

Choosing toys for your playgroup

When selecting toys for your playgroup, we suggest you consider:

Will it withstand constant, heavy use by lots of children (and adults)? Will it stand the test of time?

To stand up to lots of use, playgroup toys need to be well constructed and durable. Many toys available at discount and department stores are designed for home use, by one or two children for a limited time. This is particularly the case for toys made under license related to movie or television characters. Licensed toys tend to be poorer quality and date quickly. We recommend playgroups purchase tough, longer lasting, classic toys from reputable toy suppliers.

Is it safe for all children?

So everyone can relax and have a good time at playgroup, toys need to be safe for all ages. We recommend you avoid purchasing toys with batteries and/or very small component parts (particularly magnets) that might be swallowed by young children. Check toy labels to ensure compliance with Australian Safety Standards. Good quality safe toys have rounded edges, non-toxic finishes, no parts that can pinch or trap small fingers, and withstand repeated washing.

Can it be easily cleaned?

Playgroup toys are handled by lots of children and adults. It's important that toys can be easily and regularly washed or sanitised.

Is it appropriate to the children's abilities, interests and stage of development?

Consider the ages of the children attending your playgroup and the age range you seek to recruit. Playgroup is attended by children 0-5 years of age. Your chosen toys need to be appropriate to their stage of development, the next steps in their development, and their interests. Consider how your choice of toys promotes the development of physical, social and emotional, problem solving and language skills. Think about sensory, pretend and active play.

Does it encourage social interaction?

Playgroup is all about building relationships. Consider toys that promote social connection between children and between adults and children such as home corner kitchens, dress ups, building blocks, balls, sets of animals, cars, trains, musical instruments.

Is it simple and able to be used by children of different ages? Does it promote imagination, creativity, problem solving?

Consider toys that can be played with in different ways at different developmental stages such as toy animals and figures, toddler-friendly sturdy dollhouses, vehicles, tea sets and pretend food, or dolls. A toddler may put the things in places and empty them out, but a 3 to 5-year-old will use the same pieces to act out a story.

Keep it simple. The more a child uses their minds and bodies to make something work, the more they are learning. A piece of coloured fabric has more versatility and play value than a licenced dress up costume and stimulates greater creativity and imagination. One day it might be a superhero cape, the next it might form part of a cubby.

Think also about the families in your community when choosing toys, for instance, families from a variety of cultural backgrounds, or those families with children with additional needs. Your choice of play equipment will help families to feel included and demonstrates diversity in our communities.

Talk with your Playgroup WA Development Officer about enhancing your play environment. They will have lots of helpful suggestions about appropriate toys and where to purchase them with your grant monies.