# BEST PRACTICES IN PLAYGROUPS

# RESEARCH REVIEW AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT FRAMEWORK

For F5MC Playgroups Serving Children 0-3 Years Old

This project was made possible through collaboration of First 5 Monterey County (**F5MC**) and a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

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**Contents**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was supported by the members of the Playgroup Workgroup, Playgroup Facilitators, and other community members that are committed to providing high quality experiences to children and their families. We would like to thank them for the differences they are making today that will translate into brighter futures for Monterey County's youngest children.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First 5 Monterey County *(F5MC)* uses the *Strengthening Families Initiative*, an evidence-based framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy based in Washington, D.C., to help guide strategies and programming for families in Monterey County. This initiative highlights protective factors, or conditions in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families. This model shows that there are 5 important protective factors linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect. They are:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

First 5 Monterey County considers playgroups to be an important strategy to build these protective factors within the community. There are many playgroups offered within Monterey County. A group of *F5MC* funded playgroups have been meeting regularly as a Playgroup Workgroup to share ideas, resources, and challenges to implementing high quality playgroups. One of the findings of this group was the need for a shared understanding regarding quality of playgroup services. [1]

With assistance from a David and Lucile Packard Foundation grant, First 5 Monterey County began a project in March 2010 to research best practices and implement results to enhance the quality of playgroups provided to children ages 0-3 years. Social Entrepreneurs, Inc. (SEI) was contracted to research best practices, develop a Quality Enhancement Framework, and provide technical assistance to members of the Playgroup Workgroup. This document provides a Quality Enhancement Framework, process, research findings, and recommendations to implement best practices in playgroups serving very young children.

The goals for this project specified that research was to provide a shared understanding of best practices among playgroup providers and address the need for a research-based framework to support quality in playgroups serving very young children. Several topics or categories were identified by *F5MC* and the Playgroup Workgroup. Through conversations with *F5MC* staff, members of the Playgroup Workgroup, and the best practices research, the categories of focus were determined. They are:

- Playgroup Structure
- Playgroup Environment
- Playgroup Staffing
- Playgroup Interactions and Relationships
- Playgroup Experiences and Curriculum
- Playgroup Sustainability and Systems

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[1] The Playgroup Workgroup consists of representatives from seven (*F5MC*) partners that are implementing playgroups: four family resource centers located in Castroville, Seaside, East Salinas and King City and two adult schools in Salinas and Soledad. Pajaro Family Resource Center will be adding Playgroup services in the fall of 2010. All of the playgroups are located in high priority areas as identified in *F5MC's* Strategic Plan due to their high concentration of families put at-risk.

Based on information from more than 70 sources as well as input from the Playgroup Workgroup, high quality playgroup experiences have common attributes related to Structure, Environment, Staffing, Interactions and Relationships, Experiences and Curriculum, Sustainability and Systems. The following is an overview of the framework for quality. Please note that this summary omits important context, considerations, and details and is not intended to be applied in every situation. Refer to pages 10-18 for a more thorough discussion of each category.

| Category | Summarized Guidelines |
|---|---|
| **Playgroup Structure** | • Frequency: The same group of families attends the playgroup at least weekly.<br>• Group size: Playgroups consist of 4-12 families at one time. Use the children's ages, physical environment, and comfort of the facilitator to determine the ideal group size within this range.<br>• Duration: Playgroups are planned for approximately 2 hours.<br>• Schedule: Playgroups occur on a regular and predictable schedule at times and locations that are accessible for families.<br>• Organization: Families register for sessions, and receive information and orientation prior to the first playgroup.<br>• Routine: Playgroups follow a dependable routine, but are also flexible to meet emerging needs and preferences of families. |
| **Playgroup Environment** | • Safety: The playgroup is physically and emotionally safe for children and their families.<br>• Supplies and Materials: Toys and supplies are nontoxic. Materials adequately support the curriculum. A variety of symbols and literacy tools are present. Examples include photos, pictures, signs, calendars, and books.<br>• Comfort: The space is welcoming.<br>• Language and Culture: The language and culture of participating families are reflected in the environment.<br>• Guidelines: Guidelines for families are both presented verbally and written (posted) so that parents/caregivers understand and can refer to expectations.<br>• Organization of Space: Space is clean, organized, and supports the needs of the children that attend. For example, there are floor mats for infants and they are located away from busier toddler play areas.<br>• Location: The location is accessible to by public transport or otherwise convenient for families. |
| **Playgroup Staffing** | • Approach: Facilitators are positive, non-judgmental, and use a strengths-based approach to working with children and families. They acknowledge the parent as the child's first and most important teacher.<br>• Education: Facilitators have formal education in child development or closely related field.<br>• Experience: Facilitators have education and/or experience in adult education as well as experience with very young children.<br>• Professional Development: Facilitators seek to grow as professionals, obtaining new knowledge and skills.<br>• Language: Facilitators have the ability to communicate with the families that attend.<br>• Training: Facilitators have been trained in on health and safety and can react to risks or problems appropriately. |

| Category | Summarized Guidelines |
|---|---|
| **Playgroup Interactions and Relationships** | • Facilitator: Facilitator models play and positive interactions between parents and children; is encouraging and provides coaching and information on child development. Facilitator is aware of and sensitive to individual families' needs.<br>• Families: Parent or family members are the child's first teacher and actively participate with their child. Parents have opportunities to practice parenting skills and foster child development and have opportunities to connect with other families. They take responsibility for a positive experience at playgroup.<br>• Children: Have opportunities to play and interact with their parent or caregiver as well as with peers. Their individual strengths are recognized and supported. |
| **Playgroup Curriculum and Experiences** | • Curriculum: The program should be responsive to parent-child interest and draw from evidence-based curricula. First 5 Monterey County uses the 5 Protective Factors identified within the *Strengthening Families Initiative* developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy based in Washington, D.C. Curriculum addresses and builds the 5 protective factors:<br>    1. Parental resilience<br>    2. Social connections<br>    3. Knowledge of parenting and child development<br>    4. Concrete support in times of need<br>    5. Social and emotional competence of children<br>• Flexibility: Playgroup experiences are planned in advance but are also flexible enough to meet the needs of the children and families that attend.<br>• Information for Parents: Information on child development for parents should relate to the emerging needs and interests of the parents.<br>• Family Participation: Families are encouraged to participate in planning. This could include helping to determine what topics are covered, or identifying special experiences for children.<br>• Child Participation: Children are invited, but not required, to participate in the activities.<br>• Experiences: Experiences are meaningful, intellectually and creatively stimulating, and invite exploration and investigation. They promote children's active involvement. Children are provided with age appropriate choices for activities. |
| **Playgroup Sustainability and Systems** | • Resources: The organization seeks adequate resources to maintain or increase the number of high quality playgroups. Playgroups are offered at no cost or on a sliding scale.<br>• Program Improvement: Playgroups seek information from families about service quality, and make improvements as needed.<br>• Cost Control: Playgroups seek out ways to sustain high quality services. When difficult decisions need to be made to control costs, information about the community and families served is used to make decisions that have the least negative impact on participants.<br>• Promotion and Awareness: Playgroups are promoted in the community and are offered in conjunction with other services as appropriate and mutually beneficial. |

# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

First 5 Monterey County *(F5MC)* uses the *Strengthening Families Initiative*, an evidence-based framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy based in Washington, D.C., to help guide strategies and programming for families in Monterey County. This initiative highlights protective factors, or conditions in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families. This model shows that there are 5 important protective factors linked to a lower incidence of child abuse and neglect. They are:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

First 5 Monterey County considers playgroups to be an important strategy to build these protective factors within the community. Playgroups promote positive relationships within and among families. Playgroups provide information and resources to families to support their child's development. They provide opportunities for young children to learn through play.

There are many playgroups within Monterey County. A group of *F5MC* funded playgroups have been meeting regularly as a Playgroup Workgroup to share ideas, resources, and challenges to implementing high quality playgroups. One of the findings of this group was the need for a shared understanding regarding quality of playgroup services.

With assistance from a David and Lucile Packard Foundation grant, First 5 Monterey County began a project in March 2010 to research best practices and implement results to enhance the quality of playgroups provided to children ages 0-3 years. Social Entrepreneurs, Inc. (SEI) was contracted to research best practices, develop a Quality Enhancement Framework, and provide technical assistance to members of the Playgroup Workgroup. This document provides a Playgroup Enhancement Framework, process, research findings and recommendations to implement best practices in playgroups serving very young children. Many technical assistance tools and resources have also been created in association with this project. A list of these accompanying materials can be found in the 30.

> **About the Playgroup Workgroup**
>
> The Playgroup Workgroup consists of representatives from seven (*F5MC*) partners that are implementing playgroups: four family resource centers located in Castroville, Seaside, East Salinas and King City and two adult schools in Salinas and Soledad.[1] Pajaro Family Resource Center will be adding Playgroup services in the fall of 2010. All of the playgroups are located in high priority areas as identified in *F5MC's* Strategic Plan due to their high concentration of families put at-risk.

## PROJECT SCOPE

The goals for this project specified that research was to provide a shared understanding of best practices among playgroup providers and address the need for a research-based framework to support quality in playgroups with very young children.

Several topics or categories were identified by **F5MC** and the Playgroup Workgroup. Through conversations with **F5MC** staff, members of the Playgroup Workgroup, and the best practices research, the categories were further refined. The table that follows lists topics included in this project. The categories are a way to organize the information, but should be seen as overlapping and complementary to one another.

| Topics identified by the *F5MC* and the Workgroup | Topics as organized in this Framework | Description and Rationale |
|---|---|---|
| **Structure** | Playgroup Structure | Playgroup Structure defines how the playgroup is set up. It includes information regarding registration, group size, routine, frequency, and timing. |
| **Resources/materials** | Playgroup Environment | The Playgroup Environment refers to both the physical environment (including the resources and materials within that environment) as well aspects of the psycho-social environment. Resources and materials needed are also discussed in *Playgroup Experiences and Curriculum.* |
| **Staffing** <br><br> **Staff Development** | Playgroup Staffing | Playgroup Staffing defines the qualifications and characteristics of playgroup facilitators, including needs related to professional development. |
| **Approaches to Parent-child Activities** | Playgroup Interactions and Relationships | Playgroup Interactions and Relationships includes the many relationships that are part of playgroups, including peer relationships (both adult peers and child peers), between the facilitator and the family, and between the family members and their child. |
| **Curriculum** | Playgroup Experiences and Curriculum | Playgroup Experiences and Curriculum includes the specific elements in a playgroup, their objectives, and the methods for teaching and learning. Many other elements are addressed in curriculum, including relationships, elements of structure, and environment. |
| **Leveraging of funding sources** <br><br> **Evaluation\*** <br><br> **(Reduced this scope due to the addition of other categories)** | Playgroup Sustainability and Systems | Playgroup Sustainability and Systems address the activities that largely take place outside of the playgroup to ensure that services are available and meet the needs of the community. <br><br> Elements of evaluation are included in many of the categories, including staffing (how facilitators evaluate and improve their practice), in curriculum and experiences (that may include child assessment activities) and in sustainability (in the ways that playgroups measure their success and communicate this to stakeholders). Evaluation has occurred throughout this project. Playgroup facilitators assessed themselves during the project and will use the results to evaluate overall improvement of quality as a result of the project. |

## WHAT MAKES A PLAYGROUP

A group of children playing at the park could be considered a "playgroup". What does it mean to implement best practices in playgroups? The definition for playgroup informed the scope of this project including how best practices findings were identified and how recommendations were made for them to be implemented. Playgroup models in the U.S. and abroad show several common characteristics:

1. Children learn through play. Both structured and unstructured play provides children with opportunities to build important skills.
2. Playgroups are intentional. Children and families come together regularly for a defined period of time with planned activities.
3. In contrast to child care or preschool settings, the parent or caregiver attends the playgroup and meaningfully interacts with children.[2]
4. Playgroups offer families opportunities to make meaningful adult social connections. Parents or other caregivers interact with one another and with other community members such as child development specialists.

Models of playgroups also differ from each other in important ways. Playgroups are often, but not always, facilitated by a "teacher" or "leader." They may focus on developing specific skills during the playgroup, or, allow for free, unstructured play in an enriched environment. They may include parent education topics or simply provide the opportunity for the adults to socialize and share experiences. Playgroups may be inclusive--with children and families from diverse backgrounds coming together--or be highly specialized and focused on a particular group or population. For example, a special playgroup may include only adolescent mothers and their infants. Playgroups may focus on a specific age range or be inclusive of all families with young children, including older siblings. In addition to the list above (1-4) *F5MC* funded playgroups have several common features:

5. Playgroups are targeted for children ages 0-3, but may also permit older siblings to attend.
6. Playgroups are located in priority areas as identified in *F5MC*'s Strategic Plan due to their high concentration of families put at-risk.
7. Playgroups are facilitated by a parent educator, teacher or leader (referred to as a "facilitator" throughout).
8. The purpose of the playgroups is to help parents feel competent, well-informed and capable of supporting their child.[2]

> **Playgroups in the United States**
>
> Playgroups take many different forms and are created for different purposes.
>
> Community Playgroups. Families self organize, using the intranet or other advertising. Groups meet at parks, homes, churches, or other venues to play and socialize. They may be informal or highly organized. Typically one or more persons coordinate the playgroups, but playgroups are not led by a teacher or facilitator.
>
> For Profit Playgroups. Many businesses provide playgroups for parents and children. They typically focus on a theme or skill, such as art or movement. These groups are typically guided by a teacher.
>
> Supported Playgroups. Established organizations or agencies within communities support playgroups for families. They may be targeted to support a special group or to achieve specific outcomes. They often utilize a professional facilitator to guide playgroup time.

