

# starting a christian playgroup

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## Purpose Of This Resource Kit

The purpose of this resource kit is to provide Christians with clear guidelines of how to set up a Christian playgroup. Although Playgroup Victoria has excellent resources on how to start a new playgroup, there are no Christian guidelines listed in their manuals. The Playgroup Victoria video and booklet "Starting a Playgroup – Let the Fun Begin" is quoted throughout as an example.

The Baptist Early Childhood Team (BECT) in conjunction with the Christian Playgroup Network (CPN) have designed this resource kit to guide you step-by-step through starting a Christian playgroup. It uses the information that can be found in the Playgroup Victoria Membership Information 2005 manual, but adds relevant Christian pointers.

## Christian Playgroups / Church-Based / Community Playgroups

There is a difference between church-based playgroups and Christian playgroups. This resource kit is to help you start a Christian playgroup, not a church-based/ community playgroup. The differences are:

<i>Christian Playgroup</i>	<i>Church-Based / Community Playgroup</i>
Make a donation or may have the church premises for free.	Rent church premises.
Part of the churches' program/ is a recognized ministry of church.	Is a community program.
Are leader led playgroups. The leaders are Christian leaders appointed by the church, or may be from another church.	Are self-help groups managed by the members.
Most Christian playgroups ask little help of the community families in the running of the playgroup. The program is planned and organised by Christians from the church. Community families simply come and enjoy.	Require involvement of all community families.
It may have Christian content in the program e.g. books, songs or craft activities may have a Christian emphasis.	No intentional Christian content in the program.
Specific goal of the playgroup is outreach.	Goal is not Christian outreach.
Is a service to the community with an evangelistic goal.	Is a service to the community.
Finances may go through the church books.	Finances completely separate.
Equipment generally owned by the church and is often shared with other church programs.	Equipment may be owned by the playgroup who are at liberty to take it with them if they decide to use another venue.
Volunteers from the church may help, and the playgroup is often supported by child free adults.	May include church families as participants or volunteers.
Have a God-given purpose and a strong Christian ethos.	Network community families and may cater for different religions.

## Reasons For Starting A New Christian Playgroup

### *Why Offer a Christian Playgroup?*

Playgroup attracts many community families into the church building. It not only meets a need in local communities, but also gives a platform for Christians to share their faith and give support to families with young children as they raise children in today's society.

Many churches recognize playgroups as the church program that brings in the most unchurched people. It has actually been said by some churches that over a week more families come to playgroup than to church.

### *Why Start a Christian playgroup?*

#### Christian Reasons:

- To reach out to the community
- To give parents somewhere to meet
- To provide a caring environment for community families
- To provide a program where community families can simply arrive and enjoy playgroup
- To have a regular safe place for children to play
- To open the church building to the community
- To get community families familiar with church buildings
- To de-mystify the church and church people
- To provide a program for church families
- To cater for families with young children
- To use the church premises during the week
- To reach out to families with the love and life of Jesus
- To build bridges into the community and to make pathways for the community families into the church
- To cater for babies, toddlers, preschool children as a feeder into the children's ministry
- To impact families with the gospel.


#### *Other Reasons – Playgroup Victoria:*

- There may not be a playgroup nearby
- A new parents' group at the maternal and child health centre may want to continue to meet and develop into a playgroup
- Local playgroups are full and have waiting lists
- A neighbourhood house, church or other family service may want to offer play groups as part of their program
- A group of people may have particular interest to start a special playgroup, e.g. fathers, nannies, home educators, Arabic speaking, Saturday, etc.
- Parents may want to start a roster playgroup to have some regular "time-out".

## 10 Steps To Starting A New Christian Playgroup

To start a Christian playgroup, take the following 10 steps.

