



# Intergenerational Playgroup

Bring the generations together through play



## **Intergenerational Playgroup Guide**

This is a guide for establishing and managing intergenerational playgroups. It outlines the benefits and steps to get started, and includes information and ideas about maintaining a successful intergenerational playgroup. This guide also includes some ideas for play activities and ways of promoting the playgroup.

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## What is a playgroup?

A playgroup is a group of parents or other caregivers with young children (0-5 years) who come together on a regular basis to learn and have fun together through play. Playgroups meet in a range of diverse community settings including community centres, schools and church halls. They usually run on a weekly basis for approximately 2 hours per session. There are lots of different types of playgroups including some with special interests such as language or cultural groups. There are community playgroups, which are playgroups that are organised and run by the families who attend. There are also supported playgroups, which have facilitators who run the groups and who organise what happens in the playgroup sessions. Often supported playgroups have been funded to achieve a specific outcome or have higher fees which are paid by the families.



## Intergenerational playgroups

Intergenerational playgroups are playgroups that add a third generation to the mix by including seniors. Like all playgroups, intergenerational playgroups provide opportunities for all participants to interact together through play. Aged care facilities and services may already have connections with children including visits from local schools or early learning centres. Intergenerational playgroups offer a different opportunity in that they bring together babies, toddlers, their parents or other caregivers and older people to build an ongoing relationship in a playful environment. The parents or adult caregivers are always present with their young children, participating as a family unit.

Intergenerational playgroups are usually run as a partnership with a senior service provider or any community group or organisation with an involvement with seniors, and local families. The sessions may be jointly facilitated by staff or volunteers from aged care services or other organisations, and attending parents. Depending on the needs of the families and the seniors, if the playgroup is run in a residential aged care setting, there is often one or more members of staff from the facility (e.g. Occupational Therapist or Leisure/Lifestyle Coordinator) who help to provide leadership and who co-facilitate playgroup sessions.

Playgroup sessions usually include all the normal fun of play, craft and other experiences, stories, songs, morning tea or other shared snack time as well as time for chatting and catching up. Participating families do not need to be related to the seniors; they just need to be open to making new friendships and having fun together.

### Intergenerational playgroups can happen in different locations including:

- Retirement Village based playgroups – these playgroups meet at over 55s retirement villages.
- Day Centre based playgroups – these groups are for seniors living within the community who spend time at a day centre on a regular basis. Day Centre staff are usually involved to support the specific needs of the seniors.
- Aged care facility playgroups – these groups meet in aged care residential settings and include facility staff involvement to support the residents who attend. These groups may include seniors living with dementia or those with additional needs who could benefit from the experience of interacting with families with young children.
- Community playgroup – playgroups in the local community that include seniors in an intergenerational playgroup session.
- Community venues including Local Government facilities, schools, church halls and other suitable community facilities.

## Why start an intergenerational playgroup

There are lots of great reasons for starting an intergenerational playgroup and there are benefits for everyone involved. Increasingly, families often live a long way from their extended families. Intergenerational playgroups are a great vehicle for creating connections for families who may not have grandparents close by and for seniors who have little or no contact with young children and babies. They help to foster understanding and respect between generations, to break down stereotypes and myths that seniors and children may hold about each other, and they encourage active participation by everyone involved. Most importantly, it is a wonderful opportunity to have fun and to create connections.

### Benefits for seniors

Participating in an intergenerational playgroup can provide an opportunity for senior members of the community to:

- Feel a sense of being valued as a 'resource' to young families
- Connect with and spend time with their own extended families or other families within the local community
- Feel more involved and included in the community and with other people
- Experience a stronger sense of self-esteem through having a meaningful, valued role within the community
- Experience enhanced wellbeing through fun and friendships

### Some feedback from seniors:

*"I feel welcome and part of a intergenerational playgroup family whenever I attend. I look forward to the activity every fortnight."*

*"I enjoy seeing the children and watching them play, singing with the children and doing the actions with them. It is good for the children to feel comfortable around the elderly."*





