

Setting up a Language Playgroup

Setting up a Language Playgroup is fairly straight forward. Remember this doesn't all have to happen in week 1. It grows.

Our group started as group of 6 mothers sitting at someone's house, with our few-month-old babies lying on the floor, and us laughing our socks off as we shared our experiences of motherhood in the early days.

Advertise

To promote your new playgroup to begin with: Make posters to put up at local shops, local schools, local day care centres, churches, etc. It is likely that in some places your posters will hang around for a long time, so make sure they stand the test of time: Instead of "we meet Mondays from 9-11 in the Chalk School basement" put something generic like "we meet weekly on the north side of town"... then have one single place (like your website or a phone number) where the up to date details are posted. All your other advertising should point to the up to date website or phone number (wherever your primary contact point is and your up to date details are). Then if your group gets bigger and you change venues, or you get kicked out of your venue and have to choose another day and another venue, you don't need to replace all your posters, and it saves people turning up at a vacant location on the wrong day trying to find you.

Venue

Start by meeting at each other's houses, until the group is big enough (and meets regularly enough) to hire a hall/venue/preschool/whatever. If the group is too small, it isn't worth hiring a venue. You can also meet in a park or playground, in the summer, of course.

Look for church hall, community hall, or even a local school that might have a free classroom once a week. A preschool would be ideal. They should be able to rent it out to a community group for a very small fee. If you are using a preschool building, you could even offer to put money towards their paints and other consumables instead of having to supply your own. We thought that having an outdoor area was essential, but as we discovered, people survive without outdoor play for 2 hours a week.

Leader and Treasurer and Activity Coordinators

Appoint a treasurer and a leader. You might like to make a little roster as to who organises the activity, who reads the story, who makes the tea....

Appoint a sunshine coordinator, who welcomes newcomers, introduces them around, remembers their names at song time to sing a welcome song, and so on.

Name

Pick a nice name for your group, in your language, but that is relatively easy for English speakers to pronounce.

Language Policy

Decide what the **policy on language** will be. Options to consider include: Only the LOTE (LOTE = Language Other Than English)? Is it okay for LOTE-learning parents to speak English? Only the LOTE when speaking to kids?

Program

Decide on what the **program** will be like (structured with routine, or just free play?) You may find there are more language opportunities in a slightly structured routine, otherwise it is just kids roaming around and adults talking to each other.... although there is also great value in this too!

List of Members and Friends of the Group

Keep a **database** of all your attendees and their details. Also add the names and details of anyone who even makes the slightest little enquiry about the group - because when you are having a special event, you can invite them too, or at least send out a little newsletter now and again, as a marketing tool to make your group more successful, and better known in the community. Better known = more people get to benefit, but it also means more donations and more support.

Contact

Email contact with the group is essential, as you don't want to be on the phone all day, letting people know of a changed venue or something.

Website

As a busy parent yourself, you will appreciate not having to spend all day on the phone answering enquiries. Get a **website** as soon as possible, with all the relevant information, and point people to the website when they ring.

Insurance

We get insurance through the Playgroups Association, but if there isn't an organisation like that, you could have people sign an agreement about who pays for damages in someone's home (maybe it is half the owner and half the destroyer, and the agreement is that the item is replaced at cost of new, or whatever. The clearer that is, the less chance people will feel awkward about it, and not know what to expect or do, if something gets broken.

Budget

Collect a little money each week (or by term is much easier for people, and for the treasurer / leader); use it to buy consumables each week. Save some up to buy toys and little furniture (tables and chairs) for the playgroup when you move out into a hall or other room.

Community Support and Donations

You can get folk to donate stuff as well. Maybe people in the group have grown out of some of the toys and books, but younger families can make use of it. Businesses like to donate stuff - even if it is something useless for kids, you can raffle it off.... and mention them on your website. Your language's embassy might even make a donation. You'll also probably need to buy yourself (or have donated) a big cupboard where you can lock up your stuff at the venue.

Library

Start a library. Essential for the promotion of language, especially outside of playgroup hours.

Songs and a Song Book

Put together a song book. Be sure to have songs at the end of each session. It makes people go home happy, with a pleasant feeling, feeling part of a nice group - which is what singing does, in any language! Also, if you have songs for your transitions (like welcome, call to morning tea, call to tidy up, call to story time, goodbye) it makes things more pleasant, and is much nicer than having to shout "Okay everyone! Morning tea has started!!"

More information

The Playgroups Association has lots more information on how to set up a playgroup. You can ask them... on playgroupsact@ixa.net.au

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