

Information on setting up a Parent and Toddler Group.

WHAT IS A PARENT & TODDLER GROUP?

Parent & Toddler groups vary in style and philosophy. Many groups aim to strike a balance between adults and children's needs and provide a safe friendly and supportive environment for babies, toddlers and parents/carers.

- **ADVANTAGES OF PARENT & TODDLER GROUPS**

- Create social integration both for parent and child.
- Allows your child to socialise with others, so that they gain confidence without having to leave them alone. This means that parent and toddler groups are a good step to leaving your child in some form of daycare.
- Children have the opportunity to play with new toys and join in new fun activities.
- Give the parents the opportunity to socialise and so avoid the isolation that looking after small children can cause. This is now particularly relevant where parents are moving in to new estates and lack the back up of the extended family.

How to Start

1. DECIDE ON HOW THE GROUP IS TO BE ORGANISED

This can be as simple as deciding whether one person or a committee takes on the task of organising the group. The major advantage of a committee is that by sharing the work no one person is left to do it all and it can also provide continuity if a key member leaves. It may be useful, to ensure the continuity of the group to have the AGM in January.

2. LOCATION

This can be anywhere you are able to find a suitable space with regular availability, for example, a community centre, room in a health centre, sports hall, band hall or purpose built building. You will need adequate space and facilities for storage of toys and materials.

3. ORGANISE INSURANCE

If your group has more than 35 children on any given morning, and your venue has a floor space of 150 square metres approximately, IPPA offers cover at a very reasonable rate. Extra places up to a ceiling of 40 may be insured through IPPA Group Insurance Scheme, provided that the floor space available is increased proportionally. You need Public Liability Insurance of at least €2,600,000. Check with your Insurer to confirm that all activities by the group are covered, including once-off events.

4. NOTIFY THE HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE

You are not obliged to notify the local Health Service Executive of the existence of your group, but it may be advisable and in your interest to do so. This can provide a contact point for new parents in the area.

5. FIRE SAFETY

Ask your local Fire Officer to check the building you intend to use and to advise you about Fire Drills and other fire safety issues. You will need to obtain a copy of "Fire Safety in Pre-Schools" from Government Publications Office, 4-5 Harcourt Road, Dublin 2 (Tel: 01 6613111). They are also available to download off the Department of the Environment and Local Government website <http://www.environ.ie> follow the link to Publications then click on recent publications and then finally click on Local Government Division. They are under the heading of Fire services and emergency planning.

6. FUNDING

The National Childcare Investment Programme has funding available for parent and toddler groups. This funding is now available from the County Childcare committees having been rolled out in 2009 from the Katherine Howard Foundation, (KHF) Grants range from €100 to €600 and are available for toys, equipment & books, with limited funding available towards insurance, rent, training or minor refurbishment.

For further Information contact

Meath County Childcare Committee

Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath

Phone 046-9073010 e-mail : parentsinfo@mccc.ie

The Community Care department of your local Health Service Executive may be able to help with a Start-up Grant. You could get funding from the National Lottery, your regional office of the Department of Social and Family Affairs or, if there is one, your Partnership or Community Development Group. Local shops might help with donations

You might also need to raise funds directly, for insurance, by organising a Table Quiz, Raffle, Flag-Day, church gate collection, Coffee Morning, Race Night or a Sponsored Walk for Toddlers. Some of these activities require the permission of the Garda Siochana.

7. TOYS AND EQUIPMENT

You will need;

1. Suitable chairs and tables for adults and children
2. Tea and coffee making equipment
3. Cups and beakers
4. Changing facilities, in a separate area from the children
5. A security gate/barrier to prevent children from leaving the setting
6. A tape recorder could be useful
7. For babies - a safe area or baby haven, with soft flooring, soft toys, rattles, coloured bricks and activity centres
8. For crawlers - if the space permits, a larger cordoned off area with, for instance, roll-along toys, cars, dolls, cloth books, shape sorters, stacking toys and rocking toys
9. For toddlers and older children - dolls, teddies, prams and push-chairs, sit-and-ride toys, a garage with cars, simple jigsaws, building blocks, dress-up clothes such as hats and bags, a toy kitchen, colourful books, play dough, paint, collage and drawing equipment. Sand and water play provide good developmental opportunities, but require even closer supervision.

8. INITIAL INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Basic introductory information could be included in a welcoming letter:

- parents and carers look after their own children, this is not a crèche
- cost per family - usually €2 - €5 per session.

- children must be accompanied to the toilet by the parent or an adult nominated by the parent
- children are not allowed in the tea and coffee area
- parents and carers are asked to play an active role in the group
- day/s, time/s, duration and venue for the meetings of the Parents and Toddler Group
- telephone number of the Secretary of contact person
- safety is the responsibility of all the adults attending the session

9. DAY-TO-DAY RUNNING

Tasks for day-to-day running of the group could be put on Job Cards. These are distributed on arrival to each adult and could include some of the following tasks:

- book and set up premises, unlock doors and lock up again at the end of session
- welcome people and distribute information
- initiate new parents and carers into the group and introduce them to others
- register new members and record the attendance of all children and adults
- collect money and record it in the Accounts Book
- organise drinks and snacks, with tea and coffee in a separate safe area
- While health and safety is everyone's responsibility, it can be a good idea to have one person with a special interest in it to help raise safety consciousness. That person could also buy and maintain the First Aid Box, arrange fire drills or point out behaviours which might cause or contribute to unsafe situations
- supervise each play area
- read at story-time, lead sing-song
- clean and maintain toys and equipment
- clean and tidy up
- advertise the service

10. COURSES, OUTINGS, PARTIES AND DAYS OUT

- Parents' courses are available from many sources, for example, IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation, the Community Care section of the local Health Board, Primary Schools, Partnerships and

Community Groups, Family Resource Centres and County Childcare Committees

- VEC's offer courses for many interests and will often provide special courses for parents and carers if asked to do so
- Talks from experts could be arranged on matters like Nutrition, Child Development, Speech Therapy and the Value of Play
- The group can provide a focal point for areas of interest to parents and carers, such as hobbies, computer courses and complementary medicine. The group should avail of the expertise of members of the group
- days out for parents and children to a local amenity can be enjoyable, healthy and popular activities
- evenings out for parents and carers can provide opportunities to get a well-deserved rest from the children and to develop friendships in a relaxed atmosphere
- Parties for holidays like Christmas or Easter can be great fun. However, extra numbers need to be insured and properly supervised
- members of the group might form baby-sitting contacts

11. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Your Parent and Toddler Group should identify all health and safety hazards, such as:

- Are the premises and toys kept safe and clean
- Are fire drill held regularly
- Is a register kept
- Is there a First Aid kit
- Are electrical points covered
- Is there enough care taken at tea/coffee time
- Is an insurance certificate displayed

eliminate them where possible and reduce them if they cannot be eliminated. You need to put in place a simple Health and Safety Plan and make sure that everyone is aware of it. Often the best way of doing this is to:

- walk around the area used by the group
- write down the hazards
- determine how you will eliminate or reduce the hazards
- identify and record who will do this

- decide by when this will be done

You need to check that these steps have been taken and to regularly monitor health and safety. An Accident/Incident Book to record all accidents and near misses is essential.

If you have an employee, a Health and Safety Statement has to be completed under Health and Safety Legislation and you must have Employers Liability Insurance. You should also be aware that you must fulfill all your legal responsibilities as an employer.

Children being transported in cars do so at the invitation of the owner and the insurance situation needs to be clarified with the car insurers. If transporting children in cars or minibuses, it is strongly recommended that the children should always be secured by safety belts and appropriate child seating.

Remember - safety in the group is the responsibility of all the members.

13. ADVERTISING

You will probably need regularly to advertise your Parent and Toddler Group in places such as local Health Centres, Doctors' Surgeries, Shops, Shopping Centres, Libraries, Post Offices, Churches, Pre-schools, Primary Schools and local newspapers.

Ask your local Public Health Nurse to promote the group.

14. HOLIDAYS

Parent and Toddler Groups normally operate in conjunction with Primary Schools' terms and holidays.

This information has been taken from the IPPA the early childhood Organisation website www.ippa.ie for more information on the Meath Parent and Toddler Network contact: Meath County Childcare Committee, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath. Tel; 046-9073010

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Disclaimer: While every effort has not been made to ensure the accuracy of the above information, neither IPPA, the Early Childhood Organisation, nor the Meath Parent and Toddler Network, can accept any responsibility for mistakes, omissions or loss caused to any person acting or not acting as a result of any information expressed on Parent and Toddler Groups.

Also some information above has been taken from 'developing parent & toddler initiative in County Roscommon' compiled by Roscommon County Childcare Committee