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[2]There are also exceptions to this. In Monterey County, one funded playgroup invites parents but very few attend; children take part in activities while parents have respite and receive parenting information. This group is moving toward a parent-child interaction model.

## METHODOLOGY

SEI reviewed multiple sources in developing the best practices framework. This included review of (1) journals and publications; (2) websites and printed materials; and (3) observation of local and regional playgroups.

The first step in the project was to develop a research plan that identified the sources and publications to be consulted. The draft research plan was presented to the Workgroup and feedback was incorporated into the final research. The next step was to review the sources and publications identified in the research plan and compile a list of qualities or attributes of high quality playgroups.  Attributes were organized into categories and used to develop the **Effective Practices Matrix,** a tool for playgroup assessment. Each site was provided a blank copy of the *Effective Practices Matrix*. Playgroup facilitators self-assessed their playgroups. Kellie Reddish, M.S.W. and Early Care and Education Professional also assessed one or more playgroups at each site. The results of SEI's assessment and the sites' self-assessment were compared. Playgroup strengths and opportunities for improvement were documented into individualized Technical Assistance (TA) Plans.  Broad recommendations for improving the quality of Monterey County playgroups can be found in the accompanying materials (see page 30). Recommendations for specific playgroups and technical assistance plans have been provided to each funded partner. Many technical assistance tools and resources have also been created in association with this project. A list of these accompanying materials can be found in the Appendix (page 30).

Next, a draft version of the Quality Enhancement Framework was developed. This document outlined the major findings from research, followed by the findings from the *F5MC* playgroup assessment. The Framework was then presented to the Playgroup Workgroup and also submitted to *F5MC* staff for review. The final draft includes feedback from both *F5MC* staff and members of the Workgroup.

Finally, materials were co-created with *F5MC* staff and the members of the Playgroup Workgroup. These materials provide further guidance into effective practices in playgroups for families with very young children. They are available as attachments to this document (see page 30).

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*A Note about Families, Parents, Caregivers and Children*

Playgroups, as a strategy to strengthen families, invite and welcome families in their different forms.

★ In this document, the word "parent" is used to represent the primary caregiver. This could be a mother, father, grandparent or other guardian who is responsible for the care of the child each day.

★ The word "caregiver" is used to represent someone who is caring for the child (but is not their primary caregiver). For example, a friend may take care of a child while her parents are at work. While it is more common that "parents" attend playgroup with the child, caregivers may also bring children to playgroup.

★ This project focuses on best practice in playgroups for very young children ages 0-3.  "The child" is meant to represent one or more children within a family that that is age 0-3 (and does not include older siblings that fall out of this age range).

★ The word "family" is used inclusively – to mean the consumer (or potential consumer) of playgroup services.

# SUMMARY OF RESEARCH: WHAT IT MEANS TO HOLD HIGH QUALITY PLAYGROUPS

Based on information from more than 70 sources, high quality playgroup experiences have common elements related to Playgroup Structure, Environment, Staffing, Interactions and Relationships, Experiences and Curriculum, Sustainability and Systems. These attributes are described in this section.

## PLAYGROUP STRUCTURE

Playgroups across the country and abroad vary in their structures, or in how they are planned and carried out. Review of high quality playgroups show several common characteristics that can be considered best practices.

***What's Important***

★ Playgroups meet regularly. It is suggested that playgroups (with the same or similar grouping of families) meet at least once weekly. More frequent playgroups may be necessary to support specific program goals.

★ Group size is appropriate for the ages of children present, the environment, the facilitator, and needs of participants. Ideally groups are small, especially for the youngest infants. A range supported by the literature is 4-12 families in attendance at any one playgroup (family is defined as 1 child and their parent or caregiver). Smaller group sizes are better for the youngest children, with an ideal group size of 4-6 families in attendance. Larger group sizes with 8-12 families in attendance may be effective if the environment and facilitator can appropriately meet the needs of the families present. The group size should allow teachers to provide specialized services or care that children require to fully participate, including children with disabilities.

★ Playgroups meet for an appropriate amount of time. Playgroups for the youngest children (ages 0-3) are typically 2 hours. Some playgroups may offer free play time before or after the playgroup to allow extra time for families to play and socialize.

★ The playgroups are scheduled at a time that works for families. While there is no one perfect time slot, offering playgroups at a variety of times can help ensure that families with different life and work circumstances can attend. This may mean offering playgroups in the mornings and evenings during the traditional work week as well as on weekends.

★ The playgroup structure should help to ensure consistent participation. Groups of families (both the children and their caregivers) need to have regular contact in order to build relationships through the group. Requiring families to register for a session (series of playgroups) can help facilitate regular and consistent participation.

★ Children are invited, but not forced, to participate in activities. For example, if the group is singing songs in circle time and the child doesn't want to participate, he or she can be allowed to play quietly in an activity of their choosing.

★ The playgroup is connected to the larger community. Other organizations are aware of the playgroup and refer families; the playgroup is also a place where families can learn about resources in the community.

★ The playgroup follows a regular and also flexible routine. Routine provides predictability and consistency and allows children to develop trust, take risks, grow and learn. A dependable schedule allows a child to understand the world around them, feel secure, relaxed and comfortable. Additionally, when parents know what to expect, they can effectively guide their child, offer prompts before transitions, and help their child feel successful in navigating their surroundings. The routine should also be flexible. For example, if children are enjoying and actively participating in

singing songs during circle play, the facilitator may spend extra time teaching a new song before moving on in the schedule.

★ The structure promotes healthy habits. Providing opportunities for nourishment is important. A nutritious snack can be provided as part of playgroup or brought by individual families. This means providing a comfortable environment for breastfeeding (or bottle-feeding).

★ Families have opportunities to contribute to planning the structure. For example, families may have ideas about a special field trip, topics to cover, or, wish to meet early on a particular day so that they can participate in other community or school events. When possible, the playgroup structure and facilitator should work to be flexible and address the needs and preferences of families.

### Steps to Achieve Best Practices

• Determine the ideal group size using information about the families to be served, the facilitator, the environment, and the ages and needs of the children.

