

# Children – The Focus of Our Attention



# Principles

- ♦ **PLAYGROUPS** offer children from about 2½ years of age until they reach nursery school age a creative, social friendly and stimulating learning environment. For up to three times a week, the children immerse themselves in an exciting world to play, paint, sing, laugh, converse, experiment and to listen to stories.
- ♦ In a group of 8 to a maximum of 12 children, they gain their first valuable experiences in being part of a community. **PLAYGROUPS** are aligned under the educational system and differ from day-care and other child-care institutions in terms of their duration, age group, goals and objectives.
- ♦ **PLAYGROUPS** offer children and their parents the opportunity in getting to know other families and providing them with the possibility to experience new situations and to learn new skills.
- ♦ The two most important **PLAYGROUP** philosophies are based on the guidelines: «Help me, to do it myself!» (Maria Montessori), and «Being creative creates a strong self-image and self-esteem!» (Lucie Hillenberg).
- ♦ The pedagogical, methodical and organisational leadership is the responsibility of trained **PLAYGROUP** leaders. Depending on the size of the group and its needs, a second person supports the group - assistant, parent or a second playgroup leader.
- ♦ **PLAYGROUP** sponsors are varied: family associations, (church) communities, local councils, local companies etc.
- ♦ A key concept of the **PLAYGROUP** includes close cooperation with the parents.
- ♦ **PLAYGROUPS** are mostly privately run and financed by parent contributions. However, local councils and integration departments have identified the importance of playgroups in the early education of children and have therefore begun to subsidize playgroups.

# Playgroup “Diversity”

In addition to the traditional indoor PLAYGROUP, there is a range of other playgroup related activities:

**FOREST PLAYGROUPS** have no walls and no roof and the children benefit from the direct contact with the nature and the specialities in each of the four seasons. For safety reasons, forest playgroups are always lead in pairs, at least one of whom has a nature pedagogical training.

**FARM PLAYGROUPS** open up a new field of experience for children: watching, feeding and petting animals, harvesting potatoes, tasting apples or playing in the straw - there is always something to do. Farm playgroups are always lead in pairs, at least one of whom has a specialised pedagogical training.



# Reference Points ...

- ♦ **PLAY** – The focus of every PLAYGROUP. Playing means to stimulate the imagination, to discover, to be inquisitive, to be creative, to experiment, developing physical, cognitive and emotional strengths. Empathizing with reality and trying it in your own imagination - in short; gathering strength for life.
- ♦ **PROGRAM** – There is no fixed curriculum in a PLAYGROUP.. Instead, there are guiding principles that are based on playgroup pedagogy and the the orientation framework for early childhood education, care and upbringing in Switzerland. They recommend age-appropriate options and stimulating material for singing, handicrafts, painting, making music, moving and role-playing.
- ♦ **INTEGRATION** – Foreign-language children and children with special needs also have a place in the PLAYGROUP. They make friends learn a new language and experience being part of a group. This is not only good for the children, but also for the parents. For many it is a first step out of an isolated environment.
- ♦ **EXPERIENCES** Baking bread together, building a tower and large-scale painting. Push your hands deep into the clay. Looking at a picture book together after a heated argument. Rolling around laughing and then starting a hearty pillow fight in the "Gumpiecke". Collect colourful leaves on a walk and watching cows eating grass.
- ♦ **CLAY**, sand, dough, earth, water, grass, straw, wood: Small children perceive the world holistically, with all their senses. They feel, touch, smell, hear, look, taste - and store their perceptions. The playgroup offers them a feast for the senses.
- ♦ **GROUP DYNAMICS:** The child is challenged to learn to move and assert oneself in a group. Acknowledging other opinions and defending your own opinion takes practice. In the PLAYGROUP, small children find an ideal learning environment for social behaviour. Through contact with other children as well as with adults other than their parents, a child develops their emotional well-being, knowing who they are and where they fit in.

