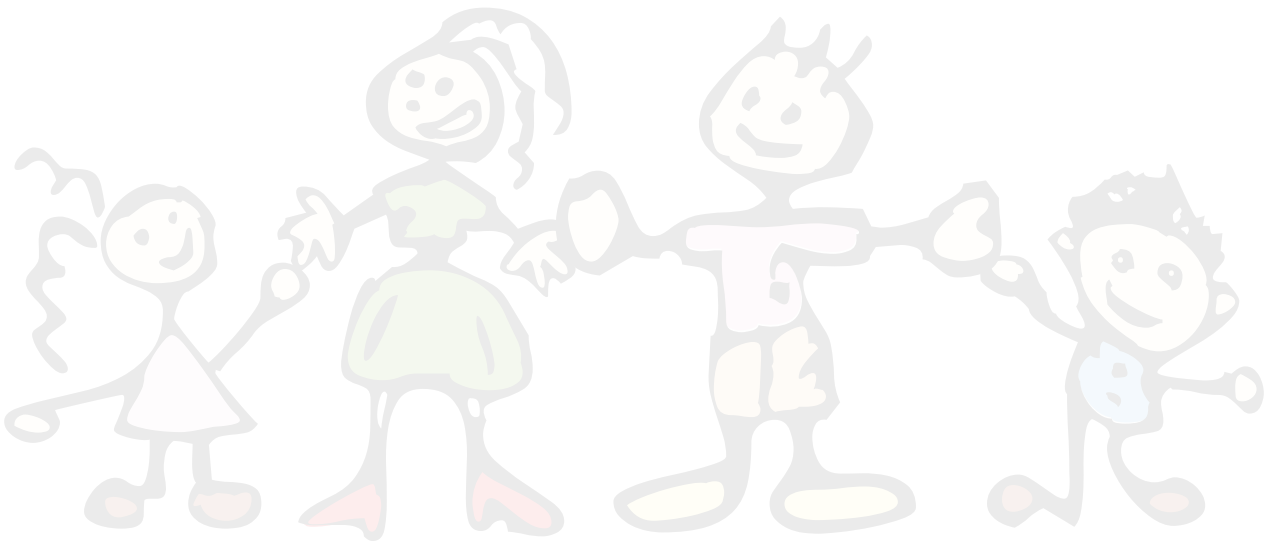


## Acknowledgements

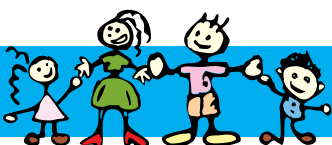
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*Kerry County Childcare Committee assumes no liability whatsoever for any damage resulting from use of this Support Guide, associated resources or its contents.*



## Foreword

The purpose of this guide is to help anyone wishing to set up a parent and toddler group; or those currently running one; to ensure a quality service is provided that runs smoothly and conveniently for all the children and parents attending.

A USB memory stick of resource templates is also available to be used in conjunction with this support pack.

The contents of which include the following samples:

*Parent & Toddler Information Leaflet*

*Parent and Toddler Charter*

*Parent & Toddler Committee Guidelines*

*Parent & Toddler Register*

*Parent & Toddler Registration Form*

*Sample Welcome Letter*

*Sample Accident/incident/injury form*

*First Aid Kit checklist*

*Fire Drill & Sample Evacuation Plan*

*Fire Drill Record*

*Complaints / Complaints Procedures*



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crafts and activities. They offer the chance to use messy items such as sand, water, play dough and glue, or larger items such as ride on toys or climbing frames, which are not suitable to some homes.

## How do they work?

Parent and Toddler Groups are usually set up within community buildings and hold sessions of two to three hours. They are run on a voluntary basis by at least two people, although it is

## Why should I use a parent and toddler group?

They provide a welcoming place for all parents and carers to make friends and feel supported. Groups can be the basis for developing long-lasting relationships for young families looking for friendship and support. They can offer a lifeline to families in crisis, support for parents having a tough time or just dealing with the ongoing demands of children.

Groups can be a starting point to go forward, maybe branching out into parenting groups and other supportive courses. They offer a surrogate or extended family to the families that attend. Ultimately, parent and toddler groups make a great contribution to the life of a community.

Parent and toddler groups offer a vital service to families; to some they are somewhere to take the children to socialise, to others they are a real life line. As any new mum will confirm, becoming a parent can be a daunting experience, nothing can quite prepare you for it, cut off from former work colleagues and social life parents can soon feel terribly isolated with this screaming bundle, and just having somewhere to go to talk to other parents or even just other adults can save your sanity. They are a place where children can learn to interact with other children and develop social skills.

They are a safe place for children to explore the world using a wide range of toys and equipment,



advisable to have at least three organisers. The adults can be parents or other family members, nannies or childminders and they stay with the children and find it is an ideal opportunity to talk to other adults. The groups provide a great opportunity for children to meet other children as well as encounter a wide variety of play opportunities.

## Setting up parent & Toddler Group

### Do Some Investigation First!

It is a good idea to establish some links with area professionals to identify the needs of parents and children in your chosen area. The County / City Childcare Committee, the area based integrated Partnership companies, Community Work department in the HSE, Health visitors, doctors, schools, nurseries and the Community/ Parish Hall are all good places to start discussing whether there is a local need for a group.

Parents will already have existing commitments with their children and it is worth doing some investigating to find out what the current demands in your chosen area are.

### Things to Consider

- **School opening and closing times**

Parents with older siblings will appreciate group times that coincide with these.

- **Local Health Clinics**

Liaising with the local Public Health Nurse will help to ensure your group sessions do not clash with the local clinic times.

- **Existing Parent & Toddler Groups**

It is worth visiting other parent and toddler groups near to your area. There are many different styles of groups. Talk to the parents and organisers and decide what you like or dislike about each group.

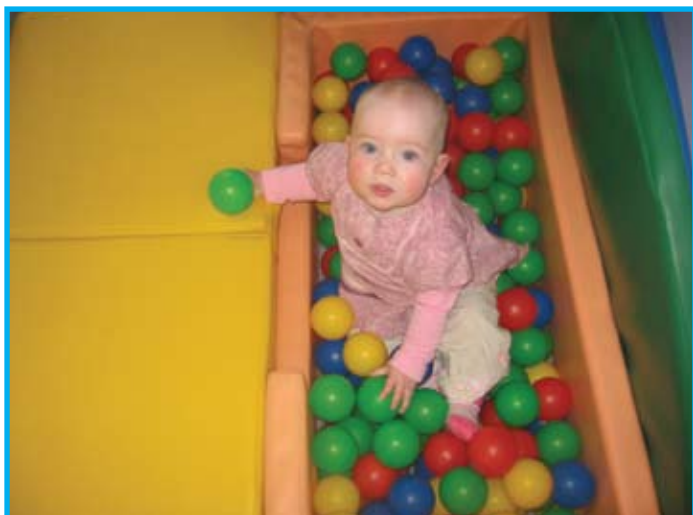
Details of times and days of their sessions are important for your planning.

