

The Good Practice Guide

for Parent and Toddler Groups



Working together to support relationships and build communities



Contents

**The Good Practice Guide for Parent and Toddler Groups:
Working together to support relationships and build communities**

Care for the Family, Mothers' Union and The Salvation Army are all committed to supporting family life, and that is why we have worked collaboratively to update these guidelines previously known as *The Good Practice Guide for Parent and Toddler Groups*. The intention of these guidelines is to help those who are doing the valuable work of supporting parents with toddlers through the provision of groups in the community.

Care for the Family is a registered charity and has been working to promote strong family relationships and to help those who face family difficulties for over 25 years. Our work is motivated by Christian compassion, and our resources and support are available to everyone, of any faith or none.

Mothers' Union is a Christian mission charity that seeks to support families worldwide. In over 80 countries, our 4 million members share one heartfelt vision - to bring about a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships.

The Salvation Army is an international Christian church worshipping and working in 126 countries and has more than 800 local churches in the UK and Ireland.

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Building relationships – strengthening community

Parent and toddler groups are a lifeline to many parents and carers as they provide a welcoming and supportive environment during the week. Because of this, groups can have a great impact on their lives, and the lives of the children who attend; probably more than most group leaders can imagine!

That's why I'm so pleased that Care for the Family, Mothers' Union and The Salvation Army have worked together to produce the resource *The Good Practice Guide for Parent and Toddler Groups*. By doing so, they are affirming group leaders across the country.

Parent and toddler groups provide a great place for parents and carers to form new friends and seek support and advice. They also provide a safe place for children to make friends, learn and interact together, which can't be a bad thing! Many of these friendships often continue outside the group as families visit each other's homes rather than sitting at home alone feeling isolated. These friendships can last a lifetime.

These groups not only offer vital friendship, but can also be a life-saving avenue for families in crisis. Those who attend toddler groups are shown unconditional love, help and support, which is ongoing and endless, not only for the children and parents, but also to their wider families and those they meet during their day-to-day lives.

So as you carry out your valuable role and ministry, do take the support that these three organisations are offering. I'm thrilled to endorse *The Good Practice Guide for Parent and Toddler Groups*, and I do so with the prayer that even more parents, carers and children will ultimately benefit from its wisdom.

Diane Louise Jordan
TV and Radio presenter

Parent and toddler groups: making a difference

Parents, carers and the toddlers who participate in these groups benefit hugely from them. Toddler groups offer helpful support by:

- Providing a safe and happy environment for children to play, learn and interact
- Being a welcoming place for all parents and carers to make friends and feel supported
- Being the basis for developing long-lasting relationships for young families looking for friendship and support
- Offering a lifeline to families in crisis, support for parents having a tough time or just dealing with the ongoing demands of children
- Being an extended family to those that attend
- Providing a starting point to go forward, maybe branching out into parents groups and other support
- Making a valuable contribution to community life

Care for the Family, Mothers' Union and The Salvation Army are all committed to supporting families, and that is why the three organisations have worked collaboratively to provide these guidelines. Our goal is to support parent and toddler groups in the valuable job they are doing, to provide practical guidelines about how to run a successful group, and to promote the important contribution that parent and toddler groups make to local communities.

The aims of the group are summarised in the Parent and Toddler Group Vision Statement, which you will find at the back of these guidelines. You may wish to display it on the wall of the venue.

There is much information in this resource about the practicalities of running a group and making it a welcoming place for children and their parents or carers.



“Our parent and toddler group isn't just a morning session to me, it's a lifestyle. The families that come to my group are important to me because they are part of the community in which I live. We go out for meals, watch videos; I invite them to parents' groups and church. I really want to help build my community and parent and toddler is a natural way of meeting families.”

Cathy, a group leader

Making friends and finding support

Children naturally make friends through participating in group activities such as the craft table, story and song times, and refreshments. Often they will be accompanied by someone other than a parent; this could be a friend of the family, a childminder or nanny, a grandparent or other relative.

Parents, carers and team members all join in with the activities and chat with each other as they do so. It can be daunting for those who attend for the first time as everyone else might appear to know each other well. Those who have been coming for some time and the leaders should be aware of this and try to be especially welcoming to newcomers.

People attend with different motives. For some it is to help their child mix with other children, while for others it is because they are hoping to meet new people. Others will be there to prevent isolation and to gain support in the responsibility of parenting.

"Some young mums live miles away from their own mothers. Sometimes they just want to ask for the tiniest piece of advice in passing. At other times, it's a long heart to heart." - Margaret

Parent and toddler groups provide activities for the children and social interaction for adults and children alike. For parents and carers, swapping ideas with others can be invaluable, and the support of others in similar circumstances can be a lifeline. It can also be an important source of help for adults who will come with whatever is affecting their life at that time; some may be suffering from postnatal depression or have other concerns.

Leaders will often know of local support that is available and it is helpful to be able to signpost those in need of help towards them. Chatting over refreshments is often when people will voice their concerns, and it is useful for the group to keep a list of helpful organisations to offer in such circumstances.

"I went along to my parent and toddler group looking for a place to find companionship and for my children to meet other children. I ended up joining a parents' group and going along to church with the people who went to my group. I really got more than I bargained for. It was great - my life is completely different now." - Claire

We all have varying capabilities and strengths at different times in life. Some parents will be able to join in and help, while others will not be in a position to contribute. Most will be grateful for the support the group can offer even if they do not say so. That they keep coming is a sign that the group is fulfilling some of their needs.

There will be a natural turnover in those attending the group as children grow on to the next stage, or parents become involved in other activities that make coming to the group less possible.

Leader and team: the vital factor for a successful group

As leader, you will probably be the one who carries the vision for the group and makes decisions about the day-to-day running. Your role is to maintain standards and to oversee the team, the session and the future of the group. You will be keen to make the group an excellent one with a good reputation.