### Step 1: Finding a Team / Finding Families

Christian Perspective	Playgroup Victoria
<p><b>Find A Leader / Team</b></p> <p>1. Start with a committed Christian leader who has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a vision for evangelism through playgroup,</li> <li>• a passion to care for families with young children,</li> <li>• a willingness to pray and intercede for families,</li> <li>• an openness to bridge building, e.g., movie nights, discussion and dessert nights, etc.,</li> <li>• an innovative approach to celebrating Easter and Christmas, Mother's Day and Father's Day,</li> <li>• an awareness of programs within their church to link families into, e.g., Alpha, Heritage Builders, Homes of Honour, Seekers Programs, etc.</li> </ul> <p>2. Choose a team</p> <p>Before you start, make sure you choose at least 2 Christian assistants, preferably one who is child-free.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk to leadership</li> <li>• Pray for willing Christian assistants.</li> <li>• Ask for Christians to volunteer.</li> <li>• Approach other Christian families in the church to be part of the playgroup.</li> </ul> <p>Meaningful relationships develop when a significant number of Christians including child-free adults are involved in the group.</p> <p>Qualities to look for in an assistant / volunteer</p> <p>It is essential that all volunteer assistants have a vital, alive, real and active Christian faith and a personal relationship with Jesus.</p> <p>There are a range of gifts, skills and abilities that will benefit a Christian playgroup. It is important to note that it is not expected that one person display all of the following qualities, or that all the qualities are listed. It is preferable that a team displays a range of these qualities.</p> <p>Consider including people who:</p> <p>love little children,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are passionate about the value of parenting,</li> <li>• enjoy working with adults and young children,</li> <li>• can assist with the preparation of craft activities,</li> <li>• are able to tell or read a story to young children,</li> </ul>	<p><b>Finding Families</b></p> <p>The first thing you need to start a playgroup is at least four interested families. Talk to everyone you can think of who may be interested in a playgroup. Surveys show that most people join a playgroup because a friend asked them.</p> <p>Once you have found some interested families, arrange a time to sit down and talk. This works best without the children, so consider meeting at night.</p> <div>  </div>

Christian Perspective	Playgroup Victoria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can lead the children in music and singing,</li> <li>• have spiritual gifts of helper, carer, hospitality and / or evangelism,</li> <li>• have time available,</li> <li>• are willing to listen attentively,</li> <li>• are genuinely interested in people,</li> <li>• are good with babies,</li> <li>• are loving,</li> <li>• are willing to help with menial tasks,</li> <li>• have wisdom and are willing to share life experiences,</li> <li>• have training or experience in areas of early childhood, family services, parenting, children's services, community development or first aid,</li> <li>• have an eye for detail to keep attendance, enrolment or financial information.</li> </ul> <p>Note: Don't reject a person outright because their qualities may not be immediately evident.</p>	

## Step 2: Developing Playgroup Vision and Mission/ Purpose

Christian Perspective	Playgroup Victoria
<p>Develop your Playgroup Vision and Mission</p> <p>The two possible scenarios are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Your church has a vision / mission statement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a group comprising playgroup and church leadership people working together to develop a playgroup vision / mission statement that aligns with the church's vision / mission statement.</li> <li>• Having a vision / mission statement gives unity, focus ownership and commitment to leaders.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Your church does not have a vision / mission statement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer to the Developing your Playgroup Vision and Mission Resource Sheet for more information.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>The Playgroup Purpose</p> <p>Start the meeting by asking everyone what they want out of playgroup for themselves and their children. List everyone's reasons and highlight the key words that you all agree are most important. Make a playgroup statement using these key words.</p>



## Step 3: Choosing the Time

<i>Christian Perspective</i>	<i>Playgroup Victoria</i>
<p>Mornings are usually the most popular time for playgroups to meet. Choose the day of the week when the church is available and best suits the Christian leaders.</p> <p>Be aware of other programs running at the church to ensure that there is not a clash or problems with noise, parking or doors left open. Particular care needs to be taken with one-off events, e.g., a funeral.</p> <p>Playgroups should meet weekly for no longer than 2 hours. Babies and small children find it hard to cope with more than 2 hours. You may choose to start off at 1 hours and build up to two hours. It is easier to increase the time at playgroup than to reduce the time.</p> <p>If moving from one to two playgroup sessions, consider running two sessions on the same morning, one after another, e.g., the first one could meet from 9:30am – 11:00am sharing morning tea together. The second group could meet 11:30am – 1:00pm sharing lunch together.</p>	<p>Generally playgroups meet once a week and run for 1 - 2 hours. Some playgroups meet over lunchtime and children and adults enjoy a meal together. Other groups have a longer session with families coming and going to meet their needs.</p> <p>The day of the week you hold your playgroup will be determined by the times most families are available. Playgroups often work in with kindergarten or school times. Choose a few days and times. This gives you more options when looking for a place to hold your playgroup. Decide whether you will meet in the school holidays.</p>

