

State of Play

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF PLAYGROUP SA

Issue Two, September 2016

PLAYGROUPS POSITIVE IMPACT

RESEARCH SUPPORTS
PLAYGROUPS ROLE IN
DEVELOPMENT

WHAT'S ON
THE SHELF?

NATURE PLAY IS
HERE TO STAY



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SPRING INTO PLAYGROUP

Welcome to the second edition of State of Play.

What a relief it is that Spring has finally sprung! It's been a real joy to head out to a variety of Playgroups and enjoy the sunshine with families again, not to mention set up messy play outside where clean up only involves a hose! And with the beautiful spring weather in full swing, we thought it perfect timing to provide some great tips on setting up a nature play space in your own backyard or Playgroup, and how to provide nature play opportunities for the youngest members of your Playgroup or family.

In honour of Father's Day, we hear from a committed Playgroup Dad about his experience attending Playgroup with his two young children. Damian is not only a committed Playgroup Dad at his local Playgroup, he is also a dedicated volunteer board member of the Playgroup SA Board of Management.

You'll read about tips for including diversity into your Playgroup or home library, and why the ever popular craft is so important for children's development. The date is set for our Annual Playgroup at the Zoo event and we encourage you all to add the event into your calendar. The final preparations are under way and we can't wait to see you all there, sharing the Playgroup fun at the Adelaide Zoo.

Playgroup SA also has a number of free events coming up including the Riverland Outdoor Playgroup and our annual Twilight Playgroup for Children's Week. Don't forget you can head to our website for all the up-to-date information on Playgroup SA events and workshops. Playgroup Coordinators can also contact Playgroup SA to request one of our messy play sessions at your Playgroup. These sessions are a chance for you to gain new ideas from Playgroup SA staff, and for all to enjoy a messy, and wondrous session full of fun.

Finally, I must send a big thank you out to all families, coordinators and volunteers that make the Playgroup movement in SA vibrant and wonderful each and every week.

We look forward to seeing you all at your local Playgroup soon.



Carley Jones
Executive Officer
Playgroup SA



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PUBLISHER
Playgroup SA

91 Prospect Road SA 5082
Phone 08 8344 2722
Free Call 1800 171 882
www.playgroupsa.com.au

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Carley Jones
eo@playgroupsa.com.au

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To find a Playgroup near you head to www.playgroupsa.com.au

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COME AND TRY PLAYGROUP TODAY!

With up to 300 community Playgroups across South Australia, your local Playgroup could be just around the corner.

Playgroup is a group of mums, dads, grandparents and caregivers who meet together each week with their babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers (aged 0-5 years) for interaction, fun and learning.

At Playgroup, YOUR CHILD will:

Socialise with other children, learn and develop new skills, listen to music and stories, gain problem solving skills, explore through play, painting, and art and craft, and most importantly... have fun!

At Playgroup, YOU will:

Learn new skills, share experiences, play, learn and engage with children, make friends, interact socially, and become an active role model for your child(ren).

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PLAYGROUPS POSITIVE IMPACT:

Research shows Playgroups play an important role in children's development

Words Yasmin Harman-Smith, Deputy Director Child Health, Development and Education, Telethon Kids Institute

Much has been written about the importance of play for children's development. In fact, play is considered so important for childhood development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a basic right of every child. In today's world however, we see children engaging in much less play with other children than previous generations. There are a number of reasons why we think this might be happening. Pressures on families are changing due to increased working hours, changes to neighbourhoods make it less inviting for children to meet and mingle, there is less available outdoor play space, there is an increased focus on early literacy and numeracy, and increases in passive entertainment through toys and entertainment devices for children are overwhelming.

In this changing landscape, Playgroups can provide safe places for children to play, and supportive environments - where parents can learn about the benefits of play as well as building a social network that supports them in their children's earliest years. Playgroups provide an opportunity for children to regularly engage in unstructured play with other children of a similar age and developmental stage, offering opportunities to develop their physical, emotional, social, and language skills. Playgroups also provide opportunities for parents and carers to socialise, learn parenting skills, and seek emotional support from one another.

Recent research by the Telethon Kids Institute - It takes a village to raise a child: the influence and impact of Playgroups across Australia, utilised information collected as part of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC).