*“I love the children, they have so much energy. I love to watch them play.”*

*“I think it’s gorgeous and it’s lovely for the children, mums and us. It’s a great idea, especially when you have the little ones for a long time and they play with you.”*



*“It is very important for children to mix with us oldies. I love it!”*



*"It's so rewarding to be involved and watch the joy our kids bring to their faces. It benefits all of us."*

*"I really enjoy all the interactions, not only for the seniors and the children but for myself. It is always nice to get out and about with lovely people."*



*"It certainly is a powerful experience to see a quite frail 92-year-old woman confidently and skilfully leading a group and warmly inviting you to sing with her."*



## Benefits for families

- Intergenerational playgroups provide an opportunity for families to add a new dimension to life experiences
- Introduce older people into the lives of families with young children who may otherwise have little experience with seniors and older family members
- Facilitate friendships and relationships across generations
- Build connection to their community and an increased sense of responsibility for others in their community
- Offer opportunities to broaden life experiences, understanding and acceptance of others
- Learn from seniors attending the playgroup
- Discover new ideas for activities to do at home

## Some feedback from families:

*“My best memory of attending this playgroup is being warmly welcomed by everyone. The happy smiles on the seniors faces as the children interact with them. It gives my children confidence to interact with people outside of playgroup especially with other adults.”*

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## Benefits for service providers and organisations

Including an intergenerational playgroup as part of the service can assist organisations to:

- Connect its services with the local community
- Experience enriched opportunities for learning more about participants in their service
- Implement a wellbeing and person-centred approach with older persons in their care
- Expand the skills and experience of staff through working with families and young children as well as with seniors.

### Some feedback from staff at aged care centres:

*“Residents with dementia are the ones that benefit the most with playgroup. They really light up. We have ladies that usually don’t talk much, or when talking don’t accurately communicate. When the playgroup session is going they smile and say things that make sense. It’s amazing to see the changes in this hour. All the residents enjoy having children around or talking to the mums. It makes them feel part of something big. I can see children enjoy being in the group as well... playgroup makes residents have less behaviour issues later that day. They may not remember the session but have a good feeling about it.”*

*“I enjoy seeing the residents faces light up when the children approach and interact with the residents. They love singing songs with the children especially the songs they remember when they were young. They also enjoy throwing the ball to the children which helps with their coordination and gives them pleasurable exercise.”*





*“Our club members really look forward to the Thursday playgroup. It has been a great learning, bonding experience for everyone.”*

*“It benefits all of our elders to have opportunity to be close and communicating with the playgroup children and their baby brothers and sisters. It reignites memories of family life and conversation of family life and creative activities.”*



*“Residents with dementia are the ones that benefit the most with playgroup. They really light up.”*







## Getting started



## Getting started

Once you have decided you would like to be involved there are a few things to consider before getting started.

## Issues to consider

Deciding how the playgroup will be run and who will be involved in running the playgroup sessions are key considerations. Aged care services will need to consider the needs of the seniors who will be attending and to determine what support and assistance they will need to participate in the playgroup.

## Choosing a playgroup space

Creating a welcoming playgroup environment for all generations to enjoy at playgroup involves attending to the physical and social space. Playgroups meet in all kinds of venues and there are no legislated standards that must be met. There is no perfect space, and many areas can be adapted to meet the needs of children and seniors alike. In our experience, the best spaces for intergenerational playgroups have:

- A safe, light, and airy indoor space with enough space for everyone to move around freely. Ideally, the venue will need to be available for 2-3 hours on the day the playgroup runs
- Access to a secure, shaded outdoor area
- Toilets and a change area for babies nearby
- Access to kitchen facilities that can be closed off from the play area
- Secure space for toys and equipment to be stored
- Parking with pedestrian access for families with young children and prams/strollers
- Space for prams/strollers and mobility aids

Having found a suitable space to run your intergenerational playgroup, you will now need to think about other things such as:

- Finding participants
- How often will you run the playgroup?
- Sourcing toys and play equipment
- Gathering activity ideas
- Exploring the differing needs and expectations of the seniors and families.

