look like

- An environment that reflects their home environment and is culturally familiar to children. For example, one playgroup asked parents and caregivers to donate cultural items to decorate the room and received a tapestry from Southern India, which has become a point of connection and discussion.
- A variety of resources that represent your community’s diversity of backgrounds and cultural experiences.
- Making quiet spaces away from sound or visual overload, such as a big box with fairy lights, a tent or a cubby house. It might mean setting up spaces outside on a verandah or lawn.
- Having gross motor opportunities so children can release energy when necessary. This might include big mats to roll on, hula hoops to jump into and out of, big cushions to jump on or ride on cars. If storage and space are a concern, you could include activities like animal walk cards (walk like an elephant with big heavy steps, or scamper like a monkey) or action cards with instructions (jump up and down five times, stretch up really high, or do some star jumps).



Think about

- How do I learn more about the individual needs of parents and caregivers who come to playgroup?
- Where can I seek support to make changes and adaptations to support specific identified needs?
- How can I ensure that the physical environment, activities, routines and traditions support all children’s development based on their needs?
- Are children of differing abilities considered when planning experiences/group time?

⁸Treasure boxes: [play ideas for children](#), Raising Children Network

2

b | Playgroup takes into account individual needs, strengths, abilities, differences and preferences

Playgroup is an inclusive space for everyone to participate and play. Ensure there are various activities and experiences to suit **individual needs, strengths, abilities, differences and preferences**, for example, messy play⁹ is important for children's sensory development, but many families may prefer not to have it at home so providing it at playgroup is ideal. Consider providing less messy options for children who don't like the feeling of textures, like paint in a ziplock bag, or providing spoons to use with gloop rather than hands so they can still participate.

Children will have **strengths and preferences** in what they like to play with, and how they want to play. Some children will immediately engage actively in play and some will prefer to sit and watch before joining in. Some will feel confident joining group times, while others will prefer to participate from a distance. These needs can be balanced and supported by providing a range of experiences and physical spaces.

Adults will have preferences and strengths too. Some will be comfortable taking the lead, while others will contribute quietly. Older parents and caregivers may need different kinds of seating so they can engage with their child. Breastfeeding mothers will need a comfortable and private space to breastfeed.



This might look like

- Having time planned to be outside, especially if the outdoors is not easily accessed throughout the playgroup session.
- Having quiet spaces where children and their caregivers can retreat to watch or rest.
- Having adult as well as child-sized seating.
- Having a wide range of open-ended experiences that support children of differing abilities to access and participate.



Think about

- Does the playgroup environment have a range of spaces and experiences to meet the needs of children and adults?
- Are there options for every child and adult to access the playgroup environment?
- How do we support adults to play at playgroup?
- How family trauma may impact parent/child relationships and where families could get support in relation to this?
- Are different parenting preferences supported at playgroup?

Some children will immediately engage actively in play and some will prefer to sit and watch before joining in.



⁹ [How messy play helps child development](#), Raising Children Network

c | Playgroup is a collaborative environment that creates opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to share their interests and abilities and tailors activities to meet these

A collaborative environment is one where participants feel they can contribute and have a say. Playgroup facilitators can encourage families to contribute by asking for their ideas about activities to offer in playgroup. Facilitators can then include them in the playgroup program. Families might suggest activities that would appeal to their child or share skills they have. Sharing interests and abilities is a wonderful way to build a sense of belonging. If someone plays an instrument, or is a wonderful storyteller or cook, encourage them to share their skills at playgroup. For example, one playgroup has a grandfather who plays the accordion every week for the children, while another has the deputy principal from the school playing the guitar for song time. Cooking together and sharing the food can be an inclusive experience and a chance to discuss traditions and festivals.



This might look like

- Recognising a child's interests and building on it. For example, one playgroup noticed children were focused on excavating a mystery object in the garden. The facilitator added treasure and tools and later created an experience of fossicking for objects in a box of shredded paper.
- Asking families what their children have been interested in or discovering at home and adding similar activities to the playgroup program. This can be through regular chats or prompts on a whiteboard or paper near the sign-in area.



Think about

- Who regularly contributes ideas to the playgroup?
- How could other people be encouraged to contribute? Could you have a suggestion box or a whiteboard asking for skills? Could there be a section on your enrolment form or ask in a social media post?
- How to support communication and sharing ideas in different ways that do not require reading and writing?



Sharing interests and abilities is a wonderful way to build a sense of belonging.

2

d | Playgroup works in partnership with families by encouraging parents and caregivers to participate and contribute to the group and learn about engaging in their child's play

Raising children is a complex task and a sense of **partnership** at playgroup helps make it easier. Partnerships are where families and the playgroup facilitator share ideas, have a trusting relationship and feel valued.

It can be difficult for one person, especially a volunteer, to run a playgroup. Finding ways to encourage families, parents and caregivers to contribute and participate makes for a richer playgroup where responsibilities are shared and everyone feels they are contributing.

For example, packing up or preparing snacks as part of playgroup means everyone, including children, has a chance to contribute. There could be a list of jobs for people to choose from each session to get the work done and show children that everyone, including them, has a role to play.

Discussing group norms and expectations with parents and caregivers can help avoid conflicts. This might include agreements on informing the facilitator when they are leaving the play space, the types of beverages provided to children, or the use of mobile phones during the session. Every parent/caregiver must understand they are responsible for their child at all times while at playgroup.

Engaging in a child's play is another way of participating. Playgroup facilitators can support families to follow their child's lead, encourage their ideas and explorations or provide them with a new challenge to practise. Talking about the learning that happens as children play helps parents and caregivers to value it.

Finding ways to encourage families, parents and caregivers to contribute and participate makes for a richer playgroup where responsibilities are shared and everyone feels they are contributing.



This might look like

- Noticing the areas that adults are comfortable in helping in and acknowledging their help.
- Create 'jobsicles' by listing tasks on pop sticks for parents and caregivers to use. Some playgroups have found this a fair and easy way to encourage parents and caregivers to help.
- Providing verbal or written information that helps parents and caregivers to play and support their children's learning.




Think about

- How do I support families to understand the connections between children's play and their learning?
- Do I need to learn more about how I can support adults to engage in children's play?
- Do I need to learn more about supporting child/parent relationships?
- What are the strategies I might include?







PRINCIPLE 3: Playgroups are about connection

Research consistently shows playgroups are important for building social networks and a sense of community and connection. For many families they are the first step to connecting with other families, while for children, playgroup can be the beginning of building relationships outside of home.

...playgroups are important for building social networks and a sense of community and connection.

a | Playgroup provides opportunities for relationship building and supporting a sense of belonging

A welcoming playgroup is necessary for **relationship building** and **supporting a sense of belonging**. Every family should be able to see themselves reflected in the playgroup, perhaps through images, activities or a welcome in their home language. Finding commonalities between families is also an important pathway to belonging. While playgroup is mostly about adults and children spending time together, it is also a time for adults to connect and learn from each other.



This might look like

- Singing a welcome song to new families on their first day of playgroup.
- Posing a question on a board or a sheet of paper for adults to answer. Starting with something simple, like 'How do you say welcome to playgroup in your language?' You might like to practise this at group time and teach all families to learn this too. Other questions or provocations could include 'What family rituals/traditions do you have?' or 'What does your child like to do at home?' This helps people to find what they have in common and share new ideas.
- Organising a play date in the holidays at a local park to encourage ongoing connection outside of playgroup.



Every family should be able to see themselves reflected in the playgroup, perhaps through images, activities or a welcome in their home language.



Think about

- Does the playgroup routine balance time for parents and caregivers to share time with their children and connect with other adults?
- Are there other ways I can support connections between families?



3

b | Playgroup provides opportunities for connection and relationship building between children, families and playgroup facilitators

Playgroups are a wonderful way to build **connections and relationships**. As they play, children practise the skills needed to establish friendships with other children and adults and develop social skills. Playgroup facilitators can encourage this by using names when welcoming families, during song time, and as families are farewelled.

Building informal networks and **connections between families** can lead to friendships. Connection at playgroup can support the sharing of parenting strengths and struggles, the feeling of being understood and supported and the sharing of information about local services and supports. Parents will have different experiences, values and expectations that influence their parenting practices. Information and advice can come from many sources, including friends, family, social media, the internet and professionals. Playgroup is another source of advice and information to support them as parents.

In supported playgroups, the **facilitator** must build relationships to offer appropriate support when needed.



This might look like

- Making sure you connect warmly with every child and their adults each session.
- Learning and using the names of both children and parents and caregivers.
- Introducing new adults and children to members of the group.
- Having family photos and names on display to promote connection.
- Supporting all families to feel connected, for example by talking about home traditions and linking families together through common practices. This could include favourite outings, things children are involved in cooking, or family rituals like 'taco Tuesday' or 'dance party Friday'.
- Playgroup facilitators sharing information about child development and behaviour, such as the Parenting SA easy guides.



Think about

- How do I ensure parents and caregivers are connected at playgroup?
- How can I support the connection of families outside of playgroup? Could you suggest and promote holiday catchups in the park or local celebrations?
- Do I have ways to find out if parents and caregivers feel connected? For example, an annual parent survey that asks questions about what they appreciate about playgroup and changes they would like to see. (See the Victor Harbor intergenerational playgroup case study on page 68 for how one playgroup used participant feedback.)
- How do I collect and facilitate family feedback that does not require reading and writing?