It showed that across Australia, around 36% of children attended Playgroups at some stage before starting school, and almost 60% of children in South Australia attended Playgroup. The AEDC is a national measure of children's development, that is collected every three years in the first year of children's full-time schooling and it measures five key areas of development: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; communication skills and general knowledge. The AEDC also collects some information about what early childhood education and care services children participated in before they started school.

Using the AEDC data, researchers identified a clear benefit of attending Playgroup for children across Australia. Children who attended Playgroup in the year before starting school were almost twice as likely to start school with the skills they needed to cope with the social and learning challenges ahead of them. Importantly, the research found that Playgroups had a benefit for all children irrespective of their cultural and language background or where they lived.

The benefits of Playgroup were evident across all domains of child development: physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development, and communication. Starting school with these foundational skills sets children in good stead for the transition to school, and provides a lifelong benefit. This research was the first to be able to demonstrate an association between attending Playgroups and improved child development outcomes.

There is still some work to do before we can say categorically, that Playgroups made the difference. For now, a spotlight has shone on the potential contribution Playgroups can make in supporting families with young children. As governments, service providers and researchers take stock of the evidence, work is taking shape around the country to identify the best way to promote healthy early environments where play is valued and encouraged.

To read the full research conducted by Telethon Kids Institute head to www.playgroupsa.com.au

For more information about Playgroup and its benefits for children, or to find a Playgroup near you, head to www.playgroupsa.com.au



Physical health and wellbeing

Social competence

Emotional maturity

Language and cognitive skills (school based)

Communication skills and general knowledge

Children's physical readiness for the school day, physical independence and gross and fine motor skills

Children's overall social competence, responsibility and respect, approach to learning and readiness to explore new things.

Children's pro-social and helping behaviours, and absence of anxious and fearful behaviour, aggressive behaviour and hyperactivity and inattention.

Children's basic literacy, interest in literacy, numeracy and memory, advanced literacy and basic numeracy.

Children's communication skills and general knowledge based on broad developmental competencies and skills measured in the school context.

Five key areas of development - Telethon Kids Institute



NATURE PLAY IS HERE TO STAY

How to create a nature play environment your children will love to explore.

Words Nathan Sim

It's no secret that children love playing and investigating outside. When you think back to your own play experiences as a child, if you're anything like me, your most memorable play experiences usually involve being out in the front or backyard. I remember playing for hours on a ton of paving sand and making caves and roads out of it; or using the mattock in the garden to create roads and rivers for when I played with my soldiers. In recent years the 'nature play' movement, has seen resurgence in the idea that playing outside in nature is memorable and therapeutic - and for good reason. Nature play has a positive effect upon children's physical, cognitive and emotional development; the basis for creativity, problem solving, reasoning, socialising and managing risk.

What is the purpose of nature play?

Play is about learning and child development - more so than child entertainment. It is an important part of healthy development in which children challenge themselves and practice skills, and children who play regularly in natural environments show more advanced motor fitness, including coordination, balance and agility, and they are sick less often (Grahn, et al. 1997, Fjortoft & Sageie 2001).

Creating a nature play environment

With the developmental benefits in mind, how do you create a nature play environment at home? Quite simply, you create opportunities to

explore, discover and engage in your own garden.

The design of your garden doesn't need to be an amazing architecturally designed landscape, it just needs to be a space to create memorable experiences, opportunities for wonderment and a place to belong. We can all remember a touch, sight, smell, taste, or sound which triggers a memorable experience. To use your garden as a learning environment is about the journey, not the destination. Plan a garden that makes the most of its natural elements such as sun exposure and topography, involve and listen to your children about how they want to use the garden and incorporate that into the design. Children like small spaces to explore and crawl through so create compartments and connect them with paths, and expect and allow for loose parts play, stones or pebbles to be stacked, logs to be rolled.

Children also want to be involved and contribute. They love helping, like my children, who collect the chicken eggs, grab the shovel to collect the dog poo, pick fruit or help pave or plant. Of course things take twice as long with them in tow but they also learn for themselves and as a busy parent it's a great opportunity to delegate tasks.