## Step 4: Choosing the Place to Meet

<i>Christian Perspective</i>	<i>Playgroup Victoria</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Points to consider when choosing the place to meet include:</li> <li>• Can you meet at your church premises or do you need to rent a community venue?</li> <li>• Indoors</li> <li>• Is there play space indoors?</li> <li>• Do you need to book a room or area?</li> <li>• Is there storage space for toys and equipment?</li> <li>• Is the venue safe for toddlers?</li> <li>• Is there play equipment?</li> <li>• Is there appropriate furniture?</li> <li>• Does anything need to be moved, or protected, e.g., musical instruments?</li> <li>• Can the doors be closed to prevent children getting out?</li> <li>• What is on the walls of the venue? Consider what may be appropriate and inappropriate for toddlers.</li> <li>• What is on the church notice board?</li> <li>• Are there pins on the notice board that children can get hold of?</li> <li>• Is a kitchen available for preparing morning tea?</li> <li>• Is the kitchen hygienic?</li> </ul>	<p>Playgroups run from all sorts of places. Some work well in homes. Some start in homes and move on as they develop.</p> <p>Existing playgroups could tell you whether or not you could hold your new playgroup at their venue on another day. This way all the equipment can be shared making it much easier for you to get started. Telephone Playgroup Victoria's new playgroup hotline on 9388 1599, country callers 1800 811 156 to find out information on playgroups with session times available and venues willing to hold playgroup sessions or visit <a href="http://www.playgroup.org.au">www.playgroup.org.au</a> for a list of where local playgroups meet and their contact details.</p>

<i>Christian Perspective</i>	<i>Playgroup Victoria</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can the kitchen access be closed off to toddlers?</li> <li>• Is there sufficient heating and cooling?</li> <li>• Is there a nappy changing area?</li> <li>• Are there fire extinguishers? Do you know where they are and how to use them?</li> <li>• How accessible and appropriate are the toilets for little children?</li> <li>• Is there an area that is not carpeted for wet play, e.g., painting?</li> <li>• Outdoors:</li> <li>• Are there poisonous plants?</li> <li>• Are the fences and gates in good order?</li> <li>• Can the children climb, move or crawl under fences or gates?</li> <li>• Is there open water, e.g., a water feature?</li> </ul> <p>Wherever you choose your venue, make sure that you leave the venue as you found it. Establish a cleaning roster and a "before you leave" checklist.</p>	<p>If you can't find a venue this way, the next step is to look at a road map and note all the school halls, churches, neighbourhood houses, community centres, maternal and child health centres, scout or guide galls. Be creative. List any local affordable place that might have space suitable for your children to play.</p> <p>Ask someone to volunteer to follow up the most suitable and convenient venues.</p>





## Step 5: Choosing Activities

<i>Christian Perspective</i>	<i>Playgroup Victoria</i>
<p>When choosing Christian play activities, it is important to note that friendship evangelism is proving to be more effective in outreach than a Christian curriculum model.</p> <p>Relationships are the key, not the program.</p> <p>However, a quality play program is very important. If you choose to include Christian content in your program, remember that concepts must be simple and adaptable to a little child's development. Design a flexible program that allows plenty of time for relationships to form.</p> <p>Place special emphasis on Christian celebrations at Easter and Christmas time.</p>	<p>Discuss together how you will spend your time at playgroup. Each playgroup programs according to what works well for adults as well as the children. A general program involves setting up, time for the children to play and adults to chat, a snack time, more socialisation and play, then time for everything to be packed away and a general clean up.</p> <p>Snack time – Plan for a break some time during the playgroup session. This may be a formal time when everyone gets together or it may be informal, children eating according to their needs. You may ask families to bring a piece of fruit to be cut up and shared or each child may bring their own snack. Consider whether milk or water will be offered as drinks or if each child is to bring their own.</p> <p>Snack time considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer healthy foods</li> <li>• Take precautions to minimise the risk of transferring communicable diseases</li> <li>• Think through safety issues, e.g., danger of children choking if eating while running</li> <li>• Keep hot tea / coffee out of reach of children</li> <li>• Be sensitive to food allergies</li> <li>• Decide whether to have party food to celebrate children's birthdays</li> </ul> <p>When thinking of the play activities for children, offer plenty of free play, because toddlers are not ready for lengthy instructions and rules. Rather they need plenty of uninterrupted time to make choices, to freely explore and experiment.</p> <p>Most popular playgroup activities are painting, sandpit, swings, playdough, cutting and pasting, bikes and home corner.</p>