As they play, children practise the skills needed to establish friendships with other children and adults and to develop social skills.

c | Playgroup creates opportunities for connection between children and their parents and caregivers

One of the important aspects of playgroup is the chance for parents and caregivers to spend time with their child in an environment that is all about being together. This shows children that their adults are interested in them, building **connections** and deepening bonds. Providing activities where children and their adults can play together, read together, sing together or talk together is important. Think about creating small activities with only 2 chairs to sit on like threading, sorting or exploring a tray of shells together. Encourage families to have fun with their children through experiences like blowing bubbles, playing peek-a-boo or sharing a funny story. Facilitators have a role in modelling this with parents and caregivers too.



This might look like

- Including cosy corners in your playgroup environment that invite closeness.
- Adding prompts at an activity suggesting words adults might use or they might make when playing with their children.
- Introducing songs like *Row, row, row your boat* that require adults and children to interact with each other.
- Playgroup facilitators modelling how to support child-led play.
- Playgroup facilitators modelling how to help children learn new skills.
- Acknowledging parent's and caregiver's positive engagements with their child.
- Making the playgroup a phone free space so parents and caregivers can connect without interruption or distraction.



Think about

- Does the playgroup's physical set-up allow for parents and caregivers to play with their children? Do I need to consider different seating or other adaptations to the environment? Do adults need adult-size chairs inside and outside?
- How can I support and encourage adults who are unsure or reluctant to engage with their children's play?



Providing activities where children and their adults can play together, read together, sing together or talk together is important.

3

d | Playgroup provides opportunities for connection between children

Playgroup is often the first chance that children have **to connect with peers**. Babies and younger toddlers will play mostly alongside others. Older toddlers and preschoolers play together more often. It is important to have opportunities for children to play alongside and together with other children and participate in group experiences like eating or singing together. This doesn't always come easily, especially for younger children. Adults may need facilitator support to help their children engage well with others. For example, young children need lots of practise turn-taking before they can share, and facilitators can help by modelling, and talking about what is happening. Children will make mistakes, and conflict can happen. It is important to help families see that this is normal and that children learn from being supported to resolve problems. Facilitators can model _____ to one another, redirection to another activity and turn-taking strategies.

Create activities where there is space for 2 or 3 children to play together, for example, a small playdough table or a small world set-up. This helps children form friendships. Create space for adults to watch over their children so they can be ready to help them when needed.



This might look like

- Bringing the group together to share food, music or movement sessions.
- Using children's names in songs to build familiarity.
- Sharing resources that help parents and caregivers understand the social and emotional development of children.
- Modelling strategies to help children with big feelings and conflict, for example by naming the feelings or issue, supporting the child as they calm, or helping children negotiate.



Think about

- Do I see children engaged with their peers and their adults?
- Do I understand how to support children and their adults in times of conflict?

It is important to have opportunities for children to play alongside and together with other children and participate in group experiences...



e | Playgroup provides opportunities for connection between parents and caregivers

Parenting or caring for young children can be an isolating experience, and playgroup is an important place for connecting, sharing and learning from each other. Sharing everyday experiences, as well as local knowledge benefits everyone. Adults can be introduced to each other and linked through highlighting commonalities like shared interests, skills and talents, so no-one feels excluded. Providing name tags will help adults learn each other's names as well as that of the children of other families. Children can be encouraged to find their name tag.

...playgroup is an important place for connecting, sharing and learning from each other.



This might look like

Having time during each session for parents and caregivers to connect. This could be a chat during snack time or as children play together.



Think about

- Do I actively introduce adults to each other to build connections?
- Are any parents or caregivers not connected within the playgroup? How can I help them connect with others?
- Are spaces available for families to connect after playgroup finishes?



3

f | Playgroups facilitate opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to connect with their local community in social, cultural and physical ways

Children and families are an important part of any community. Facilitating and attending playgroup is a valuable contribution families make to developing an active and connected community. Attending a playgroup provides opportunities for families to learn about their local community. This can be especially important for first-time parents or those new to a community. Make sure that playgroup feels like a social experience for all by welcoming everyone, introducing new families to the group and regularly using people's names. This connection may spill into informal catch ups such as school holidays play dates or encounters at the library or shopping centre.

Facilitators may support the development of their playgroup community by organising outings and playgroup visitors to add to the playgroup experience. This will broaden families' knowledge of their local community. Often families are unaware of local facilities like parks, libraries and community groups that are available to them. **Physically** visiting these facilities can provide new opportunities for play and learning.

The playgroup facilitator and participants can highlight **cultural** experiences and events that might be happening in the local area, such as a Christmas pageant or Diwali celebration.



This might look like

- Displaying information about local events at playgroup or through social media.
- Taking a few minutes at story time to talk about community events.
- Organising excursions to local venues such as the library or local park.
- Being involved in local preschool or school events.
- Children and families contributing to community projects, such as the local Christmas pageant, or arts projects.



Think about

- How can I make excursions no cost or low cost and support parents and caregivers to get to the destination?
- Do I know what is happening in the local community, and if not, how can I find out? How do I best share this information at playgroup?
- Do parents and caregivers feel confident to share their knowledge with others?



Attending a playgroup provides opportunities for families to learn about their local community.

g | Playgroup provides opportunities for connection to local resources and services

An important aspect of playgroup is the sharing of **local knowledge** regarding health, wellbeing and leisure **resources and services**. Families and facilitators can recommend services or free or low-cost activities in the community. You could invite the local librarians or fire engine to visit. Children and families learn about their neighbourhood through these connections.

Facilitators can share information about local services, including preschools, childcare, health and social support services. Handouts, brochures and displays can help in sharing this information, as can visitors such as educators from the local early childhood services.



This might look like

- Supporting families to build their knowledge and ability to access community services.
- Inviting service providers like the local community health providers or early childhood service, to talk to the group about their services.
- Having information about local services available at the sign-in table.
- Maintaining a relationship with local services to keep up to date with current information.



Think about

- Is there a chance in the playgroup routine to share information? Some facilitators will do this at song time; others will have information near the sign-in sheet.
- Who do I connect with in the wider community? Seeking advice from families helps them feel like they are contributing and can lead to excellent connections.
- How can I draw on parent and caregiver connections and knowledge? When a parent or caregiver asks a question, could I open the discussion to nearby adults so they can contribute local knowledge?
- How can I connect and network with services in my area?



Facilitators can share information about local services including preschools, childcare, health and social support services. Handouts, brochures and displays can help in sharing this information...



PRINCIPLE 4: Playgroups are safe and welcoming

Playgroups must be a **safe environment** both physically, emotionally and culturally. A secure space with minimal hazards is essential so families can relax and children can play and explore safely. Playgroups are places where families and children feel confident to express themselves without judgement from others.



a | Playgroup is a suitable environment that is physically safe (allowing children to play safely and parents and caregivers to supervise and interact with them)

Playgroups should be held in physically safe environments where children and families are unlikely to be harmed.

When a playgroup is established, an environmental assessment should occur to identify potential risks or safety concerns and modifications made to minimise these where possible. Playgroup facilitators can seek guidance and support for this through their local playgroup association (in South Australia, this is [Playgroup SA](#)). This should also occur whenever the playgroup moves to a new space or when group dynamics change; for example, new families with younger babies start attending. Before every session, checks should be done to ensure safety. This is particularly important when your playgroup is in a shared space that others use. Think about small things like electrical outlets being covered and that all cords that pose a safety risk are out of the way. Doors, fences and gates should be in working order to prevent children from wandering and separating from their parents or caregivers. Your local playgroup association or supporting organisation may be able to help with risk assessment processes.

Choose materials and resources that are safe for young children to use. Consider swallowing and choking risks and remove small objects from the playgroup space.

Ensure that children can always be seen and **supervised** by parents and caregivers. The playgroup program will need to reflect safety. For example, indoor and outdoor play cannot be safely offered simultaneously at some playgroups. In this case, playgroup routines provide specific times when all families can play only inside or outside. Parents and caregivers must be aware that they are responsible for the care, supervision and safety of their children at all times at playgroup.



This might look like

- Developing a safety checklist to use before each session.
- Determining site-specific risks, such as bush fire, snake or tree hazards and implementing strategies to minimise identified risks to children and families.
- Encouraging families to ensure they are following SunSmart guidelines.
- Providing sanitiser and sunscreen at the sign-in area.
- Clear guidelines informing children and parents and caregivers they cannot attend if unwell.
- Ensuring families understand emergency evacuation procedures, and displaying these near the emergency exits.



Think about

- Have I completed an assessment of the environment to identify any potential risks or safety concerns? Playgroup facilitators can seek guidance and support for this through their local playgroup association (in South Australia this is [Playgroup SA](#)).
- Have all staff and volunteers received an induction?
- Have families received an induction to playgroup?
- Do I check the space before each session?
- Does the playgroup environment allow for the supervision of children at all times?
- How do I ensure all equipment and materials meet safety standards?



Playgroups should be held in physically safe environments...

4

b | Playgroup is a positive learning environment where children, parents, caregivers and facilitators feel safe to try new things while feeling supported and accepted in their efforts

Trying new things can sometimes feel scary for children and adults. They worry about failing or looking silly in front of others. However, this is one way we learn – by taking risks, sometimes failing and then trying again. Make the playgroup a positive learning environment by normalising making mistakes and trying again. Celebrate the effort children and adults make when practising new things to master them. Think about experiences that might challenge **children** just a bit. Obstacle courses that require balancing, going through a tunnel or jumping are one way to do this. Build a culture in the playgroup of 'try again', 'good effort' or 'great practising'!