## Playgroup participants

There is no one size fits all when it comes to working out how many participants your playgroup should have. Each group will need to work out the ideal number of participants for their playgroup and this will vary depending on a range of factors including the space available, the age of the children and the needs of the seniors attending.

We recommend that you keep participant numbers manageable, so the group size does not become overwhelming. A group size of 5-6 families with a similar number of seniors is an ideal size as it allows everyone to get to know each other and to build relationships while still being large enough to cope with occasional and inevitable absences.

Intergenerational playgroups may not suit everyone. Playgroup WA recommends that staff working in a service provider setting or organisation should carefully consider the people who will gain the most benefit from participating in an intergenerational playgroup and those that will be able to contribute to the playgroup experience. Some participants may already have skills or talents useful at playgroup, such as being former teachers or they can play the piano, or people who enjoy reading stories to children.

## Finding families

If you are a service that is working with seniors, you may already have seniors wanting to join the playgroup. Your job will be to find families who would like to join an intergenerational playgroup. Some suggestions for connecting with families are:

- Talk to your local Child Health Nurse
- Invite a local playgroup to attend as a playgroup outing or take the seniors to visit the playgroup
- Find playgroups in your local area and contact them to see if there are any families interested in joining as an additional playgroup opportunity
- Advertise the playgroup within the service or aged care setting. There may be families already connected with your service that would love to come along
- Run an article in your service newsletter
- Ask Playgroup WA to advertise your playgroup in Playgroup WA's regular newsletters, social media and website
- Contact your local community newspaper
- Put up posters at your local primary school, library, early learning centre, community centre or shopping centre
- Hold an open day and invite families to "come and try"



## Finding seniors

If you are a service working with young children or are a group of families with young children and want to create an intergenerational experience or playgroup, then you will need to consider ways of connecting with senior members of the community. You can consider:

- Asking families to invite grandparents and older relatives, friends, or neighbours
- Advertise in seniors' newsletters and newspapers such as 'Have a Go News'
- Promote your playgroup at a local seniors' expo
- Advertise in the Volunteering WA newsletter
- Contact your local Council to source a list of local services for seniors
- Approach a local service provider working with seniors

## When and how often will the playgroup run?

You will need to choose a day and time to run the playgroup, and this may depend on a range of factors including the availability of the venue, staff and families. You might decide to offer sessions on a weekly, fortnightly, or monthly basis. Alternatively, you might run it just once in a while depending on when it suits the members e.g. once every 3 months or on special occasions.

## Toys and equipment

Playgroup toys are handled by a lot of children and adults and need to be well constructed and durable. It is also important that the toys can be easily and regularly cleaned or sanitised. The type of toys and equipment will depend on the ages of the children, and the amount of space and storage available. Rest assured, playgroups do not need a lot of equipment to get started and items can often be found second-hand. People may even be willing to donate them to the playgroup. If the playgroup is held in a community centre, school or existing playgroup setting there may already be toys and equipment available at the venue. Sites that have an Occupational Therapy Department also often have equipment that can be used in playgroups.

When choosing toys, consider ones that promote social interaction between children as well as between adults and children. The following list gives some simple ideas to help get you started:

- A play parachute or large piece of fabric
- Large soft ball/s or balloons
- Children's books. Stories in larger sized books are great to read at playgroup
- Bubble blowers or wands
- Tea sets, pretend food, and dolls
- Sets of animals, cars, and trains
- Small bean bags and a basket or container for bean bag tossing
- CDs and a CD player or an iPad with a Bluetooth speaker
- Musical instruments
- Building blocks or Duplo
- Baby/toddler toys such as pop-up toys, cars and stacking toys
- A cushioned mat or thick rug for the little ones to play on. Make sure it is non-slip and not placed in a high traffic area, so it is not a trip hazard.

Durable storage boxes and containers for storing items makes it easier to pack away and store between sessions.



## Fees and charges

You will need to think about the overall costs of running the intergenerational playgroup and if you need to charge participants a fee to attend. If the playgroup operates under the umbrella of a larger service such as a school, day centre or aged care facility, the venue may be provided free of charge. In other cases, the playgroup may have to hire the venue. Other costs could include items such as craft materials, purchasing toys and equipment and morning tea. Intergenerational playgroups tend to have small consumable and equipment needs so there may not be many costs but the playgroup will need to decide how those costs will be covered and how much participants will need to contribute to cover those amounts. Families could be asked to pay a small term fee or gold coin donation each session to go towards expenses.

You may need to appoint someone to be responsible for collecting money as well as maintaining simple financial records to show income and expenditure. The playgroup might also consider opening a bank account. This can be useful if the playgroup is applying for grants. Playgroups that decide to become members of Playgroup WA will also need to collect the annual membership fee from each family, unless they have already paid at another playgroup, and forward it to Playgroup WA.

## Playgroup WA membership and support

Playgroup WA can provide support and information to guide you through the process of getting started. In addition to the support we provide around intergenerational playgroups and activities we also offer benefits, events and support for community playgroups. Playgroup WA members pay a small annual fee per family and have access to a range of information and support. A key component of membership for community playgroups is insurance for the playgroup as well as for the participants. It is not compulsory for intergenerational playgroups to be members of Playgroup WA but we do encourage groups to register your group for membership.

You can contact Playgroup WA for a membership pack and more information about membership benefits on 1800 171 882 or by email to [hotline@playgroupwa.com.au](mailto:hotline@playgroupwa.com.au).



## Running the playgroup

## Running the playgroup

Who is responsible for running the playgroup and playgroup sessions?

Intergenerational playgroups usually run as a partnership between the senior service provider and the families attending. Playgroup activities and the operation of the playgroup is shared between families, seniors and staff. It is important to explain that the playgroup is a joint responsibility and can only work if everyone contributes. Sessions can be jointly led and managed by the service and families attending, depending on needs, and can involve staff from the service as co-facilitators.

## Communicate the session schedule with families

From Playgroup WA's experience, it is best if the playgroup can meet weekly to help build relationships. However, it may be that some seniors and families cannot make a weekly commitment but are able to meet fortnightly or monthly. That is ok too! Just make sure everyone understands and are given the schedule to avoid disappointments if people forget when playgroup is on. Another strategy is to send a reminder to the participants by text message or email. Some playgroups form a closed Facebook group or group chat to assist with communication.

## Creating a welcoming social environment

Playgroups are most successful when participants feel included and connected. Arriving at and meeting new people in a group for the first time can be intimidating. It is important to get everybody involved to encourage shared ownership and a sense of partnership in the playgroup.

The following suggestions may help to ensure that everyone feels welcome and included from the very start:

### Before starting

- Consider sending a “welcome letter” to all families and seniors before they arrive at the playgroup. The letter might include:
  - » Details on where and when the playgroup will be held
  - » Information about what to bring e.g. morning tea, hat for outside
  - » Information about parking and entering the building
  - » Details of a contact person
  - » Details of the cost (if any).

### During the playgroup session

- Provide directions or signs so families can find the playgroup room, especially if the room is not near the entrance
- Have someone to meet and greet everyone as they arrive
- Let everyone know the location of toilets and changing facilities and where to make tea and coffee if available
- Have names badges or labels available – this helps to break the ice and makes learning names easier
- Ensure everyone is introduced to each other. You might ask everyone to introduce themselves or play a game that helps everyone to learn each other's names
- Keep the participant numbers low so the group size does not become overwhelming. A group size of 5-6 families with a similar number of senior members is an ideal size. This allows everyone to get to know each other and build relationships but is still large enough to cope with occasional and inevitable absences.

### At the end or after the playgroup session

- Ask everyone if they enjoyed the session and open the conversation to allow them to talk about any issues, their favourite activities, and any new ideas they may like to try. This can also be a time when families offer support with the running of the playgroup.
- Consider touching base with families to see how the experience was for them. It demonstrates care and a willingness to take on board feedback and will likely increase engagement.
- Follow up with families who have not attended for a couple of weeks in a row.

### Encouraging interaction between the generations

Here are some ideas so everyone feels included and encourages interaction between the generations:

- Use name tags - try using this as an activity and get everyone to design their own name tag.
- Ask older members of the group to read a story to everyone
- When singing songs or rhymes, take turns choosing a song to sing
- Sit children and seniors alternately to share in activities together
- Use welcome and goodbye songs that use the name of participants
- Make morning tea a time for socialising



- Talk about shared experiences, such as favourite toys or memories as a child
- Celebrate birthdays and special occasions

Recognise strengths and skills that may be used at playgroup. There may be group members who can play the piano, sing, or are great story tellers.

## Typical session outline

Playgroup sessions usually last between one to two hours depending on the space available and the needs and interests of families and seniors. A typical session might look like:

Time	Activity
9.00am	Set up the room
9.30am	Greet everyone as they arrive for the start of playgroup – Free play
10.20am	Morning tea
10.40am	Simple guided activity everyone can do together
11.00am	Packing away, doing the dishes etc.
11.15am	Music and storytime
11.30am	Goodbye time – this might include a goodbye song

This is only a suggested guide to planning a playgroup session. Remember to be flexible and think about the needs and interests of all members of the group. Some playgroups invite seniors to join the group after they have finished setting up or when they settle for morning tea. You may choose to have less structured activities and leave more time for free play and conversation.

## Planning playgroup sessions

Planning for playgroup sessions is an on-going process of reflection on each session and developing understanding about participants' needs. Everyone involved no matter how young or old will have changing needs over the duration of the playgroup. Adjusting the playgroup activities to respond to and reflect members' needs and interests will help ensure that it continues to engage and include everyone. Some questions to ask:

### How did it go today?

- Did we encourage intergenerational participation and interactions?
- What could we do differently?
- Did the session include elements which were appropriate for our members?
- Was there predictability? Was it fun?
- How did our timing go?
- What resources do we need for our next session?

Playgroup WA's website has more resources for helping you to plan your playgroup sessions and activities and manage your playgroup – [www.playgroupwa.com.au](http://www.playgroupwa.com.au).

## Refreshments and morning tea

Most playgroup sessions include a time for sharing a snack and a drink together. How you do this depends on the facilities available and whether morning tea and refreshment can be provided for everyone. This can include tea and coffee with biscuits or a fruit platter. Families may even bring their own morning tea, along with drink bottles for the children. Any allergies within the group and existing food policies of the service will need to be taken into consideration for playgroup.

Managing the risk around hot food and drinks is something we know service providers are aware of. At playgroup, there is the added complexity of small children. We suggest the best way to reduce accidents is to have morning tea altogether and ensure everyone is sitting down to eat their morning tea at the same time. Alternatively, the playgroup could include a rule that all hot drinks must be in cups with lids on them. It may also be possible to separate the food and hot drinks area from the play areas.



# Organising the playgroup



## **Do you need a committee or organising group?**

It is not necessary to have a formal committee, but we do recommend having some form of planning or organising group. It is best to involve everyone in the decision making where you can. The playgroup will need to meet when there are key decisions to be made. You might choose to meet at the end of a playgroup session.

We suggest that one person be designated the role of Group Leader to liaise between the families, seniors and the staff contact point. This keeps the lines of communication open.

## **Health and hygiene procedures and any safety requirements**

Each playgroup will need to consider any health and hygiene requirements and conditions and how they will address and manage those. Aged care agencies and services will usually already have health hygiene protocols and guidelines within their programs and facilities and these can be included into playgroups that meet in service settings. Families attending will need to have information about what they are expected to do and if there are any specific issues that they need to be aware of. This may include requirements about immunisation and exclusions for illness. It is a good idea to include information in guidelines or welcome letters to guide families about attending if they are unwell. Playgroup WA advises that anyone who is unwell should not attend playgroup until they are sure they are not contagious and are feeling well. Ask playgroup members to notify the playgroup contact person to let them know they will not be attending.

