

PLAYWORK – CREATING QUALITY

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Introduction

A relaxed and stimulating play environment nurtures friendships and **children's** innate need to play. High quality play experiences, rich in diversity, capture **children's** interests and enable them to enjoy themselves. Play experiences include a mix of adult and child led opportunities, with choice being a key factor. The importance of **children** being exposed to managed **risks** during their play supports the development of knowledge and skills. Play settings respect and listen to **children**, embedding their voice in all they do as well as supporting individual needs to enable full **inclusion**. Staff understand **playwork** and how to engage and inspire **children** and foster strong partnerships with parents.

There are a wide variety of different play based settings, where you will find different types of play in action, such as Sports Clubs, School run clubs, Before and After School provision, Holiday Schemes, Activity based clubs, Play Centres, Open access schemes, Adventure Playgrounds, Play Rangers, Play Barges, Hospital, Play Therapy and Street Play.

This document is intended to support playworkers and those running and working in out of school and holiday club settings to build a play environment to support **children's** play and wellbeing. It is intended to be used as a precursor to our more comprehensive document, **Playwork** – beyond Quality.

Article 31 of the [United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child 1989](#) states:

‘Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities’.

Throughout the document we refer to the **Playwork** Principals.

More information on these can be found in [Section 4 of Playwork – Beyond Quality](#).

What is play?

Play is a concept that fills our minds with contradictions when we try to think deeply about it. It is serious, yet not serious; trivial, yet profound; and imaginative and spontaneous, yet bound by rules. Play is not real, it takes place in a fantasy world; yet it is about the real world and helps **children** cope with that world. It is childish, yet it underlies many of the greatest achievements of adults (Grey, 2017). Play England's Charter for **Children's Play** describes play as: 'what **children** and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons.'



Reflecting on practice

Ask yourself...

- Are there activities that I consider as play and activities that I don't consider as play?
- What play experiences do I remember as a child? How do I support **children** to create memorable play experiences?
- How do I enable **children** to play freely in a variety of different ways?
- How do I support **risk** taking in **children's** play?
- How do I support parents, schools and other settings to understand the value of **children's** play?

Why not discuss this as a team to ensure a consistent approach?

Playwork Principle 1 'All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities'

Playwork Principle 2 'Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons'

Why play?

Children's right to play is a human right defined by article 31 of the UN Convention on the Right of the child (see introduction). Free play has markedly reduced for many **children** in recent years, despite the many benefits to them. Some of the benefits of freely chosen, child initiated play are:

- The promotion of healthy brain development – in play **children** are solving problems, creating, thinking, experimenting and creating connections in the brain. **Children** who are unable to access play have brains up to 30% smaller than those who do.
- [Reduction of stress and anxiety](#) – when **children** play they generate benzodiazepine naturally which helps to reduce stress levels. Play can support **children** in processing experiences.
- [The development of children's communication skills](#) - through play **children** try out new vocabulary, talk with adults and friends and use their imagination in storytelling and role play.
- [An improvement in physical and mental health](#) – it is recommended that school age **children** take part in 4-5 hours of physically active play every day.
- A chance to explore their environment and wider community.

The above benefits may occur naturally in play.

Giving children the opportunity to play freely is of utmost importance.



You can find out more about the importance of play in the lives of children in Play England's [Play for a change briefing](#).

Reflecting on practice

Ask yourself...

- How do I know which of the **children** I work with are experiencing stress or anxiety and how do I support them?
- How do I ensure **children** have access to physically active play?
- How do I support **children** to explore their wider community through play?
- How can I find out more about healthy brain development in the age range I work with?

Why not discuss this as a team to ensure a consistent approach?

Playwork Principle 3: The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

Playwork Principle 4: For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

What is my role?

The prime focus and essence of **playwork** is to support and facilitate the play process and the role of the playworker is to support all **children** and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play. The playworkers core function is to create an environment which will stimulate **children's** play and maximise their opportunities for a wide range of play experiences.

The approach 'low intervention, high response', a style of working which supports rather than directs. Any intervention to promote play must allow sufficient flexibility, unpredictability and security for **children** to feel able to play freely – **children's** play belongs to **children**. The limitations of the setting, or constraints imposed by the type of the service, may restrict how playworkers are able to work in this way. However, **playwork** skills are founded on the values and understandings described by the **Playwork** Principles and a good playworker will always aim to intervene in **children's** play as little as possible whilst using mindful and reflective observations skills.

Playworkers need to be:

respectful observers inspirational listeners
consistent fair non judgemental creative
able to balance needs safe adaptable reflective
approachable considerate mucking in tireless
silly sensitive people who love to play

Reflecting on practice

Ask yourself...

- What are my top 3 playworker qualities?
- Would my colleagues agree with this?
- How do I feel when **children** don't need me?
- How do I balance knowing when to interact and when to stand back and observe?
- How do I ensure the child's voice is heard?
- How do I communicate with **children**?

Why not discuss this as a team to ensure a consistent approach?

Playwork Principle 5: The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

Playwork Principle 6: The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.

What does play look like in my setting?

Play looks different in different spaces and for different **children** and adults. Some people enjoy den building and role play, whereas others prefer building with blocks or rough and tumble. In his book “A Playworker’s Taxonomy of Play Types” Bob Hughes identifies 16 different types of play:

Finding out and testing one’s own and others limits Rough and Tumble	Acting out life experiences Socio-dramatic	Where everyone follows set rules Social Play	Using their imagination Creative Play
Play using words, e.g. telling jokes Communication Play	Acting out assigned roles Dramatic Play	Movement for movement’s sake Locomotor Play	Encountering risky experiences Deep play
Exploring through senses Exploratory Play	Make-believe play Fantasy play	Where conventional rules do not apply e.g. you can defy gravity Imaginative Play	Control of the elements e.g. building dams Mastery play
Play using a sequence of hand-eye manipulations Object play	Exploring ways of being Role play	Exploring history, rituals and stories Recapitulative Play	Using one thing to symbolise another Symbolic Play

Reflecting on practice

Ask yourself...