Facilitators can model risk-taking or bouncing back from failure and help families understand the importance of challenging yourself, persevering and developing resilience. If you have set up an activity that isn't going as planned, be open with families and talk about it. Maybe you can solve the problem together.

Remember, for babies, consider creating a floor space where they can safely play and explore. Provide resources like mats and cushions with unbreakable mirrors, a treasure basket, board books and discovery bottles that will challenge and engage them.



This might look like

- The facilitator problem solving out loud, asking parents and caregivers for alternative ideas and/or modelling trying alternate strategies, eg while putting together a piece of equipment.
- Talking about the importance of developing a _____, where effort and persistence are valued.



Think about

- What is my attitude to risk-taking? Do I see it as something to be avoided or as a way to build resilience?
- How do I role model risk-taking?
- How do I celebrate children trying again to master a new skill?
- How do I support children's growth and development by advocating for challenging play environments with parents and caregivers?

Make the playgroup a positive learning environment by normalising making mistakes and trying again.



c | Playgroup is an inclusive environment that is safe and welcoming for all cultures, family types, carer or child gender identity and sexual orientation, and physical and intellectual abilities

An inclusive environment means that everyone feels they belong. This means ensuring the physical space is accessible, there are spaces that enable sitting quietly to observe and resources reflect the children's lives. Adults need to feel welcomed so use name tags and welcome signs in appropriate languages. Display a sign about the playgroup routine so parents and caregivers know what will happen and when. If the space allows, display families' photos or a welcome banner with everyone's handprints to support connection and inclusion.

Consider parents and caregivers who might have additional requirements, such as needing support with physical access, reading in English, or socialising with others.

Ensure the resources available such as books and puzzles represent the diversity of the community. Make sure that children and adults can access play areas, like tables or sandpits (eg consider a sand tray or taller tables for children in wheelchairs).

Consider the needs of children when planning activities. Some children will require quiet experiences to help them calm, while others might need high activity gross motor experiences to expend energy.

Establishing playgroup guidelines supporting inclusion with families and regularly discussing or reinforcing these is one way of ensuring everyone understands expectations and responsibilities at playgroup.

An inclusive environment means that everyone feels they belong.



This might look like

- An environment that has multiple ways to interact with experiences and activities. For example, similar activities like painting might be available on the floor, at an easel and at a table.
- Experiences that explore all 5 senses: touch, sight, smell, sound and taste. These might include playdough and messy play; light boxes, magnifying glasses and binoculars; exploring scented plants like lavender or herbs; cooking experiences or tasting different fruits and vegetables.
- A wide range of books and resources selected to reflect the current community which may include books in a range of languages portraying a variety of characters in everyday life.
- Considering your surrounds; some families may not want to enter government or institutional looking buildings.
- Alternate ways of giving information to families, including verbally or with pictorial signs rather than written options. This might also include linking families to digital resources like videos.



Think about

- Have I assessed the playgroup resources to consider if they reflect inclusivity for the current playgroup community?
- Does my planning reflect the needs of the children?
- Will everyone feel a sense of belonging when they arrive?
- Am I aware of my own beliefs or biases and could these influence the inclusivity of the playgroup?
- How can I improve the inclusivity of playgroup?
- How do I support families if their beliefs or attitudes challenge the safe environment?
- Considering the use of pronouns he/she/they and appropriate titles, eg husband, wife or partner.

4

d | Playgroup is child safe (takes deliberate steps to protect children from any form of abuse or neglect, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and cultural)

Child safe playgroups consider how to keep children safe from **abuse or neglect**. According to [child safe information](#)¹⁰ by the Australian Human Rights Commission a [child safe organisation](#)¹¹ creates a culture, adopts strategies and takes action to promote child wellbeing and prevent harm to children and young people. This includes developing procedures and practices that protect children and sharing them with families, parents and caregivers. Playgroup facilitators and organisations can seek guidance and support for this from their local playgroup association. In South Australia, this is [Playgroup SA](#).



This might look like

- Developing policies, procedures and practices to support child safety relevant to the playgroup site and updating these regularly. Playgroup facilitators and organisations can seek guidance and support for this from their local playgroup association. In South Australia, this is [Playgroup SA](#).
- Developing a procedure around toileting that considers the safety of families attending playgroup and others, including children and educators on the premises.
- Maintaining a register of all staff and volunteers showing their background checks and training.



Think about

Do we have a mechanism to ensure everyone working or volunteering in the playgroup is trained and has appropriate and up-to-date working with children checks and other background checks?



¹⁰ [Child Safe Organisations](#)

¹¹ [What is a child safe organisation?](#), Child Safe Organisations

e | Playgroup is easily accessed (located in a regular and consistent location to support predictability, familiarity and sense of belonging)



The playgroup venue should be easy to find and accessible to everyone. Consider clear location signage, including playgroup operating hours. Ensure pram and wheelchair access and a pram storage area if possible. Try to keep the day and time of playgroup consistent so that families can attend regularly too. Set up a communication system, such as emails, text messages, or a social media page, so families can be alerted to changes, such as needing to cancel playgroup due to extreme weather, or special events happening ahead of time. Participants will feel included and have a **sense of belonging** even when they cannot attend.



This might look like

- Distinctive signage to indicate that playgroup is operating and where to find it.
- Flyers and brochures with a playgroup location map.
- Informing support staff such as school front office workers of the playgroup location and operation times.



Think about

Have I walked the routes that parents and caregivers might take to get to the playgroup location? Are there points that need explanation or more explicit directions?

PRINCIPLE 5: Playgroups are culturally safe

Cultural safety means that everyone feels safe to express their cultural identity and can expect to be respected and included. Playgroups are generally considered a safe, informal way for families, parents and caregivers to connect and engage. It is essential that playgroup facilitators ensure that everyone who enters a playgroup feels welcome and can see themselves reflected in the offerings and environment of the playgroup. People need to feel safe to express themselves, parent freely, ask questions and contribute without fear of harassment, judgement or exclusion.



Cultural safety means that everyone feels safe to express their cultural identity and can expect to be respected and included.

a | Playgroups are welcoming of all cultures and promote inclusion by accepting diversity as the norm

Playgroups often provide the first place for families, parents and caregivers to connect with their local community. It is important that everyone is welcomed from the moment they arrive. Diversity should be embraced and acknowledged by celebrating each person's unique gifts, talents and interests. Playgroup facilitators enable inclusive environments by providing a welcoming culture where all families are sensitively interacted with and feel included and safe.

Having a welcome sign in community languages and ensuring that children can see images of others like them (eg in books or displays) helps to build a sense of belonging.

Inclusion in playgroup means valuing and respecting people from all cultural backgrounds, being aware of what people need to feel they belong and are connected to all the experiences offered. Playgroup facilitators should be mindful of and challenge unfairness and discrimination.

Australia is a multicultural and diverse country and our playgroups should reflect and value that diversity. The community becomes richer as people share and learn from each other. **Diversity** in playgroup means participant's similarities and differences are promoted and celebrated. The role of parenting, for example, is different for every family, but the similarities of loving, protecting and nurturing children are universal.



This might look like

- Welcoming families in their home language. Displaying welcome/hello in the languages of the attending families. For example, one playgroup chooses a different language from their community for their welcome sign each week.
- Using resources that reflect the diversity of the families in the playgroup.
- Developing an 'All about me' form that enables families to share cultural information or interests they would like included in the program.
- Displaying images of the playgroup families.
- Using songs familiar to families in their languages.
- Stories that include diverse families (cultural, LGBTQIA+, grandparents).
- Asking families to share cultural knowledge at group time, eg names they call grandparents or ways to count.



Think about

- Where to access resources that are culturally diverse?
- How can I create opportunities for families to share their language and cultural knowledge?
- Inviting families to share their cultural traditions at playgroup, for example, parents and caregivers may share food and recipes.



Diversity should be welcomed and acknowledged through the celebration of the unique gifts, talents and interests of each person at playgroup.

5

b | Playgroups are responsive to the needs of all cultural identities (honour cultural heritage and the needs of children to be respected and supported in their culture)

Having a strong sense of who they are is an essential part of a child's identity, including their cultural identity. Playgroup facilitators can ensure children are **respected and supported** in their cultural identity in many ways. Incorporating various languages in signs, songs, verbal greetings and farewells are ways of recognising and valuing cultures. **Cultural heritage** is more than a person's ethnicity. It includes the values, beliefs and traditions that form part of their identity. For many families, this remains an essential part of their lives and can be shared and reflected at playgroup.

Playgroup facilitators should also be sensitive to the specific needs of communities at playgroup. It is important to recognise that needs will vary within cultural groups. Some might follow strict religious or cultural expectations, others may not. There may be class implications among some cultural groups or historical conflicts to consider. Ask playgroup members about their cultural identities and how they want to be supported rather than making assumptions. Connecting with Elders and local cultural leaders and encouraging the sharing of language, stories and skills is another way of embracing local cultural knowledge.



This might look like

- Being aware of and catering to dietary requirements when cooking at playgroup.
- Including families in discussions about parenting practices and family life.
- Ensuring resources are culturally appropriate and represent children and families in a way that honours and supports their unique cultural identities.
- Celebrating cultural events at playgroup.



Think about

- How do I find out about people's cultural identity?
- How do I encourage families to share their culture and parenting practices?
- How do I support using and maintaining home languages, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages?
- Do I include consideration of the playgroup's cultural diversity in my planning and programming?
- How will I acknowledge cultural celebrations?