• Use registration and a playgroup "session" (series of playgroups) to bring together the same families each week (or more often) and to stabilize group size. *Note: many members of the Workgroup discussed having tried a registration model and saw decreased participation. It is important to understand the needs and preferences of families within the communities, and ensure that barriers are addressed before implementing changes to structure.*

• Plan the routine in advance and provide ample time for transitions. Have appropriate choices available for children. If families are asked to bring snacks for their children, provide examples of nutritious foods, and include this with the registration materials. Promote healthy habits in other ways, such as making hand washing a fun activity that precedes snack time.

• Allow multiple opportunities (and different ways) for families to contribute and communicate about playgroups. This could include a group discussion to identify upcoming topics of interest, having comment cards available, and checking in with parents one on one to find out what is important to them and how the playgroup can support them.

• Plan structured experiences but also allow time for free play.

• Address accessibility and frequency by exploring the need for evening, Saturday and summer playgroups.

• Be flexible to modify the structure to accommodate group needs such as increasing frequency or offering playgroups year round.

### Considerations

*Group Size.* Effective group size varies depending on the environment (facility) and specific ages and objectives of the playgroup. In some cases, the environment and facilitator can safely and appropriately accommodate larger group sizes (greater than 12). A good guideline is that facilitator(s) feel that they can meaningfully interact with the families that are present, and the environment is not stressful for the participants. Group size is an important component of quality, so increases to group size as a way to serve more families should be weighed carefully against the drawbacks.

*Duration.* Two hours with families of very young children provides enough time for meaningful interaction and learning. The vast majority of playgroups reviewed met for two hours. Some playgroups may offer additional opportunities at the beginning or end of the scheduled time for free play. Two hours may also be too long for some children. One of the goals of playgroups is to help parents and caregivers understand their child's development. As part of this, facilitators can help parents and caregivers understand what is right for their child including how long to stay. The structure should be flexible enough to handle a parent who comes in late or must leave early.

*Registration.* Registration for sessions has many advantages. The essential elements of quality addressed by registration include safety (knowing who is in attendance and what needs they have), supporting effective group size, assisting with planning the experiences and topics during playgroup, and allowing the same or similar group of families to come together on a regular basis. However, several members of the Workgroup identified that implementation of a registration model resulted in decreased playgroup participation. It is important to seek information about potential barriers from families and the community before implementing changes.

## PLAYGROUP ENVIRONMENT

Playgroup environment refers to both the physical environment (and the resources and materials within that environment) as well aspects of the psycho-social environment.

### What's Important

These attributes describe the ideal playgroup environment. Physical and emotional safety is paramount, and essential.

★ The environment is physically and emotionally safe for children. Specific aspects of respectful interactions, safety and support are provided as they relate to children. For example, parents and caregivers understand that children are not to be spanked or verbally abused.

★ The space is designed and maintained for the health and safety of children and families. (See Appendix, page 28, for more information).

★ The space is welcoming. If the playgroup is hosted in part of another building, both the playgroup space and in the areas that families pass through on their way to playgroup are welcoming.

★ A well designed environment provides opportunities for exploration and learning that can serve as another "teacher" for the children and parents. Everything in the environment has the potential for learning.

★ The language in the environment is rich and descriptive.

★ The environment safely and adequately supports children of different developmental stages. For example, soft mats for infants are available and located away from busy areas where active toddlers may be playing.

★ Materials are organized on low, open shelves to encourage children to use them independently.

★ There is an appropriate space for diapering and toileting, including running water and soap. The diapering area is away from the food preparation area.

★ The playgroup location is accessible by public transportation or is otherwise convenient for families.

★ The location is available year round and can house a growing playgroup.

★ The site has both suitable indoor and outdoor space. (See Appendix, page 28, for more information).

★ The environment is large enough to accommodate the planned experiences and activities, and also has extra space to accommodate special situations.

★ Breastfeeding is supported; there are chairs or rockers available to nursing mothers.

★ Language and culture of the families that participate are represented in the environment.

★ A variety of symbols and literacy tools are present. Examples include photos, pictures, signs, calendars, puppets, and art and drawing tools.

★ Board books and story books are available, including picture books and books written in the home languages of participants.

★ Toys and materials are carefully selected to be nontoxic and safe for very young children.

★ Toys and materials include items that can be made from ordinary items at home.

- ★ The space is easy to arrange and rearrange.
- ★ The space is organized and clean.

***Steps to Achieve Best Practices***

- Playgroup facilitators should seek out information on the host site's health and safety plan. Important information about safety should also be communicated to the participating families.
- Communicate expectations for the parents or caregivers in multiple ways. For example, playgroup guidelines can be explained to new participants as part of registration, printed and taken home, and also be posted in the space.
- Using information about the individual families that attend the group, develop opportunities to reflect their home culture in the classroom. Facilitators should seek out information about the cultures of the families that participate to help ensure a welcoming environment for children and their families.
- Ensure each location has enough and appropriate materials and supplies to create suitable spaces for very young children and foster effective parent-child interactions.
- Strive to find an environment that is both accessible to families and appropriate for young children.
- Communicate to families that each person is responsible for a safe, clean and respectful environment.
- Allow time, opportunity, and resources for staff to create the ideal environment. This may mean providing staff the opportunity to see other high quality environments in pictures or in person. Time is also needed to clean and rearrange the materials, and dispose of broken or inappropriate items. Playgroups need resources to enhance and enrich the environment. In some cases this may require purchasing new items; many materials can also be made from ordinary household items.

***Considerations***

*Health and Safety.* The information presented in "what's important" is not meant to include all aspects of health and safety. Health and safety should be addressed as part of implementing best practices.

*Ideal versus Accessible.* An accessible location may not have all of the components of the ideal playgroup environment. For example, a neighborhood park may offer a centrally located and accessible space but may not be ideal for a playgroup because it does not have a play area that is appropriate for infants and toddlers. Conversely, there may be an ideal space for a playgroup that poses barriers to families without transportation. Decisions about environment should be considered carefully.

## PLAYGROUP STAFFING

The playgroup facilitator(s), also called the leader or teacher, holds a central role in providing quality playgroups. This person (or persons) guides the playgroup session. Additionally, they may have responsibilities such as outreaching to new families, planning curriculum, or inviting specialists to the playgroup. The facilitator is the coordinator, educator and conductor of information, activities and the schedule of the playgroup.

### What's Important

It is essential that the facilitator have the temperament necessary to build rapport with both children and adults. The facilitator should be open and accepting yet able to set expectations and help guide families. There are many specific qualities, skills, and attributes that are important for playgroup facilitators to possess.

★ The facilitator establishes positive, non-judgmental relationships with all children and families. They are sincere, accepting, and respectful.

★ The facilitator acknowledges the parent as the child's first or most important teacher and fosters the parent's development in that role.

★ The facilitator is a role model, providing examples of positive interaction with children.

