

State of Play

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF PLAYGROUP SA

ISSUE 2 2015

**STUCK
INSIDE?**
LET'S MOVE!

**DADS AT
PLAYGROUP**

**SENSORY PLAY
TIPS & TRICKS**

FLIP OVER FOR
SA KIDS



Letter from **STATE OF PLAY**

Welcome to another edition of *State of Play*. It's hard to believe that we are into the cooler months already. Easter and the school holidays have flown by and the first term of Playgroup is done and dusted.

We've just celebrated Autism Awareness month and in this edition we share our tips on how to experience play on the autism journey.

There are many people to thank, including the hundreds of families who helped us celebrate National Playgroup

Week in Mount Gambier, the City of Mount Gambier for its partnership and all the families who attended Easter Playgroup at Playgroup SA. A big thank you, also, to the families that stopped by our stand at the Parents Babies and Children's Expo.

We hope all Playgroup families have enjoyed their holidays and are looking forward to another great term of fun at Playgroup.

Carley Jones, Executive Officer, Playgroup SA

HANDS-ON FUN

Introduce sensory activities for children with autism and you'll find other kids will love them, too.

WORDS MELANIE BAKER, PLAYGROUP SA SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Socialising can be a daunting task for parents who have a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). But with careful planning, you can create a welcoming, exciting environment that will help these children engage in play at your playgroup.

Bring in topics that interest the child to add to their play experience and help hold their attention. Try doing the activity yourself first, giving them enough space and time to watch before they feel comfortable joining in.

Be flexible. If you've found an activity that everyone enjoys, stick with it. And don't be discouraged if no one wants to join in. Just having kids watch you demonstrate and talk about what it looks like, smells or feels like will make the activity a positive and rewarding experience.

Children with ASD might need time to process that an activity will finish soon. Cleaning or packing it up together can help. Try to remember the importance of eye contact and saying exactly what you mean. For example, when complimenting a child, try not to just say "good job", but "I think you did a good job painting your picture".

Sensory play is highly creative, has no focus on making something specific and is focused on the process, not the product. It allows children to represent feelings or thoughts with or without the use of spoken words, and can be an enjoyable, soothing experience.

As this play is open-ended and has no rules, it means every child, regardless of age, abilities or needs, can participate.

Children can use all their senses to explore, see, hear, taste, smell and, particularly, touch. All this contributes to cognitive, creative and physical development. It encourages fine motor, sensory processing and communication skills, hand-eye coordination, following directions, sharing and turn-taking. Here are some ideas to try:

- Cover a table with a plastic tablecloth or bubble wrap and let children paint with their hands. Experiment by mixing different colours together.
- Tape a piece of contact sticky side up to a table. Children can use feathers and bits and pieces to stick and unstick. Tape a long piece to the floor and have children walk over it, with or without shoes.
- Try adding flavours and textures such as cocoa powder, cinnamon and food colouring to your playdough recipe. Add scents and textures such as vanilla, orange, lemon, peppermint, rose water essence, lavender oil, dried herbs (oregano, thyme), rice, lentils, sand, pebbles or rock salt.
- To make playdough, mix together a cup of plain flour, half a cup of salt and two tablespoons of cream of tartar. Mix one tablespoon of cooking oil with a half to one teaspoon of food colouring with a cup of boiling water, and slowly add it to the dry ingredients until a dough forms. Knead until smooth and stretchy. Store in an airtight container in the fridge.
- Fill balloons with playdough. Draw faces on the outside of the balloons with a permanent marker. These can be



moulded into different shapes. You can also fill balloons with dried rice. If a hole appears in the balloon, throw it away.

- For a calming activity, add a few drops of food colouring to a cup of dried rice and mix together in a container. You can make different colours and, once dried, mix them together. Store in a sealed container. For play, use different sized cups, scoops, measuring spoons, milk bottle lids for pouring and measuring or small plastic animals to hide and bury.
- Cook some spaghetti and rinse with cool water. Add a handful, with several drops of food colouring, to a snaplock bag, seal and shake. You may like to make a few different colours. Leaving the cooked spaghetti in a sealed container overnight creates a sticky consistency. Once children have felt it 'sticky', add small amounts of water until it feels 'slimy'. You may like to add more water and move the noodles around with your hands or feet.
- To make slime, mix together two cups of Lux soap flakes and two litres of hot water and add food colouring, if desired. Leave to cool for one to two hours, or overnight, to thicken. Use on a flat surface such as a table or put in a shallow tray.
- Mix together a 500g bag of cornflour with enough water until you reach a smooth yet runny consistency. When it starts to dry out, add a little more water. Add a couple of drops of food colouring if desired.
- Ask children to help you fill containers or watering cans with water and pour it into a tray or trough. Experiment

by adding a few drops of food colouring or make bubbles by adding a little dishwashing detergent. Use warm water for a soothing and calming experience. Bath or wash dolls or large plastic animals with sponges. Add ice cubes and watch them melt during play. Add water beads or leaves and use sieves to scoop them up.