Having a strong sense of who they are is an important part of children's identity, and this includes their cultural identity.



c | Playgroups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as part of their practices

An **everyday practice** is one way of showing respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. You could ask your local preschool or school what they use. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are important for every child and family in Australia because it is part of our cultural heritage. Playgroup facilitators are encouraged to know the traditional owners of the land on which the playgroup operates and incorporate some local language words into their playgroup. Include resources, songs and stories that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as an everyday part of playgroup rather than a special event. Connection with local Elders is a way of acknowledging and embracing local cultural knowledge.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are important for every child and family in Australia because it is part of our cultural heritage.



This might look like

- Using local Aboriginal language words to greet and farewell children and caregivers.
- Working alongside local Elders and providing opportunities for connection to country for Aboriginal children and families.
- Singing songs using Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language.
- Reading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and information books.
- Using clapping sticks at song time.



Think about

- Do I know what Aboriginal land the playgroup is held on?
- How do I include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the playgroup program?
- Is there a community group I can liaise with to find out more about our local First Nations people?



5

d | Playgroup facilitators model acceptance and take an interest in all families, acknowledging and incorporating local cultural knowledge

Every child has their own **unique family** experience, including family structures, interests and community connections, cultural background or the kind of home they live in. Showing interest in children and families can help them feel acknowledged, accepted and included. **Incorporate local cultural knowledge** into the playgroup program as shared by families and the broader community or through resources and materials. For example, having farm animals and machinery as part of the block play in a farming community enables children to share their knowledge with others. Likewise, reflecting local features like the beach or a piece of bush at playgroup can help children feel connected to their community.



This might look like

- Getting to know your families so you can provide experiences that reflect their family cultures, community and children's interests.
- Celebrating local cultural community events at playgroup.



Think about

- How do I learn about children's interests and family experiences?
- How do I include children's interests and family experiences in my planning?



Showing interest in children and families can help them feel acknowledged, accepted and included.

e | Playgroups encourage interaction between diverse cultural groups through the sharing of stories that highlight their experiences in caring for children

A **diverse** playgroup offers learning opportunities where families, parents and caregivers share experiences and understandings. Sharing stories of personal experiences and traditions is a wonderful way of building community and learning from each other. All cultures value children and families but may express it differently. It is important to remember that members of the same cultural group may have different ways of being. Sharing specific experiences, such as festivals or family rituals, adds to the richness of everyone's knowledge.

Sharing stories of personal experiences and traditions is a wonderful way of building community and learning from each other.



This might look like

- Making bread using parent and caregiver recipes. Many cultures have different uses and stories that connect with bread making. Add cultural adjuncts like chapati rollers to the playdough area so children can reproduce the cooking experience.
- **Telling stories**¹² as well as reading stories from books.
- Providing resources, books and displays that reflect the diversity of the playgroup.
- Providing picture books with no words to encourage storytelling.
- Talking about traditional and contemporary ways of parenting, recognising that there can be a wide range of parenting practices.



Think about

- How can I build family sharing of cultural and traditional experiences in playgroup? For example, asking parents and caregivers to share cultural practices, songs, stories and language at group time.
- How can I learn more about my playgroup community's cultural heritage to support relationship building and playgroup programming?
- How can I help parents and caregivers to learn songs in other languages?



¹² [Telling stories with children](#), Raising Children Network

5

f | Playgroups can be culturally specific, enabling culturally and linguistically diverse families to connect through play and culturally appropriate learning experiences

There may be value in meeting the needs of a particular community by providing a targeted playgroup, for example, when a new cultural group is being established in a town or region. A culturally specific playgroup can enable adults and children to connect, learn and play together in a group that is familiar in culture and language. They can support families and parents and caregivers to learn more about living in Australia and connect to the broader community.

A culturally specific playgroup can enable adults and children to connect, learn and play together in a group which is familiar in culture and language. They can support families and parents and caregivers to learn more about living in Australia and connect to the wider community.



This might look like

Running groups in settings where cultural group members feel familiar and comfortable, such as in a park, a mosque, a community centre or a bushland setting.

For examples of targeted playgroups meeting particular community needs, see the 'Principles in action – case studies' from the Bordertown multicultural playgroup and Kirton Point Nunga playgroup on [pages 69–70](#).



Think about

- What are the cultural groups in my community?
- Are these communities represented at playgroup?
- Is there a need in my community for a culturally specific playgroup?
- Who would I talk with to understand more about this?



g | For culturally specific playgroups not facilitated by a member of the cultural group: facilitators engage with people from these cultural groups (who can draw on their own cultural insights and experiences to both create a welcoming and inclusive environment and be a trusted source of information for participants and facilitator)

Culturally specific playgroups not facilitated by a member of the cultural group need advice and support from appropriate people to be relevant to the community. Drawing on community knowledge, cultural insights and ways of understanding ensures that playgroups are culturally responsive and feel familiar, inclusive and welcoming. Using bilingual facilitators or volunteers enables effective communication and builds **trust**. Parents and caregivers who have previously attended the playgroup can be valuable because they have experience and knowledge to share with new families, parents and caregivers. They may also be a trusted resource for families and playgroup facilitators.

Drawing on community knowledge, cultural insights and ways of understanding ensures that playgroups are culturally responsive and feel familiar, inclusive and welcoming.



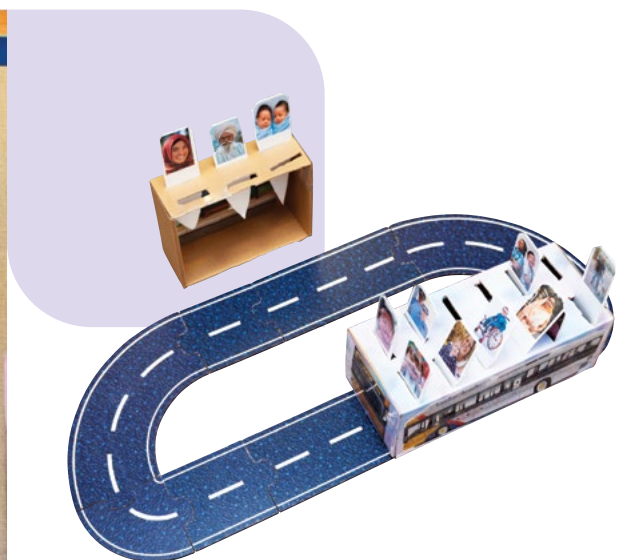
This might look like

- Working in partnership with playgroup members to help develop information resources in home languages.
- Asking playgroup members to translate English to their home language.
- Working in partnership with playgroup members for playgroup programming ideas.
- Asking playgroup members to check for cultural appropriateness when playgroup programming.



Think about

- How can I access information about culturally relevant play experiences for children?
- How might I find a trusted partner to run a culturally specific playgroup?
- How do I manage any cultural consultation required to facilitate the playgroup?
- How can I access paid translators to support my engagement with children, parents and caregivers?



PRINCIPLE 6: Playgroups are flexible

Playgroup communities change over time as children grow and the needs of the local community shift. Playgroups should be flexible and change to connect with and support shifting family and community needs.



a | Playgroup is flexible and tailors the structure, format and activities to the needs and interests of the children, parents and caregivers and local community

While playgroup routines are important sometimes things happen and a routine or activity may need to be changed. Playgroup needs to be **flexible** every session. For example, a playgroup routine or activity may change to reflect the weather – snack might be enjoyed outside on a sunny day and an obstacle course built indoors on a rainy day. The **format** of group time may change to support children to meet and pat a new pet rabbit brought in by a family. Children and families may be **inspired by local events** such as a sporting game or festival and want to incorporate them into their play. Having open-ended resources like boxes, fabric, blocks, paint and paper allows children to follow their interests by using their imagination, creativity and resourcefulness.

The changing needs of each child will also require flexibility in the playgroup. A child may arrive full of energy and need active experiences or quieter activities to start with and then build up to more active play later in the session.



This might look like

- Having a shorter, more structured routine for a baby playgroup (under 12 months) including more discussion time for parents and caregivers, along with singing and reading.
- Providing flexible options for when and where children might eat their snacks.
- Responding to children's interests by adding or changing planned experiences and activities.



Think about

- How often do I respond to the needs of children, parents and caregivers and adapt the playgroup?
- Do the playgroup resources allow for easy and quick changes?
- Am I attuned to children and families' changing needs?
- How do I facilitate conversations that allow families to tell me their child's current play interests?



While playgroup routines are important sometimes things happen and a routine or activity may need to be changed. For example, a playgroup routine or activity may change to reflect the weather – snack might be enjoyed outside on a sunny day and an obstacle course built indoors on a rainy day.

6

b | Playgroup is adaptable and tailors to the changes and structure of the playgroup location

Playgroups may need to change location for lots of reasons; the bathroom plumbing may be broken or there is a beehive in the garden. It may be necessary to **tailor** the program, for example, to an all indoors or all outdoors experience so children can be supervised effectively. An **adaptable** playgroup can manage such changes through ongoing communication in ways that meet the community's needs. It is important that families understand the reasons for the changes and, whenever possible, are involved in designing them.