## Step 6: Equipment

<i>Christian Perspective</i>	<i>Playgroup Victoria</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure all the equipment is safe. If any equipment is broken or damaged, set aside for possible repair. Enquire from the church office if a repairman is available to help. If the equipment is unable to be repaired, dispose of it.</li> <li>• Perform a regular safety check on all equipment.</li> <li>• Provide toddler-size tables and chairs. This is a health and safety issue as toddlers can hurt themselves by falling off adult-size chairs and tables.</li> <li>• If doing a messy craft activity, e.g., painting, water play, make sure smocks are available for the children.</li> <li>• Keep an inventory of all equipment for insurance purposes.</li> <li>• If other ministries in the church share the equipment, make sure everyone knows who owns the equipment and reach an agreement on where and how equipment is stored.</li> </ul>	<p>List the toys and play materials you need. Consider also the crockery and cutlery for both adults and children. Most venues have a kettle, plates, cups and bowls for snack time. If not, you may need to provide your own.</p> <p>Once you have made a list of the equipment, you need to ask a volunteer to be responsible for the list. Can anyone get things donated? If they let the equipment person know, these items can be crossed off the list.</p> <p>You don't have to go out and buy expensive toys and equipment. Search through opportunity shops, fetes or garage sales.</p>



## Step 7: Adult Responsibilities

<i>Christian Perspective</i>	<i>Playgroup Victoria</i>
<p>Christian playgroups are leader led. This means that Christians from the church take on the role of leadership within the playgroup. These leaders make decisions concerning the running of the playgroup and plan the program.</p> <p>Overall responsibility of the playgroup rests with the playgroup leaders and the church, however each family attending playgroup should feel welcome and part of the group. It is important everyone feel a sense of ownership of the playgroup for the success of playgroup.</p> <p>It may be helpful to delegate tasks and draw up a roster. This way people will feel more involved in playgroup. Tasks could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting up equipment</li> <li>• Preparing a craft activity</li> <li>• Preparing snack time, i.e., boil the kettle and set out cups for adults and children. You may roster mums to bring a light snack for the adults for morning tea.</li> <li>• Preparing music (if a music program is run)</li> <li>• Washing dishes</li> <li>• Packing away.</li> </ul> <p>Important Information</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Playgroup is a time for children and parents to bond. Do not let cleaning and packing away interfere with the bonding experience.</li> <li>2. Church leaders are not responsible for the supervision of children at playgroup. It should be made clear that children are the responsibility of the person who brings the child.</li> <li>3. It is the responsibility of parents to administer all first aid and to discipline their own child.</li> <li>4. Parents should supervise their child/ren at all times, including story and singing time.</li> <li>5. If a parent needs to leave their child for any reason, it is their responsibility to ensure someone is responsible for their child/ren.</li> </ol>	<p>Decision Making – our experience has shown that a playgroup succeeds if it belongs to everyone. Everyone shares in the decision-making and everyone helps with the workload. If one person makes all the decisions, they are often left with all the work. Before long they burn out and people leave because their opinions are not being heard.</p> <p>Supervision – Be sure that adults bringing a child to playgroup know that they are responsible for their child’s behaviour and safety and that it is every child’s right to be supervised for safe and fair play. Many playgroups find that it’s best to write down simple guidelines that outline the expected behaviour of both children and adults at their playgroup. You may wish to do this now but it may be more appropriate to discuss after the playgroup has been running for a few weeks. Simple guidelines let everyone know what is expected. This helps to maintain a relaxed group that is fun for everyone.</p>

## Step 8: Insurance

<i>Christian Perspective</i>	<i>Playgroup Victoria</i>
<p>If your church has insurance through the Baptist Union of Victoria (BUV), you will have adequate insurance for playgroup. If you are insured through the BUV, you do not need to be insured through Playgroup Victoria. However, we do recommend that playgroups join Playgroup Victoria as non-insured members benefit from Playgroup Victoria resources.</p> <p>If your church is not insured by BUV, you will need to find out if the church's insurance covers your playgroup, particularly if you meet offsite.</p> <p>Remember, for insurance purposes, it is important to keep an inventory of all equipment such as tables, chairs and play equipment. It is also important to keep a record of accidents and incidents.</p>	<p>It is essential that your playgroup be covered by a comprehensive insurance policy. Playgroup Victoria offers a membership package that includes an insurance cover that has been especially designed to meet all playgroup needs. Ask for a volunteer to contact the association to make arrangements for insurance to cover your playgroup right from the start.</p>



