

EC LINC R2A

Birth to Three Best Practices: Playgroups

General Project Description

First 5 Ventura County (F5VC) received funding from the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to implement a “Research to Action” project with four (4) additional EC-LINC communities. The primary goal of the project is to establish the effectiveness of playgroups in the continuum of care for serving young children (birth to three) and their families. An additional project goal is to maximize the benefits of playgroups for participating children and families and their communities, as well as to demonstrate the impact of playgroups on long-term outcomes in order to build sustainable sources of funding.

Project Partners

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The background image shows a playgroup environment. In the foreground, two blue sensory bins are on the floor. The bin on the left contains white rice and small colorful beads. The bin on the right contains dark brown beans. A child's hands are visible in the right bin, using a small red cup to scoop beans. Other children are partially visible in the background, and a colorful fabric hanging is on the wall.

Playgroup Definition

“A structured, intentional opportunity for parents and/or caregivers and their young children to engage, learn, and play to support the optimal development of the child, the social emotional needs of the family, and increase social connectedness.”

Vision Statement

“All families have access to fully-funded, high-quality, evidence-informed playgroup services in their local communities.”

Mission Statement

“To establish the effectiveness of playgroups in the continuum of care for serving young children (birth to three) and their families.”

Core Values

- Parent and/or caregiver as first teacher
- Strengths-based approach
- Fostering and nurturing behaviors
- Culturally and linguistically responsive
- Positive interactions
- Neighborhood/community based
- Play-based
- Engaging families as decision makers
- Intentional
- Child and family centered
- Relationship based
- Embedded in a network of support
- Warm, welcoming, nurturing environment
- Facilitator is knowledgeable, trained and promotes the intended outcomes of the group

Evaluation Framework



Goal	Program Level	Staff Level	Participant Level
Increase Early Literacy and School Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program has the tools to perform direct assessment of child's letter recognition or phonological awareness through use of a validity and reliability tested instrument designed to measure early literacy skills. The program has adequate resources to support the development of early literacy and school readiness skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have the necessary skills and training to support early literacy and school readiness skill development. Staff provide high quality early literacy and school readiness skill development playgroup services to families and children. Staff employ assessment instruments to identify children struggling with early literacy skill development. Staff are connected to early intervention programs to assist families with needed referrals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read to child daily. Talk to child daily. Sing to child daily. Play with child daily.
Increase Children's Social-Emotional Competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program has the tools to perform direct assessment of child social-emotional development through use of a validity and reliability tested instrument designed to measure social-emotional development. The program has adequate resources to support parent and/or caregiver knowledge acquisition and the social-emotional development of children. The program has materials available to assist parents and/or caregivers in understanding typical and atypical child social-emotional development in the family's primary language written in plain language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have the necessary skills and training to support children's social-emotional development. Staff provide high quality child development playgroup services to families and children. Staff employ assessment instruments to identify children who may not be meeting social-emotional developmental milestones. Staff are connected to early intervention programs to assist families with needed referrals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and/or caregivers report understanding the components of social-emotional competency. Parents and/or caregivers report understanding the importance of meeting early social-emotional needs through positive interactions and touch. Parents and/or caregivers understand the importance of safely fostering independence and can recognize when children are ready to move to the next level.

Evaluation Framework



Goal	Program Level	Staff Level	Participant Level
Increase Parent and/or Caregiver Knowledge of Child Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program has the tools to perform direct assessment of child development through use of a validity and reliability tested instrument designed to measure child development. The program has adequate resources to support the physical, cognitive and social-emotional development of children. The program has materials available to assist caregivers in understanding typical and atypical child development in the family's primary language written in plain language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have the necessary skills and training to support children's development. Staff provide high quality child development playgroup services to families and children. Staff employ assessment instruments to identify children who may not be meeting developmental milestones. Staff are connected to early intervention programs to assist families with needed referrals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and/or caregivers report understanding where their child should be developmentally based on the child's age. Parents and/or caregivers report understanding that children develop at different rates and that even sibling groups can differ significantly. Parents and/or caregivers have realistic expectations of what their child should be able to do for their age and/or ability.
Increase Parent and/or Caregiver Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program uses culturally competent practices. The program uses a strengths-based, family centered approach. The program uses an approach or curriculum with caregivers that is designed to affect change. The program understands parent's and/or caregivers' ability to affect change in their own practices based on current family circumstance. The program has materials available to assist parents and/or caregivers in understanding typical and atypical child development in the family's primary language written in plain language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have the necessary skills and training to build rapport and supportive relationships with parents and/or caregivers. Staff provide high quality playgroup services to families and children. Staff are knowledgeable about community resources and supports. Staff are connected to family support and mental health programs to assist families with needed referrals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent and/or caregiver self-reports of feeling able to manage child's behavior, help them prepare for school, and promote their development.

Evaluation Framework



Goal	Program Level	Staff Level	Participant Level
Increase Positive Parent/Caregiver-Child Interaction and Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program uses multiple strategies to increase positive parent/caregiver-child interaction. The program has materials available to assist parents and/or caregivers in understanding what positive interactions are and explain the importance of such interactions in the family's primary language written in plain language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have the necessary skills and training to assist families in understanding positive parent-child interactions. Staff provide high quality playgroup services to families and children. Staff are knowledgeable about adult learning styles and can use differential teaching styles to maximize results. Staff are receive reflective supervision to improve practices with families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent and/or caregiver self-reports of feeling able to manage child's behavior, help them prepare for school, promote their development. Parent and/or caregivers report using/engaging in activities with child that they learned in playgroup. Parent and/or caregivers are using everyday activities to promote growth and development. Parent and/or Caregivers report they are better equipped to manage their child's behavior.
Increase Parent/Caregiver Social/Community Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The program is embedded in the community and has strong relationships with family-servicing agencies. The program has materials available to assist parents and/or caregivers in understanding what positive interactions are and explain the importance of such interactions in the family's primary language written in plain language. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff have the necessary skills and training to assist families in accessing resources and a deep knowledge base of available community supports and resources. Staff provide high quality playgroup services to families and children. Staff are knowledgeable about referral processes for community supports and resources. Staff have the skills to foster group connection and cohesion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and/or caregivers report connections with other caregivers in the playgroup as a result of participating



Best Practices Framework

Best Practices in Engaging Families

- Develop recruitment and outreach plans include strategies to effectively reach target populations.
- Design and use intake forms and other documents in the family's primary language, that are simple and easy to understand, and provide appropriate space for completion by the parent.
- Playgroup policies and procedures are conveyed to parents in plain language.
- Programs link families with other needed supports and resources.
- Programs use validity and reliability tested child developmental screening instrument for social and emotional development.
- Programs provide fluent and bilingual abilities if the community requires it.

Best Practices for Playgroup Facilitators

- The facilitator job description defines minimum education and/or experience in early childhood development or related fields.
- The facilitator models a strengths-based and family centered approach.
- The facilitator possesses cultural competency and sensitivity for effective practice with culturally and linguistically diverse families.
- The facilitator provides fluent and bilingual abilities if the community requires it.
- The facilitator has a firm knowledge base in positive parenting, child development, and the local service system.

Best Practices in Playgroup Frequency, Session, and Venue

- To maximize the experience of participants, a minimum of 4 and maximum of 12 dyads (child and caregiver) must be present. To be considered a group, there must be a minimum of 4 dyads (child and caregiver), however this may vary according to diverse needs, start-up of groups, etc.
- Sites should have standards in place based on the location, venue, participant's needs, etc.
- Playgroups typically consist of 8 – 12 dyads (child and caregiver) per facilitator.
- Sessions are typically held from 1-3 hours as appropriate to age, developmental level, individual needs of participants, etc.
- To maximize benefits, playgroup sessions should meet on a weekly basis for a minimum of 8 weeks.
- The venue should include a welcoming, comfortable and safe physical environment.

Best Practices in Playgroup Content and Structure

- Playgroups should have a consistent routine with a mixture of structured and unstructured activities involving children and adults, interaction with different materials, and evidence-informed activities for parent and child development.