- **Monday Morning Syndrome**

Bear in mind that experience has shown that that people do not want to go to a group run on Monday mornings

## Choosing A Venue

Finding suitable premises can be a difficult task. Ideally, you are looking for a large hall with good toilet and kitchen facilities, an enclosed garden or outside play area and of course plenty of storage space. Unless you are lucky enough to be able to use a purpose built early years building, you will probably have to compromise on something, but remember the size of the hall will dictate how large the group can be.





**There are many issues that will help you decide whether a venue is suitable or not:**

### • Rent

It is important to find out exactly what the rent will be before accepting the use of the premises. In some instances a donation may be asked for instead of rent, but be clear about what a suitable donation is! What does the rent/donation cover? Will you have to pay separately for using the heating? Are there any other hidden costs?

### • Keys

Who holds the keys to the premises, will someone let you in? Will you be given a set or will you have to collect them before each session?

### • Accessibility

Is there a car park? Is the venue child and parent friendly? Is the facility shared with other groups at the same time? Check long-term availability of the facility. (Be aware that if you choose to run all year round, there will need to be some provision for older siblings to attend during school holidays). Is the external access door childproof?

### • Facilities/Accommodation

Look for the area providing security for parents to avoid escaping children! Remember you may start with very little equipment, but as the group grows, you may require more; so check the availability of storage space carefully. Look out



for adequate storage, clean and accessible toilets and sinks, food preparation area, adequate heating and light and general ease of access for all people (consider pram, pushchair and wheelchair access). Is there any suitable space within the building to store prams and buggies? Remember that if you bring them into the hall you must think of safety and Fire Drills.

### • Play Area

This must be a safe, clean and clear space. Consider the floor covering, is it non-slip when wet, or is it a carpet that is difficult to clean? Bear in mind that a room with an echo has a negative effect upon children. Will messy play be allowed or are there restrictions? If so will you need something to protect the floor? Will you need to provide some mats to enable the children to play on?



### • Heating

Is it safe? Do you need any guards? Is it adequate for the size of the hall?

### • Ventilation

Can the windows be opened?

### • Kitchen

Is there somewhere you can make drinks and snacks? What equipment will be available i.e. kettle & cups? Is there any storage space available?

### • Toilets

Are they easily accessible. Is there an area suitable for nappy changing purposes? How will nappies be disposed of, or will parents take them home with them?

### • Fire Exits

Find out where they are, how to use them, and what the fire drill procedure is. How do you sound the alarm and where should you go? Have your own fire drill procedure clearly displayed. The local Fire Officer may be willing to come along and advise you on many of these points.

### • Insurance

You must have the appropriate insurance before you open a new group. Do the owners of the

hall/premises have a policy which gives you cover? Or do you have to arrange your own insurance cover? If there is already cover for groups, ask to see the policy and check with the company that you are covered. Public liability and loss and damage of equipment are required.

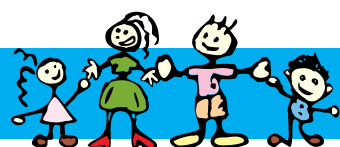
See Insurance Contacts *at back*

### Choosing a name

Decide on a name for the group for advertising and banking purposes being careful not to exclude people i.e. mother & toddlers could sound like dads, childminders, grandparents, carers, etc. are not welcome.

All adult carers are in a parental role when they are at the group. However, if you are running an 'exclusive' group – a group for single mums under eighteen, for example – clearly state this. Decide on an age group for the children and make it clear that everyone who has children of that age group is welcome. For example, mention in your literature that the group is also for babies, and is appropriate for children up to school going age.

If you are a faith-based group you should make that clear, but explain that you extend a welcome to people from different religious backgrounds and ethnic groups. Ensure people with disabilities know they are



welcome. But do make it clear if wheelchair access is not available in the building you use. Any concerns you have about accessibility should be referred to the owner of the premises you use.

Some groups choose to call themselves by a different name (such as Stepping Stones, Sparklers, Busy Bees, Tiddlers). These names are chosen in an attempt to emphasise that the group is not exclusively for parents and toddlers, and also to engage children and build in an identity to the group.

## Advertising

Put up posters in local Health Clinics, GP surgeries, local shops, schools, pre-schools, libraries and the actual premises of the group. Hand out flyers outside local schools, preschools, Public Health Nurses anywhere that parents with young children go. Give details of your group to the County / City Childcare Committee, (see list of useful contacts) HSE Community Work Department, the area based integrated partnership companies and also local newsletters or websites.

## RUNNING A PARENT & TODDLER GROUP

### Developing Rules

It is a good idea to think about some general rules to start with. These can later be decided by the group and change to meet the needs of the group. (i.e. No smoking and parents are responsible for their own children at all times).

### Setting Objectives

A Parent and Toddler Group Charter is a good way of outlining the aims of the group and shows that you endeavour for excellence in all that you do. Display a copy on the wall of your venue – this declared intention will motivate all members of the organising team/committee and the other carers.

### Roles & Responsibilities

Who Will Run The Group With You?

Running a parent and toddler group (even a small one) involves a lot of work, you don't have to do it all yourself. Get help!

It is advisable to have a minimum of three organisers on your committee to ensure cover is available and to provide a consistent approach. This may prove difficult in reality and many

#### The Parent and Toddler Group Charter

We aim to:

**Welcome Everyone**

Give a warm welcome to everyone, whatever their age, relationship to the child, culture, religious background, race, gender, disability sexual orientation or membership of the Travelling Community.

**Be Excellent**

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

**Provide a Safe and Happy Environment**

Offer a safe and happy environment for the members of the group - parents, childminders, carers and children.

**Care for our Team**

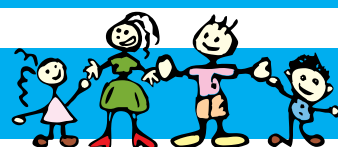
Value, encourage and care for every member of the organising team/committee.

**Offer Friendship**

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

**Involve Parents, Childminders and Carers**

Encourage parents, childminders and carers to assist and participate so that they will feel they are an essential part of the group.







groups run with just two main organisers. The organisers have a responsible position for the children and adults attending.

### Things to consider on how the group will run and who will do the following tasks:

- Contact person for giving and receiving information?
- Planning a session
- Advertising the group
- Collect keys if necessary
- Setting out the activities
- Welcoming children and parents – new and existing.
- Helping children and parents to participate in the session
- Providing refreshments and snacks
- Supervising the children
- Managing the time-table of the session
- Buying equipment and materials
- Collect fees and pay bills
- Keeping registers and records
- At the end return equipment and clean up after each session?

All these jobs are important, so it would be a good idea to have a group of parents to help set up and clear away the equipment, and clean the premises at the end of the session. Parents can be asked to make the refreshments on a rota basis. Explain to the group how everyone can help and place a rota or list asking for volunteers. Put this in a prominent place so they can see it on arrival. Give all newcomers an introductory leaflet explaining that everyone attending the group is expected to help in whatever way they can.

As stated previously it is advisable that the organisers set up a committee; this will ensure that all the tasks and responsibilities are shared equally among the adults in the group. All decision making is a lot easier and more fun if it is done on a shared basis. Your County / City Childcare Committee can support you in developing a committee and / or encouraging new members to your group.



## Equipping your Parent & Toddler Group

### Basic Equipment

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



CE Mark



LionMark



BATR Mark

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.
- 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.



Ensure that any products with age warnings (e.g. not suitable for children under three) are not accessible to these age groups.

The following list of suggested toys and equipment will encourage 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:

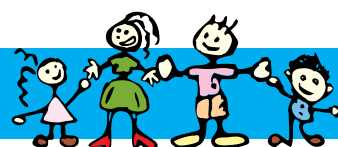
Baby chairs  
Rattles  
Soft toys  
Mobiles  
Musical instruments e.g. bells, shakers, tambourines  
Activity centres  
Stacking / nesting cups  
Cloth and study board books  
Pull around toys  
Blocks and bricks

### 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 e.g. Stickle bricks, Duplo  
Dolls' house, garage  
Wheelie toys and bikes  
Playhouse  
Glue stick for craft activities







## Other

- Kitchen equipment
- Kettle or urn
- Cups (plastic ones for the children)
- Knives, spoons for food preparation
- Plates for serving
- Tea, Coffee, milk, sugar, healthy snacks for the children

## COST

Points to consider:

- a) Cost of rent or donation for hall hire.
- b) Insurance.
- c) Refreshments.
- d) How are you going to buy the basic needs, toys and equipment?
- e) Are you able to fundraise before hand? Or you could apply for a grant from your County / City Childcare Committee. (see useful contacts)
- f) Are you going to make a charge per adult, per child or per family? How much?





## Record Keeping

### Weekly register

It is important to have a register for parents to sign in on their arrival in case of any emergency evacuation of the building i.e. fire drill. This must show the name of every adult and child coming into the group and an IN and OUT column to show when they have left the building. This allows you to keep track of every team member, visitor, parent/carers, and child that is on the premises during each session.

### Registration form

New parents/carers joining your group should fill in a registration form. You may wish to use the contact details supplied to produce an address list for the parents/carers involved in the group. Data protection declaration: A statement should be made on the form about how the information supplied on it will be stored and used and who will have access to it. The person completing the form must be asked to give their written consent for the information to be used in the ways indicated. The information supplied must not be used for any purpose other than those stipulated. For further advice, contact your local County / City Childcare Committee. (see useful contacts)

### Medical Conditions / Allergy Record

It is essential (and can be life-saving) to maintain a record of children's medical conditions (e.g. asthma, epilepsy), and allergies. It is also important to record 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 daily register when the children arrive. Of course, **parents/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

A book is required to record any incidents involving children or adults.

A separate page is required for each incident recorded to prevent breaking confidentiality about information regarding families. If a child or parent 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/carers should sign to show that what you have recorded is acceptable to them. Keep the accident book in a place where any member of your organising team can find it easily.





emergency. If a telephone is not available, make sure someone has a mobile phone, or knows where to find the nearest public phone.

## FINANCE

You will need to open a current account. The money taken at each session and any grants or fundraising that you may do, is paid into the current account. Then any spending on the group's behalf, for rent or refreshments etc. can be paid for by cheque. All transactions involving the group's money should be recorded and all receipts kept.

## DEVELOPING POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Any hall you hire should have their own health and safety policies and fire drill; you must be aware of these and can adopt them for your group or make your own. You must do your own safety checks of the premises and your own equipment.

## FIRST AID REQUIREMENTS

A well stocked first aid kit should be available at each session. It is a good idea to keep a first aid manual in the box for reference purposes. It is also recommended that someone within the group has some first aid training.

### Suggested contents of the First Aid Box:

- 20 individually-wrapped hyper-allergenic adhesive plasters (assorted sizes).
- 2 sterile eye pads.
- 4 individually-wrapped sterile triangular bandages
- 6 safety pins
- Individually wrapped antiseptic wipes
- 6 12cm x 12cm individually-wrapped sterile un-medicated wound dressings.
- 2 18cm x 18cm individually-wrapped sterile un-medicated wound dressings.
- 1 pair disposable gloves – non-powdered latex or latex free (Nitril)
- Paramedic Shears
- Sterile Eye Wash

You should not keep tablets or medicines in the first aid box.

Keep at hand a list of telephone numbers of local doctors and hospitals. You should be within reach of a telephone in case of





# SAFETY ASSESSMENT & AWARENESS

## Safety checks

- Check the room you use before each session, making sure previous users have not left anything 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 dead-locked 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 meeting room, use a stair-gate to prevent children gaining access.

## Ensuring the safety of children during the session

- Adults are present throughout the session and remain responsible for the children



they bring. This must be explained clearly to the parents/carers when they first attend the group; ensuring that their children are supervised particularly whilst sleeping, in outdoor spaces, taking part in activities like water play, and when adults are talking or taking part in activities.

- Parent and toddler group organisers are not required to have Garda Vetting carried out, as the **parents and carers remain with, and are responsible for, their children at all times.**
- Groups should ensure that babies and crawlers are neither harmed nor over-restricted by play activities and equipment which are provided for older children.
- Groups which provide additional adult activities should have sufficient volunteers and/or staff (for which Garda vetting is required) to ensure the safety of the children.

