



What is a playgroup and what does it mean to me and my family?

"Playgroup is a place of firsts. First learning, listening, following directions and most of all first friends. Not just for the children, but for the adults as well. I was looking for a place to take my grandson on the days I "babysat" him. Something to enrich his little world (he was 6 months old when we first attended playgroup) and just basically get out of the house. What we both got was so much more than that!

We got a welcoming, non-judgemental place to meet others, share experiences as well as parenting tips (some of us share grandparent tips), all while the littles played, explored, and learned. We all saw these tiny tots grow together, squeal with delight when they see their friends and enjoy spending the time together, all while learning routines and preparing for preschool etc.

For the parents/grandparents and caregivers this gives a place for questions: Does your child do this or that? How do you handle this? etc. It's a wonderful place for "child wrangling networking" so to speak. Playgroup has formed bonds beyond the four walls of the room it's held in, a place that you didn't know you needed until you are there. ***Sandy, Lakes Region Community Service Playgroup Member***

Through countless conversations about our work and thoughtful reflection, we realized that playgroups are one of the most valuable ways to build community and provide resources to local families. Whether it's meeting at a local park or gathering at a library for storytime and activities, playgroups offer families opportunities to introduce their children to early literacy, social and emotional learning, and community connections.

We've created this document based on our shared knowledge and experience, outlining key points for starting a playgroup. Our hope is that this resource can be helpful to everyone—from early childhood professionals to local parents—seeking to create a successful playgroup in their community.

We understand that every community is unique, with different needs and priorities. This document is not meant to be a one-size-fits-all guide but rather a flexible starting point. Feel free to adapt or modify it to suit your community's specific needs.

Ultimately, our goal is for this to serve as a roadmap, helping you take the first steps toward creating a thriving playgroup that fosters connection, learning, and support for families in your community.

The Alliance's Community of Practice created this document with a special recognition to guidance of the following members:

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- Erin Cayer - Early Childhood Coordinator at Concord School District, Concord, NH
- Carol Stone - Newborn Navigator at the Family Resource Center of Central NH at Lakes Region Community Services, Laconia, NH
- Cathy Livingston - Director of the Family Connections Resource Center at Children Unlimited in Conway, NH
- Stevie Klein, Family Engagement Coordinator for Smart Start Greater Nashua, Nashua NH
- Courtney McKaig -Family Wellness Coach at Mt. Ascutney Prevention Partnership in Windsor, Vt
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PLAYGROUPS



HOW TO MAKE YOURS A SUCCESS!

1

SET EXPECTATIONS

Create a reliable schedule. Setting an expectation for the flow of the group is helpful for everyone.

Try making a visual schedule like this one!



2

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Be sure your content is for a specific age range, and solicit your playgroup setting that expectation.



"This playgroup is for toddlers ages 2-4"

3

ONGOING SUPPORT

Each family is unique and the support they need will vary. Embedded support for your facilitator ensures families receive the support they need.



4

SET THE TONE

Organize your space to include things like diaper changing stations, designated areas for snack, restrooms, and free play.

Offer diapers and wipes to better serve families in need.



5

SPREAD THE WORD

Create communications and share on Instagram, Facebook, and Email. Share flyers with local libraries.

Use a sign-in sheet instead of a registration. This is less formal and still captures demographic data.

So you want to start a playgroup...

<p>Structure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a reliable schedule and create a routine each time you meet. This helps with participation from children, and provides dependability for parents/caregivers. You can adjust this schedule as needed, but for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Start with welcome song ○ 10 minute puppet show ○ 10 minute storytime ○ 5 minute dance break ○ 2 minute clean up (play clean up song) ○ 10 minutes of bubbles ○ End with goodbye song ○ Free play for 30 minutes ● Use a visual schedule to support children with transitions between activities ● To promote participation from all families (avoid families leaving without helping clean up) schedule clean up time prior to end of class activity (before bubble time or goodbye song for example)
<p>Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Offering one-pagers on family resources is helpful ● “Jbrary” on youtube is an library of kid songs you can learn and teach at your playgroup https://jbrary.com/ ● Offering a rolling kiosk for resources ● Pyramid Model resources https://challengingbehavior.org/resources/ ● Resource for collaborating Pyramid Model with local libraries https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1l-ZIXSFIHEeg871H-o2sYwsZs-Ep7Wd_gmK_LskJsHq4/edit#slide=id.p
<p>Expectations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set expectations for parents to ensure parents are aware of their responsibility during the playgroup. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Disclose the target age group for the playgroup. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This storytime is recommended for ages birth - 18 months. Join us for stories, songs, and a puppet show! ○ Parent/caregiver required to accompany child using bathroom

