

Toddler Group Partnerships

Advice and guidance for churches considering partnering
with external organisations
to run a toddler group



Working in partnership with another organisation to run a toddler group can be a really great way for a church to serve the local community and offer support to families. It can be an opportunity to provide volunteer/work experience in early years provision, to have a bigger team to run sessions and for church to do mission and outreach. However, working in partnership with an external organisation or a community group can raise challenges caused by differing views, unmatched expectations or miscommunication.

If your church is thinking of starting a group in partnership with an external organisation such as a children's centre or a group of parents, this guide is here to help you consider what this might entail before you start.

As you explore the possibility of starting a toddler group in partnership with others, it is really important to gather all the participants together for frank, honest conversations. Listed overleaf are aspects of running a toddler group that should be discussed. Please read the [Church of England's Safer Environment and Activities guidance](#) before you begin.

Once you have had these discussions, it is recommended that you put together a written agreement based on all the decisions made that everyone involved approves of and can sign.

To support and encourage the team running the group, briefing and debriefing after each session is helpful to address any issues. Termly team meetings can be helpful to reflect and assess how the toddler group is going. As you evaluate the progress of the group or in the case of any conflict, it can be helpful to refer to the written agreement and make sure the partnership is still working.



Aspects to consider:

Objectives/Vision/Values

- What is the purpose of the toddler group?
- What are the values of the group?

If the intention of the toddler group is to share Christian faith, are all parties onboard? It is really important to be transparent about your aims as a church if this is your intention. If the partnership organisation is unhappy with this aim, is this toddler group the right venture?

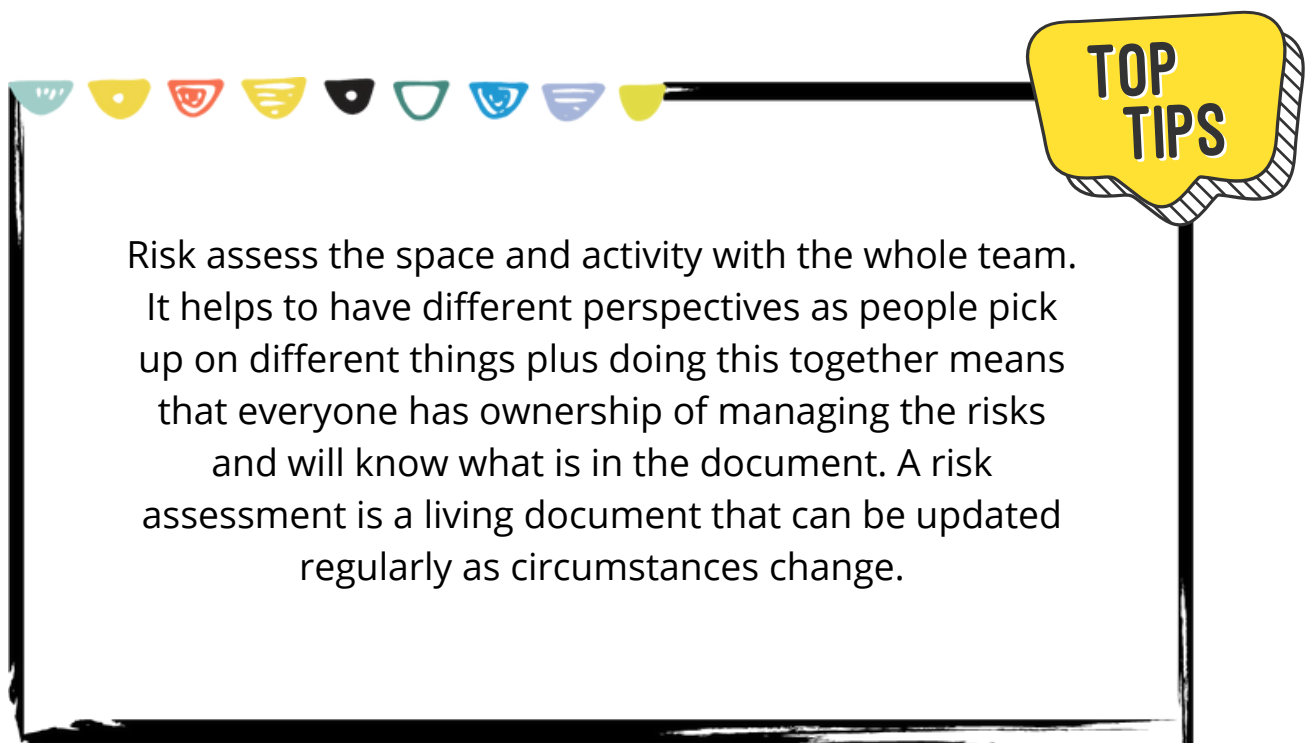
- What do we expect from parents/carers? What do we expect from our team? Top Tip – as part of safer recruitment, having role descriptions for the team is useful to help manage expectations.
- Have we thought about community guidelines and how we communicate these to all who attend?
- What will a session offer?
- How long will it run?
- Do we have a structure in mind?
- Will our toddler group run all year round or term time only?