## Ensuring adults safety during the session

- Any additional volunteers and staff involved in the group can play an active role in maintaining the level of supervision but should not assume total responsibility.
- Although parents/carers remain responsible for their child/children, every adult within the group should be safety conscious, everyone should be encouraged to prevent accidents and remove any hazards.
- No-one should be asked to do jobs which are hazardous to themselves or to the children in their care.





# ORGANISING AND RUNNING MEETINGS

## Before the meeting - Parent's Information

### Welcome letter

Prepare a welcome letter or introductory leaflet. Make it friendly and informative, keeping in mind that it is for new members on their first visit, so it should cover 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/committee chairperson.
- Health and safety issues such as areas allocated for pushchairs.
- An explanation of how parents/carers can pass on comments or complaints to you and the team.
- Let them know “this is *your* group and we welcome your input”.

Dear Mary,

We're really pleased you've joined Early Days parent and toddler group!

I'm Nora Murphy, your group leader/chairperson, and together with the rest of the organising team I would like to welcome you. We'll do all we can to help you feel part of our happy group.

For your information, we are open on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9.30am and 11.30am.

The cost is Euro X per family group.

Please note that we run our group during school term time only.

We like to keep the entrance hall free for everyone's safety. Please leave your prams, buggies or other large items in the room on the right hand side of the hall when you arrive. There is an additional fire exit at the end of the hall: this is only for use in emergency, so please do not leave by that exit.

It is important that every member of the group feels relaxed, supported, safe and secure – and has fun – while they are here. For that reason we have a maximum number limit of 50 adults and children; as group leader I am responsible for ensuring that we do not go over the maximum. For the same reason, may we remind you that when you register each week you are agreeing to follow a few simple ground rules that will help us enjoy our time together: please see our parents agreement.

We do value your comments on the group, and would also like to know if you have any concerns or suggestions about how we can do things differently. Please let me – or any of the team members – have your feedback. This is your group and we always welcome your input.

From time to time we run parenting courses and discussion evenings. You are very welcome to join us.

Above all – have fun and enjoy being together!

Nora Murphy

Group leader

PS If you need to speak to me outside group hours, feel free to call me on \_\_\_\_\_



## Parental Agreement

A Parental Agreement needs to be circulated to new members as part of your welcome letter, or as a separate leaflet, setting out parents'/carers' responsibilities. Your parental agreement could read, for example:

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

Your child's safety, the way s/he relates to and plays with other children, are your responsibility. So if s/he's about to throw a brick – intervene!

If another parent expresses concern about an action of yours or your child's, listen graciously. Explore each other's point of view, even if you don't agree, or feel you have been misunderstood. Stay friends!

### No Shouting, No Smoking, No Swearing.

Appreciate the members of the organising team who are here to organise and facilitate the group, but who are also part of our group family.

Look after, 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!"

Policies and procedures also need to be disseminated to parents, childminders and carers.

## Parent Information Pack

The following is a list of information that might be included in the Information Pack:

- Complaints/compliments procedure
- Behaviour policy for children and adults
- Exclusion of sick children policy
- Accidents/incidents policy
- Policy on outings with the group

## The Meeting

### Preparation on the Day

#### - Open up and prepare

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

#### - Team numbers

Make sure there are enough committee members/organisers 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. A nominated team member should be available to take the register, and if anyone leaves during the session, this also should be noted in the register. In the event of a fire, the nominated person can then reliably inform the fire service of any people left in the building.

#### - Number limit

There are no fixed rules about how many adults or children can attend. The number will be determined by the insurance policy and influenced by the number of adults available to assist, the size of the space available, and



how many children you judge can play safely with the toys that you provide. Take advice from your local Fire Officer if you are in doubt. In areas of high demand, group leaders sometimes enrol parents/carers in advance, and start a waiting list. Experience has shown that usual attendance is around 70% of those that enrol. The group leader is responsible for deciding the maximum number that can be safely accommodated, and for (tactfully!) turning away anyone who arrives after that maximum number has been reached.

## The Welcome

It can take an adult a tremendous amount of courage to join a new parent and toddler group. Recognising this is important and an organiser can help make an adult feel welcome by introducing them to one or two parents or carers initially. You may find it helpful to have the *Welcome Letter* and *Parents Agreement* ready to give to adults upon joining to provide them with information about times and dates of sessions, charges and the aims of the group.

Make your point of registration friendly and informal. If you have several members on your organising team/committee, one member should welcome and another should take each new person through to show them the fire exits, toilets and changing facilities, and introduce them to others. Aim to introduce them to one or two of your 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 their first visit. If possible, have a comfortable chair for pregnant mums so they do not have to sit on a tiny children's chair for the whole session.

## 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/carer.

Get to know each parent as an individual; calling parents by their name (not just John's dad or Ellie's childminder)

## Session outline

### - Welcome and registration

An important occasion – see above.

### - Unstructured beginning

Have available toys such as the train set, cars and story area so children can play freely while their parents/carers chat with each other and with team members. Do not have sit and ride toys available at this stage.

### - Craft table

A craft table can operate throughout the morning, allowing the parents/carers and children to come and go. It provides a good place for parents/carers to chat to a team member while helping their child with the activity. Your activity could tie in with the story you tell or mark significant dates in the calendar.

For example:

Make decorations which you can use on the Christmas tree at the parent and toddler Christmas party; tell the story of the nativity at story time.

Make cards for Mothers Day and Fathers Day – but be sensitive as not all children live with both parents or may have lost a parent.

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.





## Painting

**Planning:** If parents are forewarned children can be dressed in old clothes. Have everything ready before you start: a place to dry paintings, a pen to name work, extra towels & tissues. Ensure there are ample pots /trays of paint for each place set.

### Equipment needed:

- Ideally child size table and chairs or easel
- Aprons (or old shirts worn backwards)
- Newspaper to cover table or easel & floor
- Bowl and towel to wash hands
- Paper & paint
- Large Brushes or just fingers!
- Variations: potato, hand or sponge printing.
- Trays for printing (washed ready meal trays are ideal).



