

# Play Together

Inclusive Play Book





# Introduction

**PlayTogether** is an inclusive play program, developed to foster inclusive cultures within our playgroup village. This booklet has been designed to support inclusive play opportunities for all children and families, especially those with additional needs, disability, or from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It explores a selection of child-led play ideas, with modifications to ensure everyone can play together and participate.



# What is play?

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**Play is often described as “what children do when they are not being told what to do”.**

Through play, children begin to discover and understand the world around them. They develop their imagination and social skills and start to learn to make decisions for themselves.

Play can take many forms and how each child plays is completely unique. Playgroup provides the opportunity for children to play with their parents or caregivers, and other adults and children in a safe, nurturing community environment.

# Play is for everyone!

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At playgroup we believe that everyone should feel they belong, regardless of their background, culture, gender or ability. Playgroups celebrate the differences and strengths of all children and families.

PlayTogether is about acknowledging the individual needs of every child and caregiver, by creating a rich culture which identifies and seeks to remove any barriers to participation.

## Common barriers to participation are:

- A physical space/or activity that is not accessible
- Lack of understanding from other playgroup members
- Communication difficulties

When these barriers are removed, families of all abilities and backgrounds are able to play together and celebrate our unique differences. By playing and learning together on a regularly basis, communities learn compassion and acceptance, understanding that although we are all different, we are all the same.



# How can we make playgroup inclusive?

**Being inclusive is about ensuring everyone's needs are met at playgroup.**

By considering participant's varying culture, communication, movement, visual and hearing needs; inclusive playgroups can respond to additional needs associated with developmental delay. By understanding each need, we can modify our space, activities and materials we use at playgroup, so that everyone can play and learn together.

# Setting the scene for inclusive play

Ten simple things to make your playgroup even more welcoming and inclusive:

## 01.

### **Be friendly!**

Say hello and welcome all families. Introduce new and existing playgroup families. Use first names and consider having name tags for everybody. Build on these relationships each week.

## 03.

### **Cut down on visual distractions and background noise.**

People with sensory processing difficulties can be overwhelmed by too much clutter and noise.

## 02.

### **Ensure the physical space can be accessed by everybody.**

Think about your space. Is there plenty of space to move around between furniture, particularly with a pram/wheelchair/walker? Are there any steps? If so, are there alternative access routes to support mobility.

## 04.

### **Define play areas and spaces.**

For those with sensory or social aversion, breaking up a large open space with defined play areas helps children understand where they can play, what they can play with, and how they should play.

## 05.

### **Provide a quiet area where children can take a break.**

A quiet space could be a tent or tee-pee or a corner where there tends to be less traffic. Consider having some cushions or a blanket in the space and a box of quiet sensory toys and books.

## 07.

### **Use visual supports to demonstrate what to expect during the session.**

Visual schedules can help illustrate session routines to support language delay, they may include “first... & then...” cues, or to identify play activities and storage which help guide unpack and pack-up routines.

## 06.

### **Have a predictable routine to each playgroup session.**

Routines help families relax and prepare for what will happen throughout playgroup: playtime, craft, morning tea, story time, music, and saying goodbye song.

## 08.

### **Set up play activities on different levels and surfaces.**

If someone is unable to play on the floor, have some toys on a table. Additionally, some children may find it easier to paint at an easel rather than on a table. Securely fastening craft/art work to a table top will be helpful for children who are less able to hold the paper still.



## 09.

**Have a range of materials at craft time to suit all children.** Thick textures, crayons and paintbrushes are easier to grasp.

## 10.

**Provide messy play tools for children who are sensitive to certain textures.** For example, provide scoops for rice play or paint brushes for shaving foam play. Have a bucket of water and a towel next to messy play activities so children can wash their hands straight away if they want to.



# Different types of play

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At playgroup we recognise that children learn through play, with different types of play providing a range of learning outcomes to support their development.