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parent required to accompany child for duration of playgroup ○ Facility is not responsible for child during playgroup ○ Share awareness of facility rules if applicable (Nut free facility, no photos allowed, weight limit for play equipment, etc.)
<p>Facilitation/ Staffing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having someone who is familiar with playgroups to facilitate the playgroup is helpful to know how to appropriately engage families. This ensures the playgroup runs smoothly and can model what that looks like for parents so eventually the parents can be the ones facilitating the playgroup. ● If a parent is to facilitate a playgroup, offer them training from an early childhood education professional. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Embed ongoing support for that parent facilitator.
<p>Inclusivity/ Environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In case families have additional children outside of the recommended age range for the playgroup, offer self-guided play options (if space is available and if permissible by your funding and/or grantor) so the other children are occupied during the playgroup. Examples of this can include having the following items readily available in a separate but visible area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Various books spanning a wide range of readers ○ Coloring pages and crayons ○ Various toys spanning a wide age range (doll house, kitchen set, blocks, leggos, train set, puzzles, etc.) ● Do your research to ensure your playgroup time is not competing with another local agency's programming for families of the same demographic. You want to ensure parents are having the best opportunities to meet each other. ● Collaborate with your local partners to incorporate relevant information or even additional programming to your playgroup. Examples of this could include:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Incorporating a breastfeeding support session, a nutrition info class, pyramid model, vaccinations, welcome baby info, community baby shower, etc.) ● Collaborate with existing events to ease parents having to travel to multiple locations to make it to multiple events. Ex: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If a pre-existing family event is at the library at 10 AM, start your event at 11 AM, so you're already where the parents are. ● Ensure diaper changing areas are available.
<p>Communication/ Recruiting/ Attendance tracking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prepare a communication regarding the playgroup so parents can anticipate what is coming up or be made aware of any cancellations. Ex: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Instagram post ○ Flyer ○ Email ● Share that communication with all partners (library, FRCs, in welcome baby bags, etc to reach more parents) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Libraries work with public schools to promote events, so they can get your information to schools as well! ● Requiring a signing keeps the playgroup informal, headlining the need for signing can look like, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “we ask for you to sign in to ensure everyone is out of the building in case of a fire or emergency” ○ “in case we need to cancel or change the location of this event we would like to contact you in the future” ○ “in case any belongings are left behind we would like to be able to contact you to return your belongings to you” ○ Create a column on the sign on sheet for parents to indicate resources they need or are interested in ● Included in the sign-in can be an option for email to add them to your newsletters or mailing list for upcoming events. ● Spotlight one community partner each playgroup session

<p>Funding</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reach out to Town Rotary clubs for grants. ● Banks often have funding for community led initiatives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensuring you have a document outlining what your goals are for your group is important ● Find a community partner to be your fiscal sponsor to receive the funds on your behalf, if you have trouble securing funds due to not being a non profit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public libraries are a great community partner (typically) who could host your playgroup at no cost for using the space. Some libraries have materials/resources for families too! ○ Libraries do a great job promoting playgroups too!
<p>Navigating pitfalls/ challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents bringing children outside of the intended age group for the playgroup can cause issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Having a parent's contact information to address this privately is helpful to address this challenge. Funding can limit playgroup resources, and parents can become frustrated when their children who don't fit the age group requirement aren't receiving the same resources as their child who meets that age group requirement. Address this one on one with the parent and remind them of limitations due to funding and grant requirements. Encourage them by saying you're happy that they are there and they are still more than welcome to join, however, there's only so much they can offer to a child that the playgroup is not intended for. A reminder that tax dollars do not pay for the playgroup, rather grants do, and grants have very specific requirements for how funding is spent. ● Some parents purposely leave right before clean up time, leaving the other families to clean up after them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Including a schedule that weaves clean up time to happen before the ending of the playgroup can help with this. Offer the end activity after clean up time (goodbye song, bubble time, etc.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tammy Vittum shared resources for creating a visual schedule to aid with this. https://youtu.be/UndsRsrpHbo?si=dutfjtsGO9eHPVmE ● Some families change their child's diaper in public settings. This can be problematic for many reasons. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure you have a designated diaper changing area with a changing table. ● Crumbs from snacktime can end up all over the room. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have a designated snack area to ensure food related messes keep to one designated area. ● Sometimes parents can be the behavioral issue within the group. Direct follow up with that parent has better outcomes than addressing the group corporately or headlining too many expectations of the families.
<p>Evidence-based Framework supporting Playgroups as a positive learning experience</p>	<p>The HOPE Framework consists of 4 evidence-based building blocks, which describe the types of key positive childhood experiences that are critical for healthy development. This framework was developed and described by Dr. Charlyn Harper Browne and Dr. Robert Sege, in a paper published in Academic Pediatrics in 2017.</p> <p>The HOPE Framework is grounded on the Core assumption of the Science of the Positive from Jeff Linkenbach at the Montana Institute, which states that the positive exists, it is real and worth growing.</p> <p>We know that <i>Positive Experiences</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote children's health and well-being, ● Allow children to form strong relationships and connections, ● Cultivate positive self-image and self-worth, ● Provide a sense of belonging, ● Build skills that promote resilience <p>Playgroups are a powerful example of how community and science connect to provide meaningful support in the lives of our youngest children. Below are ways that playgroups support each of the building blocks of HOPE.</p>

<p>RELATIONSHIPS</p>	<p>Stable nurturing relationships with other children and adults through interpersonal activities.</p>	<p>Playgroups provide a natural setting for children to interact with caring adults and other children in a fun, accessible way.</p>
<p>ENVIRONMENT</p>	<p>Safe, equitable, stable environments for living, playing, learning at home and in school.</p>	<p>The location and settings of the playgroups are thoughtfully determined to provide a warm, welcome environment that can be easily accessed by families.</p>
<p>ENGAGEMENT</p>	<p>Social and civic engagement to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness.</p>	<p>Playgroups, by design, are meant to develop a child's sense of community and connectedness, showing the child that they are valued and welcomed in the playgroup space.</p>
<p>EMOTIONAL GROWTH</p>	<p>Emotional growth through playing and interacting with peers for self-awareness and self regulation.</p>	<p>When children have unstructured time to play with their peers in a playgroup, they build up their ability to navigate peer-to-peer relationships and develop stronger awareness of themselves and others.</p>