Location

Is the group going to be held on church premises or external premises?

- Have you risk assessed the activity and had it authorised by the PCC?
Have you checked with insurance providers?
- Who will provide what equipment/toys?

Here is a [risk assessment template](#) for you to use.



Risk assess the space and activity with the whole team. It helps to have different perspectives as people pick up on different things plus doing this together means that everyone has ownership of managing the risks and will know what is in the document. A risk assessment is a living document that can be updated regularly as circumstances change.

Team

If the group is to be run by church, Church of England safeguarding procedure must be followed.

- Is everyone safely recruited, DBS checked and Safeguarding trained?

Work with your Parish Safeguarding officer to achieve this. If you have any questions, please contact safeguarding@leeds.anglican.org

Team

- Who will lead the group and be the person in charge?
- Who will do what?
- Who will be your first aider? Do you have a back up person in case they are unavailable? Is it possible to get some first aid training for the whole team?
- Will you provide refreshments? Who is trained in food hygiene?
- How will you support and encourage the team?
- Can you arrange termly meetings to gather everyone, reflect on what is or isn't working and plan for the next term?

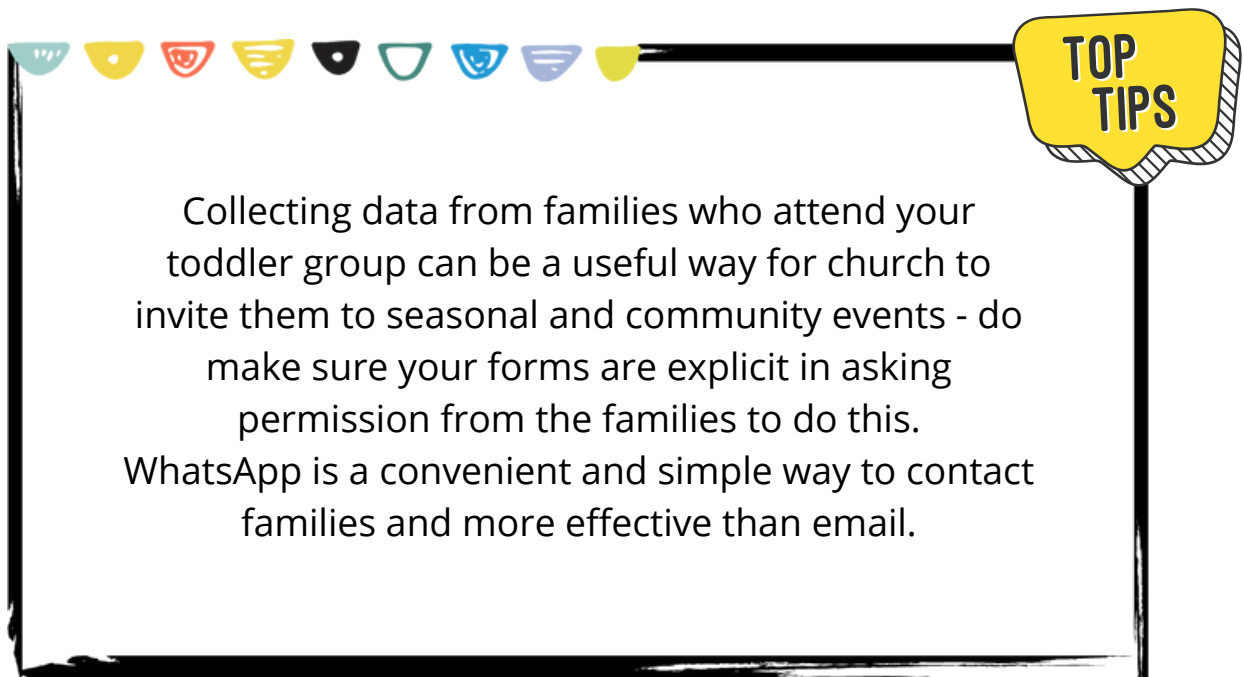
TOP TIPS

To make sure you meet with all of the team, at the start of each term, instead of running a toddler group session on the first week back (when schools start) why not use that time for a team meeting? Serve nice tea & coffee and cake and make an occasion of it; celebrate the work everyone is doing!

