

HAVANT PARENT AND TODDLER PROJECT

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Supported by



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So you have a parent and toddler group up and running, its success will however depend on two things: one; people knowing about the group and two; the quality of the group.

Advertising

Even the best group in the world will not be attended by people if they don't know you exist. Advertising is important, especially to a new or not so well established group.

Advertising need not be expensive, a simple but eye catching poster and leaflets can easily be produced on any computer, do however be sure that you have included all the important details such as: Name of group, Where and When the group is open, and Who can attend.

Where to advertise your group

Put up posters in surgeries, local shops and libraries. Hand out fliers outside local schools and anywhere that parents with young children go. Give details of your group to organisations such as Children's Information Service, Hampshire Children and Families Forum, local Health Visitors and The Pre-School Learning Alliance.

Quality

What makes a quality parent and toddler group? Well P+T mean different things to different people, they can be:

A place to escape the confines of their own home.

A place to socialise.

A point of contact and informal advise. (Coffee and chat)

A chance for children to develop social skills.

A chance for children to access a wide range of toys and activities.

Learning through play.

A time for parent and child to spend quality time together.

By providing these things and maintaining a simple structure, you will achieve a good quality group that gives children and families the best possible start together.

First impressions count

The set up of the room can make a big difference to how people interact. Break the room up into different areas, of course the size of the room will dictate how many areas you can have, but the baby mat needs to be separate from the main area. If possible a quiet area is also good for reading books. Put some activities on tables such as puzzles or stickle bricks. Set chairs around tables and mats close to the activities to encourage the parents to join in.

Make sure everyone receives a warm welcome when they arrive, if they are new to the group make sure they know what to expect throughout the session and that they know where the toilets and baby changing facilities are.

Be sure to tell them about safety issues such as fire exits and fire drill. Where they can leave pushchairs, and any rules the group may have. During the session make sure they are not left out, introduce them to others.

Some groups have a welcome pack for newcomers.

Ideas for welcome leaflet:

- Dates and times that sessions run including whether you are term time or all year round
- Names and contacts of people who are on the committee
- A brief outline of how the session runs for example: 10am - 10.45 free play followed by singing then refreshments with a story time at the end
- Mention that everybody takes it in turns to help, that you use a rota system and that everybody helps to put the toys and equipment away at the end
- If people have a special talent for craft ideas or story telling then ask them to offer their services occasionally

In bold letters write that parents are always responsible for their own parents whilst they are at the group

Play equipment and toys

It is important that whatever toys you choose they are suitable for the age range that you cater for, remember that if you open during school holidays you will need some toys suitable for older children as well. All toys and equipment needs to be kept in good order and be clean. Any toy or item of equipment that is broken must be removed to prevent the risk of injury.

Below is a list of the types of toy suitable for different age groups, toys should also reflect different races and cultures and abilities.

Books should cover all age groups.

Don't forget that the Toy Library and Library will loan toys and books to groups, this is a great way to vary the range you offer without buying everything yourselves.

Activities to consider: -

Things to:

- Look at
- Examine closely
- Encourage bodily exercise
- Drop, throw, put in, take out, test with mouth
- Cuddle
- Make lots of pleasant sounds

Crawling

- Mirrors (non glass safety)
- Roll-about toys
- Filling and emptying toys
- Sound toys
- Swinging & Rocking
- Comfort toys
- Baby walkers

Toddlers

- Slide
- Climbing frame
- Home corner
- Construction Toys
- Balls
- Scoot-a-long toys
- Garage and cars
- Dolls House
- Prams
- Dressing up clothes
- Jigsaws
- Water Play
- Simple musical instruments
- Sand
- Trampoline
- Tent
-

Drawing or Painting, puzzles and books should be out every week, other toys should be rotated as to offer variety.

What Else Can You Offer

There are any number of other things that you can offer.

Craft	This can be anything from colouring in, painting, sticking, cooking, junk modelling, see our craft pack for details of simple crafts for the under fives.
Messy play	Sand, water, playdough, gloop clay dough, stretchy dough.
Singing	Just 10 or 15 minutes a session singing nursery rhymes and activity songs. Keep a list of different songs and vary those you use each time.
Parachute	Great as a group activity the children love it, if you don't have one, borrow from another group or the toy library.
Story Time	Sharing books or Story sacks with the group.
Visitors	Invite other organisations to come into your group: Toy Library, Library Services, Music Fusion, or information for adults such as Fire and Safety Officer, Dental Health Nurse.

Outings Organise a trip, have a picnic in the park, or hire a coach for a trip to a place of interest such as Staunton Park, Poultons Park, Moorsvalley Country Park or Marwell Zoo. Most parks will do discounted entry for groups.

There is a lot of work involved in any parent and toddler group, you do not need to do it all yourself, get some help. It is good practice 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.

Ask parents to help. Explain to them how the group is run and ask for volunteers.