- 'Paint' the fence or outside walls with water and brushes. Water the lawn, plants or trees.
- Everyone loves bubbles. Watch them float by, try to pop them and take turns at blowing them.

SIMPLE NO-COOK IDEAS

- Make a fruit salad together. Adults can help to cut up the fruit and children can transfer it to the bowl and take turns mixing it together.
- Cut bite-sized pieces of banana, strawberries, grapes, watermelon or rockmelon to thread onto natural pop sticks to make fruit kebabs.
- Prepare crackers or sandwiches for snack time. Provide children slices of cheese, a butter knife and a plate and let them spread butter or spreads onto the crackers or bread and put cheese on top.
- Remember to have a washbasin or sink close by for cleaning hands and be aware of the products you used to ensure they are safe, especially for children who are sensory seekers and may attempt to swallow. Supervision is required at all times. ●



DADS MATTER

It's important to make every minute count when it comes to busy dads and their children, says Laura McCard.

WORDS LAURA MCCARD, PLAYGROUP SA SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT TEAM LEADER

Dads spend a total of about four hours a day with their children, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

That means they're probably spending two hours caring for their kids, and two hours playing and talking with them.

If we really think about that, two hours is a very short figure in a 24-hour day. It's important to make sure that time is spent well.

Playgroup is a great option for dads and grandads, because it gives them the chance to interact with their children and grandchildren in a supportive environment.

It's a place where children can show Dad what they do each week and dads can meet other families, network and share thoughts and experiences.

Group time often means dads and father figures have the chance to join in and sing along with the children, something they may not do otherwise.

Here at Playgroup, we've been pleased to see so many dads and grandads attending groups in Term One. A great way to encourage dads to come along is to host a Saturday or Sunday or twilight weeknight session between 5.30pm and 7pm, either as a one-off or scheduled event.

We want father figures to be included at Playgroup, even if it's only once a year or term.

There are plenty of ways to create quality time at home for the working parent, whether it's Mum or Dad, Grandma or Grandpa or other special people.

SHARE A STORY

Children love being read to and everyone reads stories differently, so it's great to mix up the narration of a story. You could incorporate this into a regular bedtime routine.

TAKE TIME TO TEACH

When you're out and about, point out things that you and your children notice and take the time to explain and explore together. For example if you see caterpillar, talk about what they eat, how they come from an egg and how they eventually turn into a cocoon, then turn into a butterfly.

SWITCH OFF

Watching television together might be a ritual for some families, but if you limit the time spent on screen media you will instantly find you enjoy more quality time together.

STOP TO LISTEN

Put your phone away, stop anything that might be distracting you and dedicate a period of time solely to your child, without acknowledging outside pressures and influences. Only your undivided attention will allow you to capture those golden moments. It also helps nurture and build their confidence.

TAKE A TRIP

Nothing says quality family time like a good old Sunday drive together. Use this time to talk and chat and watch whatever is happening through the window. Combine it with a picnic or a trip to a park to kick around a ball or visit a playground or beach.

EAT TOGETHER

It can be challenging to find the time to all sit around a table and eat together. But if you make a few small adjustments, this can be a wonderful part of your daily routine and a place where great conversation happens. ●

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Kids need plenty of active play all year round, even when it's cold and grey outside.

WORDS CARLEY JONES, PLAYGROUP SA EXECUTIVE OFFICER

It's cold and dark outside, the wind is blowing and the ground is wet and muddy. You've braved the elements to get to Playgroup, and all everyone wants to do is enjoy the cosy indoors. Everyone, that is, except the bustling, noisy, high-energy movers of the group. It's important to get those noisy bodies moving outside.

There is a mounting body of evidence suggesting that children and young people are leading increasingly sedentary lifestyles, the size of Australian backyards is decreasing and screen time for children and young people is on the rise.

According to the *2014 Active Healthy Kids Australia Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Young People*, less than half of our children and young people are not getting enough exercise.

The Australian Physical Activity Guidelines recommends that children aged two to four years should participate in at least 180 minutes of physical activity each day.

For some families, Playgroup might be the only time their kids can access any form of physical play. It's important to schedule some high-energy, big movement play time into the session, particularly outdoors when the weather permits.

