

## Child as focus points



**Playgroups - Information  
points for parents**

# Defining points.

Groups of no more than ten children, from three years old until Kindergarten entrance, meet in **PLAYGROUPS** once to three times weekly; to play, do handicrafts, sing, listen to stories and experiment.

**PLAYGROUPS** are constant groups that meet regularly. They differ from other childrens groups in their aims, the child age range and parental involvement.

**PLAYGROUPS** offer both young children and their parents the chance for new contacts and experiences within a wider social environment.

Two important basic tenets in **PLAYGROUPS** are: «Help me to do it for myself!» (Maria Montessori), and «Independent work creates self-confidence!» (Lucie Hillenberg)

**PLAYGROUPS** are run by trained playgroup leaders. Leaders are supported by a parent-helper (on a rote basis), a trainee or a second leader (two carers are recommended for groups of six to ten children).

Administrative duties of **PLAYGROUPS** are carried out by local clubs, church organizations, local community groups or private companies/enterprises.

A close working relationship with parents is a fundamental concept of **PLAYGROUPS**.

**PLAYGROUPS** are chiefly financed through parental subscription. They are partly supported by local authority.

«**Forest- playgroups**» are without walls or roofs – these groups profit from Nature's playground! (Recommended child-leader ratio: groups of up to 8 children require 2 leaders, from 8–12 children 3 leaders are required).



# Point by point...

**PLAY:** Free play is central to all playgroups. Play is discovery: encountering and testing rules and borders, perceiving and processing reality through fantasy play. In brief: preparing for life.

**PROGRAM:** There is no fixed study program in a playgroup. Instead the playgroup leader creates a stimulating environment and many opportunities for singing, handicrafts, painting, music, movement and drama.

**INTEGRATION:** Foreign children as well as children with special needs have a place in playgroup. They can make friends, practice the new language and learn about being a member of a group. This holds true not only for the child but also for the parents. For many it's the first step out of isolation.

**EXPERIENCES:** Playgroup offers a world of new experiences. Baking bread together, or building an enormous tower. Smearing paint over an area larger than yourself! Pushing your hands deep into sticky clay. Looking calmly at a picture book together, after a noisy row. Crying with laughter; then joining in a boisterous pillow fight. Collecting colorful leaves and observing cows on a nature stroll. All these fabulous experiences and many more await a child in Playgroup.

**CLAY:** Sand, dough, dirt, water, grass, straw, or wood: young children perceive the world with all their senses. They feel, touch, smell, hear, and taste – and in doing so increase their knowledge of the world around them. Playgroups offer a feast for the senses.

## **GROUP DYNAMICS**

The playgroup is an ideal environment for young children to learn about social behavior. Here they can learn to act and assert oneself within a group. Recognising alternative viewpoints and defending one's own is practiced. Parent helpers help increase the child's experience of relating with different adults.

**ROLEPLAY:** For once, to be allowed to roar ferociously like a lion. To receive attention as a «cute little kitten». To dress up as a ghost and give everyone a proper fright! By role-playing a child works through experiences and eagerly tries out all facets of his personality. Fortunately, in playgroups there are costumes to dress up in and children to join in the play!

**IRREPLACEABLE:** Over time, playgroups have become irreplaceable. Today's smaller families and the increase in traffic and inner city areas are not suited to young children's need for movement and discovery. Playgroups are therefore welcome islands: where children can enjoy all those things that are indispensable to their all round development.

**PROCESS OVER PRODUCT:** Handiwork that children bring home from playgroup can sometimes appear a little strange to adult eyes! However, for the child it is nothing less than a work of art that he himself has created from A to Z, requiring dedication, concentration and his own ideas. Playgroups value the creative process involved, without expecting a particular end product.

**PREVENTION:** Through close observation the playgroup leader can uncover possible developmental delays, idiosyncrasies or special needs of a child. Together with parents, and when requested under the guidance of a child development professional, the child's next steps on the developmental path can be planned and accompanied, until such a time as he can continue independently again.

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT:** At no other educational stage is parental involvement as intense as in the playgroup. Playgroup age children live between two worlds. The better the contact between home and playgroup, the better children are able to cope in both worlds, and the easier it becomes to take those steps outside the home.

# Points of reference.



## How can I find a playgroup?

Playgroup addresses are held at Mother and Father Advice services, Youth Departments, as well as at Local Authority Offices and regional Playgroup- (expert and contact) Advisory Services: [www.spielgruppe.ch](http://www.spielgruppe.ch)

## How can I judge the standard of a playgroup?

External indications of standard are:

- Group size (maximum 10 children)
- Qualification and further training of playgroup leader
- Room size of approx. 60 msq. (including adjoining rooms)
- Assistant leader (parent helper, apprentice, or second leader)
- Transparency of administrative responsibilities (book keeping, insurances etc.)

Internal indications of standard are:

- Does your child go happily to playgroup?
- Is a valuing and empathetic environment offered?
- Does the playgroup leader encourage parental involvement?
- Do you feel happy as parents in your dealings with the playgroup leader?





### **What will my child learn in a playgroup?**

He will learn: to be part of a group: to play, disagree, laugh, speak, and celebrate with other children. He will encounter different materials, widening his perceptual experience. He will enter a new learning environment of active experiences. And he is given the opportunity to practise the tricky task of separating from mum and dad in a protected environment.

### **What does a playgroup have to offer parents?**

Parents profit from playgroup too: they forge new contacts, and experience their child in a group situation. By talking with the playgroup leader they receive an all-round view of their child, and are able to discuss any problems or questions. Last but not least, they can themselves once again, thanks to the playgroup, experience a world of fantasy and creativity!



# Closing point

«Children need water, mess, bushes, animals, and space, where they themselves choose to work and play. One can let them develop without all that; with carpets, stuffed animals or asphalt streets and courtyards. They survive it – but one shouldn't wonder when later they don't achieve particular basic social goals.»

Alexander Mitscherlich (1908 bis 1982)

## Point.

All necessary information about playgroups can be found at [www.spielgruppe.ch](http://www.spielgruppe.ch)

Further copies of this leaflet can be ordered by contacting:  
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