Ideally, a regular, reliable team is an important part of a parent and toddler group. Try to find people from all age groups and walks of life, who share the same vision. Allow them to use their gifts for the benefit of the group, whether through craft activities or excellent listening skills. Some will have faced difficulties in life such as bereavement, infertility or postnatal depression that will enable them to empathise with a group member.

"I do feel the weight of responsibility sometimes. But I'm so delighted by the people I meet, and by the impact we have on people. I really think it's worth it. My team means so much to me." - Jackie, group leader

Invest in the team

Support your team and allow them to support you too. Talk together as you work, and build up their confidence with heaps of praise. Welcome feedback from the team — encourage them to pass on their ideas and concerns, and take them seriously. Meet socially outside the group setting, and try to have at least an annual social outing. Be aware that team members may be having difficulties in their own lives, so listen with care if they want to talk so that you will remember to ask how things are progressing.

If you have few team members and feel slightly overwhelmed, a rota of parents and carers might be a good way of ensuring that everyone who can takes a turn in doing a particular task or role. Asking them to participate in this way makes parents and carers feel that they belong to and are essential members of the group. And, who knows? One of them may become a valued member of the team in the future. When considering who should take on a specific role it is important to bear in mind the safer recruiting guidelines in the policy you are working under for safeguarding (see section 7).

"We have great fun together. We often combine cleaning toys and then going out together; we have a great time. It'd be even better if we didn't have to clean the toys!" - Chris, team member

Support for you

Try to find someone outside the group to support you so that you don't become overwhelmed with the responsibility of being the group leader. This might be a family member, close friend or, if the group is affiliated to a church, the minister or leader.

Some parent and toddler groups have a management group which shares the decision making and care for the team. The management group should give clear guidelines and information to the team, supporting them at all times.



Know your boundaries

Don't take on burdens that are not yours. If a member of the group needs further support, you are not responsible for providing it. But you can point them in the right direction. If the group is part of a church you will probably have links locally to a vast array of skills, life experiences and projects that you can draw on. Further help is available from organisations listed on page 28.

Parents and carers are responsible for their children at all times. However, you are responsible for anything that is in the best interest of the whole group. So, for example, if you have an ongoing problem of one parent telling off other people's children, take the parent aside and explain that everyone is responsible for their own child, not other people's children. If one child is hurting another and their parent does nothing about it, it is legitimate for you to step in and talk with the passive parent. Explain that it is in the best interest of the group for them to intervene in their child's behaviour.

Do your best!

There are a huge variety of parent and toddler groups across the country, but your group is unique. Whatever its size, and however long it has been running, you are aiming to do the best you can. Always be on the lookout for new ways forward, but don't be put off if you can't achieve everything that is recommended in these guidelines – for example, if you don't have the money to buy so much equipment. You will be valued for who you are by the people who come to the group. And you are providing a valuable service to the community.

REMEMBER!

- Gather together a good team with a variety of skills
- Invest in the team
- Find someone to support you
- Know your boundaries
- Be on the lookout for new ways forward
- Make use of resources



Creating a successful parent and toddler group

Give a genuine welcome

At the heart of a good group are people who draw others back time and time again. Always make sure everyone is given a genuine welcome so that they will feel secure and more likely to return for a second visit.

"I came to parent and toddler because the people that run it are fun. They seem interested in me." - Nick

Make the point of registration friendly and informal. Give out an introductory leaflet or letter (see page 30 for details). If you have several members on the team, one member should welcome and another should take each new person into the main room, introduce them to others, and show them the fire exits, toilets and changing facilities.

Aim to introduce newcomers to one or two of the most friendly group members who will include them in conversations and activities. It can be difficult for newcomers to remember more than a couple of names on the first visit.

Try to make comfortable seating available (rather than tiny children's chairs) – this is especially important for pregnant mums.

Extend your warmth beyond the first session

However friendly you are on that first meeting, you will need to keep it up! It will take a few sessions for a newcomer to feel at home. Aim to remember the child's name and something about the parent or carer.

Some of those who come will do so purely so that their child can play with other children, but others are hoping for much more than that. They may be looking for friendship, advice, or to spend time with other adults. The group can be a place where they find sincere people who have a genuine concern for them.

Nurture all who come to the group

Cherish the parents, carers and children in the group by letting them know they are special. You are providing security and love for the children, as well as the opportunity to play and learn social skills.

You can provide encouragement for parents who may be experiencing a time of low self-esteem. Parents and carers will feel that they are an essential part of the group if they are encouraged to help in its smooth running. Encourage them to befriend newcomers, and ask them to assist with craft activities or to help in tidying away equipment. Always remember to thank them for any contribution they have made and involve them by means of consultation. Listen to their suggestions regarding the running of the group.

Offer a listening ear

If a parent or carer is experiencing difficult circumstances, you (or someone in the team) may be the person they need to talk to. Don't undervalue the impact of listening, and remember that listening is not giving advice or making judgements.

By stepping in too quickly with advice you can stop people opening up any further. Listening attentively and giving people your time can, in many cases, be as much as people need.

Some people may require more than a listening ear, so attempt to find more help for them if they are agreeable. Don't try to do it yourself! If the group is affiliated to a church, the church may be able to offer resources for counselling, help and care. Details of other organisations which provide further help can be found on page 28.

Be the place where real friendships are made

Ultimately, the parent and toddler group is a place where genuine friendships can begin; some just for the short term and others more lasting. It's a two-way thing! Not only will parent and carers find friendship, but the team will find new friends too! Consider it a privilege to serve those who come through the doors.

REMEMBER!