This might look like

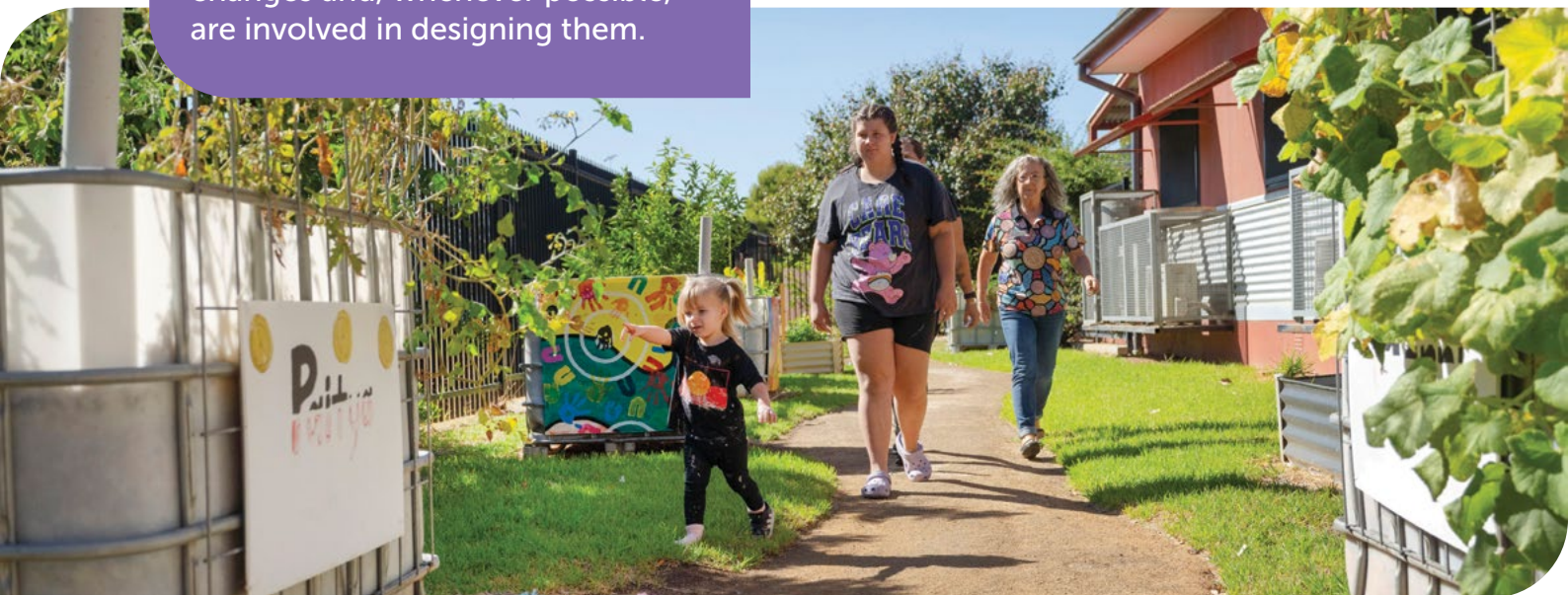
- Running playgroup in an alternate location, such as a park or library, when necessary. For example, some playgroups that run in schools needed to relocate during building works. While this occurred, careful communication meant children, parents and caregivers could keep attending playgroup.
- Weather events, such as persistent rain or extreme heat, can mean that planned playgroup sessions must be inside. For example, one playgroup ensures that all parents and caregivers receive a text informing them when weather will change the playgroup routine.



Think about

- Can I access family contact numbers and details for communication purposes?
- How will I set up a social media page or group text to communicate with families about playgroup changes?
- Who else needs to be informed about changes to playgroup provision, for example, the local council or preschool director at the site?

It is important that families understand the reasons for the changes and, whenever possible, are involved in designing them.



c | Playgroup is dynamic and ready to change as the needs of the children and families change

A dynamic playgroup can change to meet the changing needs of children, families and communities. For example, a playgroup focus might change in response to specific community information about children's development. A playgroup routine may also need to change to adapt for the changing needs of children and families. For example, a playgroup routine for babies may not need a snack time and may be shorter in duration. It may not need to include group story time but would benefit from time with adults reading individually to children. Activities for older children will need to be more challenging than those for younger ones.



This might look like

- Changing the time a playgroup runs in response to the children's ages. For example, a baby playgroup moved from the afternoon to the morning as the children became more mobile and their sleep patterns changed.
- Introducing a new focus for a period of time to support the developmental needs of children in the group.



Think about

- Do I understand the children and community enough to adapt the playgroup when necessary?
- Where can I get information about my community needs to support the decision making around playgroup location and playgroup type? (Local councils can help with community profiles.)



A dynamic playgroup can change to meet the changing needs of children, families and communities.

PRINCIPLE 7: Playgroups are both strengths-based and strengthening

Raising children is complex. All parents and caregivers have both successes and challenges at different times. Playgroups offer an ideal space for families to build on their strengths and create new ones alongside other families and playgroup facilitators. This is what is meant by being both **strengths-based and strengthening**.



Playgroups offer an ideal space for families to build on their strengths and create new ones alongside other families and playgroup facilitators.

a | Playgroup focuses on parent and caregiver capacities and resources, recognising and valuing their strengths, skills and knowledge as children's first and most influential teachers

A key focus of playgroup facilitation means facilitators recognise parent/caregiver **strengths and capacities**. These strengths and capacities include their intellectual, physical and social skills along with their knowledge and interests. Along with **material resources**, parents and caregivers often also draw upon available additional social resources, such as family, friends and their community. As a child's **first and most influential teachers**, parents and caregivers play a crucial role in children's development, learning and wellbeing. Playgroup facilitators can support parents and caregivers in their caring roles by noticing and building on what they do well, such as their patience with children or interest in block building. In this way, facilitators uplift parents' and caregivers' existing strengths and support them in developing new ones.



This might look like

- Noticing and valuing positive moments, for example, commenting on how a child responds when the parent or caregiver connects with them and shows interest in their play.
- Affirming when an adult manages a child's big feelings or intervenes sensitively in a conflict.
- Inviting parents and caregivers to share a skill at playgroup for example, play the violin at group time or share their weaving skills.



Think about

- Do I look for child and family strengths?
- How do I find out from families about their strengths and capacities?
- How can I build on these strengths to support parents and caregivers in their parenting role?



Playgroup facilitators can support parents and caregivers in their caring roles by noticing and building on what they do well...

b | Playgroup facilitators work in partnership with parents and caregivers to contribute to the design and delivery of the playgroup

Families and parents and caregivers know their children best, so drawing on their knowledge to design and deliver the playgroup program is essential. A **partnership** between parents and caregivers and playgroup facilitators can strengthen the knowledge of all. Partnerships are based on developing mutual trust and using different strengths and skills to achieve a common goal. Working in partnership means parents and caregivers are consulted about playgroup decision-making. For example, consulting with them about playgroup start times or how long children need for snack time. This can support a culture of belonging and grow the confidence of parents and caregivers as their children's first teachers.

Playgroup facilitators can share their playgroup program ideas with parents and caregivers. This shows parents and caregivers the thinking behind the program, can grow their understanding of child development and play, and will enable them to contribute their activity ideas too.



This might look like

- Actively asking parents and caregivers to contribute ideas to playgroup programming. Consider creating a 'family ideas' sheet or poster where parents and caregivers can jot down play ideas or ask questions for you to discuss in the group.
- Following through on family ideas in appropriate ways. This may include discussions with families to support understanding about developmentally appropriate play activities and experiences.

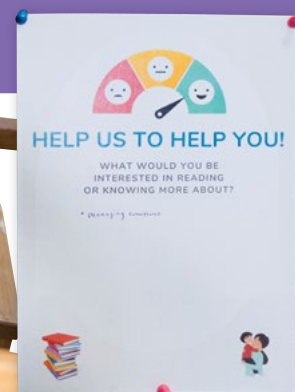


Think about

- How do I draw on parent and caregiver knowledge about their children so that I can design an engaging program for them?
- How do I share designing a program with parents and caregivers?



Families and parents and caregivers know their children best, so drawing on their knowledge to design and deliver the playgroup program is essential.



c | Playgroup offers an environment for parents and caregivers to build on their strengths, capacities and knowledge through peer support and by sharing other relevant information

Children learn most from those they spend the most time with, so building parent and caregiver strengths, capacity and knowledge is a vital part of the playgroup experience. Adults often say that they learn from watching what others do and through sharing advice. Learning from their **peers** is an effective way to develop as a parent. The playgroup facilitator has a particular role to notice and share the **strengths, capacities and knowledge** of parents and caregivers to reinforce and grow positive parenting practices.

A culture of recognising strengths, capacity and knowledge is positive for all involved and can support families when they are struggling or feeling challenged. Playgroup facilitators can acknowledge parent and caregiver strengths to uplift their capability and competence and enhance self-confidence in their parenting role.



This might look like

- Encouraging parents or caregivers with helpful parenting strategies to share these with others.
- Asking parents and caregivers to share how they have managed challenging parenting situations.



Think about

- Do I look for parent strengths, capacities and knowledge at playgroup?
- How do I regularly acknowledge parents' and caregivers' strengths, capacities and knowledge as they engage with their children?



Children learn most from those they spend the most time with, so building parent and caregiver strengths, capacity and knowledge is a vital part of the playgroup experience.

d | Playgroup facilitators model appropriate play experiences and demonstrate positive parenting practices to enhance the confidence and knowledge of parents and caregivers

and are ways that help playgroup facilitators enhance parent and caregiver **knowledge and confidence**. 'In the moment' comments as playgroup facilitators notice and name what children are doing support parents' and caregivers' understanding of how children learn through play and how adults can help them. Playgroup facilitators can model following children's lead in play by providing children with space and time to explore and problem solve before stepping in to lead by teaching a new skill or concept. When facilitators notice and name what parents and caregivers are doing this can help build parent and caregiver confidence and their understanding of how to support their child's play and learning.

Consider providing written information about the value of playgroup experiences and activities and the learning they promote.



This might look like

- Modelling play, especially for new children and their parents or caregivers.
- Explaining why you are doing something in a particular way.
- Using noticing and naming to acknowledge parents' and caregivers' actions and highlight how those actions support their children's learning and development.



Think about

- Does the playgroup program reflect parent and caregiver contribution regarding their children's strengths, interests and areas for growth?
- How does the playgroup program support parents and caregivers to build their knowledge and confidence?
- How do I source current parenting information from trusted sources?



When facilitators notice and name what parents and caregivers are doing this can help build parent and caregiver confidence and their understanding of how to support their child's play and learning.





PRINCIPLES 8 AND 9: For organisations who are establishing and running supported playgroups

Principles 8 and 9 explain the organisational-level support and governance organisations should offer to implement and sustain high quality supported playgroups.

Some supporting information is included for these 2 principles. However, their elements are not broken down individually like the other principles. Organisations should reference the *Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice*¹³ which provides clear and concise information about how organisations can support the provision of high quality playgroups.

Playgroup facilitators might also like to use this section to understand the kinds of supports organisations should offer to support high quality playgroup provision.

As a playgroup facilitator, if you would like to learn more about available support, please seek guidance and information from your local playgroup association (in South Australia this is [Playgroup SA](#)). More information about support available in South Australia is provided in this section.

This information, whilst aimed at supported playgroups and facilitators, can be used by all playgroup facilitators and organisations of all playgroup types to guide quality improvement and professional learning.



¹³ *Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice*, Australian Institute of Family Studies

Support for playgroups in South Australia

In South Australia, there are several avenues of support for playgroup facilitators. Parent-led playgroups are encouraged to join [Playgroup SA](#) (PGSA) for support and inspiration. Playgroups that are associated with specific organisations can expect some support from their affiliated organisation whilst also being able to join PGSA.

Organisations wishing to support an existing supported playgroup, establish a new supported playgroup or improve the quality of volunteer facilitated playgroups can seek further guidance and information from the following organisations who either facilitate and/or support playgroups in South Australia.

- [Playgroup SA](#) is a non-profit, community organisation committed to providing quality services to families and young children. They are a primary source of information and support for organisational and community playgroups. They offer training, and courses to support playgroup facilitators and resources, factsheets and play ideas for facilitators and families. They also facilitate a variety of supported playgroups with specific focuses.
- The [Department for Education](#) facilitates playgroups on department sites and offers a range of information and support related to playgroups. The department's website includes comprehensive information about their [Learning Together Communities](#) playgroup facilitation and playgroup mentoring program. The department's [Playgroups: a facilitator's guide](#), is an online playgroup resource available to all playgroup facilitators.

- The [Department for Human Services](#) (DHS) Safer Family Services offers a range of supports and resources available to playgroup facilitators and families through their Family Support Services programs. [Community Development Coordinators](#) located in communities across the state, [Families Growing Together](#) programs and workshops and [Parenting SA](#) resources are accessible to support children being safe and well at home, connected to family, community and culture. DHS also has the [Adults Support Kids \(ASK\)](#) website that assists families with questions about parenting and services available.
- [Catholic Education South Australia](#) (CESA) offer [Supported Playgroups in Catholic Education \(SPiCE\) playgroups](#) located within South Australian Catholic schools. CESA offers extensive support to their playgroup facilitators and is open to supporting other organisations operating playgroups.
- [Libraries SA](#) are an excellent source of information and support for playgroup facilitators and families who can attend a playgroup at a specific library site or source a range of resources from their [local library](#). Their [Kids catalogue](#) can help locate resources and information on many different topics and their [What's on in our libraries](#) page lists the events planned at different sites.



Playgroup types

The three components of playgroups

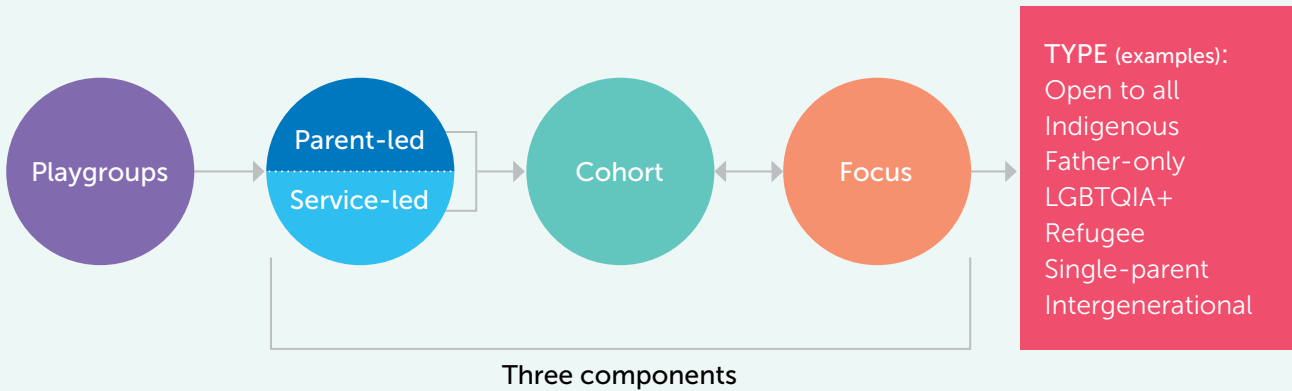
The three components of playgroups operate in various combinations to differentiate playgroups by type for children and families. If you are not sure the type of playgroup you fit into, the diagram and explanation below might help.

Component one denotes playgroups are **parent-led** or **service-led**. Parent-led playgroups are initiated and run by the families that attend. These groups typically access venues in their local communities. Service-led playgroups are offered to children and parents/caregivers by various government, non-profit, school-based and/or religious organisations and often have paid staff to facilitate the playgroup.

Component two denotes the playgroup **cohort**. Cohorts are the groups of people who attend playgroups. Playgroups can be inclusive of all people or specifically defined by the language, disability, capabilities, culture or interests of the participating children and families.

Component three is the **focus** of activity within the playgroup, such as outdoor play, learning another language or enabling caregivers in their parenting. The focus of activity can vary according to the aptitude and interests of the cohort. For example, intergenerational playgroups facilitate children’s and families’ connections with senior Australians through play and Aboriginal playgroups build strong relationships with community.

Parent-led playgroups and **service-led** playgroups both make decisions around **cohort** and **focus**, which then defines the **TYPE** of playgroup.



Information adapted from McLean K, Edwards S, and Tarasuik J (2022) *Playgroup statement*, prepared for Playgroup Australia, Australian Catholic University

PRINCIPLE 8: Playgroups have organisational-level support and governance

This principle refers to a range of organisational-level supports required to operate a high quality supported playgroup and includes the following elements of quality as outlined in the *South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework*.

- a Playgroups are provided with some organisational-level support and governance through their host organisation or their state or territory playgroup association.
- b Playgroups are supported to implement the quality principles and elements of the *South Australian playgroup quality improvement practice framework*.
- c Where possible, playgroups are adequately resourced so that families can access them at low or no cost.
- d Playgroups are provided with:
 - i access to a playgroup manual
 - ii tools (such as forms, signs, policies or reports)
 - iii assistance to find suitable venues and negotiate a lease
 - iv promotional material to attract new members
 - v training and support to playgroup committees
 - vi starter kits, including toys and resources
 - vii ideas for play activities and playgroup structure.
- e Playgroups facilitators are provided with support, access to mentoring, role modelling and professional development opportunities.

These elements are designed to provide a consistent approach to supporting playgroup facilitators in promoting positive outcomes for parents, caregivers and children.

Connecting playgroup facilitators through professional learning and networking opportunities to build knowledge and skills is valuable when possible. This can be in person or online.

Organisations should reference the *Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice*¹³ for clear and concise information about how they can meet principle 8.

Organisations wishing to establish supported playgroups or improve the quality of volunteer facilitated playgroups can seek further guidance from various organisations that support playgroups in South Australia (see [page 61](#)).



This might look like

- Adequate resourcing to support quality playgroup provision.
- Providing opportunities for playgroup representation in governance structures.
- Developing consistent forms, procedures and policies to support facilitators and enable data collection and evaluation.
- Creating consistent branding and signage for playgroups to tailor as needed. This might include information sheets, posters and social media tiles.
- Connecting playgroup facilitators with others doing the same role through formal and informal networks.



Think about

- How can the organisation support playgroup facilitators by providing administrative and professional learning support?
- How can organisations connect playgroup facilitators to existing resources?
- How can population level data inform responsive playgroup provision?
- How can the collection and evaluation of service wide data inform ongoing quality improvement?

¹³ *Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice*, Australian Institute of Family Studies

9

PRINCIPLE 9: Supported playgroups draw on skilled facilitators to engage families and link to local services

Skilled facilitators are the most valuable asset to a supported playgroup. This principle outlines the qualities and skills that organisations can develop in their playgroup facilitators as follows.