How our nature play garden works

Yes, we are fortunate to have a larger backyard by today's standards but a lot of what we have done in our backyard can also be

achieved in a smaller one with minor adjustments. Our 200 square metre nature play backyard contains 17 fruit and nut trees so my children can experience what comes into and out of season - a smaller garden can still include a fruit tree, even in a pot. The trees also create mood and shading, a forest effect for hiding, and attracting insects and birds. It is accompanied by a sand pit and mud pit with rock borders and an outdoor shower to allow the children to dig, mix, create and clean up after! At ground level children have a sense of independence created by dense planting of succulents, lavenders, deities and canna lilies which create secluded hideaways, and require children to follow meandering paths to discover what is around the corner; while an adult from the living room can observe the children. Elevated timber cubby houses plus an old metal jungle gym provide height to allow the children to be above adults and see things from a different perspective, and a 1950s bucket swing allows the children to explore their environment from another point of view and imagine the possibilities.

In nature play children can find their own level. When needed, they can find refuges for quiet play or if they're after rough and tumble, they can easily find their spot. Nature play caters for all learning and emotional types. Just as important though, by encouraging independent play it enables children to work together and learn valuable skills while parents get to sit back, relax and enjoy watching their children grow.

TIPS FOR NATURE PLAY GARDENS

Your nature play garden doesn't need to be a large area, it just needs to be a place where children can explore. Here are some tips on what to include:

- Include a variety of plant types (such as flowers, fruit trees, shrubs) for children to explore and learn
- Create high and low experiences with plants and items to climb and crawl underneath
- Create small spaces for children to crawl through and hide inside
- Be flexible, allow children to make changes to the space through digging, planting, stacking and moving rocks
- Include a variety of elements, dirt, grass, water and rocks
- Mix toys and other household items into the nature play environment

PREPARING FOR PRESCHOOL

You passed the baby stage, survived the toddler stage and you're quickly entering the Preschool stage. It's amazing how quickly your child develops and before you know it, they'll be starting school. To help prepare your child for school, now is the perfect time to start thinking about your options for Preschool. But where do you start?... We've got your initial questions covered.

What is preschool?

Preschool is best described as an educational program for children in the year before they start formal schooling. The Preschool programs are designed and delivered by degree qualified early childhood teachers using the approved curriculum framework called the Early Years Learning Framework with a strong focus on learning through play – building on the skills already developed through attending Playgroup. In South Australia, the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) is responsible for providing preschool education programs in a range of government funded centres including Preschools, Kindergartens, School-based Preschools, Integrated centres and Children's centres. Some Preschools provide additional programs such as Playgroups, Occasional care and Emergency care.

What does Preschool offer my child?

Aside from providing a stimulating environment where your child can begin to socialise and develop with other children their age, the preschool learning environment provides opportunities for your child to:

- Learn, practise and refine new skills
- Extend communication skills, thinking and knowledge
- Make new friends
- Learn to negotiate and cooperate

with other children and have fun

- Develop confidence
- Share ideas, learn to problem solve and develop curiosity
- Learn to follow new routines, follow instructions and develop independence
- Develop good learning habits for life

Research demonstrates the many lifelong benefits and positive learning outcomes for children who attend preschool regularly.

When can my child start Preschool?

There is one intake at the beginning of each year for children who turn four years of age before 1 May. However, it is strongly recommended that you start the process of enrolling in Preschool once your child turns three years of age. Children are eligible to attend preschool for an average of 15 hours per week for 40 weeks of the year. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children under the Guardianship of the Minister may enrol in preschool after their third birthday.

The best thing to do is register your interest at your local and/or preferred preschools in the year before your child is due to start (at the age of 3). If you're uncertain about the best time for your child to attend preschool, or feel they may benefit from delaying their start until the following year,

you can talk with the preschool director or school principal about your options.

What are the financial costs of attending Preschool?

Preschool fees are set by the preschool governing council, however, the payment of preschool fees may be negotiated with the preschool director or school principal. Preschool fees may vary, however, the annual state average for 2016 is \$405.00. No child is excluded from a government-funded preschool on financial grounds.

Does Preschool cater for children with additional needs?

Children with additional needs due to disability or developmental delay, culturally and linguistically diverse background or other family circumstance may be eligible for support through the following programs:

- Preschool support
- Bilingual support
- Speech and language support

If your child has additional needs, you can discuss their individual needs and circumstances with the Preschool Director or School Principal.