Engaging in **Physical Play** is essential to the development of gross motor skills. Being physically active builds a child's awareness of their body and their relationship with the space around them. It can improve their concentration and focus whilst also providing opportunities for taking turns and playing with others.

**Pretend Play** helps build confidence through role play and make-believe activities. Creativity and social skills are enhanced and children begin to make sense of their world.

Incorporating art, craft, music and a host of other games and activities, **Creative Play** allows a child's imagination and creativity to flourish and grow. Both gross and fine motor skills can be enhanced through creative play and children also learn how to express their emotions.



**Play with letters & numbers** is a fun way to introduce early literacy and maths concepts to young children, helping them start to recognise and identify symbols and patterns.

**Science Play** encourages inquiring young minds to explore and experiment, developing problem solving skills and inspiring confidence to investigate cause and effect. Children can be encouraged to think about what will happen, which demonstrates to the child that their ideas are valued. Concepts and thinking skills can be developed through asking plenty of “what if..?” questions about the activity.

When children engage in **Sensory Play** activities, they explore the world of textures, colours, smells and sounds, facilitating their creative development and a sense of curiosity.

Children love to sing and move to music. **Music Play** at playgroup provides an opportunity for children and adults together to have fun and release energy, while also developing coordination, rhythm and memory.



The following pages provide examples of fun activities from various developmental early childhood play types. Each one features tips and ideas on how the activity might be adapted to ensure everyone can be included and play together.

# Playlist

## Creative play:

Shoe Fish Mural.....	P 12.
Friendly Faces.....	P 13.
Easy Collage.....	P 14.
Shakers.....	P 15.

## Physical play:

Newspaper Bats & Balls.....	P 16.
Balloon Tennis.....	P 17.

## Letters & number play:

Alphabet Sifting.....	P 18.
Chalk Numbers.....	P 20.

## Pretend play:

Choo-Choo Train.....	P 21.
Shopkeepers.....	P 22.

## Science play:

Balloon Rocket.....	P 23.
Magnetic Fun.....	P 24.

## Sensory play:

Sensory Bag Play.....	P 25.
Shaving Foam Play.....	P 26.
Playdough.....	P 28.
Bugs in the Mud.....	P 29.

# Shoe Fish Mural

### Why?

Young children can use the outline of their shoe as the basic shape for a fish. Across the whole activity time, parents and children will form a beautiful mural of various sizes of fish to create an aquarium that displays harmony and diversity. The activity does not require advanced skills in drawing. Every child can create their very own design on their fish: some fish might have fins, some might have a unicorn horn – there's no limit to the creativity!

### What will you need

- Shoes
- Pencils
- One large piece of white poster paper to make an aquarium
- Crayons and markers: any type of drawing materials that suit various age groups.

### Instructions

1. Get the little ones to take off one of their shoes and trace the bottom of it onto the paper.
2. Then, using the shoe as an outline as the fish, encourage the children to create fins, gills, eyes, mouth and scales on “their fish”.
3. When the drawing is complete get the children to colour in the fish with markers.

### Modifications:

Encourage the children to cut out their fish and glue them on to a large piece of paper, and then get them to draw a background so it looks like the fish are swimming in an aquarium (or the ocean). The children will get a kick out of taking their shoes off in public and using them to make art!

### Tip!

**Provide chunky crayons and paintbrushes that are easier to grab hold of.**

**The “fish” can be taped onto the table so it doesn't move around while the child is decorating it.**

**If someone does not want to take their shoe off, have them stand on the paper and you can draw around it on their foot.**

# Friendly Faces

### Why?

We all look different. No one person looks the same as another – even identical twins have some differences! Encouraging children to interact and become aware of individual differences can be difficult. This activity allows children to create a face using a variety of different textures. It aims to encourage acceptance and celebration of our unique differences.

