

Getting Started Tips for the Hosting Mom

Introduction

Playgroups give moms and dads a chance, especially first-time parents, to find support, encouragement, advice and friendship.

Hosting the playgroup simply means providing a location for the moms and children to meet. The hosting mom would need to plan for some activities. The activities are spelled out in the lesson plans and are designed to be simple and easy to carry out.

Start to create a group by setting parameters. What is the age of the children you want in your group? Will you plan activities for the children only, or do you want to include the moms and dads also? Will you have a regular location, or do you want to rotate locations? Will you go on field trips, or hold meetings on playgrounds?

Choose a day and time. It's good to set a fairly regular schedule if you can so activities will be predictable and accessible for others.

Keep track of the group. As moms, dads, and kids join the group, keep a database of names, kids' birthdays, phone numbers, etc. It's important to keep some good records for getting in touch with participants and keeping track of who's who. You might also want to print a list for all the group members so you can connect with them outside of regular group times.

Be prepared. *Read through the lesson plan first!* The plans are created in such a way as to make it as easy as possible to host a playgroup. But you'll find that things will run much more smoothly when you've read through the lesson ahead of time. Any handouts will be provided in packets with your lesson material.

Key Points on Child Development

Child development specialists have identified **four areas** of brain development. Each area of brain development should be incorporated into each playgroup lesson.

1. Intellectual

- Babies are highly active in their own learning process. Research has provided in the last ten years an expansion of our understanding of brain development. Babies are continually discovering new concepts about the world around them such as cause and effect concept, locating hidden objects, repeats performance laughed at, and imitation of simple gestures and sounds. As you observe your child you will see growth in their understanding of their world daily.

2. Social/Emotional

- What a child learns in the first three years will influence the rest of his life. A child who learns trust during the first few years of life is more likely to grow up to be a trusting adult. A child learns social skills in his first few years of life. For example, what is appropriate behavior and what is not appropriate behavior. He learns to share, to follow instructions, sit at the table, and eat with the family. You model and teach these skills every day. A child learns to be gentle, how to play with others, and how to keep things tidy.

3. Language

- Babies from day one are discovering the complex world of language. They are developing their receptive language as they listen and watch their parents and others speak. They are very much in tune to the subtle nuances of their own native language. Babies begin to develop their expressive language first through imitation than refinement and eventually limited conversation.

4. Motor Skills

- This is the development of your child's physical abilities. Babies begin life functioning on a reflexive level but soon make the transition to a more deliberate and direct use of their bodies. They develop from top to bottom and from trunk to limbs. Every move they make is essential and necessary to strengthen and increase their muscle tone and reinforces their understanding of the control they have over their body.

As you go through the various activities in the playgroups, always take the time to discuss which areas of development are used in each activity and what could be done to use the other areas in the same activity.

For example, if you are singing "The Wheels on the Bus," talk about what developmental area is being used. If everyone says language is the main developmental area, ask, "What could we do to enhance motor development?" If parents can get used to thinking of their child's development, their experiences in the playgroup will be more rewarding.

Continually encourage your parents to observe their children.

Source: *Welcome Baby "Keeping Your Baby Healthy" guide and Home Visitor Guide.*

Ice-Breaker Suggestions

At the start of your playgroups you will want the mothers to learn a little bit more about one another. To get people chatting, laughing, and knowing more about one another you can use some of the following activities.

- **Mystery Guest:** As the moms enter the meeting place, place a sticky note on their back with the name of a character from a book, nursery rhyme, or something that adds to your theme. Each person walks around and asks questions of the others until they can identify the mystery guest on their back.

- Scavenger Hunt: Divide into two teams or more depending on your numbers and have parents go on a scavenger hunt through their pockets, purses, diaper bags, and persons. The team to find the list of items first wins. Team work is required. The list might contain things like: a pair of glasses, a cell phone, a baby bottle, a pacifier, a comb, etc.
- Get Acquainted Bingo: First, jot down some interesting facts about each guest attending the playgroups. You may note that “Susan just got pregnant” or “Sally just got promoted.” Draw a grid on each card, three squares across by three down. In each square write a question about one of the other guests using your list of interesting facts. For example, since Susan just got pregnant you might write, “Who’s expecting the stork?” and for Sally you might ask, “Who’s moving up the employment ladder?” Distribute the questions throughout the cards so all are a little different. Give each guest a card and a pencil and ask her to find the answers to the question on her card by asking the other guests creative questions. When they find a match, have them get an initial from the matching player in the appropriate square. The player who gets a bingo first wins a prize.

For Partnering Up

- Match up famous couples (Jack & Jill, Ricky & Lucy, Romeo & Juliet). Give each person a card with one name and have them find their partner.
- Nuts & Bolts: Give each person a nut or a bolt. You need to get many different sizes from the hardware store. Have each individual find the one that fits her half.
- 2 Piece Puzzles: Using postcards or pictures that go along with your playgroup theme, cut them in 2 pieces and have each person find her other half. You can also do this in 3s or 4s.
- Compound Words: Find someone whose word goes with yours. i.e. Sand – Box, Car – Seat, Bike – Helmet, etc.

DON'T FORGET TO HAVE FUN!