## **Working with Children check (WWC) and Police clearance requirements**

Parents are responsible for their child/ren at all times and they should never be left alone with seniors or staff. Under those conditions, staff and seniors do not need Working with Children Checks and adults attending with their children are not required to undertake police clearances. Playgroup WA advises services to contact the Working with Children Screening Unit by visiting their website at <https://workingwithchildren.wa.gov.au/> for up to date information.

## **Managing families' concerns and questions about medical conditions such as dementia**

Families attending playgroup may have questions about meeting with seniors living with dementia. Senior service providers are best positioned to talk with families and provide them with up to date information and reassurance about memory loss or dementia and let them know what to expect from their elderly participants. Senior service providers might meet with families separately to provide and link them with useful websites or reading material.

## Older children attending playgroup

The purpose of playgroup is for families with children 0-5 years of age. Occasional attendance such as during school holiday periods is acceptable however each playgroup will need to consider if they would be happy to have older children coming along on those occasions and how it would impact on the playgroup and the other participants. It will also depend on the space you have and if the other playgroup members are happy to have older children attending. If the request to bring an older child is because they are home sick, you will need to remind them of the playgroup guidelines and ask them not to attend that week.

## Keeping records

Most playgroups will need to keep some kinds of records about their members and who attends playgroup sessions. Enrolment forms are a great way of recording important information when families and participants first start. Maintaining an attendance register or list will also help with keeping an eye on things such as who has been attending, how many are attending and may be required for insurance purposes. Playgroup WA member playgroups are required to maintain attendance information for playgroup sessions. Information and templates to help you are available on Playgroup WA's website at [www.playgroupwa.com.au](http://www.playgroupwa.com.au).

## Insurance requirements

You are not required to have insurance however Playgroup WA recommends that playgroups have insurance cover for their members, contents, and public liability insurance. Some services may already provide insurance for the playgroup as part of their organisation's insurance policies. Playgroup WA provides insurance for playgroups as part of their annual Playgroup WA membership which includes the following insurance cover:

- Personal accident insurance
- Contents insurance
- Public Liability insurance

Further information about Playgroup WA membership and insurance is available at [www.playgroupwa.com.au](http://www.playgroupwa.com.au) or by contacting Playgroup WA on 1800 171 882.



## Playgroup WA Membership

It is not compulsory for intergenerational playgroups to be members of Playgroup WA although you may find that some families are already members of Playgroup WA.

Playgroup WA encourages you to register your intergenerational playgroup as members. This would involve processing annual membership forms and fees that must be collected and paid to Playgroup WA by each participating family. Membership of Playgroup WA provides ongoing support for the intergenerational playgroup with finding participants, activity ideas and management advice.

Being a Playgroup WA Family Member entitles families the opportunity to tap into the expertise of the staff at Playgroup WA in relation to play, children's development and the successful running of playgroups and receive assistance to develop a strong basis for the playgroup to become self-run and viable.

A key component of membership is the insurance coverage for all playgroup members which covers loss or damage of playgroup toys and equipment, personal injury, or accident where the playgroup meets or during an excursion.

You can contact Playgroup WA for a membership pack. More information about membership benefits is available at [www.playgroupwa.com.au](http://www.playgroupwa.com.au) or our free call number 1800 171 882.

## Resources

Playgroup WA has a range of playgroup and play resources on our website including resources for helping you in running and managing your playgroup. We also have lots of great play and activity ideas including information about activities that work well in intergenerational playgroup settings. Playgroup WA member playgroups are also able to access support and information from our Development Officers.

Playgroup WA Development officers can also help you with information about reputable suppliers for purchasing books, toys and equipment.





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[www.playgroupwa.com.au](http://www.playgroupwa.com.au)