For further information contact your local preschool or call 8207 2458.



3 STEPS TO PRESCHOOL

- **Step 1** – Choose your preferred Preschool
- **Step 2** – Contact the Preschool to register your interest
- **Step 3** – Complete the Preschool Enrolment Registration form provided by the Preschool

STARTING PRESCHOOL IN 2017

For further information on enrolling in Preschool head to www.decd.sa.gov.au/child-care/types-childcare/starting-preschool-2017

TO FIND YOUR LOCAL PRESCHOOL

www.decd.sa.gov.au/sites-and-facilities/education-and-care-locations/find-school-or-service



CRAFTING CONFIDENCE IN CHILDREN

Words Carley Jones

It's the process not the end result of craft that aids children's development and confidence in a range of key developmental milestones. Here's why we think craft is important for children and why we encourage Playgroups to offer craft.

How many families out there have a fridge overflowing with 'craft creations'? How many of us at the end of Playgroup take home an extra bag of spaceships and glittery creations? So, is there a point to Playgroups offering varied craft activities each week?

In short, yes! There are many benefits to allowing children of all ages, the opportunity to participate in craft activities both at Playgroup and home. Craft activities can range from painting, to gluing, to collage or creating a masterpiece for the Christmas tree. It is important when we offer children the opportunity to participate in craft, that they are allowed to partake at their own pace and there is no pressure on the children to deliver the next Mona Lisa at the end of the session.

This is because it's the process that is important for children, not the end product. When providing a set craft activity, try not to restrict the children in terms of materials either. If you are painting with brushes, but young Sammy has decided the kitchen sponge is far more interesting to paint with, then by all means let Sammy create!

WHAT ARE THE DEVELOPMENTAL BENEFITS OF CRAFT FOR CHILDREN?

Fine motor skills

Craft opportunities allow children to build bilateral coordination (using both hands together), the building blocks to learning to write and do up buttons later on for example. Fine motor skills are the use of hands and fingers in this context, and it's important to develop these skills as they lead to completing daily tasks such as eating, using scissors and writing down track.

Relationships-self confidence

Joining in an activity like craft with your child allows the relationship between you and them to develop whilst allowing their self-confidence to grow. It provides children with a sense of accomplishment and pride when presenting their masterpiece to loved ones.

Social skills

Negotiating the use of the sticky tape and simply sharing a creative space with others allows children the chance to develop social skills, in particular negotiating how to operate in a group. Craft time also

allows children to begin to learn to self-regulate in a group while waiting for the paint to be topped up or the patty pans to be shared out. Waiting in turn is a vital group norm. Working in a group environment or simply discussing the process required for the activity teaches children how to communicate and encourages a more varied vocabulary.

Imagination

The opportunity to allow children to build and create frees up their mind and assists in developing their imagination and creativity. Children can use their imagination to produce an image in their minds of what they want to create, then learn to plan and translate it into an end product.

Remember, with children under the age of 5, it's the process of creating, not the final product. All of the skills mentioned, plus other skills developed through regular attendance at Playgroup can help prepare children for Preschool/ Kindergarten and School.



WHAT CRAFT ACTIVITIES CAN YOU OFFER AT YOUR PLAYGROUP OR HOME?

Here's some ideas appropriate for each age group and developmental milestone

BABIES



FINGER PAINTING



CREATING WITH STICKERS

TODDLERS



MAKING A COLLAGE



BLOSSOM TREE

PRESCHOOLERS



HIGH FIVE HAND



PAPER BAG PUPPETS

WHAT'S ON THE SHELF?

Do the books you read with your children contain themes relevant to their environment?

Words Cathi Tucker
BEEd(EC)(Hons),BA Flin



There's a lot to be said about the benefits of reading with children and research from the Center on the Developing Child – Harvard University shows that a vocabulary-rich environment in the early years makes a life-long difference for educational opportunities. The research states that differences in the size of children's vocabulary first appear at 18 months of age. By the time Children reach school, those who are engaged in a language-rich environment develop a vocabulary 2 to 3 times larger than those who are not.