## Step 9: What Will it Cost?

<i>Christian Perspective</i>	<i>Playgroup Victoria</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some churches allocate a budget to their playgroup. This is determined during the initial set-up period.</li> <li>Playgroup leaders need to determine the fees for families attending playgroup.</li> <li>Some Christian playgroups charge an additional annual registration fee.</li> <li>A budget needs to be put into place to regulate how the playgroup money is spent.</li> <li>Some of the payment options currently being used by playgroups are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- families pay a set amount weekly</li> <li>- families pay a set amount each term</li> <li>- families pay a yearly fee.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Fundraising – Have a particular reason for fundraising. A fundraising event can sometimes detract from the purpose of the Christian playgroup. Only organise fundraising events if this is in line with your church's philosophy and constitution.</p> <p>Playgroup and Taxation Most church playgroups operate as a church ministry and will fall under the church's ABN (Australian Business Number) and taxation obligations. You should discuss with your church treasurer any taxation implications for the playgroup.</p> <p>If the playgroup is not a ministry of the church seek taxation advice for your group's situation.</p> <p>Goods and Services Tax (GST) Most churches are registered for GST. GST is applicable on the fees charged by playgroups and 1/11 of fees collected should be remitted to the ATO. The playgroup can claim back any GST paid on expenses they incur.</p> <p>A church can choose to treat the playgroup ministry as a non-profit sub-entity of the church for GST purposes. If the turnover of the non-profit sub-entity is less than \$100,000, it need not register for GST. As a non-profit sub-entity, the playgroup cannot claim back any GST input credits.</p>	<p>Draw up an annual budget, then calculate your fees per family to meet your budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine the recurring costs – rent, administration</li> <li>Set an amount to spend on play equipment</li> <li>Include membership to Playgroup Victoria</li> <li>Estimate cost of perishable materials, e.g., glue, paint, textas.</li> </ul>



Christian Perspective	Playgroup Victoria
<p><b>Employees</b> If you employ staff, the church will be responsible to withhold PAYG tax under its registration. You should contact your Treasurer to ensure that all responsibilities regarding your staff are met.</p> <p>Tax deductibility on donations. Gifts to playgroups are not tax deductible.</p>	

## Step 10: Ready to Startt

Set a playgroup starting date for about 2–6 weeks ahead. If all the planning is not done by then, meet instead at someone's home or at a local park. Before leaving the meeting, swap names and telephone numbers so families can keep in touch. Encourage everyone to get their allocated tasks done quickly while enthusiasm is high.



## Playgroups Can Be Missional

### ***Principles of a Missional Playgroup***

Listed below are some principles of where a playgroup can be missional. This list is not exhaustive and it includes principles that are currently being successfully used in many church playgroups to bring people into a relationship with Jesus. As a Christian playgroup, you may choose to prayerfully implement them.

1. Faithful prayer is a vital and integral part of the playgroup ministry and out reach.
2. The playgroup is seen by the church as part of its total ministry and is supported by leadership. Ongoing encouragement is given to everyone involved.
3. The leader is a committed Christian who is passionate about playgroup as a ministry and can build a likeminded team around him/ her.
4. The differences between a Christian playgroup and a community playgroup is discussed and clearly understood.
5. A mission statement has been developed in conjunction with church leadership in line with the vision of the church.
6. Relationships develop when the size of the playgroup allows meaningful interactions (BECT recommends 8-12 adults including leaders).
7. Meaningful relationships develop when a significant number of Christians, including childfree adults are involved in the playgroup.
8. Playgroup leaders and helpers include a variety of ages, with or without children, men or women.
9. The focus of the playgroup is friendship evangelism, not the Christian curriculum. Relationships are the key, not the program.
10. Someone on the church leadership team, e.g., the pastor, regularly visits the playgroup.
11. All written and verbal information about the playgroup clearly states the Christian nature of the playgroup.
12. Regular bridge-building activities link playgroup and church families together at organised functions.
13. Willing church members are available to help playgroup families in need.
14. The playgroup's profile in the church is raised when the playgroup's leadership team involves a leader (or their spouse) who is on the church's leadership team.
15. Caring and sharing is the heart of playgroup ministry, e.g., celebrating children's and adult's birthdays, a meal provided, flowers and gifts, intentionally connecting people with similar interests (taking advantage of natural friendships).
16. Church people are being appointed to the playgroup leadership team whose specific responsibilities are pastoral care, evangelism, communication and special events.
17. Where the church community is continually updated about playgroup information, there is increased interest, involvement and prayer.