The benefits of outdoor play include good health, better self confidence and social skills, movement, balance, coordination, reaction time, better motor skills, increased mental awareness and weight management.

So, if it's cold and dark, rug up. Throw on that jacket, pull on those gumboots and explore the outdoors. If you're on the go outside, you'll be surprised how quickly you warm up. A quick 30 minutes outside can provide children with many benefits for the day. If going outside is impossible, provide some big movement activities inside, such as an obstacle course made from furniture, action songs and rhymes, encouraging dance movements such as skipping



and leaping at different heights and speeds. Here are some play items for pre-schoolers to encourage active play:

- Boxes, crates, tubes and containers;
- Balls of different sizes, colour and texture, including balloons;
- Skipping ropes, scarves and fabric strips;
- Buckets, spades, paintbrushes and sweeping brushes;
- Pots and pans;
- Leaves and pine cones; and
- Mats, cushions, beanbags and tyres.

TRY THESE PLAY IDEAS:

- Make an obstacle course made from everyday objects.



Try pillows and cushions to climb over, limbo using a parent-controlled broom handle, chair legs to tunnel under;

- Play balance games. Place a skipping rope on the ground and practice walking on it, carrying a bell or cup or water for an extra challenge;
- Play pass or toss the bean bag;
- Choose a partner for songs and games such as Row, row, row your boat;
- Tie short lengths of rope around soft toys (as a lead) and take the toys for a planned walk; and
- Lay out a long roll of paper and let children paint it with their feet. This is a really fun, messy, sensory experience for young children.

HOW DO WE PLAN FOR ALL AGES IN ONE ROOM?

- Use furniture and toys to define set play areas;
- Label play areas for parents, such as Baby Safe Play Area;
- Allocate a 'safe space' for babies to explore without risk of injury;
- Establish a caring culture where children are encouraged to be respectful of each other, the equipment and the room; and
- Establish 'turn taking' guidelines. ●

If you would like to know more about how to incorporate physical play into your playgroup routine, please contact Playgroup SA on freecall 1800 171 882.

BIG PLAY DAY OUT

Hundreds of families helped Playgroup SA launch its National Playgroup Week in Mount Gambier in March.



PLAYGROUP Workshops

2015

Cost per Playgroup Workshop (inc GST)

Playgroup SA Members	\$15
Playgroup SA Coordinators	\$15
Playgroup Group Booking (minimum of 4 people)	\$10 per person
Non-Members of Playgroup SA	\$40



PLAYGROUP SA
Playing, learning, supporting families

Enrolments / Enquiries

Playgroup SA 1800 171 882 or through submitting a 'Workshop Enrolment Form'.

Bookings are essential to secure your place and payment is due strictly FIVE business days prior to the Playgroup Workshop.

No REFUNDS or CREDITS will be given without a minimum of five business days notice.

Crèche

A crèche service is available on-site when stated. This service is included in the Workshop Cost.

Location

Playgroup SA Head Office
91 Prospect Road, Prospect SA



CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENTS Training available 12 March / 18 June / 10 September
FREE for Playgroup Coordinators - Enquire with Playgroup SA for further details.

Coordinators Workshop

Are you thinking about starting a Playgroup?
Are you a new Playgroup Coordinator?
Are you interested in assisting with the running of your Playgroup?

The Coordinators Workshop will provide you with all the information that you need to assist in these roles!

This workshop includes invaluable tips on how to effectively run a Playgroup, as well as creative play ideas and useful information on the value and benefits of play. This is also a great opportunity to connect and brainstorm with other Playgroup Coordinators and Playgroup SA staff in developing your own Playgroup support network.

Thursday 19 February
10am - 12:30pm
Crèche available

Saturday 2 May
10am - 12:30pm
NO Crèche available

Thursday 20 August
10am - 12:30pm
Crèche available

Thursday 12 November
6pm - 8pm
NO Crèche available

This workshop is centred around age appropriate play ideas and activities for pre-school age children.

A change in the process of school intake has prompted a demand for stimulating ideas and activities for 4-5 year old Playgroupers, prior to school entry.

Pre-schoolers need and respond well to structure. They are more capable of managing intense emotions and they require routine to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Pre-school age children start to display more curious and questioning behaviours... they are more prone to pushing the boundaries and they often love to experiment with exploration and risk taking.

Pre-Schoolers at Play

Thursday 5 March

10am - 12pm

Crèche available

Wednesday 4 November

6pm - 8pm

NO Crèche available

Make & Play

Tuesday 12 May

6pm - 8pm

NO Crèche available

An opportunity for fun to MAKE and PLAY, create and share ideas and activities using homemade, recycled and inexpensive materials - for the Playgroup and the home. This workshop will explore the developmental process of creating your own play resources and will feature discussions about the types and categories of play, tips on how to create interactive play environments and hands on fun making toys!