Data collection/paperwork

It is important to have a register for each session to keep a record of who is in the building for fire safety or reference afterwards. This information must be stored securely and used properly as per GDPR regulations. Here are [registration form](#) and [photo consent](#) templates to take a look at.

- Who will take the register and where will this be stored safely?
- Consent forms are helpful for emergency contact details, food allergies or photo/social media consent. Who will create this form and where will completed forms be stored securely?
- Does the church have permission from attendees to contact them about other activities/services?
- What happens with all the data collected from attendees? How will this be used?



Finance

- Will you charge or ask for a donation for the group? How will you cover costs?
- What costs will the group have i.e. refreshments, equipment, craft materials?
- Where will this money go? Do you need a charity bank account or can it go into the church accounts?
- Who will be in charge of counting and storing cash?
- If you are applying for funding, are there targets you will have to report or evidence you will need to provide? Are there certain criteria you have to meet?
- How will you replace old/damaged equipment?

Conflict

Often when groups have started and settle into a routine, things can drift and that is when conflict can arise. Having the written agreement to refer back to is helpful when managing disagreements.

- What will you do if there are disagreements arise once the group has started?
- Can you arrange a team meeting or leaders meeting to discuss the issue? Can you put a process in place for handling conflict i.e. what you plan to do in the written agreement?

It is a good idea to review the partnership annually and check that everyone is happy.

Ending a partnership

A partnership can end for a multitude of reasons; sometimes toddler groups run for a season and then have to close because there aren't enough people to run them. Whatever the reason, it is important to end the agreement well and communicate clearly with everyone.

Overleaf is a sample partnership agreement you could adapt for your context. This is not a legally binding document but is a helpful tool when deciding to end a partnership.

Hold a meeting with your team/volunteers to talk through what is happening, to get feedback and to plan for how to end this well. If possible, communicate the end of the partnership to the families who attend (and any other stakeholders) with as much warning as possible (1-3 months ideally).



Sample Partnership Agreement template:

_____ (Church) & _____ (External organisation)

will work together to offer

a toddler group called _____

held in _____ (location)

on _____ (day/time/frequency)

- _____ (Church) will provide:

(team/venue/equipment?)

- _____ (External Organisation) will provide:

(team/venue/equipment?)

Both parties will help to set up the group from _____ and tidy up when the session finishes at _____.

Church volunteers will lead a story time and share Bible Stories, songs and a prayer. (If you want to use your group to share faith?)

Both parties will adhere to the Church of England's Safer recruitment and Safeguarding policies and procedures.

Both parties have risk assessed the venue and activities together and all team members have seen the risk assessment.

_____ will have responsibility for the weekly register and family consent forms and safe storage of this information following GDPR regulations. (Data Collection)

_____ will be in charge of publicity and social media.

The Toddler Group will ask for a donation/charge a fee of £_____per family per session. All monies raised will go into_____(where the money will be banked). These funds will be used to _____ (How will this money be used..... refreshments/ equipment/resources)

_____(Church/External organisation) will make funding bids to cover any large equipment costs.

The whole team will meet together each term to discuss any issues and reflect on the progress and impact of the group on _____ (specific dates)

If there are any issues or conflicts arising , team members are to raise them with _____ (named leaders) as soon as possible and the leaders have responsibility to respond within this time frame:_____.

This Partnership agreement will be for_____ starting _____until _____ and the team will meet on _____to review the partnership and decide whether to renew this agreement.

If before that time, either party decides they want to end the partnership, then they must bring this arrangement to a close with _____ months written notice. The reason for ending should be clearly communicated to the team and, where possible, discussed with the intention of ending well. A review meeting will be held to reflect on what worked, what was learned, and how to honour the partnership.

Signed by: