

Best practice questionnaire

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 team and their facilities.

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 and 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 subsequent weeks to see how they're getting on?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

You know you've got children when...

...getting out the house takes 3hrs from the moment you started saying "we need to go".

Welcome pack: Does this include session times and fees, contact information, community 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?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

Being inclusive: What provision is made for children or carers with disabilities or language difficulties? 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?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

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. 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?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

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?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

Activity: Is there a good variety of 'Quiet Space' Activities - eg jigsaws, drawing, play dough, duplo, train set, home corner, dressing up? And 'Big Space' Activities- eg balls, slides, ride-ons, parachutes?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

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?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

You know you've got children when...

...you realise there are two 5 o'clocks in a day!"

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?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

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

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

You know you've got children when...

...you go out to buy something you need for yourself but arrive home with something for the kids instead.

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. And working with your umbrella organisation will also allow you to use their resources and be even more effective.

Vision: Does your group have a clear vision and objectives? Do these tie in with the vision of your umbrella group (church or community organisation)? Do you regularly give them feedback and updates?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

Team: 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? How successful is your recruitment of volunteers?

Strength Weakness Room for improvement

action

You know you've got children when...

...you have to fight the urge to say woo woo when going under a tunnel in a car full of grown ups.

Involving the 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 they help with setting up and putting away, making drinks, crafts? Are parents involved on the committee, helping with fundraising, feeding back ideas? Do you offer activities to parents outside of the toddler group, eg holiday events, trips out, buggy services, special event evenings?

- Strength
- Weakness
- Room for improvement

action

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 or carers who haven't attended for a while?

- Strength
- Weakness
- Room for improvement

action

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?

You could send 'Playtime' your bright ideas or your group profile. Set up a toddler group network in your area. You could undertake some training yourself (e.g. Building Blocks), or train new leaders within your group and share your vision. Consider doing a full self-assessment (e.g. PSLA) or other quality assurance scheme. If you have good craft or story ideas, think of ways of sharing your resources with others.

What will we work on next?

action

Resources:

The Good Practice Guide for Parent and Toddler Groups

Free to download from www.engagetoday.org.uk/playtime/resources/goodpractice

Building Blocks

Free to download from www.scriptureunion.org.uk/Tiddlywinks/ParentandToddlerGroups

PSLA Early Adventure - Building and supporting baby and toddler groups (2009)

Available to purchase from the Pre-school Learning Alliance www.pre-school.org.uk/shop/catalog/product_info.php?products_id=177

OFSTED National Standards for Under 8s

www.childcarelink.gov.uk/pdf/ofsted/Module5.pdf

Factsheet on Safety in Toddler Groups

www.capt.org.uk/FAQ/default.htm for factsheet on safety in toddler groups