- Give a genuine welcome
- Extend your warmth beyond the first session
- Offer a listening ear
- Nurture all who come to the group
- Be the place where real friendships are made

“One mother came who was married to an overseas student. She barely spoke our language and we didn't speak hers, but we got along very well. She was tearful when she and her family returned home. She said she would really miss us. The group had meant so much to her when she was in a strange country with only her children for company.”

Lynn, a group leader



What happens at a group?

All parent and toddler groups are unique and will find a structure to suit them. The following programme is a sample of a typical session that can be adapted to meet the needs of the children, parents and carers in a group.

Welcome and registration

This is an important part of the session – see ‘Creating a successful parent and toddler group’ pages 9–10.

Unstructured beginning

Have toys available such as train sets and cars, and open up the story area so that children can play freely while their parents or carers chat with each other and with team members. Do not bring out the sit and ride toys at this stage.

Craft table

A craft table can operate throughout the session, allowing the parents, carers and children to come and go. It provides a good place for the adults to chat to a team member while helping their child with the activity.

The activity could tie in with the story you tell or mark significant dates in the calendar. For example, you could:

- Make decorations which can be used on a Christmas tree at the parent and toddler Christmas party, and tell the story of the nativity at story time
- Make cards for Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day (remember to be sensitive as not all children live with both parents)
- Make animal faces out of paper plates and tell the story of Noah's Ark at story time
- Decorate biscuits to eat on children's birthdays

Story time

Encourage parents to listen to the story along with the children; this will help the children to understand that story time is not a time to talk. Serve drinks and biscuits to the children while they are sitting down.

“During story time I was reading ‘The Three Little Pigs... and so the pig went up to the man with a wheel barrow full of straw and asked if he could have some straw to build his house.’ ‘Don't be silly,’ shouted Isaac. ‘Pigs don't talk!’” - Lynn

‘Happy Birthday’

The group can decide what traditions will work for them when a child in the group is celebrating their birthday. The possibilities are many including: clapping and singing ‘Happy Birthday’ after the story, having special biscuits or an artificial cake with candles, or a birthday board with cards on and a list of the children's birthdays for that week and perhaps a ‘Happy Birthday’ banner across the top.



Free play for the children and refreshments for the parents and carers

While the children play freely, serve tea, coffee and biscuits to parents and carers. Ensure the children are safe from the hot drinks.

Sit and ride toys

As it nears the end of the session, it is a good time for children to play on sit and ride toys, thus enabling them to let off steam before they go home. Having a safe area available for the babies is always important, but particularly so at this time.

Song time and notices

Encourage parents and carers to join in with their children, and sit everyone in a circle. Ask different children for their favourite song, and sing three or four of these before finishing with one song. Many groups finish with the same song each week to mark the end of the session. If it is a Christian group, include a faith-based song or prayer during song time. Link the song with the craft activity where possible. For example, if the activity was making animal faces, you could sing 'Who built the ark? Noah, Noah'. The end of a time of singing is a good opportunity to hand out any notices for the following session or future events.

REMEMBER!

- Welcome and registration for all visitors
- Unstructured beginning to the session
- An ongoing craft table with a structured activity
- Story time and drink for the children
- Sing 'Happy Birthday' when appropriate
- Time to play on sit and ride toys
- Song time and giving out notices

Parent and toddler groups: basic procedures

Before the meeting

Registration form

New parents or carers joining the group should fill in a registration form. You will find a sample form on page 31. You may wish to use the contact details they supply to build up a database of parents and children involved in the group.

Data protection

A Data Protection Notice should be included in the registration form to inform the parent or carer about how the information they supply on it will be stored and used and who will have access to it. This data must only be used as stipulated. The parent or carer completing the form must be asked to give their written consent for the information to be used in the ways indicated. Further information on data protection can be obtained from your organisation. (Salvation Army groups — please see appendices.)

Attendance record

In addition to the registration form you need to keep an attendance record for each session. It allows you to keep track of every team member, visitor, parent, carer and child that is on the premises during each session. This is necessary if you have to evacuate the premises in the event of a fire.

Medical conditions/allergy record

It is essential (and can be life-saving) to maintain a record of children's medical conditions (for example, asthma, epilepsy), allergies and special dietary requirements (for example, some children may have a milk or nut allergy; others may be vegetarians and therefore unable to eat certain biscuits). These details should be given on the registration form and a further note made in the attendance register when children arrive. Of course, parents and carers are responsible for what their children eat and drink, but it is helpful for the whole team to be aware of the needs.

Accident book

If a child or adult has an accident while at the group, it must be recorded in an Accident Book. The details needed are the time, the type of injury, the first aid administered, and whether or not a visit to the doctor or hospital was necessary. The parent or carer should sign the record to confirm that they agree with it. Keep the accident book in a place where any member of the team can find it easily. If your organisation does not have its own official accident book, you can order one from your local branch of WHSmith — see page 28.

Incident book

Keeping a record of other incidents, such as two children persistently fighting or a child damaging property, is also advisable.



Money matters

If you are running a Salvation Army or Mothers' Union group seek advice from your organisation about how to deal with financial matters, and find out their approach to charging parents. You could take care of the group money yourself or appoint someone else to do so. If your group is independent, work out the costs involved and decide how you are going to meet them. For example, you may decide to apply for local grants. Decide what your charging policy will be; some groups leave out a collection bowl for donations, others have a fixed charge.

If you open a bank account and keep records of the money coming in and out, appoint two signatories who should be unconnected (not husband and wife, brother and sister, parent and child or good friends) and independent of each other. Regular management accounts (information) about the financial state of the group should be presented to the trustees or those appointed to oversee the running of the group. If you have a management committee, keep them informed as to how the money is used.

If a parent or carer genuinely can't pay, don't penalise them. What you do if someone who is able to pay but won't is at your discretion. You could explain to them what the fee covers (for example, room hire, refreshments, insurance, purchase of good quality toys). Explain that the fee is not for profit and that any money left over will be ploughed back into making the group even better. If someone still refuses to pay, it is legitimate to consider refusing them a place in the group.