★ The facilitator incorporates a strengths-based approach to working with families and is open to learning new things.

★ The facilitator models and coaches parents in the observation of children's interests and response to those interests (as well as responding to parents' interests) – and thus models for parents the importance of knowing their own child and how to listen/observe/respond to the child.

★ The facilitator has formal education in child development or a related field.

★ The facilitator has education and (or) experience with adult education.

★ The facilitator plans the playgroup, but also remains flexible to meet the emerging needs of children and families.

★ The facilitator is knowledgeable about the community and resources and offers information and suggestions to families.

★ The facilitator has experience providing high quality group experiences.

★ The facilitator seeks to grow as a professional, seeking out development opportunities and new knowledge.

★ The facilitator can speak the language(s) of the families that attend.

★ The facilitator is aware of their role and also boundaries; when families need assistance outside of what can be offered through playgroup, they offer referrals and connections (without attempting to provide the services themselves).

★ Facilitators have health and safety training (including First Aid and CPR). They understand reporting requirements for child abuse and neglect.

### Considerations

*Language*. The ability to communicate with families and children in their home language underlies each of these capabilities. Facilitators must speak the language(s) of participants or have adequate interpretation to be able to develop relationships and communicate effectively with the group. This may mean having more than one facilitator present. In some cases, having a facilitator that speaks multiple languages is not possible. The facilitator can look for ways to communicate with the family, such as asking other families to help interpret.

### Steps to Achieve Best Practices

• Recruit and hire personnel that have experience with young children and their families and that have formal education related to early childhood practice.

• Require that facilitators have experience in adult education. This could include an adult education credential or significant experience facilitating adult learning.

• Provide professional development opportunities for staff that focus on providing services for very young children and their families.

- Implement a supportive supervision structure that allows for consistent reflection and quality improvement. Provide opportunities for supervision that allows staff to maintain the psychological and intellectual space necessary to offer high quality playgroups.
- Implement mechanisms to assess family satisfaction with playgroup services and facilitators.
- Recruit and hire people that speak more than one language. When many languages are spoken, volunteers or families themselves can help to bridge communication.

## PLAYGROUP INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

There are many different relationships that are supported by playgroups, including (but not limited to) the interactions between the facilitator and children, interactions between facilitator and the parent or caregiver, relationships between and among parents, and relationships between and among children.

### What's Important

Young children learn through relationships, therefore it is essential that warm, welcoming and inclusive interactions that facilitate positive relationships be ever present at playgroups. Specific elements related to interactions and relationships are listed below.

- ★ Facilitators provide a model for parents or caregivers to follow. The interactions between the facilitator and parents or caregivers provide the coaching and support necessary to transfer parenting and child development knowledge.
- ★ Each adult takes responsibility for the safety and well-being of children at the playgroup.
- ★ The facilitator takes an active role (and gives direction when needed) to guide parents to provide positive, effective, and age appropriate guidance for children.
- ★ The tone or approach of the facilitator helps participants to feel comfortable and safe.
- ★ Families have the opportunities to help plan or contribute to the playgroup. They may have opportunities to lead a particular activity with the whole group or with their child only.
- ★ Interactions and experiences leave participants feeling secure, relaxed, and comfortable.
- ★ Parents and caregivers respond to the child's cues, interests and preferences.
- ★ Parents and caregivers exchange ideas and develop friendships.
- ★ Playgroups are welcoming to families, including fathers, grandparents, and other caregivers.
- ★ Children are given opportunities to interact and learn from each other through play and socialization.
- ★ The individual strengths of children are recognized and celebrated.

### Steps to Achieve Best Practices

- Ensure that elements of structure and curriculum promote positive relationships. For example, planning so that families attend weekly and interact with some of the same families each week helps children and their parents gain familiarity and trust. Ensure that group size and the environment allows for meaningful interaction (a very large group size may not work unless there are small group activities, appropriate space, and extra volunteers or facilitators).
- Establish expectations and guidelines for playgroup behaviors/protocols that will result in a safe and consistent atmosphere. For example, at the playgroup parents/caregivers are guided to provide nurturing touches; they do not spank or hit their child.
- Help families to understand their child's development by providing verbal, written, or illustrated information on what the child has learned during the playgroup.

- Provide a consistent structure or schedule so that parents and children know what to expect.
- Provide "free" play time to help families create meaningful interactions and relationships.
- With consent from each family, consider distributing a "class list" so that families can contact each other outside of playgroup.
- Facilitators can help families understand social play and interactions between children. For example, they can point out interactions between very young infants that may not be evident to the parents. When older children have conflict, they can model a caring, appropriate response and also may also directly explain the behaviors, and ways to address them.
- Facilitators need opportunities to reflect, problem solve, and even role-play difficult situations and relationships. A knowledgeable supervisor or peer can provide a sounding board and support for facilitators.

### Considerations

*Addressing Community Needs*. Playgroups may be focused to meet the needs of a particular population. These playgroups may have different approaches to planning the playgroup and welcoming new participants. For example, a playgroup for infants that were born prematurely may take more of the form of a parent support group, and grow into a play-based setting as the children grow and develop. It might be important in this situation to exclude older siblings due to the vulnerabilities of the youngest infants.

## PLAYGROUP CURRICULUM AND EXPERIENCES

Curriculum refers to both the content (the material to be learned), and process of learning (the actions and resources involved in teaching and learning). Experiences are defined as actions that take place within the playgroups that support the curriculum. The word "experience" is also used interchangeably with the word "activity" but is meant to emphasize the importance of *interactions* of the very young child with people, objects, and their environment.

### What's Important

Effective curriculum and activities make the time spent at playgroup meaningful and allows playgroups to accomplish the desired outcomes. Thoughtful and intentional planning is required. Based on the literature there are many attributes of effective curriculum.

★ The planned activities and approach to each playgroup should take into consideration the array of developmental needs of children.
★ Activities should be rooted in experiences that are relevant to the children and be replicable and easily implemented by parents or other caregivers.
★ Playgroup activities should be planned in advance and incorporate what is known about individual and group strengths and needs.
★ Playgroup activities provide an opportunity to enhance the parent or caregivers' understanding of child development. Parent education topics can be included to strengthen parent knowledge.
★ Playgroup activities provide opportunities for the parent or caregiver to practice new skills. Activities can engage the parent and child together, providing practice with their child.
★ Parents are involved in curriculum planning. This could include providing ideas about themes or topics to cover.
★ Experiences are meaningful, intellectually and creatively stimulating, and invite exploration and investigation. They promote children's active involvement.

★ Activities are based on the curriculum framework but are also flexible to meet the current needs of the families. For example, if families in attendance seem to be concerned about a particular issue, the facilitator can adapt the playgroup to help discuss and address some of these concerns.

★ Parents are facilitators of their child's learning and are supported in their role as their child's first and most important teacher.

★ Playgroups incorporate family goals, culture and preferences and also balance that with developmentally appropriate practice.

★ Facilitators model and coach parents to guides the child's learning via focused questions and positive interactions.

★ Activities are brief and allow for movement. The time for any activity is developmentally appropriate for the age of the children.

★ Children are invited, but not required to participate in activities.

### Steps to Achieve Best Practices

- The program should be responsive to parent-child interest and draw from evidence-based curricula.
- Gather feedback from parents and children in multiple ways on an ongoing basis. Tailor the playgroup experiences to build on the strengths, needs, and preferences of families.
- Consider using a tool such as the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) during the playgroup so that parents can be aware of developmental milestones. This can help families become aware of delays and identify needs for early intervention.
- Test activities out to see which ones engage children and offer learning across developmental domains. Offer some popular activities each playgroup such as play dough or easel painting and provide new activities to keep children and parents interested and excited.
- Make changes necessary to ensure that the structure of the playgroup supports the selected curriculum. This may mean increasing playgroup frequency and duration, or implementing registration for playgroup series.

### Considerations

*Evidence-based Curriculum.* Research for this project did not identify an evidence-based curriculum specific to playgroups with very young children. However, other curricula from early care and education, parent support, or both, can be modified to meet the structure and goals of playgroups. Following discussion with members of the Workgroup, *Parents as Teachers*, *The Creative Curriculum*, and *HighScope* were recommended for primary sources for curriculum in playgroups. Further evaluation is needed to measure the results and outcomes of playgroup involvement.

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**Example of Playgroup Routine**

1) **Arrival** – free play or time for individual parent/caregiver to read books to their own child in lap (15-20 minutes).
2) **Circle time** – songs, finger plays, puppets, felt boards or stories (15 minutes).
3) **Activities** – carefully selected to provide developmentally appropriate learning opportunities. They may include choices in 2-3 different domains:  (40 minutes).
   - Sensory Exploration
   - Speech and Language
   - Cognition/Intellectual
   - Gross Motor/Physical
   - Fine Motor/Physical
4) **Snack time** – children sit at a small table to eat a healthy snack (15 minutes).
5) **Parent education topic** – during or directly following snack time (20 minutes).
6) **Clean up** (5 minutes).
7) **Large group movement activity** – may include an activity such as obstacle course, follow the leader, parachute or goodbye song (10 minutes).

**Transition and Departure** – families say goodbye (10 minutes). May include a handout for parents/sticker or stamp for children (5 minutes).

# Playgroup Sustainability and Systems

Sustainability refers to the ability of playgroups to provide continued positive outcomes within the communities that they serve. The majority of playgroups exist as part of a larger organization or network. These systems can support playgroup quality in many important ways.

### What's Important

There are many attributes of systems that are necessary to support ongoing, high quality playgroups.

★ The organization seeks recurrent funding to maintain or increase the quantity and sustainability of playgroups.

★ The organization seeks to meet community needs. This may mean increasing the number of playgroups to avoid waiting lists, or supporting specialized groups as needs arise. It may also include developing programs for older siblings that occur during the playgroup time, so that the parent or caregiver can focus on the youngest children in the family during playgroup.

★ Sufficient funding is sought from multiple sources so that playgroups are offered at no cost or on a sliding fee scale.

★ Organizations or agencies are supportive of parents and families and consider their opinions and suggestions.

★ Organization or agencies seeks opportunities to control costs. This can include leveraging in-kind donations, collaborating with other groups.

★ Facilitators are provided regular and frequent opportunities for professional development and training.

★ Playgroup facilitators are supervised in a supportive manner that helps them grow and improve their practice.

★ Playgroups have mechanisms to evaluate the quality of the services that are provided on an ongoing basis.

★ The playgroup is promoted throughout the community. Playgroups are offered in conjunction with other services as appropriate and mutually beneficial.

### Steps to Achieve Best Practices

• Develop partnerships and pool resources with other organizations for shared training and professional development.

• Develop partnerships to ensure playgroups can be offered in accessible locations and can be funded via multiple funding streams.

• Use data to drive decisions. For example, review the attendance patterns of families and explore needs for evening, weekend, and summer playgroups.

• If special populations or needs emerge at playgroups, determine if a specialized playgroup can be offered.

• Help staff and families realize the importance of evaluating playgroups. Ensure that evaluation information is shared.

• Consider developing partnerships with youth organizations to offer programming for older siblings during the playgroup time at the same or nearby location.

### Considerations

*Sustainability.* Solutions to reduce program costs may conflict with best practices. For example, group sizes can be increased, but not without consequences to the families that attend. Families can be charged a fee for playgroups, but for some that creates barriers (and may specifically prohibit some families from attending). Playgroups can occur less frequently, but children and families miss out on many of the benefits of consistent participation. Measures to control costs can impact accessibility and quality so should also be considered carefully. In Victoria, Australia, playgroups are an important strategy and widely implemented. The playgroup staffing varies based on the needs of families. More specifically, information is provided to groups so that they can start their own playgroups. Some, but not all playgroups are facilitated. Many other playgroups charge a fee for a series of playgroups, but also offer scholarships or a sliding fee scale. Other organizations are "doing more with less" by increasing group size while utilizing volunteers. Innovative solutions such as

these can help to sustain services during difficult economic times. Decisions about programs must balance best practices with the needs of the individuals and communities served.

## SUMMARY OF BEST PRACTICES FOR NEW AND EXISTING PLAYGROUPS

A summary of guidelines is provided to help new and existing playgroups plan and implement high quality playgroups. Please note that these are guidelines but not rules; the needs of individual communities and populations may influence the importance of each of these elements.