Make out a rota or list asking for volunteers. Put it in a prominent place. Give all newcomers an introductory leaflet explaining that everyone attending the group is expected to help in whatever way they can.

Organisation

On the day:

- Collecting the key and unlocking the premises, this can be a responsibility many people do not like.
- Setting out the activities, make sure you vary the toys and activities on offer each session.
- Welcoming children and parents, it can make a big difference to the success of the group.
- Supervising the children, although parents are responsible for their children, keep an eye on what is happening within the hall.
- Managing the time-table of the session, although people are willing to help they often need someone to lead the way.
- Clearing away the activities, encourage everyone to help, including the children.
- Helping children and parents to participate in the session, encourage parents to interact with their children.
- Providing refreshments, in the interest of encouraging healthy living this should be milk or water and a healthy snack. Children should also be seated for refreshments. Take great care if hot drinks are being served to adults, these should be kept away from children due to the risk of scalding.
- Keeping registers and records, the register should show the number of people (children and adults in the room at any one time).

It is also good practise to keep a separate record of each family that use the group, this allows you to contact them or family member should the need arise.

You will also need:

- Plan the session.
How will the session run, what time will refreshments be? When will singing / story time be? What craft is going on? These things need to be thought about before the session. The main structure of the session will become routine but craft and other events need to be planned and prepared.
- Do the banking, pay the bills, buy the equipment and materials.
These are all small jobs that need to be done outside of the group, but collectively they take up time.
- Keep the register and the waiting list, write and receive letters, do the advertising, newsletters and welcome pack. Has someone use and know-how on the computer to produce such documents? If your group is very successful you may find it necessary to have a waiting list of people waiting to join.
This will need to be kept up to date.

The Committee

The people who do these tasks and help run the group make up what is commonly known as a committee. The person in charge is officially known as the chairperson. The person who takes on the banking is the treasurer and whoever looks after the paperwork is the secretary. These people are usually the named signatories of cheques as well. It is good practice to use to signatures on each cheque.

Other committee members can help out with any of the above roles and can also help with fundraising ideas, washing toys as needed and replenishing any sundry items like tea, coffee and biscuits etc.

When new people join the group try and get across the message that everybody helps to run the group and it is all done on a voluntary basis.

Remember if you have helped out on a committee like this to put it on your CV.

Meetings

In order to plan the smooth running of a group the committee needs to get together and decide what needs doing and who is going to do what. If the group is fairly small this may be a five minute meeting at the end of a session. If you have a large group or lots of things going on this may be a more formal affair. You may need to advertise the meeting so all committee members can attend. You may wish to take notes at the meeting about what was discussed and what decisions were made, these can then be distributed to everyone in the group, so that everyone is informed. Committee meetings are a good time to update on the groups finances. A simple record such as the one below will allow you to keep a check on the money that the group has available.

Books to be kept by the Treasurer. These are

- Register
- Cheque book
- Paying-in book
- Bank statements
- Petty cash float, normally about £10

These books must be available for members to see on a regular basis.

Weekly accounts

All money received or spent should be recorded on a weekly basis

Income

Subs	6.00
Fund-raising	3.00
	<hr/>
	£9.00
	<hr/>

Expenses

Milk etc.	1.50
Rent	5.00
	<hr/>
	£6.50
	<hr/>

Total paid into Petty cash £2.50

Petty cash brought forward from last week £10.00

Petty cash now this week £12.50

Large amounts of money should not be held in the petty cash. Pay money regularly into the Bank

All receipts should be kept for any money spent.

A yearly Balance Sheet should be completed by the Treasurer. All group members should be shown the balance sheet.

GROUP YEARLY ACCOUNT

INCOME

	£
Subscriptions Collected	00.00
Fund Raising	00.00
Post Office/Bank or Building Society Interest	00.00
Grants - eg. City Council, PLA	00.00

	00.00

EXPENSES

	£
Rent	00.00
Refreshments	00.00
Toys/Equipment	00.00
Insurance	00.00
Other	00.00

	00.00

		£
	INCOME	00.00
+	BALANCE C/F	00.00

		00.00
-	EXPENSES	00.00

	BALANCE	00.00

Rules or Policies

It is up to the committee to decide on group rules or policies and for health and safety and risk assessments. These policies are there to give guidelines should something happen. For example a behaviour policy sets out what behaviour is and is not acceptable and what will happen if unacceptable behaviour is used. This lets everyone know what is expected of them and guidelines of how to deal with a problem should it arise. Some simple hygiene rules such as washing hands after visiting the toilets and before snack time, will help build good habits. Wiping down tables, regular cleaning of toys, and dealing with body fluid spillages should also be considered.

Child protection is an issue that many people feel happens elsewhere, but unfortunately it happens all too often right under our noses. This **MUST NOT** be ignored. Basic training in child protection issues is highly recommended for anyone involved with children.