### What will you need

- Paper plate
- Glue
- Collage materials such as patty cake papers, pom poms, feathers, pasta, buttons, bottle tops, felt, etc

### Instructions

1. Talk or read a book about emotions and facial features before you begin. Ask the children to describe what they look like; ask them to describe the person sitting next to them (ie eye and hair colour, colour of skin, size and shape of nose, etc)
2. Pick out different collage items to make their face
3. Glue items onto the plate and create a face.

### Tip!

**Use different coloured plates to create culturally diverse faces.**

**Have some larger plates and collage elements for children who have difficulty grasping little things.**

**Include hand held mirrors (with adult supervision) to allow children to look at themselves.**

### Modifications:

Encourage the children to create different faces and talk about feelings, textures, colours and appearances. Have the children create different characters or animals using the same materials.

# Easy Collage

### Why?

Collage can provide an opportunity for children to explore different textures and shapes, as well as develop their hand-eye coordination, self-expression and spatial awareness.

### What will you need

- Contact (adhesive book covering)
- Paper
- Stapler and staples
- Scissors
- Fabric bits, coloured rice, macaroni, paper shapes, feathers etc

### Instructions

1. Cut the paper to frame the edge of the contact.
2. Staple the contact to the paper, making sure the backing paper is face up.
3. Peel off the backing paper to expose the sticky surface when ready to start.
4. Stick the collage items on to create a picture.

### Modifications:

Great nature pictures can be created using leaves, nuts, berries and sand.

A stained glass window effect can be created by using coloured cellophane paper pieces on clear contact stapled to a cardboard frame.

### Tip!

**Secure the paper to the table or to an easel so it doesn't move around whilst it is being decorated.**

**Provide one or two completed examples as visual demonstrations of the activity.**

**Some children enjoy the sensory experience of tearing up paper, which can then be used to stick on their collage.**



# Shakers

### Why?

Children will enjoy using these to make their own music and sing along. As they are not too noisy, they are also good for accompanying recorded music and song.

### What will you need

- Small empty drink bottles or similar lidded containers.
- Rice, sand, pebbles, small pasta shapes or lentils
- Electrical tape
- Stickers for decoration

### Instructions

1. Pour a small amount of the rice, sand, pebbles, pasta or lentils into the bottle or container. As the ingredients make different sounds, you may like to add some of each.
2. Put the lid on tightly and seal with electrical tape.
3. Decorate with the stickers.



# Newspaper Bats & Balls

### Why?

Learning to throw, catch and hit a ball is a fun way to develop hand-eye coordination and gross motor skills. Equipment for physical play activities can be made from readily available and inexpensive household items.

### What will you need

- Newspapers
- Masking or electrical tape

### Instructions

1. For the bats, roll up about 10 sheets of newspaper into a cylinder bat. Secure with plenty of tape.
2. Scrunch or roll up some newspaper into a ball. Use masking tape to bind the ball. The more tape, the heavier the ball will be.
3. Children can bat the ball to each other. As they practice, slowly increase the distance between the children and/or decrease the size of the ball.

### Modifications:

Make a target (eg a box or two chairs for goal posts) for children to aim for.

Start simple scoring or counting during the game to introduce early maths concepts.

### Tip!

Place the ball of newspaper inside an old stocking and hang from a tree or washing line for the children to hit with the bat.

Provide an opportunity for children to practice the movement of hitting the ball before engaging in a larger group game.

Ensure there is plenty of space so everyone can access the game.

You can roll, throw and catch the newspaper ball, or use a soft play ball.

## Physical Play

# Balloon Tennis

### Why?

Get moving, burn some energy and have fun with this very simple, inexpensive activity. Balloon tennis encourages social interaction and promotes physical and hand-eye coordination. This is a great indoor activity if it is too hot, cold or wet outside!

### What will you need

- Paper plates
- Rulers or long cardboard tubes
- Balloons
- Tape

### Instructions

1. Tape paper plates to a ruler or long cardboard tube to represent a tennis racket.
2. Blow up a balloon and hit it between players.