Playgroup facilitators:

- are culturally responsive (as defined by the *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*⁴)
- have a high level of interpersonal skills and appropriate expertise to interact well with children, parents and caregivers
- are **skilled** and have a high level of interpersonal skills and appropriate expertise to interact well with children
- develop trust with families by listening to children, parents and caregivers
- provide information to parents and caregivers in a variety of ways
- organise visits from other community organisations as appropriate
- arrange visits from health professionals as appropriate, eg maternal and child health nurses, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, dietitians, financial counsellors, etc.
- collaborate with other services or agencies to bring new participants into the playgroup
- provide 'warm referrals' to other services such as family violence or mental health support services.

Organisations should reference the *Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice*¹³ for clear and concise information about how they can meet principle 9.

Skilled facilitators are the most valuable asset to a supported playgroup.



This might look like

- Developing a job and person specification for the position of playgroup facilitator that includes the attributes listed above.
- Provide a professional learning program for facilitators or connect them to other learning opportunities.



Think about

- How can the organisation recruit high quality candidates?
- How can playgroup facilitators be connected to other parts of your agency or allied agencies to provide wider professional support opportunities?

⁴ *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*, Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council

¹³ *Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice*, Australian Institute of Family Studies

Find out more

PRINCIPLE 1: Playgroups are about play

Children's play

[Early Childhood Australia's statement on play](#), Early Childhood Australia

[Why play is important](#), Raising Children Network

[Activities for learning with your child \(GreatStart\)](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Engaging young children \(0–5 years\) in nature play](#), Australian Institute of Family Studies

[Nature Play SA](#)

Setting up and running your playgroup

[Encouraging a sense of belonging and connectedness in early childhood education and care](#),

Australian Education Research Organisation and Early Childhood Australia

[Playgroups: a facilitator's guide](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Asking questions that spark play and imagination](#), Raising Children Network

Numeracy development

[Early numeracy skills: how to develop them](#), Raising Children Network

Children's literacy development

[Raising Literacy Australia](#)

[Words Grow Minds](#)

[Paint the Town REaD](#)

PRINCIPLE 2: Playgroups are child-focused, child-inclusive and developmentally appropriate

[Early Childhood Australia's Statement on Play](#), Early Childhood Australia

[Early Years SA app](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Words Grow Minds](#)

[Playgroups: a facilitator's guide](#), Department for Education, South Australia

PRINCIPLE 3: Playgroups are about connections

[Supported playgroups: A practice guide for facilitators](#), Department of Education, Queensland

[Helping kids handle conflict](#), Kids Helpline

[Paint the Town REaD](#)

[Time in: guiding children's behaviour – Parent Easy Guide 83](#), Parenting SA

[Circle of Security International](#)

PRINCIPLE 4: Playgroups are safe and welcoming

Multicultural

[Raising Literacy Australia](#)

[Yarn Strong Sista](#)

Inclusion

[Inclusion resources](#), Early Childhood Australia

[Autism SA](#)

LGBTQIA+ families

[The challenges facing LGBTQIA+ families](#), First Five Years, Goodstart Early Learning

[Rainbow Directory SA](#), Catalyst Foundation

Building resilience and a growth mindset

[Why children's mindset matters](#), First Five Years, Goodstart Early Learning

[Emerging minds](#)

Outdoor safety

[Kidsafe SA](#)

[SunSmart](#), Cancer Council Victoria

Trauma informed resources

[Australian Childhood Foundation](#)

Child safety

[Supporting a child safe environment](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Playgroups: a facilitator's guide](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Protective practices guidelines – information for parents and carers](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Child safe environments compliance](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[National principles for child safe organisations](#), Child Safe Organisations, Australian Human Rights Commission

[Child Safe Environments Program](#), Department of Human Services

PRINCIPLE 5: Playgroups are culturally safe

Cultural diversity

[Culturally Responsive Framework 2022](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia](#), Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council

[What is cultural safety?](#) Centre for excellence in therapeutic care, Australian Childhood Foundation

[Welcoming cultural diversity](#), Kids Matter Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative

[Australian Migrant Resource Centre](#)

[Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia](#)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture

[Embedding Indigenous culture in everyday learning and activities](#), Care For Kids Group

[Koori Curriculum](#)

[8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning: Aboriginal Pedagogy, 8 Ways](#)

[Curriculum resources](#), Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Education

[Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country](#), Reconciliation Australia

[Cultural Welcome to Kurna Country](#), Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, University of South Australia

[Kurna language videos](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[NAIDOC](#)

PRINCIPLE 6: Playgroups are flexible

Local council information

[Local Government Association South Australia](#)

PRINCIPLE 7: Playgroups are both strengths-based and strengthening

[Parent Easy Guides](#), Parenting SA, Department of Human Services

[Raising Children Network](#)

[Activities for learning with your child \(GreatStart\)](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Family Support Services](#), Department of Human Services

[Early Childhood Organisation](#)

[Adults Supporting Kids \(ASK\)](#), Department of Human Services

PRINCIPLE 8 AND 9: For organisations who are establishing and running supported playgroups

[Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice](#), Australian Institute of Family Studies

[Australia's Playgroup Statement](#), Playgroup Australia

PRINCIPLE 8: Playgroups have organisational-level support and governance

[Playgroup SA](#)

[Principles for high quality playgroups: Examples from research and practice](#), Australian Institute of Family Studies

[Australia's Playgroup Statement](#), Playgroup Australia

[Playgroups](#), Department for Education, South Australia

PRINCIPLE 9: Supported playgroups draw on skilled facilitators to engage families and link to local services

[Culturally Responsive Framework 2022](#), Department for Education, South Australia

[Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia](#), Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council

Principles in action – case studies

The following case studies capture stories from 3 playgroups to give facilitators examples of how the quality elements relate and connect to playgroup practice and delivery.



Victor Harbor intergenerational playgroup

This playgroup is one of several operated by the Victor Harbor Library as a service to their community. As part of the City of Victor Harbor, the library has a strong commitment to inclusion and connection, including through the Caring Neighbourhood initiative aimed at engaging people aged over 65. The playgroup is run by a library officer with the assistance of a skilled volunteer who is particularly creative.

PRINCIPLE 4, element c: Playgroup is an inclusive environment that is safe and welcoming for all cultures, family types, carer or child gender identity and sexual orientation, and physical and intellectual abilities

The intergenerational playgroup began as a 10 week pilot to test the viability and structure of the program. Participants, including families and older people, were actively engaged in giving feedback after the pilot. It was found that the playgroup enriched the lives of all involved. It enabled children without extended families to engage with older adults and for 3 generations to connect through fun experiences.

PRINCIPLE 3, element f: Playgroups facilitate opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to connect with their local community in social, cultural and physical ways

Some changes were made to the playgroup format as the result of feedback, including moving the group to the children's area in the library. Another change was to remove a screen during song time, so the older participants could enjoy the children's faces as they sang.

PRINCIPLE 6, element a: Playgroup is flexible and tailors the structure, format and activities to the needs and interests of the children, parents and caregivers and local community

The playgroup now runs fortnightly for an hour to meet the community's needs, although everyone is encouraged to stay to read, play and talk. The playgroup incorporates a Ngarrindjeri acknowledgement and language as a recognition of Country. The local child care centre is encouraged to bring their children along to visit the playgroup, adding further connections across the community.

PRINCIPLE 3, element f: Playgroups facilitate opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to connect with their local community in social, cultural and physical ways

PRINCIPLE 5, element c: Playgroups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as part of their practices

Resources and materials have been provided from the libraries' collection and through funding from the Friends of the Library group.

PRINCIPLE 3, element g: Playgroup provides opportunities for connection to local resources and services

A 92-year-old man is a treasured participant who is actively involved in getting out chairs, playing at the playdough table and chatting with children and families.

This is a group where young children, their families and older adults are visible, valued and actively contribute to the wellbeing of their community.

PRINCIPLE 4, element c: Playgroup is an inclusive environment that is safe and welcoming for all cultures, family types, carer or child gender identity and sexual orientation, and physical and intellectual abilities

At the 2023 Regional Showcase awards, the City of Victor Harbor awarded the Victor Harbor Library the Meaningful Connections Award for 'bringing together young and old in your intergenerational playgroup program'.



Bordertown multicultural playgroup

This playgroup is run by the Carol Murray Children's Centre team, a Department for Education rural integrated service.

The Director of the service noted that changing demographics in the town had led to an increase in migrant families who seemed isolated. The director felt this was disadvantaging the children as they started preschool, so, in conjunction with the Migrant Resource Centre, the children's centre began partnership with an invitation only multicultural playgroup.

PRINCIPLE 5, element f: Playgroups can be culturally specific, enabling culturally and linguistically diverse families to connect through play and culturally appropriate learning experiences

This group, while small, is having a powerful effect on both parents and caregivers and children, building a sense of belonging to the playgroup, the children's centre and the community. This connection continues with the Migrant Resource Centre following up with home visits when families miss a few playgroup sessions.

PRINCIPLE 3, element f: Playgroups facilitate opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to connect with their local community in social, cultural and physical ways

One aim of the playgroup was to reduce the real and perceived barriers to families engaging outside their homes. The playgroup is free and families report that the children's centre and especially playgroup is a place where they feel they belong.

PRINCIPLE 7, element a: Playgroup focuses on parent and caregiver capacities and resources, recognising and valuing their strengths, skills and knowledge as children's first and most influential teachers

Incorporating group project such as weaving connects the families to their cultures. Parents and caregivers are able to share their expertise and skills.