| Category | Summarized Guidelines |
|---|---|
| **Playgroup Structure** | • Frequency: The same group of families attends the playgroup at least weekly.<br>• Group size: Playgroups consist of 4-12 families at one time. Use the children's ages, physical environment, and comfort of the facilitator to determine the ideal group size within this range.<br>• Duration: Playgroups are planned for approximately 2 hours.<br>• Schedule: Playgroups occur on a regular and predictable schedule at times and locations that are accessible for families.<br>• Organization: Families register for sessions, and receive information and orientation prior to the first playgroup.<br>• Routine: Playgroups follow a dependable routine, but are also flexible to meet emerging needs and preferences of families. |
| **Playgroup Environment** | • Safety: The playgroup is physically and emotionally safe for children and their families.<br>• Supplies and Materials: Toys and supplies are nontoxic. Materials adequately support the curriculum. A variety of symbols and literacy tools are present. Examples include photos, pictures, signs, calendars, and books.<br>• Comfort: The space is welcoming.<br>• Language and Culture: The language and culture of participating families are reflected in the environment.<br>• Guidelines: Guidelines for families are both presented verbally and written (posted) so that parents/caregivers understand and can refer to expectations.<br>• Organization of Space: Space is clean, organized, and supports the needs of the children that attend. For example, there are floor mats for infants and they are located away from busier toddler play areas.<br>• Location: The location is accessible to by public transport or otherwise convenient for families. |
| **Playgroup Staffing** | • Approach: Facilitators are positive, non-judgmental, and use a strengths-based approach to working with children and families. They acknowledge the parent as the child's first and most important teacher.<br>• Education: Facilitators have formal education in child development or closely related field.<br>• Experience: Facilitators have education and/or experience in adult education as well as experience with very young children.<br>• Professional Development: Facilitators seek to grow as professionals, obtaining new knowledge and skills.<br>• Language: Facilitators have the ability to communicate with the families that attend.<br>• Training: Facilitators have been trained in on health and safety and can react to risks or problems appropriately. |

| Category | Summarized Guidelines |
|---|---|
| **Playgroup Interactions and Relationships** | • Facilitator: Facilitator models play and positive interactions between parents and children; is encouraging and provides coaching and information on child development. Facilitator is aware of and sensitive to individual families' needs.<br>• Families: Parent or family members are the child's first teacher and actively participate with their child. Parents have opportunities to practice parenting skills and foster child development and have opportunities to connect with other families. They take responsibility for a positive experience at playgroup.<br>• Children: Have opportunities to play and interact with their parent or caregiver as well as with peers. Their individual strengths are recognized and supported. |
| **Playgroup Curriculum and Activities** | • Curriculum: The program should be responsive to parent-child interest and draw from evidence-based curricula. First 5 Monterey County uses the 5 Protective Factors identified within the *Strengthening Families Initiative* developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy based in Washington, D.C.,. Curricula should address and build the 5 protective factors:<br>   6. Parental resilience<br>   7. Social connections<br>   8. Knowledge of parenting and child development<br>   9. Concrete support in times of need<br>   10. Social and emotional competence of children<br>• Flexibility: Playgroup activities are planned in advance but are also flexible enough to meet the needs of the children and families that attend.<br>• Information for Parents: Information on child development for parents should relate to the emerging needs and interests of the parents.<br>• Family Participation: Families are encouraged to participate in planning. This could include helping to determine what topics are covered, or identifying special activities for children.<br>• Child Participation: Children are invited, but not required, to participate in the activities.<br>• Activities: Children are provided with age appropriate choices for activities. |
| **Playgroup Sustainability and Systems** | • Resources: The organization seeks adequate resources to maintain or increase the number of high quality playgroups. Playgroups are offered at no cost or on a sliding scale.<br>• Program Improvement: Playgroups seek information from families about service quality, and make improvements as needed.<br>• Cost Control: Playgroups seek out ways to sustain high quality services. When difficult decisions need to be made to control costs, information about the community and families served is used to make decisions that have the least negative impact on participants.<br>• Promotion and Awareness: Playgroups are promoted in the community and are offered in conjunction with other services as appropriate and mutually beneficial. |

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# GLOSSARY

**Activity:** The actual events or actions that take place as a part of the program. (Source: www.cdc.gov/getsmart/program-planner/Glossary-Eval-Res.html)

**Curriculum:** Refers to both the content (the material to be learned), and process of learning (the actions and resources involved in teaching and learning). (Source: www.nald.ca/adultlearningcourse/glossary.htm)

**Frequency:** How often the playgroup meets.

**Routine:** Routine refers to the sequence and timing of playgroup activities. For example, a playgroup routine might include a welcome, free-play, circle time, and closing circle. The routine also specifies how much time is spent in each of these activities. The terms schedule and rhythm are sometimes used to describe the same concept.

**Schedule:** The schedule refers to the frequency and duration of playgroups. For example, the playgroup schedule includes 1 class offered each week from 9 am to 11 am.

**Self-Regulation:** The ability to control one's behavior often in opposition to emotional drive (for example, controlling an anger outburst). The kinds of support vary with children's age, but all domains of their development will influence self-regulation. For infants, there needs to be recognizable patterns in their interactions, signals for the essential routines in their day (such as food, comfort, and sleep), and the opportunity to test their ability to control or affect the environment. For toddlers, opportunities for exploration and autonomy are necessary along with role models of appropriate behavior sequences. The support that language can provide to toddlers as they carry out simple requests and label their own actions is also critical. For preschoolers and kindergarten children, the essential opportunities are for more complex directions, clear sets of rules, skill-appropriate responsibilities, understandable consequences of their actions, and again, positive role models. (www.nature.com/nrn/journal/v4/n3/glossary/nrn1056_glossary.html)

**Framework:** The underlying structure or support.

**Protective factors:** Conditions in families and communities that, when present, increase the health and well-being of children and families. They are attributes that serve as buffers, helping parents who might otherwise be at risk of abusing their children to find resources, supports, or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress. (Source: Strengthening Families and Communities, 2010 Guidebook, Department of Health and Human Services)

# Appendix

## Playgroup Health and Safety Checklist

This checklist is based on the checklist and information provided in Good Beginnings Alliance-Hawaii. *Playing top Learn How to Start and lead a Community Play+Learn Group. Other health and safety materials were also consulted.*

## Overview

*For the Facilitator*:

☐ The location is readily identifiable and accessible to emergency response personnel.

☐ The location allows for the safe arrival and departure of children.

☐ I am prepared for emergencies by having:

☐ Training in First Aid and CPR

☐ First Aid kit/manual and contact numbers with me at every group

☐ Have easy access to a phone

☐ I can see every child and am aware of all adults present.

☐ I have made sure that all equipment and materials, indoors and outdoors, are safe, in good shape and appropriate for the abilities of the children.

☐ I follow a regular schedule that I may have already set for cleaning and sanitizing materials. (Examples can be provided if needed.)

☐ I know how to recognize and report any child abuse using guidelines and reporting forms from the state department responsible for child services. I know resources available for families for prevention.

☐ I am familiar with the site's Health and Safety Policies and Procedures.

## Safety Checklist

*Indoor*

☐ There is a minimum of 35 square feet of usable space per child in each of the primary indoor activity areas (not including diaper stations, toilets, corridors, hallways, closets, cubbies, storage areas/shelves, etc.).

☐ The space is designed so that staff can supervise children by sight and sound at all times without relying on artificial monitoring devices.

☐ A fully working fire extinguisher and smoke detector are in each space and tagged and serviced annually.

☐ A written evacuation plan is posted and all adults have read the plan, know where the exits are and are responsible for their child(ren) in case of emergency.

☐ Emergency telephone numbers are posted.

☐ Electrical outlets are covered with a choke-proof, child-resistant device and all electrical cords are secured.

☐ Heavy furniture or equipment is stable or securely anchored.

☐ Safe, ability appropriate toys/activities are accessible to children. Children age birth-2 don't have access to small objects.

☐ Hot items, including beverages, are kept out of the reach of all children.

☐ There is no chipping or peeling paint or exposed asbestos.

☐ Loose rugs are skid proof.

☐ Privacy locks on bathroom doors are not accessible to children or locks can be opened quickly from the outside.

☐ Secure gates or barriers are present at the top and bottom of stairs and any unsupervised doorways if any child age birth-2 is present. Gates meet safety standards.

☐ Open windows have screens in good repair, unless area is free of flying insects.

*Outdoor*

☐ Outdoor area is fenced with manmade or natural barriers to prevent access to street or other dangers such as open water.

☐ Outdoor area is arranged so staff can supervise children by sight and sound.

☐ Outdoor play area has open space for active movement, age appropriate play equipment and materials, and places for open exploration.

☐ Play space is free of animal feces, broken glass, cigarette butts or other trash.

☐ Climbing equipment, swings, and slides are stable or securely anchored.

☐ If swings are used, a clearance area and fall zone of at least 6 feet surrounds the swings. They have no pinch points or "S" hooks.

☐ Cushioning materials are placed under climbers, swings and slides with a fall of 36 inches or more.

☐ If there is a sand area or box, it is covered when not in use.

☐ Family member or Facilitator applies sunscreen to children, age 6 months and older, when needed.

☐ Children are wearing shoes while playing outside.

*Supplies – To be checked once a day*

☐ Bathroom and Diapering Areas:

☐ Children can reach faucets, using secure step if needed (but hot water faucet is not available to child) or they are held by an adult while washing hands.

☐ Liquid soap, running water and paper towels are provided.

☐ If there is a diapering area, it is separated from food areas and cleaned and disinfected after each use.

☐ Soiled diapers are sealed in plastic and kept out of reach of children.

☐ Children are never left alone on changing table and an adult keeps one hand on the child at all times.

☐ If a potty chair is used, it is washed and disinfected after each use.

☐ All adults wash their hands with warm water and liquid soap after toileting, diapering and any contact with bodily fluids and when hands are dirty.

☐ Toys are made of non-toxic materials. (Vinyl, some types of plastics, and paints can contain materials harmful to young children).

☐ Art materials are non-toxic.

☐ There are no latex balloons or plastic bags within reach of children age 3 and under.

☐ If a toy chest is used, the lid has safety hinges and air holes, or there is no lid.

## LIST OF ASSOCIATED MATERIALS

The following materials were created in association with this project. They are resources and references for *F5MC* and members of the Playgroup Workgroup.

**A - Playgroup Parent Survey.** A copy of the Parenting Ladder developed by the University of Idaho is provided. Other demographic questions are provided on the second sheet. This is a tool that can be used to assess changes as a result of attending playgroups.

**B – Flyer (Parent Friendly Fact Sheet Template).** Brochures promote F5MC playgroups and answer questions like, "what is a playgroup?," "why are they important?," and "how does our community benefit?" This template is designed for families that might be interested in attending.

**C – Mileage Reimbursement Form for Peer Visits and Mentoring.** Playgroup facilitators may need financial assistance and incentives to attend other playgroups or professional development opportunities. A form for recording the event, drive time, and hours spent was developed to support professional development through this project.

**D – Making Community Partnerships (Information and MOU Template).** Older siblings are often in attendance at playgroups. Rather than exclude them, organizations can seek to build partnerships with others to provide programming.  This brief provides guidance for these partnerships.

**E – Guide for Workgroup Meetings.** Guidelines for facilitating supportive Workgroup meetings have been created and shared.

**F – Workgroup Meeting Agenda Template.** The playgroup Workgroup may consider meeting in the future; this template can be used to organize the time and topic.

**G – Sample Registration Form and Liability Waiver.** New playgroups may wish to register families for playgroups; this provides the organization with important information about the family that is attending. A sample liability waiver is also included. To implement this form, the liability waiver should be sent to the appropriate person or division for approval (for example, a new program at a school would ask for approval from the principal or other authorized person).

**H – Attendance Sheet Example for a 7-Week Session.** A sample attendance sheet is provided.

**I – Analysis of Playgroup Offerings for F5MC.** Using information from funded playgroups, this document identifies past and present, playgroup offerings as well as recommendations for frequency toward best practice.

**J – Example Playgroup Flyer – Spanish (developed by Pajaro FRC).** This flyer is an example of how to promote a new program. It was developed by Pajaro FRC and used to recruit families for playgroup.

**K – Playgroup Observation Tool for Peer Visits and Mentoring.** As part of peer mentoring, this tool provides a place for visitors to document and reflect on their experience.

**L – Playgroup Fact Sheet Template for Administrators and Professionals.** Brochures promote F5MC playgroups and answer questions like, "what is a playgroup?," "why are they important?," and "how does our community benefit?" This template is designed for referring agencies and other professionals and organizations in the community.

**M – Recommendations on Playgroup Frequency.** This brief summarizes information on playgroup frequency, and includes recommendations for structuring playgroup offerings in alignment with promising practice.

**N – Library and Resource Checkout Sheet.** Playgroups may have materials they'd like to share with parents; this sheet can be used to track what's been lent. Similarly, members of the Workgroup may wish to share resources with one another, and the form can be used to remember what materials have been checked out and what's been returned.

**O – Master Supply List.** The supply master list includes the requests from playgroups.

**P – Sample Guidelines for Families.** Using materials from best practice research and existing materials used by funded playgroups, guidelines have been compiled that present parents with the information they need to fully participate in playgroups.

**Q – Strategies for Building Positive Relationships.** In December 2010, members of the Workgroup identified strategies that they use to build positive relationships. The results of this meeting are documented here.

**R – Playgroup Health and Safety Checklist.** The health and safety checklist can be used to identify risks in the environment.

**S- Playgroup Calendar and Contacts (Spring 2011).** The playgroup calendar is used to track the current the offerings of funded sites. Members can organize peer visits or inform families of other playgroups in the area.

**T – Curriculum Review.** Benefits, potential limitations, and costs of curricula were explored and noted. Information from the Review was used for discussion with members of the Workgroup.

**U – Effective Practices Matrix.** This tool is designed to be used to assess playgroup quality. It can be completed by the person facilitating the playgroup (self-assessment) or by an outside professional.

**Electronic Workspace.** An electronic workspace has been developed for this project. It can be accessed at:
https://sites.google.com/site/playgroupWorkgroup/