# Reference Points ...

- ◆ **ROLE PLAY:** Be a «lion» and roar, receive attention as a «little kitten». Dress up as a ghost and trying to scare others: In role play, the child processes what it has experienced and tries out all facets of its personality with relish. In the playgroup there are towels and other utensils for dressing up - and lots of children to play with.
- ◆ **INDISPENSABLE:** A playgroup has long since become indispensable. Changed family settings, the increasing traffic and the built-up environment can no longer do justice to the urge by small children to exercise and explore freely. A PLAYGROUP is therefore a welcome "island": small children can do what benefits their overall development.
- ◆ **PROCESS VERSUS PRODUCT:** Drawings, paintings, models etc. that a child brings home from a playgroup may sometimes seem bizarre to adults. For the child, however, it is a work that they have created themselves from A to Z: with dedication, concentration and their own ideas. The PLAYGROUP encourages creative processes - it does not demand a specific end product.
- ◆ **PREVENTION:** Through careful observation, the playgroup leader identifies possible developmental delays, peculiarities, and special needs of a child. Together with the parents and if necessary with the help of a specialist, solutions can be agreed upon and taken - at a time when the problems have not yet manifested themselves.
- ◆ **PARENT COOPERATION:** Great importance is attached to cooperation with parents in the playgroup. Children in playgroups are between two worlds: the more trusting the contact between parents and the playgroup, the easier it is for the children to find their way in both worlds. Cooperation is central and has a positive effect on the transition, integration and learning development of the children.

# Orientation points

## WHERE DO I FIND THE NEAREST PLAYGROUP?

Various information sources are available

- ♦ Online-Playgroup directory at [www.spielgruppe.ch](http://www.spielgruppe.ch);
- ♦ Homepage of the local community or school;
- ♦ Family centres;
- ♦ Parent support centres;
- ♦ Google (enter the keyword: Spielgruppe or Playgroup, the postal code and/ or the location);
- ♦ Fach- und Kontaktstellen (regional specialized contact centres: [www.sslv.ch/adressen-fach-und-kontaktstellen-fks.html](http://www.sslv.ch/adressen-fach-und-kontaktstellen-fks.html)).

## CRITERIA

- ♦ Group-sizes (8 to 12 children)
- ♦ Training and further education of the playgroup leader(s)
- ♦ Room size of ca. 6m<sup>2</sup> pro child (incl. side rooms)
- ♦ Support: With the help of an assistant, intern or a second playgroup leader.
  - ♦ Professional framework conditions such as correct contracts, regulation in the event of failure, insurance, transparency in price, etc.



## EDUCATIONAL AND PERSONAL CRITERIAS

- ♦ Does my child like going to the playgroup?
- ♦ Is there an appreciative and empathetic approach being maintained in the playgroup?
- ♦ Does the playgroup leader strive for cooperation with the parents?
- ♦ As parents, do we feel comfortable in the interaction with the playgroup leader?

# Parent Cooperation

## ♦ WHAT DOES MY CHILD LEARN IN THE PLAYGROUP?

It learns to interact in a group: to play, argue, laugh, talk, celebrate with other children. It encounters new materials and has numerous sensory experiences. It enters a new field of learning. Furthermore, it gets the chance to practise being separated from their parents while being in a protected environment.

## ♦ HOW DO I AS A PARENT BENEFIT FROM THE PLAYGROUP?

You make new contacts, you experience your child interacting in a group environment, you receive suggestions and support for everyday childcare and can exchange ideas with an educational specialist. Parent evenings and parent-child activities offer the opportunity for stimulated exchange with other parents. More often than not, friendships develop that last far beyond the duration of the playgroup.



# Conclusion

- ♦ Early childhood education means: being active, exploring, asking questions, observing and communicating.
- ♦ A child feels comfortable when they receive support that is appropriate to their needs and skills. Trusted, reliable and available caregivers can provide this best.
- ♦ "Parents need to recognize and encourage their children's natural love of learning. They can offer their children a framework for dealing with themselves and the world." (Orientation framework for early childhood education, care and upbringing in Switzerland)

**EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PLAYGROUPS: [WWW.SPIELGRUPPE.CH](http://WWW.SPIELGRUPPE.CH)**

IG Spielgruppen Schweiz GmbH  
Uster West 24 | 8610 Uster  
[bildung@spielgruppe.ch](mailto:bildung@spielgruppe.ch)



## TEXTE

IG Spielgruppen Bildung  
[www.spielgruppe.ch](http://www.spielgruppe.ch)  
Franziska Hidber  
[www.silberfeder.ch](http://www.silberfeder.ch)

## GESTALTUNG UND LAYOUT

Nicola Zoller  
[www.seedesign.ch](http://www.seedesign.ch)

## FOTOS

[adobe.com](http://adobe.com)  
Archiv IG SpielgruppenBildung GmbH