### Tip!

Because balloons move more slowly through the air than balls do, they can often be switched into games to allow children longer reaction times to participate.

Take turns batting the balloon around the group, having the bats person call out the name of who they are batting to.

If a balloon pops, encourage parents and children to applaud or cheer in celebration.

Balloons can be frightening for some children; ensure this activity is away from the established quiet space.

# Alphabet Sifting

### Why?

This sensory experience provides an opportunity for children to experience and explore the world of letters, as well as helping develop hand-eye coordination and motor skills. This activity gives children the chance to examine and explore different textures and materials through play. When children begin to understand that letters are symbols that have meaning, they take an important step in building their life-long reading foundations.

### What will you need

- Letters (magnetic letters, foam letter shapes or small blocks)
- Sand or flour
- Medium-sized container
- Small colanders or sand sifters

### Instructions

1. Mix the letters with sand or flour in the container.
2. Adults may need to model how to scoop the letters up with the colander or sifter.
3. Once a letter is collected put it aside and continue until all letters are found.
4. Say the letters and sounds as you discover them. Match or help children place these in alphabetical order.

### Modifications:

Once you have collected all the letters, make words or spell out the names of the children.

Add numbers to the container to encourage number recognition.

Consider hiding animals, puzzle pieces, large buttons and shredded paper.

Fix magnets onto lengths of string so the children can “fish” for the magnetic letters.

Write or help children write their names, and encourage them to match the letters they find.



## Tip!

To encourage collaborative play, buddy children up so they can work together to find the same letters or colours.

Provide a variety of sifters and colanders or use sponges or playdough to make handles easier to grip.

Ensure everyone can reach the activity: does the container need to sit on a table or on the floor? Make certain the container is stable and won't easily be knocked over. Placing a rubber mat under the container is an effective way to do this.

# Chalk Numbers

### Why?

Chalk numbers is a fun activity that exposes children to numbers while building strong learning relationships. Using numbers in everyday play will help children to become familiar with them, building an understanding of number patterns and mathematical concepts. Learning through play is the best way to learn!

### What will you need

- Chalk
- Water
- Paintbrush

### Tip!

Allow free play with chalk and water and enjoy watching the creativity unfold.

Allow children and adults to write numbers on outside walls and on footpath so there will be space within reach for everybody.

Provide watering cans or spray bottles as alternatives to paintbrushes.

Additionally, you can make paintbrush handles easier to hold by wrapping with material, sponge or playdough.

### Instructions

1. Write a number on concrete with chalk.
2. Ask children to use the paintbrush and water to trace the number written in chalk on the concrete.
3. Repeat the first step, offering children the opportunity to choose the number drawn or invite them to draw the number themselves if they are able.

### Modifications:

Have large number stencils the children can “water paint” onto a surface to produce their own numbers.

Read counting books like “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” or sing “Ten in the Bed”.

Combine cornflour, baking soda, food colouring and vinegar in a squeeze bottle to create erupting numbers on the concrete.

## Pretend Play

# Choo-Choo Train

### Why?

Pretend play can spur child development and help improve social skills. Often children go through periods where they are interested in particular themes (in this case trains) and these can be incorporated into social play. As they learn to take turns, children will also exercise their motor planning and coordination skills.

### Instructions

1. Line up chairs one behind the other so that they are all in a line facing the front chair.
2. Pick a “driver” (get the children to take turns being the driver) and ask him/her to sit in the front chair.
3. Get all the children to sit in the remaining chairs and make a “choo-choo train” movement with their arms as pistons.
4. Everyone on the train sings “choo choo” to a melody of your choice and pretends the train is moving.

### What will you need

- Chairs & Imagination!

### Tip!

Ensure there is plenty of space for everyone to move around, including space for children in wheelchairs.

The “train” could stop at pretend shops where the passengers go in to buy something.

Adapt to bus, taxi, tram, plane or other transport. Talk about safety by buckling in and taking turns to find a seat.

Some children may prefer to watch or signal the train with a flag.



## Pretend Play

# Shopkeepers

### Why?

Children often enjoy pretending to do things and copying the people and activities they see day to day. Whether they are a waiter, a doctor or a shopkeeper, this kind of play helps build their confidence to handle everyday situations. It can also develop social skills and inspire their imagination as they make up stories around their characters.

### Instructions

1. Help the children set up a pretend shop.
2. Children take turns being shop keeper and customers, where they need to ask for the goods they want and make pretend purchases.
3. Adults can follow the child's lead, visiting their "shop" and asking for items at the counter.

### What will you need

- A table for a shop counter
- Toys or items from around playgroup to pretend to sell
- Counters or play money
- Optional: shopping bags or dress ups, including hats or jackets.

### Tip!

Let children decide the shop themes and let them be creative.

Some children will find it less intimidating if they have favourite soft toys posing as customers.

Have the shop counters at a height everyone can reach, using milk crates or empty boxes in addition or instead of tables.



# Balloon Rocket

### Why?

Children are naturally curious about the world around them. By extending their interest with simple activities, adults can support their engagement and understanding of basic scientific principles. Every day, children observe and engage with the movement of air: they catch bubbles, fly paper planes or kites, watch clouds move or feel the wind. This activity uses everyday items to demonstrate how air moves.

### What will you need

- String
- Plastic straw
- Balloon
- Sticky tape
- 2 chairs

### Tip!

**Help the children use a pump to blow up the balloon.**

**Use visual supports and have an example ready to demonstrate the activity.**

**If a balloon pops, encourage parents and children to applaud or cheer in celebration.**

**A popping balloon can be very frightening for some children: ensure this activity is away from the established quiet space.**

### Instructions

1. Thread the string through the straw and tie the string between two chairs.
2. Blow up balloon (DO NOT TIE! Hold closed to keep the air in) and tape to the straw.
3. Let it go! Let it go!

### Modifications:

Make paper planes or fans. Use large eye droppers to blow feathers, leaves, paper, etc.

# Magnetic Fun

### Why?

Building positive behaviours around science helps children to see the relevance of science in everyday life. Encouraging children's natural curiosity supports them to develop skills such as problem solving, discovery, prediction, exploration and investigation.

### What will you need

- Magnets
- Collection of metal and non-metal items eg car keys, paper clips (large), plastic bricks.

### Instructions

Encourage the children to explore the items to see what happens.

Ensure electronic and computer equipment is not within reach.

### Modifications:

Wander through the play space to see if the children can find anything the magnets will attract. Place the items attracted to the magnet on a tray and hold the magnet underneath. Try moving the objects around using the magnet.

### Tip!

**Have magnets stuck onto the fridge, metal doors, or trays for children to play with.**

**Ensure there is a variety of different-sized magnets: not everyone will be able to pick up very small ones.**

**Be mindful of children who may put small objects in their mouths.**

## Sensory Play

# Sensory Bag Play

### Why?

This activity provides sensory and exploratory play to encourage problem solving through experimentation and enquiry. It also helps children understand patterns, shapes and colours while promoting a natural curiosity towards creative learning. The activity can be extended to create a range of experiences, which encourages language, literacy and numeracy development.

### What will you need

- Paint or gel
- Ziploc or heat-sealable bags
- Coloured foam, soft toys, glitter etc

### Tip!

This activity is widely enjoyed by many children. To be sure everyone can access the sensory bags, they can be taped onto trays instead of onto table tops.

The shapes added can be themed according to interest or colour.

### Instructions

1. Place paint, and/or other media such as gel, slime, shaving foam in ziploc or heat-sealable bag.
2. Add soft snakes, dinosaurs, glitter, foam shapes etc to the bags.
3. Heat seal bags or, if using ziploc bags, close and tape end to prevent the bag from being opened.
4. Tape bags onto a flat surface and let play begin.



## Sensory Play

# Shaving Foam Play

### Why?

Shaving foam is an amazing, messy, sensory experience that uses all five senses of touch, sight, smell, sound and even taste (though tasting is not encouraged!). It is a textural wonderland that changes and reforms in your hands. Adding colour enables swirls and patterns to form and burying and hiding toys in the foam adds to the sense of discovery and play. Shaving foam encourages children to manipulate and mould materials, building their fine motor skills and coordination.

### What will you need

- Shaving foam (brands for sensitive skin are gentle for little hands)
- Water tray/ trough
- Dinosaurs (or other rubber toys)
- Food colouring
- Dry towels for clean-up time

### Instructions

1. Spray shaving foam into a tray or trough.
2. Mix through a few drops of food colouring.
3. Draw in the shaving foam with a paintbrush.
4. Add dinosaurs or rubber toys in the clouds of foam.
5. Enjoy the swirly, gooey fun of exploring through the foam.

### Modifications:

Use multiple trays with different colours and swap the trays so the colours can mix together. Ask the children discovery questions like, "What does it feel/smell/sound like? Can you squish it through your fingers? What happens when the colours mix?"



## Tip!

Spray shaving foam into Ziploc bags and tape them to a tray or table for children who don't want to put their hands right into it.

Young children may prefer to play alongside others, rather than with them. Having a tray or container for each child (or in pairs) with everyone doing their own thing around a central table can bring the group together more effectively.

Shaving foam is not suitable for children who like to taste as they play. You may like to substitute with whipped cream or jelly.

## Sensory Play

# Playdough

### Why?

Making and playing with playdough encourages social interaction and exploration of textures. Not only does it strengthen fingers, fine motor skills and creativity, but making the dough together is the perfect opportunity to explore measuring and pouring, gaining early mathematical skills at the same time.

### What you need?

- 1/2 cup oil
- 2 cups plain flour
- Food colouring
- Cookie cutters

### Tip!

Get the whole group involved by making playdough in small groups.

Have a variety of playdough tools and ziploc bags on hand for children who don't enjoy the sensation of touching the dough.

Traditional playdough can be firm to handle, moon dough or kinetic sand are fun alternatives.

### Instructions

1. Add oil to flour and mix thoroughly
2. Add a few drops of food colouring to water and mix through enough to make soft, coloured dough.
3. Use for pretend play by supplying cookie cutters and other kitchen utensils.

### Modifications:

Add different textures or scents to the dough. Rice, oats, herbs or flowers with a few drops of essential oils or food essence will further support sensory development.



## Sensory Play

# Bugs in the Mud

### Why?

Sensory activities are great for children of all ages, allowing children to learn and create in a safe, stimulating play environment. Make sure you have a big enough container for the mixing so children are less likely to spill the contents everywhere.

### What you need?

- 3 packets of cornflour
- 1 packet of cocoa
- Water
- Assorted plastic bugs
- Large tub to mix the 'mud' in

### Instructions

1. Add cornflour and cocoa to the large tub.
2. Slowly add water, mixing as you go until you get a slightly running mixture.
3. Add plastic bugs.
4. Encourage the children to put their hands into the tub and feel around for the bugs.

### Tip!

Provide rubber gloves for children who don't want to touch the "mud" and have a bucket or bowl of water and a towel on hand. Alternatively, incorporate the ideas from "Sensory Bag Play", placing the bugs and 'mud' inside a ziploc bag.

Have different sizes and colours of bugs to find.

Leave some bugs out of the "mud" or have pictures of them so children can see what they are looking for.

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We hope that the ideas presented within this booklet will help foster a genuinely warm and welcoming culture of inclusion within your playgroup community and beyond.

For further information and resources, please visit:  
**[playgroupaustralia.com.au](http://playgroupaustralia.com.au)**