PRINCIPLE 2, element c: Playgroup is a collaborative environment that creates opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to share their interests and abilities and tailors activities to meet these

PRINCIPLE 7, element a: Playgroup focuses on parent and caregiver capacities and resources, recognising and valuing their strengths, skills and knowledge as children's first and most influential teachers

The playgroup runs alongside preschool and long day care programs, so children are connecting with their peers as they play, and families are seeing play and learning in action. Parents and caregivers are also introduced to Australian ways of talking, singing, reading and playing with their children.

PRINCIPLE 7, element c: Playgroup offers an environment for parents and caregivers to build on their strengths, capacities and knowledge through peer support and by sharing other relevant information

One aim of the playgroup was to reduce the real and perceived barriers to families engaging outside their homes.



Kirton Point Nunga playgroup

The Nunga Playgroup at the Kirton Point Children's Centre for Early Childhood Development and Parenting in Port Lincoln has been running for 12 years and is one of 9 playgroups at the centre. The playgroup is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

PRINCIPLE 5, element f: Playgroups can be culturally specific, enabling culturally and linguistically diverse families to connect through play and culturally appropriate learning experiences

It has a focus on building confidence for children and families to engage in the education system.

PRINCIPLE 7, element c: Playgroup offers an environment for parents and caregivers to build on their strengths, capacities and knowledge through peer support and by sharing other relevant information

The playgroup, which runs weekly, is for children from birth until they go to preschool along with a wide selection of family members, including aunts, grandparents, parents and more. The group averages 25–30 people a week although some sessions have had up to 95 people attending.

PRINCIPLE 3, element f: Playgroups facilitate opportunities for children and parents and caregivers to connect with their local community in social, cultural and physical ways

There is a strong sense of connection, community and belonging at the playgroup. A non-Aboriginal facilitator runs the playgroups alongside an Aboriginal early childhood worker who was also a parent participant. An Elder also regularly visits the playgroup.

PRINCIPLE 5, element g: For culturally specific playgroups not facilitated by a member of the cultural group: facilitators engage with people from these cultural groups (who can draw on their own cultural insights and experiences to both create a welcoming and inclusive environment and be a trusted source of information for participants and facilitator)

Learning about and sharing culture is an important aspect of the playgroup, as is the support and development of child and adult wellbeing. For example, a recent art exhibition was put on by the participants of the playgroup. Parents and caregivers painted alongside children and each other, sharing stories and language as they learned from each other. One person said that she had found her passion for painting again through the project.

PRINCIPLE 5, element e: Playgroups encourage interaction between diverse cultural groups through the sharing of stories that highlight their experiences in caring for children

The playgroup and the children's centre staff believe that adult wellbeing supports child and family wellbeing.

PRINCIPLE 7, element c: Playgroup offers an environment for parents and caregivers to build on their strengths, capacities and knowledge through peer support and by sharing other relevant information

Learning about and sharing culture is an important aspect of the playgroup, as is the support and development of child and adult wellbeing.



Connections with the community are valued and the Aboriginal Health Service, Child Maternal Health team and midwives are regular visitors, along with other allied health practitioners. A recent session was based around creating fresh pureed food for babies. Baby massage and first aid awareness sessions occur regularly.

PRINCIPLE 3, element g: Playgroup provides opportunities for connection to local resources and services

The atmosphere is deliberately casual and relaxed, so adults can opt in and out of offered sessions and relationships can build over time. Staff will include the benefits of play as they chat with families and link the play to children's learning. There is a strong emphasis on literacy, with songs and stories featuring in each session. There are plenty of book giveaways funded through the Indigenous Literacy Foundation.

PRINCIPLE 1, element d: Playgroup highlights the value and importance of play for children's development and learning

PRINCIPLE 1, element e: Playgroup builds parent and caregiver confidence and capacity to engage in play with their children every day

PRINCIPLE 6, element a: Playgroup is flexible and tailors the structure, format and activities to the needs and interests of the children, parents and caregivers and local community

The program for the playgroup includes fine and gross motor play, music and links to the children's centre goals and priorities. Whenever possible children's play and learning possibilities are spread throughout indoor and outdoor settings so children have a choice of where they are most comfortable.

PRINCIPLE 2, element a: Playgroup provides children with access to developmentally appropriate activities and environments that reflect children's interests, cultural backgrounds, physical and developmental needs

Attendance at the Nunga Playgroup has connected many families to other playgroups and programs offered at the local school and in the children's centre. Sharing information and supporting family connection to other early childhood services is a feature of the program.

PRINCIPLE 3, element g: Playgroup provides opportunities for connection to local resources and services

In 2023, the Nunga Playgroup was awarded the Outstanding Reconciliation Initiative Award in the South Australian Public Education Awards.



Glossary

Definitions of key words and phrases to support your understanding

Terminology

Acknowledgement of Country: a statement of recognition of the traditional owners of the land where the playgroup is being held. An acknowledgment of Country can be given by anyone.

Welcome to Country: a formal process that recognises both Aboriginal people from another country and non-aboriginal people. A Welcome must be undertaken by an Aboriginal Elder, Traditional Owner or custodian of the land.

Definitions relating to playgroups

Intergenerational playgroup: a playgroup that combines several generations, such as children, parents and caregivers and seniors.

Parent-led playgroup: a playgroup that is parent organised and led.

Playgroup: a gathering of children aged birth to school age and their parents or caregivers who meet regularly for play and social interaction.

Playgroup facilitator: a paid or volunteer person who runs the playgroup and is responsible for planning and organisation.

Service-led playgroup: a playgroup that is organised and led by a service or organisation, usually with a paid facilitator and a specific focus.

Supported playgroup: a playgroup that has a paid facilitator or volunteer running the group.

Definitions relating to child development

Agency: the ability for children to make choices and influence what happens around them.

Concepts: are the organising ideas that children develop through play and interactions with those around them. Examples include concepts of size, space, height, weight, number, colour, questioning and turn-taking.

Developmentally appropriate: experiences, activities and expectations appropriate for a child's stage of development and capability.

Fine motor development: building the small muscles, usually in the hands and wrists, so a child can grasp, grab, hold and manipulate objects.

Gross motor development: building the big muscles in the arms, legs and torso so children can balance, walk, climb, run and throw.

Literacy development: children build their literacy from their earliest days as they learn to vocalise, speak, listen, draw, understand and watch.

Numeracy development: children build their numeracy, or the ability to see and use mathematics in everyday life from birth, through play.

Numerical language: words and phrases that describe mathematical concepts and support numeracy development. For example, big, tall, high, small, short, low, empty, full, half full.

Predictability: young children feel more secure if they have a sense of what is likely to happen next. If they know that after they wash their hands they can have snack, or after song time comes story time, they will feel more confident and increasingly be able to prepare themselves.



Definitions relating to playgroup facilitation

Active listening: when a person listens to someone else with attention and empathy to understand and to accurately reflect back what is being said.

Coaching: supporting a parent/caregiver or child to meet a goal by offering suggestions, talking them through situations and encouraging them.

Group norms and expectations: are an agreed set of behaviours a group abides by. For playgroup these may include being responsible for your child at all times, not taking photos of other children without permission, notifying the facilitator if you are leaving the playgroup area and restrictions on hot drinks around children. These are usually developed by or with the parents and caregivers and shared among the group. They can be revised from time to time.

Growth mindset: research indicates that people with a growth mindset recognise that they can learn and achieve by practise, making mistakes and trying again. They tend to be persistent and not give up easily.

Modelling: where an adult or child demonstrates a skill, or way of engaging that others can copy.

Noticing and naming: recognising or noticing something a parent or caregiver is doing well, and commenting on it. 'Look at how Freddie kept trying to finish that puzzle as you encouraged him.' Or 'Celeste is singing all the songs today. You must have been singing together at home. That makes a difference!'

Provocations: using open-ended opportunities and questions to stimulate and provoke children to problem solve and wonder.

Scaffolding: is the support that adults give children as they are learning. This might be by asking questions, prompting, making provocations or modelling a new skill. For example, if a child's block building keeps falling down, an adult might wonder about using bigger blocks at the bottom, or smaller blocks at the top. The child can then decide to explore this or try another idea.

Strengths-based approach: is about recognising and building on a person's strengths, rather than focusing on deficits. This approach recognises that everyone can grow and change with support.

Trauma informed practice: is practice that supports families affected by trauma, including creating trauma-sensitive environments and supporting the emotional regulation of adults and parents affected by trauma.

Definitions relating to playgroup experiences

Discovery bottles: clear plastic bottles or containers with various materials inside and the lid firmly glued on. Fillings can include twigs and rice for rain sound, hair conditioner and small objects for a calming floating experience.

Playgroup routine: a flexible timetable that outlines the order of the session. It usually includes a welcome, free play, a snack, reading and singing time, and a farewell.

Sensory experiences: activities and experiences that allow children to use their senses, eg taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight as they explore their environment.

Small world play: creating scenes using miniature objects such as people, animals, fences, vehicles and so on. Children build their understanding of the world as they play.

Song bag or box: a bag or box of objects representing songs, for example a sheep for Baa Baa Black Sheep, or a star for Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. The names of songs may be written on cards and placed in the bag or box. The facilitator may select an object or card from the box or invite children to do so. The group then sings the selected song.

Story table or mat: a story represented by a collection of objects placed on a table or mat so children can recount and tell the story using the objects.

Treasure basket: a basket with various materials for babies to explore using their senses. These can be themed, for example, all wooden objects or textured materials.

Acronyms

CESA: Catholic Education South Australia

DHS: Department of Human Services

LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and more

PGSA: Playgroup South Australia



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