Insurance

The group must have insurance cover in case an adult or child is hurt. Check with your own organisation about the nature of the cover automatically provided for groups running under their auspices, and assess whether this cover is appropriate. If you are running an independent group, check whether the building in which you meet has its own insurance and seek advice about any insurance cover you should take out. Take a copy of the insurance certificate from the venue before using the building. If you are not covered by the owners' insurance, there are insurance policies available for parent and toddler groups which can also cover theft. The Pre-school Learning Alliance has an insurance policy which covers all a group needs. All insurers will expect you to exercise your responsibility to use the accommodation and any equipment safely. Keep an inventory of what you have and what it costs to replace the items listed.

Time limit

There are no fixed rules about how long a session should run. Many groups run sessions for one and a half to two hours, others for longer.

Organising outings

If you are planning trips away from the premises, additional guidelines are needed (contact your own organisation where relevant). The leader should take positive steps to promote safety and ensure proper precautions are taken to prevent accidents. Particular thought should be given to risk assessment, additional insurance, and safeguarding procedures.

Number limit

There are no fixed rules about how many adults or children can attend a group session, but there will be a capacity for the venue as far as fire regulations are concerned. Assess how many children can play safely with the toys that you provide and the number of volunteers available. Take advice from your local Fire Officer if you are in doubt. Once you have decided on the maximum intake, post a note of this clearly on the door. In areas of high demand, group leaders sometimes enroll parents or carers in advance, and start a waiting list. Experience has shown that usual attendance is around 70 per cent of those that enroll.

Safeguarding and Health and Safety

These vital subjects have been given their own sections on pages 16-22.

On the day

Open up and prepare

Keys may need to be collected from and returned to the owner or caretaker of the premises; ensure you know whose responsibility this is each week. Arrive in good time to set out the toys and check room safety.

Team members

Make sure there are enough team members to cover all necessary jobs – including making the refreshments.

Register

It is essential to keep track of all parents, carers and children who are on the premises at any group meeting. Nominate a team member to take the register and to make a note in the register if anyone leaves during the session. In the event of a fire, the nominated person can then reliably inform the fire service of any people left in the building.



REMEMBER!

- Ask parents or carers to fill in a registration form
- Keep a record of children's medical conditions, allergies etc.
- Use an accident book and incident book
- Manage the money
- Ensure there is relevant insurance cover
- Open up and prepare the room
- Have enough people on the team
- Keep an attendance record

Keeping children safe: safeguarding issues

It is vital that all parent and toddler groups have an up-to-date safeguarding policy in place. The notes here do not constitute a policy but serve to emphasise the need to have one.

Everyone concerned in any activity that involves children (irrespective of whether their parents or carers are present) should adhere to an up-to-date safeguarding policy. This is for the safety and protection of the children and any vulnerable adults – and for the protection of the team. All team members must receive safeguarding training, have a copy of the policy, and agree to implement it. Your safeguarding policy should be reviewed annually and be in line with current legislation.

Written information should be given to parents and carers, telling them about the policy and specific measures to ensure the safety of the children. A copy of the safeguarding policy should be displayed clearly while the group is in session or directions given as to where it may be viewed. See the sample notice sheet at the back of this document on page 35.

For details of Mothers' Union diocesan safeguarding policies and procedures, contact your diocesan trustee group or Mothers' Union staff at Mary Sumner House. See contact details on page 27.

Salvation Army groups should adhere to the *Safe & Sound* policy. See contact details on page 27.

If you are running an independent group and have no child protection policy, several agencies offer free advice. CCPAS (The Churches Child Protection Advisory Service) offers outline policies which can be adapted to meet the needs of specific activities – see page 18 for contact details. The safeguarding policy may be a large document which may be difficult to display on a notice board, so a generic sample notice sheet for independent groups has been produced on page 35.

All policies should include guidelines about the selection process of employees and volunteers who will come into unsupervised contact with children.

“Having a safeguarding policy in operation will help to protect the most vulnerable in society – the under-fives, too small to protect themselves!”

David Pearson, former CEO, CCPAS

Other important issues which safeguarding policies should cover include:

- Safer recruitment for all – Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks (or equivalent), references and application forms
- Arrangements for ongoing support structures for all
- Practical procedures for keeping children safe
- Definitions of the different types of abuse
- Information about the signs and symptoms of abuse
- Instructions about what to do if abuse is suspected or reported, including who to contact if specialist advice is needed
- Provision for with children with special needs

Sometimes urgent and immediate action is required. In that case, those present should do what they can to protect the child and contact Social Services or the police if the child is in immediate danger. The person named in their policy as the contact in matters relating to safeguarding issues should be informed as soon as possible.

For Salvation Army groups: the incident should be recorded and reported to line management at DHQ or THQ notice of concern for non-urgent cases of abuse (*Safe & Sound* appendices 21) or report of suspected abuse (*Safe & Sound* appendices 20), whichever is more appropriate.

At parent and toddler groups, parents and carers are the primary carers while at the group. It is important that they understand this. Nappy changes and supervising children's visits to the toilet should be undertaken by the child's own parent or carer.

The taking and use of photographs in the group needs to comply with data protection law. Photographs taken by parents for personal use only is exempt from the Data Protection Act. Written permission from the parent or carer is required for all other photographs to say they are happy for the photographs to be used. Set out in the agreement letter where and when the photographs will be used, and for what purpose.

Because parents and carers are the primary carers, parent and toddler groups are not required by law to have any involvement with Social Services, but it is helpful to have a good relationship with them and keep them informed of the group's activities.

REMEMBER!