### Painting gives children the opportunity to:

- Learn colours
- See what happens when colours are mixed
- Control a brush and marks made on the paper
- Express feelings and expand vocabulary e.g. "it's slimy"
- Explore the feeling and texture of the paint

## Story/Rhyme/Singing Time

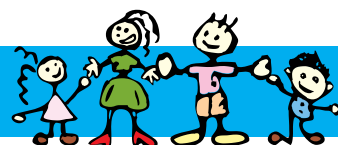
**Planning:** Choose simple stories that children can follow. Books with good pictures and a few words on each page are ideal. Keep the stories short, remember to keep eye contact, and use expressive face and voice tones. Try using a prop perhaps a teddy or doll which tells the children that it is time to sit down because teddy/doll wants to listen to the story.

### Equipment needed:

- Suitable stories/books/rhymes/songs
- List of favourite songs
- CD player, basket of instruments

### Story time gives children the opportunity to:

- Enjoy stories and to sit for short periods
- Develop their listening skills
- Develop social skills



## Happy birthday

If a child in your group is celebrating his/her birthday, sing Happy Birthday at the end of the story. You could have special biscuits, an artificial cake with candles, or a birthday board (a notice board with a list of the children's birthdays for that week, with birthday cards on and a 'happy birthday' banner across the top). Serve drinks and biscuits to the children while they are sitting down.

## Free play for the children; tea/coffee for parents/carers

While the children play freely, serve hot drinks with biscuits to parents/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 the sit and ride toys, thus enabling them to let off steam before they go home. A safe area for the babies, which must always be available, is particularly important at this time.

## Song time and notices

Ask parents/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.

The end of song time is a good opportunity to hand out notices for the following week or future events.



## Carers and Children - Achieving the Balance!

The toys need to cover the entire range of children attending and be clean and in good condition. However, there are two factors that need consideration:-

**Firstly** the age range of the children.

**Secondly** the needs of the adults to interact with each other versus the needs of the children who need adults to help them become competent learners.

## The secret lies in the room layout and the examples set by organisers.

The aim of parent and toddler groups is usually to encourage parents and carers to interact with their children as well as socialise with other adults. Achieving the right balance is the key to successfully meeting this aim. Therefore, putting adult chairs near the activities will encourage this, as well as making floor space for adults to sit and join the children's activities.

The result of putting adult chairs at one end of the room and children's activities at the other clearly states that the adults avoid regular involvement within the children's activities. Almost like an invisible barrier! Try different layouts and see the





difference!

Adult chairs can also be used as a screen to ensure the babies are kept safe from the group's other activities and that older children can become involved in an activity without being interrupted by little ones. The position of these chairs will then encourage parents to chat to each other and be close to their children. Position the baby area away from older children's toys containing small pieces.

Art activities and 'messy' play will need to be near a water source for ease.

You may find it is useful to try several ways of laying out the room during the early months to find an arrangement that suits the group of families attending.

## Activities

Whenever a child is playing, they are in fact, learning. A parent and toddler group is an ideal opportunity to encourage adults to interact with their children to encourage, support and extend their learning. Children learn through play.

Take a simple cooking activity. A child will learn maths through the weights and measures, science through the combining of ingredients and the changes involved through the heating or cooling, social rules by taking turns and working in a group and further language through the new words discussed.

Story time, snack time and singing or music time are ideal times for the group to come together, whereas, individual activities allow the children to choose their tasks with their parents' and other children.

To offer activities that meet all the needs of children's development, try to include activities from all the following areas:

### Physical Play:

The large physical activities include activity mats and activity centres, free space to roll and move, sit on trucks or cars, soft, spongy balls, mats, a small slide, big cardboard boxes, ropes in wiggly shapes to follow. The smaller physical movements include providing chalks and other

drawing materials, painting and art activities, jigsaws, cutting with scissors, and threading activities.

### Construction Play:

Foam bricks and stacking cups are safe examples for babies. For toddlers of 18 months to 3 years, stacking blocks and construction such as Duplo, wooden bricks, stickle bricks. For 3 – 5 years play equipment is required such as Lego and simple Meccano.

### Imaginative Play:

This can be provided very inexpensively. Household items such as pots and pans, bedding, dustpan and brush, plastic cutlery and some play food provides a home corner. An office can be made using old paper and pens, an unwanted typewriter, stickers, envelopes, rulers, rubbers, rubber stamp etc. Cars, a garage and roadway. Dressing up clothes provide children with the tools to act in a character (these can simply be unwanted clothes or material off cuts).

### Materials to explore:

Rattles, toys with buttons to twist and push, toys to dismantle and re-assemble, Counting and sorting activities, games and books. Sensory play such as water, sand, cooked spaghetti, jelly, play dough, bubbles or flour play in a tray.

Many of the County Childcare Committees will have resources available that include endless activity ideas for children, your local library is also an excellent resource.

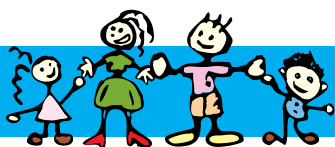




## Useful Contacts

For support, business and general advice, resources, regular newsletters, training courses and grants information contact your local County / City Childcare Committee:

CCC Name	CCC Contact Address	Phone	Fax	Email	Website
Carlow	Enterprise House O'Brien Road Carlow	059 9140244	059 914 0651	info@carlowccc.ie	www.carlowchildcare.com
Cavan	Railway Station Belturbet Co. Cavan	049 9529882	049 9529881	admin@cavanccc.ie	www.cavanccc.ie
Clare	1 Kilrush Rd. Ennis Co. Clare	065 686 4862	065 686 5515	info@clarechildcare.ie	www.clarechildcare.ie
Cork City	29 Penrose Wharf Cork	021 450 7942	021 450 7914	corkcitychildcare1@eircom.net	www.corkcitychildcare.ie
Cork County	Market House Buttevant Co. Cork	022-23880	022 41657	info@corkchildcare.ie	www.corkchildcare.ie
Donegal	Glenview Business Park Donegal Rd., Ballybofey Co. Donegal	074 9132416	074 9130314	info@donegalchildcare.com	www.donegalchildcare.com
Dublin City	108 James Street The Digital Hub Dublin 8	01 5424100	01 5424107	info@dccc.ie	www.childcareonline.ie
Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown	5a Woodpark Sallynoggin Co. Dublin	01 236 8030	01 236 8012	info@dlrcountychildcare.ie	www.dlrcountychildcare.ie
Fingal	ABCO KOVEX Building Swords Business Park, Swords Co. Dublin	01 807 7660	01 807 7669	info@fingalcountychildcare.ie	www.fingalcountychildcare.ie
Galway	9B Liosban Retail Centre Tuam Rd. Galway	091 752039	091 735701	mail@galwaychildcare.com	www.galwaychildcare.com
Kerry	2 James Street Tralee Co. Kerry	066 718 1582	066 710 2945	info@kerrycountychildcare.com	www.kerrycountychildcare.com
Kildare	The Woods Clane Co. Kildare	045 861 307	045 982 411	info@kildarechildcare.ie	www.kildarechildcare.ie
Kilkenny	2nd Floor, Desart House Lower New Street Kilkenny	056 7752 865	056 7786 903	kkccc@eircom.net	www.kkccc.ie
Laois	6 Lismard Court Portlaoise Co. Laois	057 8661029	057 8681970	info@laoischildcare.ie	www.laoischildcare.ie
Leitrim	Laird House, Church St. Drumshanbo Co. Leitrim	071 964 0870	071 964 0871	info@leitrimchildcare.ie	www.leitrimcountychildcare.ie
Limerick City	1st Floor, The Granary Michael St Limerick	061-407525	061-407522	childcare@limerickcity.ie	www.limerickcitychildcare.ie
Limerick County	Lower Ground Floor Croom Mills, Croom Co. Limerick	061 600 918	061 600898	info@clcc.ie	www.clcc.ie



Longford	Longford Enterprise Centre Templemichael Longford	043 3342505	043 3342504	enquiries@longfordchildcare.ie	www.longfordchildcare.ie
Louth	Unit 14 Ardee Business Park Hale St., Ardee Co. Louth	041 685 9912	041 685 9913	info@louthchildcare.ie	www.louthchildcare.ie
Mayo	First Floor, Chambers House Ellisson Street Castlebar Co. Mayo	094 9047010	094 9021777	mayochildcare@mayococo.ie	www.mayochildcare.ie.
Meath	Old Revenue Offices Commons Road, Navan Co. Meath	046 907 3010	046 906 7221	fiona@mccc.ie	www.mccc.ie
Monaghan	17 The Grange Plantation Walk Monaghan	047 72896	047 72881	monaghanccc@eircom.net	www.monaghanchildcare.ie
Offaly	St. Joseph's Community Centre Kilcormac, Birr Co. Offaly	057 91 35878	057 91 35879	info@offalychildcare.com	www.offalychildcare.com
Roscommon	Arm Castlereagh Co. Roscommon	094 96 22540	094 96 20878	info@roscommonchildcare.ie	www.roscommonchildcare.ie
Sligo	Unit 6, Cleveragh Retail Park Cleveragh Sligo	071 91 48860	071 91 48849	sligochildcare@gmail.com	www.sligochildcare.ie
South Dublin	C6 Clondalkin Civic Offices Ninth Lock Road, Clon- dalkin Dublin 22	01 457 0122	01 457 0322	info@southdublinchildcare.ie	www.southdublinchildcare.ie
Tipperary North	Civic Offices, Limerick Rd. Nenagh Co. Tipperary	067 44888	067 31478	childcare@northtippcoco.ie	www.northtipperarychildcare.ie
Tipperary South	Unit 5, Ground Floor Hughes Mill, Suir Island Clonmel Co. Tipperary	052 61 82274	052 61 28776	info@southtippchildcare.ie	www.southtippchildcare.ie
Waterford City	4B Manor Village Cork Road Waterford City	051 860 444	051 860 445	info@waterfordcitychildcare.com	www.waterfordcitychildcare.com
Waterford County	9 Emmett Street Dungarvan Co. Waterford	058 43601	058 43602	waterfordcochildcare@eircom.net	www.waterfordcoco.ie
Westmeath	6 St John's Tce, Blackhall Mullingar Co. Westmeath	044 93 35454	044 93 47962	info@westmeathchildcare.ie	www.westmeathchildcare.ie
Wexford	7 Castle Hill Enniscorthy Co. Wexford	053 9237156/ 053 9239763	053 9239540	info@wexfordchildcare.ie	www.wexfordchildcare.ie
Wicklow	Kilmantin Hill Wicklow Town	0404 64455	0404 64444	info@wccc.ie	www.wicklowcountychildcare.ie



## Insurance Contacts:

### **Padraic Smith & Co. Ltd.,**

Newcourt House,  
Stradville Avenue,  
Clontarf,  
Dublin 3.  
Telephone: (01) 8330888  
Email: [info@psmith.ie](mailto:info@psmith.ie)

### **Kevin Sheerin,**

Community Insurances Consultants Ltd.,  
39 Hyde Park Avenue,  
Blackrock,  
Co. Dublin.  
Telephone: (01) 2886550  
Email: [Kevin@communityinsurances.ie](mailto:Kevin@communityinsurances.ie)

### **IPPA,**

Unit 4,  
Broomhill Business Complex,  
Broomhill Road,  
Tallagh,  
Dublin 24.  
Telephone: (01) 4630010  
Email: [info@ippa.ie](mailto:info@ippa.ie)





## Appendix 1

### Best Practice – Self Assessment Questions for Parent & Toddler Groups

These questions provide an overview of the main aspects of running a toddler group. Use them to identify both your group's strengths and areas for improvement. Remember that what each group can provide will depend very much on the size of their organising team and their facilities. However, these questions should get you thinking about the areas that you want to develop.

#### WELCOME

Walking into a new group can be daunting, so it's vital that newcomers are made to feel welcome and comfortable. First impressions last! Many groups find it useful to appoint a "welcomer" who can ensure newcomers are introduced to other mums, shown where the facilities are and are made aware of any group procedures. Other groups find a 'buddy' system works well. Your welcome will be one of the most important aspects of your group, so think about these questions:

**Newcomers:** Do they get asked their names, receive a welcome pack? Are they shown around the facilities? Do you pair newcomers with people who have been coming for a while? Are newcomers followed up in the following weeks to see how they're getting on?

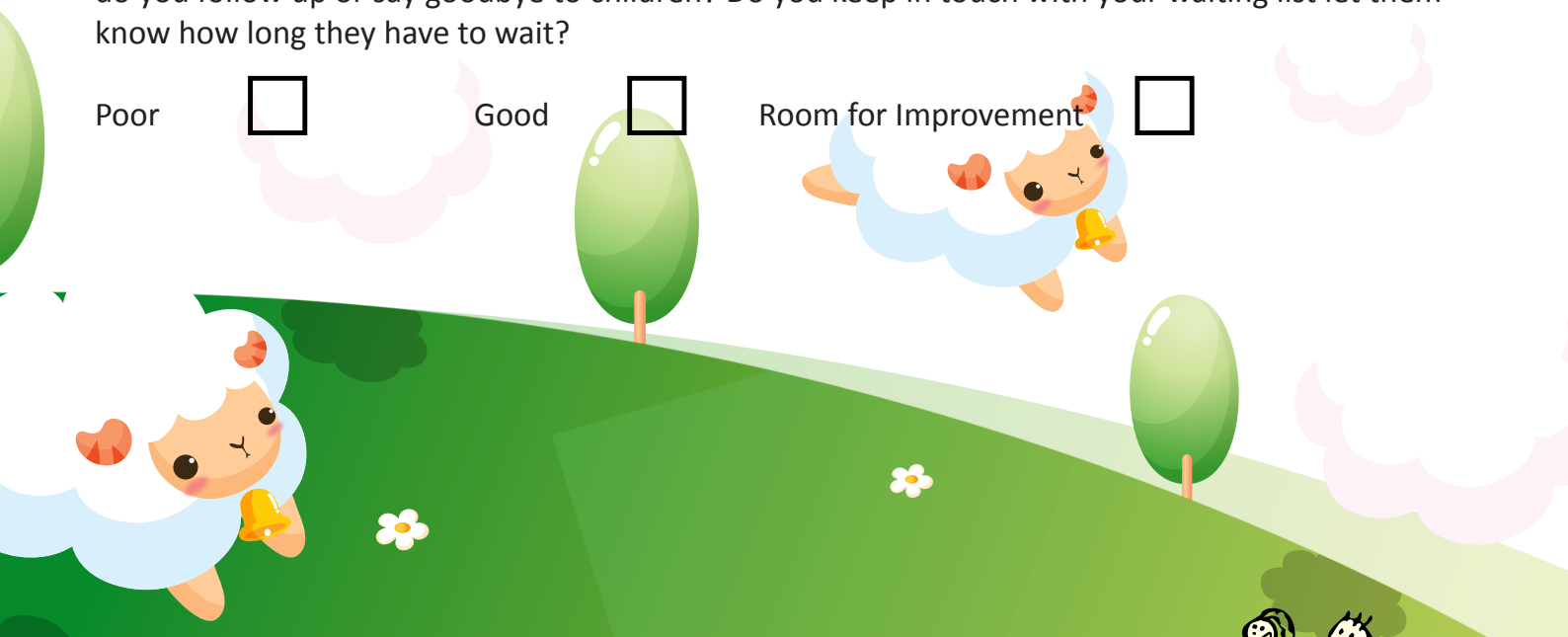
Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

**Welcome pack:** Does this include session times and fees, contact information, group rules/guidelines, details of duties and parent rotas, further info on how the group is run? How do you keep records accurate and up to date?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

**Being inclusive:** What provision is made for children or carers with disabilities or for families from new communities? Do you display information about the team or publish a newsletter? How do you follow up or say goodbye to children? Do you keep in touch with your waiting list let them know how long they have to wait?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐



## ACTIVITIES

While it is good to have a variety of activities, it is often helpful to have a routine that signals the start and end of each session. Some groups have a planned programme; others vary their toys each week. Your activities will depend on your available resources, but here are some points to consider:

**Routine:** Does your group have a routine with activities that signal beginning and end for the children? Do you have a planned programme? Are your toys and activities varied week by week?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

**Craft:** Does this allow the children to develop creativity and choice? Do the crafts allow a variety of skills, including sticking, painting, cutting, messy play, play dough? Are the children's crafts displayed?

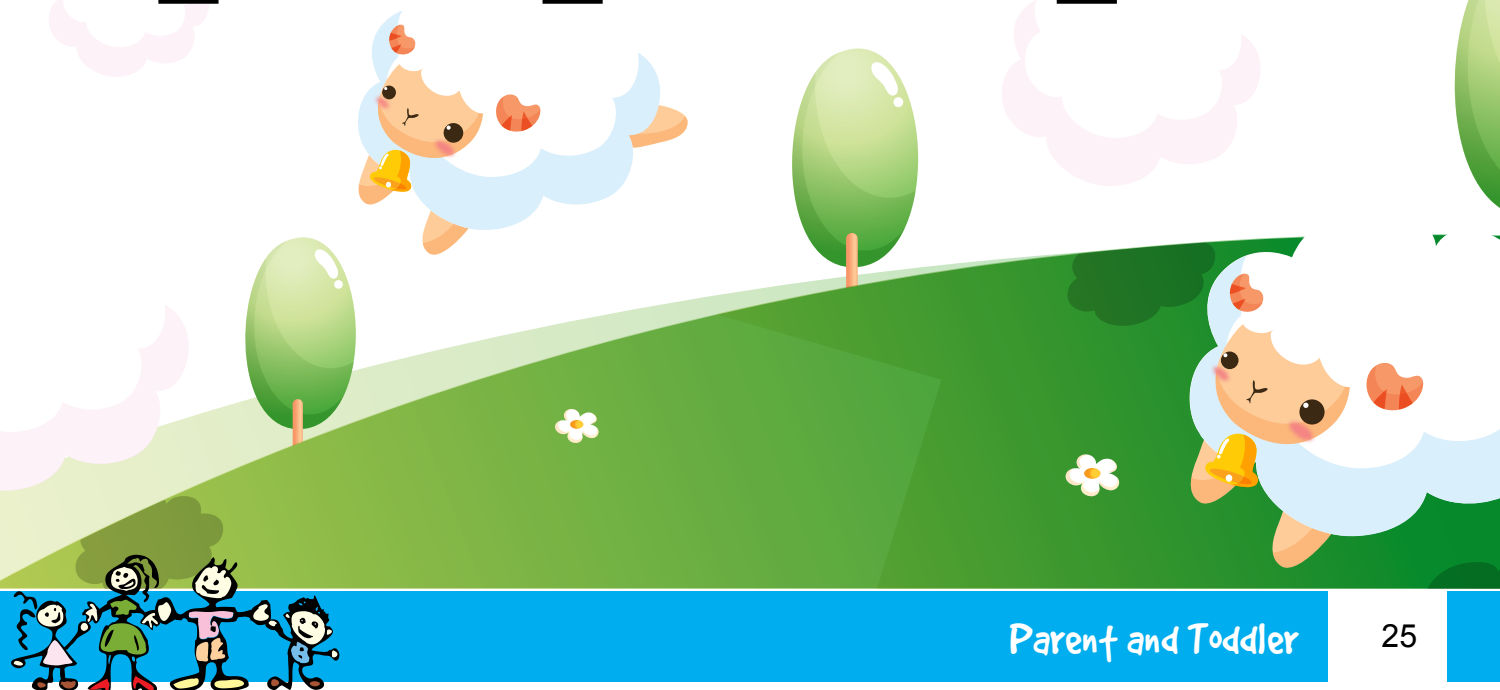
Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

**Activity:** Is there a good variety of 'Quiet Space' Activities - e.g. jigsaws, drawing, play dough, Duplo, train set, home corner, dressing up? And 'Big Space' Activities- e.g. balls, slides, sit and ride, parachutes?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

**Literacy & Music:** Does song time include musical instruments, words and actions, new songs, songs for all ages? Do you have book corner, story time? Are parents encouraged to read to their children?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐



## HEALTH AND SAFETY

This is an important topic that we can't cover fully here, but make sure that you have thought about the following questions, and have policies and procedures to cover these where necessary. Also make sure that these have been circulated as required.

**Health:** Are there good facilities for nappies or potties? How regularly are toys cleaned and checked for safety? Are snacks healthy? Is there choice and variety? Are hot drinks served away from the children?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

**Security:** Are the premises secure - can children wander out? Have you set maximum numbers? What are your procedures for accidents or fire safety? Is there a protected space for the babies and those learning to crawl? Do you have details of your group insurance?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

## TEAM

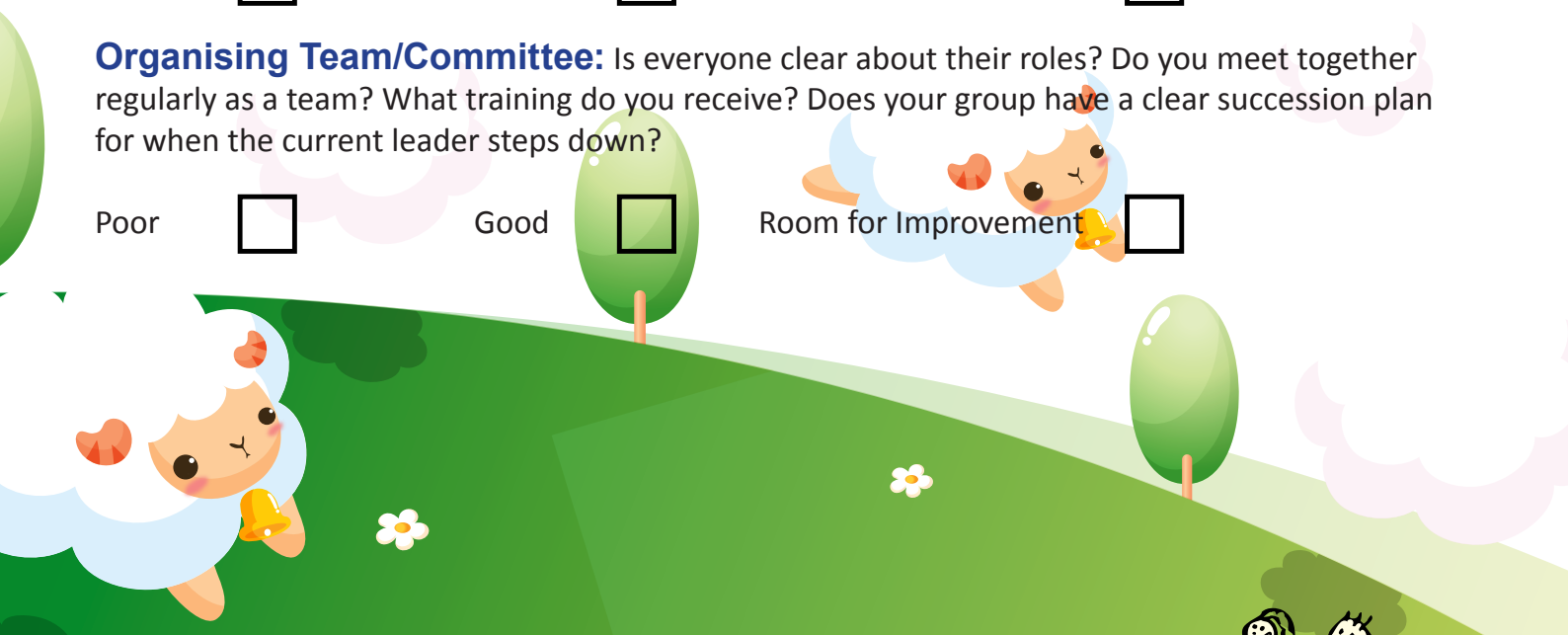
A good team will enable you to do more than you thought was possible: 'Together everyone achieves more'. But teamwork often requires effort and thought to make the most of its potential. It's also vital to be clear about your vision and objectives, so that you can all work towards the same goals.

**Vision:** Does your group have a clear vision and objectives?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

**Organising Team/Committee:** Is everyone clear about their roles? Do you meet together regularly as a team? What training do you receive? Does your group have a clear succession plan for when the current leader steps down?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐





## INVOLVING THE CHILDMINDERS, CARERS AND PARENTS

When the parents are involved they will feel ownership of the group. As a toddler group you also have the opportunity to offer extra services to the community such as parenting courses. The parents and carers will often offer help and friendship to each other, but it can be helpful to have someone nominated to oversee care and support.

**Involvement:** Do all members have the opportunity to help with setting up and putting away, making drinks, crafts? Are members involved on the organising team/committee, helping with fundraising, feeding back ideas? Do you offer activities to parents outside of the toddler group, e.g. holiday events, trips out, buggy services, special event evenings?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

**Help and support:** Do you run parenting courses? Are health leaflets available? Do you make the most of local resources such as health visitors? Do parents know who to talk to for problems or advice? Do you follow up parents, childminders or carers who haven't attended for a while?

Poor ☐ Good ☐ Room for Improvement ☐

## WHAT NEXT?

Ideally, you will want to keep improving and move from 'good to great'. Toddler groups have huge potential to impact their communities and to make a difference in the lives of children, so the way we run our groups really does matter. Even if your group is well-run with few obvious areas for improvement, have you considered the following ideas?

Set up or participate in a toddler group network in your area. You could undertake some training yourself, or train new leaders within your group and share your vision. If you have good craft or story ideas, think of ways of sharing your resources with others.