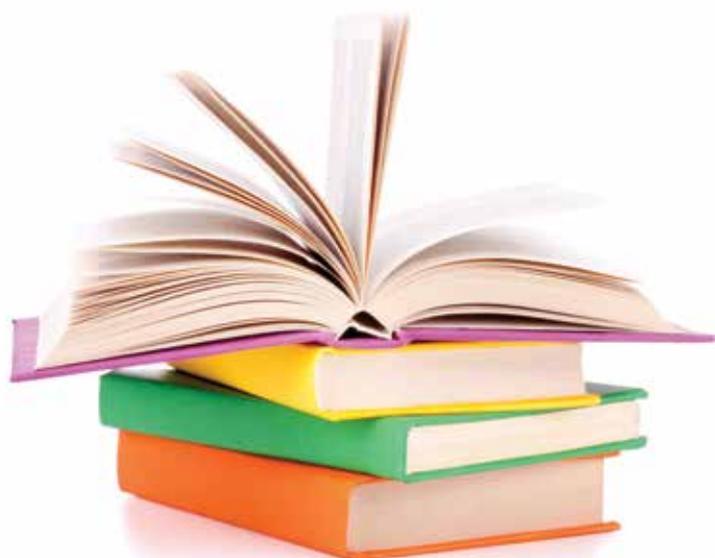
But it's not just reading with your child that is important – the content should also be relevant to your child's environment. There are a number of well written, interesting and imaginative books out there

that children love, which is great, but it is equally important that there is a balance of content that contains relevant themes your child can relate to.

A recent study I carried out on the relevance of content in children's books, found that there were a number of key aspects of everyday life and diversity, lacking. The research highlighted a strong gender imbalance in the books examined where male characters (human or animal) and occupations seemed to dominate. On closer examination, it became evident that a vast majority of children's books in the study portrayed characters as animals rather than people and there were a limited number of books set in Australia or involving stories around modern Australian life.

Reading books containing relevant content that children can link back to everyday situations - that they are familiar with, can aid in their social development and dealing with feelings, build self-esteem and provide them with a sense of belonging. But how do you choose books that provide a balance between imagination and everyday life? Some key suggestions to consider when choosing books for your children may be:

- Read the book cover to cover paying attention to the words and illustrations
- Choose books that are well written with a good storyline
- Choose books that are respectful and inclusive of



MAKING YOUR OWN BOOKS

One way of having fun with books is to make your own books.

This activity can be as simple or as complex as you wish. You could make a book using very basic craft – some cardboard (could be re-cycled) some curtain rings, a hole punch, glue, photos, children's artwork, or simply place children's artworks into plastic sleeves and create a title page for a ring binder. Of course the possibilities of utilising the wonders of technology are endless. One of the best-loved books I have seen was a homemade catalogue of lawnmowers, made by a family with their child who was very keen on them.

Book making is an activity that you could share at Playgroup or at home over a number of weeks. As with any published book, it's important to include the publication details, name of author(s), illustrator(s) and the date the book was created. You can go more "up market" by publishing and selling the book, perhaps this could be an annual fundraiser for your Playgroup. There are many printers who offer online book publishing.

aspects of diversity such as cultural and linguistic diversity, gender roles and people of all ages and abilities

- Choose books that are written for children; be cautious about comments or illustrations that may contain a different meaning for adults
- Look at the roles of female and male characters; check that girls are as active in the plot as boys.
- If inanimate objects have been ascribed a gender, are there some male and female characters?
- Think about the role of animals in the books, if they are portrayed as if they were human

(for example: speaking, wearing clothes, living in a house), are the female characters being as active as the male characters, and are gender role stereotypes being challenged?

- What occupations and activities are being portrayed?
- Think about a young child's perception of themselves as a growing person with interests in different areas, does the book match their interests?
- Are children portrayed being involved in real activities in their home and community? For example, working around the house/garden, going 'to work' with a parent, helping with the

shopping, caring for pets, being with extended family.

- Do the books show families like yours and families like those of the child(ren) who will be reading the book?
- Are there families who reflect your community in terms of their ethnicity, age, physical ability, employment, relationships?
- Are Indigenous Australians presented in a contemporary way?

And, finally, consider it an ongoing goal that over time you can build a collection that ticks all the boxes, rather than expecting to find a library of individual titles that cover all of the areas above.