- Adhere to an up-to-date safe guarding policy and practice guidelines
- Protect the children in your care – as well as yourself and the team
- Train team members in safeguarding issues
- Review the policy and practice annually
- Provide parents and carers with written information about the policy
- Display the policy (noticesheet) while the group is in session
- Obtain permission before taking or using photographs
- It is essential that these safeguards are put in place

Safeguarding contacts

Disclosure and Barring Service

PO Box 110
Liverpool
L69 3JD
Tel: 0870 90 90 811
Web: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service

CCPAS (Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service)

PO Box 133
Swanley
Kent
BR8 7UQ
Tel: 01322 517817
Help line and Lo-call: 0845 120 4550
Email: info@ccpas.co.uk
Web: www.ccpas.co.uk

NSPCC

Weston House
42 Curtain Road
London
EC2A 3NH
Tel: 020 7825 2500
Fax: 020 7825 2525
Email: help@nspcc.org.uk
Web: www.nspcc.org.uk

The Salvation Army Territorial Headquarters UK Territory with the Republic of Ireland

Safeguarding Unit
101 Newington Causeway
London
SE1 6BN
Tel: 020 7367 4772
Fax: 020 7367 4774
Email: safeguarding@salvationarmy.org.uk
Web: www.salvationarmy.org.uk

Health and safety

"The parent and toddler group was a lifesaver. It was the only real outlet I had to meet with other people in the same position as me. I made some good friends there." - Anne

Fire safety

Invite the local fire officer to visit the place where the group meets. They will be up to date with the fire safety regulations and will be able to give instruction about fire exits and how to practice a fire drill. They will also check that the fire extinguishers in the building are correct and in good working order. All fire extinguishers must be regularly maintained.

Make sure parents know who in the team is responsible in the event of an emergency. This would often be the group leader and, if they are not available, their deputy.

"We had a great time when a firefighter came to do a fire safety talk. He came in his uniform - the children loved it. It was great for the carers too!" - Linda, team member

First aid

A well-stocked first-aid box is essential. It should be accessible but out of reach of children and must be restocked regularly. As a guide, a basic box should include the following items:

- A leaflet giving general guidance on first aid (for example, Health Service Executive leaflet *Basic Advice on First Aid at Work*)
- 20 individually-wrapped sterile adhesive dressings (assorted sizes)
- 2 sterile eye pads
- 4 individually-wrapped sterile triangular bandages
- 6 safety pins
- 6 individually-wrapped 12cm x 12cm sterile unmedicated wound dressings
- 2 individually-wrapped 18cm x 18cm sterile unmedicated wound dressings
- 1 pair disposable gloves

Do not keep tablets or medicines in the first-aid box.

At least one qualified first-aider must be available at each session. Contact St John Ambulance for details of first-aid courses in the area – see page 28 for details.

Keep at hand a list of telephone numbers of local doctors and hospitals. Be within reach of a telephone in case of emergency and make sure someone has a mobile phone if there is no phone available in the building.



Food safety

Each toddler group where food is prepared on or off the site needs to have written procedures on the provision of food.

Food hygiene regulations 2006

On 1 January 2006 food hygiene legislation changed across Europe. The new regulations consolidate and simplify the existing legislation. The main change is the need for some food operations to have a documented food safety management system. The amount of documentation will depend on the size and nature of the operation. Activities such as the occasional preparation of food by individuals or groups for gatherings or for sale at charitable events are excluded. For more regular 'low' risk activities where food is brought onto premises, simplified procedures and record keeping should suffice.

A food safety management procedure requires that:

- Hazards to food safety which might be present are identified
- Controls are in place to deal with these hazards
- Controls are carried out and if something does go wrong it is clear what should be done to rectify the problem
- Procedures are kept up to date
- Documents are kept to demonstrate what the procedures are
- Records are kept to show that procedures are working

Detailed advice on food safety management from the Food Standards Agency can be found at www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/hygiene/sfbb.

More general information is available from the Food Standards Agency website www.food.gov.uk or from your local environmental health department.

Hygiene

All toilets and nappy changing areas need to be checked for cleanliness. All cleaning products must be locked away. If there is not a facility to dispose of nappies safely, ask parents and carers to take them home. Ideally, nappies should be burned or put into two bags and tied securely before they are thrown away.

Venue safety and security

Check the room you use before each session, making sure previous users have left nothing unsafe behind.

Find a secure place for buggies and prams. Leaving them in the entrance halls compromises security and blocks the exit in the event of emergency. You may need to invest in some bicycle locks if you are unable to shut them away.

Doors should never be deadlocked in case of an emergency.

Safety covers should be plugged into all sockets. If you have heaters, use fire guards; if you have stairs, use stair-gates. If there is no door between the kitchen and the meeting room, use a stair-gate to prevent children having access.

Equipment and toys

When buying toys, ensure they all carry the relevant symbols of safety and quality. Look for one or more of the following symbols:



(Lion Mark)



(EC mark)



(Approved Lion Mark retailer)

Consider how the equipment you buy will fit into the space available. The layout of the equipment is important and careful consideration should be given to:

- Having a safe area for babies
- Having adequate storage
- The importance of children being visible at all times (such as the use of transparent playhouses)

Care should be taken that fingers are not trapped when children are using sit and ride toys.

Toys should be regularly checked, maintained and cleaned. Broken toys should be disposed of immediately. Discourage gifts of second-hand toys and check the safety of toys children bring in from home.

Toys provided should be appropriate to the different age groups and varying stages of child development. The local Early Learning Centre offer 10 per cent discount to parent and toddler group leaders; proof of charitable status is required.

The following list of suggested toys and equipment will encourage children's physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. Don't be discouraged by the length of the list; start with a small number of good quality items.

For babies under 12 months:

- Baby chairs and rings
- Rattles
- Soft toys
- Mobiles
- Musical instruments, for example, bells, shakers, tambourines





For toddlers aged 12-24 months:

- Books
- Paper and colouring pencils
- Building blocks
- Toy buggies
- Wheelie toys
- Sit and ride toys
- Protective sheets for painting and play dough area
- Painting overalls
- Finger paints (non toxic)
- Climbing frame with safety mat
- Cushions/beanbags for reading corner/puzzle area
- Wooden jigsaw puzzles

For children aged 2-3 years:

- Construction toys, for example, Sticklebricks, Duplo
- Dolls house, garage
- Wheelie toys and bikes
- Playhouse
- Glue stick for craft activities

REMEMBER!

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Put fire safety precautions in place ○ Keep a list of local emergency numbers ○ Keep an up-to-date first-aid box ○ Have a qualified first-aider at all sessions ○ Be near a telephone ○ Have written food safety management procedures ○ Check the safety of the room before all sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Keep buggies secure and away from the entrance ○ Maintain cleanliness and lock up cleaning equipment ○ Use stair-gates and fireguards ○ Dispose of nappies with care ○ Buy toys with safety symbols ○ Clean and check toys regularly ○ Provide a safe area for babies ○ Keep children in direct sight at all times
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Communicating with the group and the community

Be inclusive

The name 'parent and toddler' is not a totally inclusive title so state clearly in all the literature that everyone is welcome - mums, dads, grandparents and other carers.

However if you are running an 'exclusive' group - a group for single mums under 18, for example - clearly state this. All adult carers are in a parental role when they are at the group. Mention in the literature that the group is also for babies and is appropriate for children up to school age (although usually children leave at three years to go to playgroup or nursery school).

If you are a faith-based group you should make this fact clear, but explain that you extend a welcome to people from different religious backgrounds and ethnic groups.

Ensure that people with disabilities know they are welcome. Most public buildings should have suitable adaptations unless the cost is considered unreasonable. Any concerns you have about accessibility should be referred to the owner of the property.

Some groups choose to call themselves by a specific name (such as Stepping Stones, Sparklers, Busy Bees, or Tiddlers). This can help to emphasise that the group is not exclusively for parents and toddlers, and also help to engage children and build in an identity to the group.

"Not surprisingly, I was in a minority as the only dad. I actually felt very special. The children loved having a man around. They couldn't get enough of me!" - Dave

Vision statement

On page 29 you will find an example of a vision statement. This sets out the aims of the group and shows that the group intends to work for excellence in the endeavour. Display a copy on the wall of the venue. This declared intention will motivate you and the team to offer the best service you can at all times.

Welcome letter

Prepare a welcome letter or introductory leaflet. Make it friendly and informative, and aim it towards new members on their first visit, covering all the basic information they need to know. Include, for example:

- The days and times of opening
- Any changes in meeting times during school holidays
- Contact name and telephone number of group leader
- Health and safety issues such as areas allocated for buggies
- An explanation of how parents and carers can pass on comments or complaints to you and the team. Let them know: "This is your group and we welcome your input."

Parental agreement

As part of the welcome letter or as a separate leaflet, set out the parents' and carers' responsibilities. The letter could read, for example:

It is important that every member of the group feels relaxed, supported, safe and secure, and that they have fun while they are here. May we remind you that when you sign in each week you are agreeing to follow a few simple ground rules that will help us enjoy our time together:

- Your child's safety and the way they relate to and play with other children, are your responsibility. Please intervene with your child if others are at risk of being hurt!
- If another parent is concerned about something you or your child is doing, listen graciously — even if you don't agree, or feel you have been misunderstood. Stay friends!
- Appreciate the team members who are here to organise and facilitate the group, but who are also part of the group family.
- Take care of and encourage your children to look after the room, the equipment and each other, and take care with drinks, buggies and belongings.
- Above all, have fun and enjoy being together!

See page 30 for a sample combined welcome letter and agreement; you could adapt this to suit the group.

Newsletter

You might like to produce a newsletter which could provide more 'ongoing' information. This could be distributed via doctors' surgeries, playgroups and libraries. You may also like to produce copies written in any foreign languages spoken in the area. In addition to the essential information included in the welcome letter, it could include details of:

- Parents' groups or other activities that you run or can recommend
- Fundraising events, summer outings and Christmas parties
- Where and when the group meets, what it costs and who can come

Recommendations and referrals

Arrange to meet with local health visitors, the National Childbirth Trust (NCT) or other agencies and ask them to recommend the group. People more readily choose services when they are recommended by people they respect. This could be a more effective way to advertise the group than handing out leaflets.

"One of the health visitors in the town recommends our group to new mums, especially those who are a bit low. People come here because it makes such a difference to their lives." - Sharon

1277

On average there are just 1,277 days in the life of a UK child between birth and starting nursery education. 1277 is an alliance of churches and other agencies that support the work of church-based toddler groups. It exists to develop and implement a national strategy to support church-based toddler groups and their associated activities. The vision of 1277 is to see universal access to excellent, safe, Christian toddler groups which are demonstrating God's love at the heart of their communities. 1277 helps to raise awareness of effective strategies for developing spirituality and faith for toddlers and their families. It also provides an opportunity to create more local networks between toddler groups. It is very useful for signposting leaders to resources, training and ideas as well as encouraging prayerful support. For further information visit the 1277 website: www.1277.org.uk.

REMEMBER!

- Everyone is welcome
- State clearly if you run an 'exclusive' group
- Display the Parent and Toddler Vision Statement
- Write a welcome letter
- Prepare a parental agreement
- Produce a newsletter
- Get recommendations
- Register with 1277



Further support for families

Through the parent and toddler group, you are already helping many of the group members more than you will know. You may also be inspired to go one step further in supporting families – for example, by offering parents’ groups or other activities, or locating sources of help for families with particular needs.

All three organisations that have produced these guidelines have resources and support networks offering further help.

Care for the Family

Garth House
Leon Avenue
Cardiff
CF15 7RG

Tel: 029 2081 0800

Email: mail@cff.org.uk

Web: www.careforthefamily.org.uk

Care for the Family produces *Playtime*, a newsletter for church parent and toddler group leaders which provides encouragement and an opportunity to share ideas and inspiration. There is also an annual *Playtime* conference. Other activities include family-building breaks for single parent families, and free telephone befriending services for those widowed young, parents of children with additional needs and bereaved parents. Care for the Family has a range of parenting resources, including the *Positive Parenting* range of courses which cover the children in the early years through to teenagers.

Registered Charity No. England and Wales: 1066905; Scotland: SCO38497.



Mothers' Union

Mary Sumner House
24 Tufon Street
London
SW1P 3RB

Tel: 020 7222 5533

Email: mu@mothersunion.org

Web: www.mothersunion.org



Mothers' Union is a Christian mission charity that seeks to support families worldwide. In over 80 countries, our 4 million members share one heartfelt vision - to bring about a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful and flourishing relationships.

Rooted in our voluntary ethos, our activities are driven by and undertaken through members wherever they are. Through praying, enabling and campaigning, including community outreach and supportive programmes, Mothers' Union promotes stable marriage and family life. We tackle the most urgent needs facing communities, and we undertake projects that foster strong families, protect children and result in cohesive and independent communities.

Registered Charity No. 240531.

The Salvation Army Territorial Headquarters UK Territory with the Republic of Ireland

101 Newington Causeway
London
SE1 6BN

Email: afm@salavationarmy.org.uk

Web: afm@salavationarmy.org.uk



Adult and Family Ministries

The Salvation Army is a worldwide evangelical Christian church. Our message is based on the Bible; our motivation is the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Inspired by our faith, we engage in a programme of practical action to serve the community, to help those who are suffering and in need, and to fight for social justice.

Within the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland there are more than 800 Salvation Army social service centres and churches (corps). We run 120 drop-in centres offering support and help for people in need and serve 3,000,000 meals every year at community and residential centres. Every working day, we reunite ten people with their families through our Family Tracing Service. And the Salvation Army's Employment Plus supports over 2,500 people on the Work Programme to help people get back into employment.

On average 414 parent and toddler groups per week, with an average weekly attendance of 14,742, enable children to play in safe environments and allow parents to meet with Salvation Army Officers and other parents for support.

Contact the Salvation Army's Safeguarding Unit for their *Safe & Sound* policy at the above address or telephone 020 7367 4772.

United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland
Registered Charity No. England and Wales: 214779; Scotland SCO09359.

Useful contacts and resources

Pre-school Learning Alliance

The Fitzpatrick Building
188 York Way
London
N7 9AD
Tel: 020 7697 2500
Fax: 020 7700 0319
Email: info@pre-school.org.uk
Web: www.pre-school.org.uk

St John Ambulance

PO Box 133
National Headquarters
27 St. John's Lane
London
EC1M 4BU
Tel: 08700 104950
Web: www.sja.org.uk

Tiddlywinks

Scripture Union Mail Order
PO Box 5148
Milton Keynes MK2 2YX
Tel: 08450 706 006
Email: mailorder@scriptureunion.org.uk
Web: www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Tiddlywinks
Described as 'the flexible resource for pre-school children and carers', the Tiddlywinks books offer a user-friendly, fun introduction to Bible stories.

WHSmith

Customer Services
Greenbridge Road
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN3 3LD
Tel: 0845 603 6543
Email: customerrelations@whsmith.co.uk
Web: www.whsmith.co.uk

Family Caring Trust

44 Rathfriland Road
Newry
Co Down
BT34 1LD
Tel: 028 3026 4174
Email: office@familycaring.co.uk
web: www.familycaring.co.uk
Produces a seven-session course for parents of children up to the age of six, aiming to enable parents to become more confident and learn new skills.

Gingerbread

520 Highgate Studios
53-79 Highgate Road
London, NW5 1TL
Tel: 020 7428 5420
Helpline: 0808 802 0925
Web: www.gingerbread.org.uk
Advice for single parents.

Family Lives

CAN Mezzanine
49-51 East Road
London N1 6AH
Tel: 020 7553 3080
Helpline: 0808 800 2222
Email: centraloffice@parentlineplus.org.uk
Web: www.familylives.org.uk
Provides freephone helpline and parenting advice and support.

Contact a Family

209-211 City Road
London
EC1V 1JN
Helpline: 0808 808 3555
Tel: 020 7608 8700
Email: info@makingcontact.org
Web: www.cafamily.org.uk
Brings together families whose children have disabilities.

Sample handouts and forms

Sample vision statement

The Parent and Toddler Group Vision Statement

We aim to:

Welcome everyone

Give a warm welcome to everyone, whatever their age, relationship to the child, culture, religious background, colour, gender or disability.

Be excellent

Show excellence in all that is done in our group, from making coffee to comforting a person in distress. At all times to try to maintain our high standards.

Provide a safe and happy environment

Offer a safe and happy environment for the team to work with parents, carers and children.

Care for our team

Value, encourage and care for every member of the team.

Offer friendship

Offer true friendship to everyone who comes to our group and create an environment where friendships can be made among our group members.

Involve parents and carers

Encourage parents and carers to assist and participate fully in the group as the group is for them and their children.
The group is run by members of
[insert if appropriate: the Salvation Army/Mothers' Union/name of church].



Sample welcome letter/agreement

Dear [name of parent/carer]

We are really pleased that you have joined [insert name of group] parent and toddler group!

I am [name of leader], the group leader, and together with the rest of the team I would like to welcome you. We will do all we can to help you feel a part of our happy group. The group is run by members of [insert if appropriate: the Salvation Army/Mothers' Union/name of church].

