

Let's get started

Parish Play Group



Parish Play Group - Where do we start?

An excellent starting point for a parish beginning ministry to Children and Families is to launch a weekday Play Group for families with under school aged children.

What is Play Group?

Play Group is a welcoming, joy-filled space where parents and children come together for a couple of hours on a weekday morning to connect, share life, and play in a parish setting. Families are invited to relax, build friendships, and enjoy time with their little ones in a safe and supportive environment. The session can include simple elements that reflect the seasons of the Church or favourite Bible stories, shared in ways that are engaging and age-appropriate. Children and parents enjoy gathering for a gentle circle time with songs, actions, rhymes, and activities that help the children connect with the themes of the day.

Why start with a Play Group?

First, it sends a clear and joy-filled message: *your family belongs here*. It creates a warm, welcoming space where parents, carers, and children feel seen, supported, and valued. This early sense of belonging can become the foundation for lifelong connection with the Church community.

Through play, story, song, and simple activities, little ones encounter God's love in ways they can naturally understand. These early experiences help families grow in faith together and gently prepare children for fuller participation in the Church's liturgical and sacramental life.

Finally, it can be led by volunteers with minimal training, using flexible, low-cost resources that are easy to adapt to any space or community. With just a few willing hands and a welcoming spirit, a parish can offer a vibrant ministry that blesses families.

Simple Steps to Make It a Reality:

1. **Start with a Conversation:** Meet with the parish priest and leadership to share the vision and benefits.

2. **Identify and gather a Team:** Begin with 2–3 volunteers who are passionate about children and family ministry and willing to learn.
3. **Visit an existing Playgroup:** Visit a church play group nearby and observe how they run it. The [Mainly Music Group](#) program is a great example of a Playgroup model.
4. **Onboard your volunteers:** Liaise with your parish office so that your volunteers can begin the process of registering and completing the requirements to be an Archdiocesan volunteer as soon as possible. The Parish office will:
 - a. guide each individual on the correct pathway for onboarding in accordance with the Volunteer Compliance Matrix.
 - b. ensure each individual is linked with the appropriate parish and role.

The parish office (particularly the team member responsible for volunteer compliance) will manage the onboarding process and track each volunteer progress. The Parish Safeguarding Officer then provides ongoing support to ensure safeguarding requirements are maintained.

Once the parish has confirmed the role, direct your volunteers to register via the Welcome Portal: <https://welcome.brisbanecatholic.org.au/> Volunteers will need to select the correct parish and role when completing their registration.

4. **Meet as a team** to develop a plan (The Archdiocesan Ministries Children and Families team can support you with planning, training and resources). Considerations will include:
 5. Decide how often playgroup will be and which day is best. (Consider the capacity of your team) Families respond best when playgroup is regular so that they know what to expect. Most parishes aim for every week during the school terms, but starting once a month or twice a term is fine too.
 6. Decide on a space for Playgroup to be held: Consider, room size, enough space for free movement and multiple activity zones, quiet area, active area, messy play area, reading corner, baby zone. Storage: for toys, cleaning supplies, personal belongings. Pram/Car seat parking: space at entrance for prams and bags. Kitchenette: for snacks, bottles, washing hands. Child-friendly toilets, change table.
 7. Secure a small budget for resources. Basic starting gear could include: play mat, toys, musical instruments, clapping sticks, shakers, books, pencils and paper. Later you can add other items all depending on your space.
 8. Create a Parish Activity Plan (or Risk Assessment) to help prepare for practical considerations such as supervision, car parking, road access, bathrooms etc (your parish will have templates commonly used within your parish).
 9. Arrange the method of communication for the team. WhatsApp group chat is commonly used.
 10. Decide how you will organise your roster as a team, who will lead group time? etc
 11. Plan how you will let the community know Playgroup is happening? Remember your target audience are families, including new families, so be sure to promote on your parish's social media and school platforms as well as the parish newsletter.

Sometimes it takes many invitations so don't give up!

12. Consider collaborating with your parish school. This can be a wonderful way to foster positive relationships between parish and school and nurturing a sense of belonging for families in the wider parish community.
13. **Suggested annual plan:** Term 1- usually Lent towards Easter. Term 2 – Easter – Pentecost. Term 3: Ordinary time. Term 4: Advent – Christmas. There are some lovely feast days that can be used as a theme through the year like, Assumption August 15th, and All Saints Day.
14. **Create a schedule:** A typical 1.5–2-hour session might include: Free play, group time, get to know you games, simple craft, storytime, singalong. Optional: byo light morning tea for parents and children.
15. **Launch and Reflect:** Make time to reflect as a team after each Playgroup and after a few Playgroup's gather feedback from families.
16. **Celebrate and Grow:** Share stories and photos in the parish bulletin or on social media. This builds momentum and encourages others to get involved. You might like to make a group chat including the families that come along to keep them updated.

Once your Playgroup is well established you may want to explore some other great options:

- Children's Liturgy of the Word
- Monthly family mass
- Primary-aged youth group
- An Encounter Catholic Kids (ECK) fun day or holiday program
<https://www.encountercatholickids.com.au>

We're here to help!

Children and Families Team, Archdiocesan Ministries

Website: childrenandfamilies@bne.catholic.net.au

Follow us on Instagram: @encounter_catholic_kids

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