DADS AT PLAY

From birth to preschool, much of a child's learning is achieved through play.

Play isn't just about having fun, according to Ngala – Parenting with confidence, playing with your baby is one of the best ways you can get to know each other and for your baby to learn about themselves and the world in which they live.

Playing with children, helps to build their imagination, promotes social skills, assists physical development and helps them to understand emotions. And when it comes to play, the role of a father is crucial in providing a child with a safe, secure and stable environment to develop.

At Playgroup SA, we believe that children learn best through play and support the idea of both parents: mothers and fathers, being involved in the play experience of Playgroup. We recently spoke with father of two and Playgroup SA Board member, Damian Pulgies about his experience as a father at Playgroup.

Words Damian Pulgies

It's true, one of the best ways that a father can bond with their child is through play. And the best thing a father can do is take on their role in play right from the start.

As a conscientious father, and volunteer Board Member of Playgroup SA, I am aware of the importance of children learning through quality play experiences. The early years of life are so important in setting up children for success and for positively contributing to society.

With this in mind, I have on many occasions, taken my children (Kimberly 3 and Finn 16 months) to our local Playgroup, at Netley Kindergarten. I've found that Playgroup provides a great environment for play and really supports my children's learning. Learning is a lifelong journey. It is important to create a foundation and environment for learning to flourish from an early age. I really enjoy the experience of seeing my children having fun and exploring at Playgroup. There are so many things

to do from painting, participating in craft and joining in with song and dance, to trampolining, balancing on tyres, visiting the chickens, and touching and smelling a variety of plants. And the best thing is I get to do all of this with them.

My most memorable experience at Playgroup so far, was seeing my daughter Kimberly paint using an easel for the first time. It was such a pleasure to see how proud and happy she was with the outcome (and being able to use her favourite colour purple, of course!) Seeing my son Finn smiling, laughing and dancing with the other children during music time is always a delight.

Netley Playgroup attracts a number of local parents and caregivers. There is often at least one other father who attends regularly. I have enjoyed developing a sense of connectedness to the other parents and caregivers through sharing experiences.

I believe it is not enough to show your love to your family by just working hard and long hours. I see my role, as an active father, to partner with my children so they develop to their full potential – intellectually, emotionally and physically. Attending Playgroup is a key part of this connection. I see this as a positive influence on my relationship with my children and we always look forward to going to Playgroup.

Reference: Ngala parenting with confidence www.nagala.com.au

Playgroup membership is just \$40 for a full year. Half year, term and concession memberships also available. Plus, your first two sessions are FREE.

To find a Playgroup near you head to
www.playgroupsa.com.au



NOTHING BEATS NATURE FOR BABY PLAY

Words Carley Jones

Nature play is making a comeback. There are so many developmental benefits of nature play for children and it's exciting to see how playgroups are engaging in it. But how do we include babies in nature play?

Children have a natural instinct to bond with nature and from the earliest of beginnings, they will seek out any opportunity to explore nature. It's a natural response, you place a baby down on the grass at the park and the first thing they do is start picking up leaves, pulling at the grass, and playing in the dirt. They start exploring.

Here at Playgroup SA, we are regularly being asked "how do we include babies in nature play?" Well, we're here to tell you that it's really easy and all it takes is some imagination and supervision.

Nature play for babies helps build both fine and motor skills, along with assisting with cognitive development. Little direction is required with nature play and the best thing you can do is provide the natural elements and then let them experiment.

Nature Trays

Set up a tray with some dirt (free from small debris) and large plastic animals and allow small hands to explore the texture of the dirt and bang, bury and re-discover the animals through the dirt.

If you don't have room for grass, why not turn an old tyre or plastic wading pool into a planter with grass and allow small hands and feet to explore the feel of grass. You can add in animals or trucks and cars to make the environment more interesting.

Nature 'feely' box

Go for a hunt through your local community or park and find larger items of interest such as large dried leaves, sticks with rough and smooth exteriors, pine cones, feathers or moss. Then place them in a box and allow babies to pull out and feel the different objects.

Leaves and flowers

Pop a variety of leaves and flowers in between 2 sheets of clear contact and seal together. You can then place these on the wall down low for babies to explore and touch, or tape to the floor for easy access.