For your information, we are open on Tuesday and Thursday each week during term time between 9.30 and 11.30 am. We like to keep the entrance free for everyone's safety so please leave large items including prams and buggies in the room on the right of the hall when you arrive. The fire exit at the end of the hall is for emergency use only and should not be used at other times.

We like to ensure that every group member feels relaxed, supported, safe and secure, and that they have fun while we are here. For this reason we have a maximum number limit of 50 adults and children, and as group leader it is my responsibility to ensure we don't exceed the maximum. When you register each week you are agreeing to follow a few simple ground rules that ensure everyone has an enjoyable time.

- Your child's safety and the way they relate to and play with other children, are your responsibility. Please intervene with your child if others are at risk of being hurt!
- If another parent expresses concern about something your child has done, listen graciously. Explore each other's point of view even if you don't agree or feel you have been misunderstood. Stay friends!
- Appreciate the team members who are here to organise and facilitate the group, but who are also part of the group family.
- Take care of and encourage your children to look after the room, the equipment and each other, and take care with drinks, buggies and belongings.

Everyone's comments about the group are always welcomed. If you have any concerns or suggestions about how we can do things differently, please let me or any of the team know. This is your group and your input is always welcome.

If you have any questions about [name of church] please approach us as the group is run by members of the church. From time to time the church offers parents' groups and discussion evenings that parent and toddler group members are very welcome to join in.

Above all, we are about having fun - so enjoy being together!

[name of leader]
Group Leader

PS If you need to speak to me outside parent and toddler group times, call me on [insert your telephone number].

Sample registration form

Parent and Toddler Group Registration

PARENT/CARER'S NAME:

CHILD/CHILDREN'S NAME/S:

CHILD/CHILDREN'S DOB:

CONTACT ADDRESS:

POSTCODE:

CONTACT TEL NO:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

REGISTRATION DATE:

MEDICAL CONDITIONS:
(e.g. allergies, asthma)

SPECIAL NEEDS:

SIGNED:

RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD:

DATE:

The group is run by members of [insert if appropriate: the Salvation Army/Mothers' Union/
name of church].

Sample attendance record

Adult's Name	V *	P *	T *	Child's Name	DOB	Special Needs	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date

*Visitor, Parent/Carer, Team member

Sample volunteer agreement form

Parent and Toddler Group Volunteer Agreement

Thank you for the interest that you have shown in becoming a helper at [insert name of parent and toddler group]. The group is run by members of [insert if appropriate: the Salvation Army/Mothers' Union/name of church].

We value the children and young people in our care and also those working with them. In line with official recommendations on safer recruitment and as part of our commitment to children and young people, we ask volunteers to complete this form. Anyone who is in a leadership role is required to have a DBS check in England and Wales or the appropriate criminal records check in other countries. It is important that you contact [insert name] who will explain about this process.

FULL NAME: DATE OF BIRTH:

ADDRESS:

POSTCODE: EMAIL ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER: MOBILE NUMBER:

Brief role profile: [name of group] Volunteer

Responsible for assisting at Parent and Toddler group sessions.

This may include helping with activities such as play, craft, song time, story time, and refreshments.

In addition you may become involved in associated activities including, but not limited to, outings, toddler services, parent and carer socials, crèches etc.

You will be responsible to:

Your primary responsibility is towards the health, safety and welfare of those attending. As with all those volunteering, you will be expected to comply with the safeguarding policy that the group works under.

Your time commitment will on average be:

Experience, qualifications and training

Please give details overleaf (or on a separate sheet of paper) of your experience of working with and looking after children or young people and details of any relevant qualifications or training. Include a brief outline of any previous involvement with this or another church.

References

Please complete the details below of two people who would be willing to provide a personal reference. (Referees need to be independent, so do not ask family members. A suitable referee would be someone

who has known you in an official capacity for at least two years such as a church leader, minister, church employee or youth/children's leader). If you are in employment, one referee should be your present employer. If you have been involved with another church in either voluntary or paid work during the last five years, please give them as one of your referees.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

..... POSTCODE:

PHONE NUMBER: RELATIONSHIP:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

..... POSTCODE:

PHONE NUMBER: RELATIONSHIP:

YOU WILL BE REQUIRED TO ATTEND A CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING SESSION AND MAY BE REQUIRED TO HAVE A DBS CHECK OR EQUIVALENT.

- I confirm that I have received a copy of [insert name of parent and toddler group] safeguarding policy and that I will endeavour to follow the guidelines contained within it.
- I confirm that the information submitted is correct and complete.
- I agree to inform [insert contact name] if I am convicted of an offence or if I become the subject of a police investigation, social services or social work department investigation. I understand that failure to do so may lead to the immediate suspension of my work with children.

[If your parent and toddler group is a registered charity, for unpaid volunteers you may like to consider using the following wording in the volunteer agreement form:]

Legal information

We have a duty to inform you that this agreement is binding in honour only and is not intended to be a legally binding contract between us. It may be cancelled at any time at the discretion of either party. Neither you nor [insert name of parent and toddler group] intend for any employment relationship to be created either now or at any time in the future.

SIGNED: DATE:

Please return completed form to: [Insert contact details].

Sample safeguarding policy notice

This is a generic notice for independent groups. For further information see page 16

The Parent and Toddler Group Safeguarding Policy

We are committed to following government guidelines on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. This includes good working practice and safe recruitment of all.

We work to a formal safeguarding policy, and this can be seen on request from one of the designated persons shown below.

These designated persons have been appointed by the leadership to respond to any safeguarding concerns in respect of this group.

1:

2:

Please speak to one of the designated people if you have any concerns regarding the safety or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.

The group is run by members of [insert if appropriate: the Salvation Army/Mothers' Union/name of church].