Health and Safety are two words that make most people turn and run, but they needn't. Health and safety is about being aware of potential hazards and taking precautions against them. A named person must be responsible for health and safety, they must check the hall for anything that cause danger to anyone coming to the group. For example, are there plug sockets? Are there any stairs? Stacked chairs? If so how can you make these safe? Use socket covers, stair gates, spread chairs out or cordon off with other chairs. If a potential hazard is not removable then you must make people aware of it. I.e. A stage in a hall. Put up a sign that no one is to go on the stage. By taking such simple steps you have fulfilled your obligation to the safety of the group. This obligation applies of course to the equipment that you use as well. Is the equipment in good order? Have you done everything you can to make equipment safe? E.g. if scissors are used make sure they are round ended and that an adult is present. If you use a climbing frame is it set up properly? Are you using the correct safety mats? These checks are known as risk assessments. You must also make sure that anyone helping within the group uses the correct equipment for the job. E.g. uses a step ladder and does not climb on the tables or chairs.

Whether you adopt a policy or agree on your own rules, keep it relevant to your group and keep it simple!

Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment means taking a look at the things you are doing, or about to do, calculating the risks that may be involved, and looking for solutions. We all know the obvious things to consider when caring for small children, but often, especially when we are in unfamiliar surroundings, it is easy to overlook something that may turn out to be a hazard.

For example, you may be perfectly happy to have your child come into your kitchen while you make a cup of tea, but when there is a group of children underfoot, it is probably much safer to keep them out. You may wish to use a gate across the kitchen door, but perhaps the hall you are using does not make this easy. Risk assessment means you look at the possibilities, weigh them up, and take the safest action you can.

Stairs and doors are always hazards for small children. The solution, as at one group where a church hall opens directly onto a busy road, may be to station a volunteer (equipped with storybooks) near the danger point to act as a diversion. The same idea worked in a hall where the stairway was too wide to allow a gate to be fitted.

Risk assessment does not just mean preventing accidents: it also means making plans for the accidents that may happen in spite of all your best efforts. Keeping an accident book can help you to identify areas that need further attention. For example, you may discover that two play areas are too close together, causing children to trip over each other, or an item of equipment needs more space.

Fire Procedures

Have you thought out what you would do at your P & T Group if there was a fire?

- q Are your fire exits all unlocked and unobstructed? Make sure parents don't put chairs in front of them when they are sitting and chatting.
- q Have you decided how you would raise the alarm? Have you a whistle or a hand bell or would you just shout? Is your voice loud enough to reach everywhere?

- q Does everyone know where the fire exits are? All new parents should be told this and good practice would be to have your fire procedures written out and displayed for everyone to see.
- q Does your register reflect how many people are attending the group? Many groups just have the name of the parent attending and a tick next to it or the amount of subs paid. The fire brigade say that each week next to the name of the parent there should be recorded the number of people/children with her including herself. If there is a fire the register must be taken outside and you will be able to tell how many people should be accounted for. If people leave the group early they should sign out.
- q Somebody should be given the responsibility of checking the toilets etc. in case anybody has not heard the alarm.
- q Does everybody know where to assemble outside for a head count?
- q Whose responsibility would it be to phone the Fire Brigade? Don't assume some-body else has done it.
- q How regularly do you have a fire drill? If you have one you will see what has and what has not worked properly.

Training

If you feel unsure about your skills to deal with any of these things, or maybe you just want to learn about a subject in more detail, well there are plenty of opportunities out there to do just that. Many courses are free to anyone working with children or those who are in receipt of benefits. There are numerous courses to choose from:

First Aid	Books and Story time
Child Protection	Being creative in Art
Health and Safety	Top Tots
Food Hygiene	
Basic Book-keeping	

Useful Addresses

Information help and advice:	Hampshire Children and Families Forum
	Mill Hill Early Years Centre

Mill Road
Waterlooville
PO7 7DB
02392 263255

Pre-School Learning Alliance
Speedwell House
Speedwell Close
Chandlers Ford Ind. Estate
Eastleigh SO53 4BT
02380 279210

Hampshire Children's Information
Services
0845 602 1125
www.hants.gov.uk/childcare

Insurance:
Pre-School Learning Alliance
69 Kings Cross Road
London
WC1X 9LL
020 7833 0991
pla@pre-school.org.uk

Morton Michel
Insurance House
Oliver Grove
London
SE25 6EW
020 8768 670

Services

Toy Library

Further addresses can be found among the sample sheets in the pack.

Mill Hill Early Years Centre
02392 268581

Library Services
Mary Jones
02392 232537
mary.jones@hants.gov.uk

Story Sacks
Trospacc Early Years Centre
023 9249 8377

Funding:
Grant Finder
Economic Development Officer
Havant Borough Council
Civic Offices
023 9244 6590

Funder Finder
Havant Council of Community
Services
023 9264 5777