Snack time

Allow babies to experience snack time outside. They can listen to the different sounds and watch the busy world of wildlife around them. Let the babies pick at the grass with their bare hands or take their shoes off and feel the grass between their toes. You could also use this time to run leaves, flowers or feathers up and down their arms and legs and let them enjoy the different feelings from the different textures.

Water

Place some flower petals or a variety of leaves into a water play tray and let babies swirl them around while watching flowers float about in the water.

Messy nature play

At many of Playgroup SA's events, we have incorporated nature messy play by simply placing tubs of sand or mud out for babies to use their hands to explore the texture of natural materials. But it doesn't always stop there, we've also seen many young babies climb into the tubs and really enjoy the experience.

When providing nature play for babies, there are so many options available but always remember to offer them larger items to play with that don't pose a choking hazard, as with babies...all things tend to go in the mouth.

For more information or to find a Playgroup near you visit www.playgroupsa.com.au



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IS YOUR PLAYGROUP AFFILIATED WITH PLAYGROUP SA?

Playgroup SA is a not-for-profit, community based organisation committed to providing quality services to families with young children throughout South Australia. By affiliating with Playgroup SA, your Playgroup will join a community of up to 300 Playgroups running across South Australia and gain access to a range of benefits and resources.

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- Apra Music Licence
- Free Advertising
- Ongoing support from friendly qualified staff
- Exclusive Playgroup Events
- Professional Workshops
- Member benefits
- Access to a range of music resources, literacy materials, activity ideas and more

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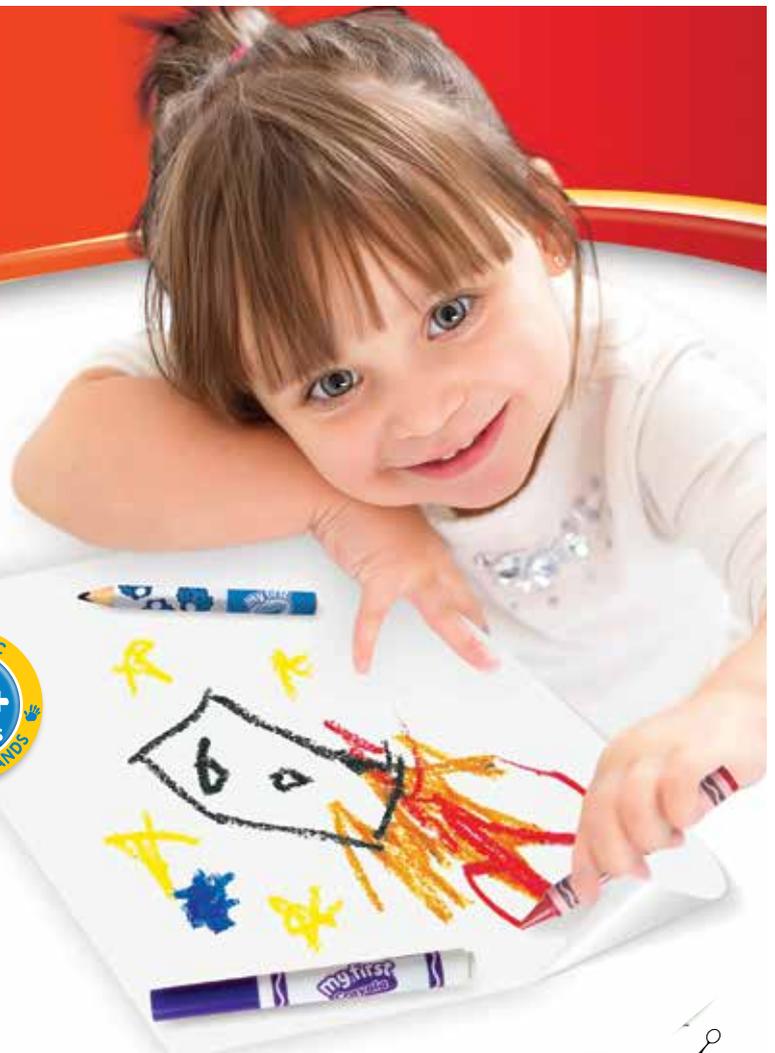
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