Messy Play

Explore the value and benefits of messy play and gain age appropriate play ideas - but most of all, be engaged and have fun!

Messy Play makes an enormous contribution to your child's early language and literacy development. It is a vital component to children's cognitive processes and developing creativity, and benefits all children's learning!

Thursday 19 March

10am - 12pm

Crèche available

Music & Movement

Learn about the importance of music in early childhood. Discover how to run your own interactive Music & Movement session at Playgroup and gain fabulous ideas to get your playgroup families moving and singing. Includes actions and dances, props, musical instruments, parachute songs, songs that encourage movement and music for babies

Thursday 14 May

10am - 12pm

NO Crèche available

Christmas Craft

Come along and celebrate the festive season with this fabulous hands-on art and craft workshop that will provide you with inspiring ideas to share with your children! A fun and interactive Christmas themed session that will explore a variety of art materials, techniques and ideas to use with young children in the lead up to Christmas.

Thursday 22 October

10am - 12pm

Crèche available

HOME TRUTHS

The latest census figures reflect the importance of our children's early years.

WORDS ALANNA SINCOVICH, YASMIN HARMAN-SMITH AND SALLY BRINKMAN, TELETHON KIDS INSTITUTE

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a national measure of children's development. Collected in the first year of full-time schooling, the AEDC measures five key areas of development: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; communication skills and general knowledge. Taken together, these domains provide a holistic picture of a child's development and are important predictors of later health, wellbeing and academic achievement.

Every three years, teachers of children in their first year of full-time school record information for each child in their class, based on their observations. In 2009, the first census covered 261,147 children (96.5 percent of children enrolled to start school at this time); 2012 saw the second national data collection, this time with 289,973 children (97.5 percent), and in May to July 2015, AEDC data is being collected nationally for a third time. This national census gives us vital information to help shape the future and wellbeing of Australian children.

The AEDC provides us with a snapshot of how children are faring developmentally across the country. It can be considered a reflection of how well a community is supporting their children in their early years, and it also provides evidence to support health, education and community policy and planning.

Although the majority of children are doing well, more than one in five South Australian children are developmentally vulnerable by the time they get to school. In 2009, 22.8 percent of South Australian children, that is 3,419 children, were developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains of the AEDC. In 2012, this number increased to 23.7 percent; or 4,115 vulnerable children.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

The environments and experiences children are exposed to from pregnancy through to school age shape their development.

- Children learn best when they are healthy, independent, and physically ready for each day. In their earliest years, it is important for children to form good nutrition and sleep habits. To thrive at school, children need play opportunities from birth, such as: active play, messy play, drawing, cutting and play dough. To develop independence, they also need time and support to practice self-help skills.
- Children do well in social settings when they are confident, happy to try new things and can get along well with their peers. Children develop self-confidence and social skills through their earliest relationships. Positive

and supportive relationships teach children how to get along with others and they also help children learn that they are capable and important.

- Children adapt best to a classroom environment when they can consider others, concentrate, have patience and are beginning to manage their emotions. Children learn to regulate their emotions, follow instructions and wait their turn by practicing these skills in their early environments. Positive and supportive relationships with consistent rules and boundaries provide a safe environment in which children can develop these skills.
- Children love to learn new things at school when they have developed an early interest in reading and counting, and can recognise numbers and shapes. In their earliest years, children have a natural curiosity and love to learn about the world around them. Reading, playing games, counting and talking about their experiences makes the most of children's natural curiosity. This teaches children basic concepts and prepares them for school.
- Children who are successful learners are able to communicate their needs and thoughts to others. Children can develop good communication skills when they are given the opportunity to listen and speak. Talking to children about everyday tasks, environments and experiences, singing songs together, as well as asking and answering questions, helps prepare them for communicating independently.

Parents play the most important role in their children's lives, but they do not need to do this alone. Programs and services are available to support parents before their children start school. In their earliest years, much of children's development is best supported through play-based opportunities. One way parents can learn more about how to support development through play is by attending Playgroup with their child. Through providing a safe, fun learning environment, Playgroup can support children's physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development. Playgroup is also a great place for parents to meet other parents, support one another and learn from each other.

Children's early years are so important – their brains are developing rapidly. Children who are thriving when they start school are likely to continue to do well. Getting it right in the early years sets the foundation for lifelong benefits to children and to the whole community. ●

Alanna Sincovich, Yasmin Harman-Smith and Sally Brinkman are Adelaide-based researchers with the Fraser Mustard Institute.