- How do I feel about play types? Am I comfortable allowing all different types of play in the setting?
- How do **children** in my setting experience different play types?
- How do I need to change or develop our play space to support more play types?
- Does my setting facilitate **children’s** free choice of play?

Why not discuss this as a team to ensure a consistent approach?

All play types are as important to the development of the whole child as each other. If **children** are unable to engage in one or more of them they may suffer from “**play deprivation**”. For more information on play types see [Playwork-Beyond Quality](#).

Playwork Principle 7: Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people’s play on the playworker.

Playwork Principle 8: Playworkers chose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and wellbeing of children.

How do I keep children safe whilst they play?

Risk Taking in Play

Risk taking is a normal part of children's play and is any play opportunity which allows the child to feel uncertain or to overcome a personal challenge. **Risk** taking whilst playing is giving children the opportunity to push their boundaries physically and/or emotionally. A **risk benefit assessment** acknowledges that there is an element of **risk** in everything that happens and assesses the **risk** and the benefits to the child. Children are given the chance to stretch themselves, and test and develop their own abilities without being exposed to unacceptable risks of serious injury. By providing opportunities for children to encounter and manage risks we are enabling them to have the chance to develop their own risk assessing skills. For more information see page 67 of [Playwork-Beyond Quality](#).

Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2017) sets the standards for learning, care and development for children from birth to five. It acknowledges that every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential. The Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements need to be met to ensure compliance with current legislation for out of school settings on the Early Years Register and ensure best practice for settings on the Compulsory and Voluntary parts of the Childcare register. A full checklist of these requirements can be found in Section 3 of [Playwork-Beyond Quality](#).

Suitable People

Providers have a responsibility to ensure that all people working with children are suitable to do so. All employees (and volunteers where relevant) should have a full enhanced DBS certificate completed by the employer and references should be sought. For those involved in recruitment, Safer Recruitment training is strongly recommended.

A full induction programme should be provided for all new employees, to ensure that they are have a full understanding of their role and how they are expected to interact with children. An example induction checklist can be found in Appendix 1.

Reflecting on practice

Ask yourself...

- How and when do we assess **risks** and benefits to **children**? Do we consider different types of **risks**?
- Am I sure we are meeting all of the **Safeguarding** and Welfare requirements? How do I know? How often are these reviewed?
- How do we support new employees in their role? How often do we review our induction process?
- Has at least one member of staff involved in recruitment undertaken Safer Recruitment training?

Why not discuss this as a team to ensure a consistent approach?



How do I ensure all children have equal opportunities?

*“All **children** are morally and legally entitled to play within their own community whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need. Inclusive play means that all **children** and young people have equal access to good quality local play provision. This means that they can play with others or alone as they wish in a rich environment that supports their play needs and gives them access to a wide range of play opportunities.” (Play: Inclusive Provision, Play Wales)*

To be fully inclusive we need to consider the following factors in our setting:

Environment:

Our environment is adapted to meet all children’s individual play needs.

Attitudes:

Adults are positive role models and support and facilitate play for all children.

Policies:

Our policies fully reflect the needs of the children in our setting and are clearly written.

Families:

All families are welcomed in our setting and we communicate effectively with them.

Ethos:

We have a clear ethos, written by our team, which everyone strives to achieve at all times.

Reflecting on practice

Ask yourself...

- How do we ensure we are offering inclusive play opportunities for all **children**?
- Do we discuss, understand and respond to individual **children**’s needs?
- What does our setting need to do to develop **inclusion**?
- Do our policies reflect an ethos of inclusive practice?
- How do we change communication methods with families when needed? Do we get to know families in advance of **children** starting with us?
- What are our setting strengths and how do we build upon these?
- Do we ensure all members of staff understand the inclusive ethos?
- How do we obtain support if we need it?

Why not discuss this as a team to ensure a consistent approach?

In quality inclusive out of school provision, staff will have undertaken training and professional qualifications and professional development that supports inclusive play. Regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the provision in meeting the play needs of all the **children** helps to identify areas of weakness.

Websites:

- [The right to play](#) – supporting children to play in challenging circumstances
- [A playworkers guide to risk](#) (Play Wales)
- [Play England – The importance of play](#)
- [Play England - Manifesto of play](#)
- [International Play Association – Article 31 poster UNCRC](#)
- [UNICEF, United Nations Convention on The Rights of the Child articles](#)
- [Inspired Children](#)
- [Play Scotland](#)
- [Playwork Principles simplified](#)
- [Hanging out – Older Children at Play](#)
- [Inspired Children](#)
- [Skills Active – Playwork, A Skilled and Qualified Workforce](#)
- [Playwork – an Introduction](#)
- [Play Sufficiency](#) (Play Wales)

Books for further Learning:

- Reflective Playwork revised edition, Jacky Kilvington and Ali Wood, Bloomsbury Academic 2018.
- Evolutionary Playwork: Reflective Analytic Practice by Bob Hughes Routledge, 2011
- The Buskers Guide to Playwork, The Busker's guide to risk and the Busker's Guide to Participation, Shelly Newstead
- Playwork inspired learning, a new approach to play in the Early Years, Chris Watkins, 2020
- No fear, growing up in a risk averse society, Tim Gill 2000

Glossary

Child and play centred Playwork that responds to the play needs of the children, not to external requirements.

Child protection and Safeguarding The duty of adults to care for children in a way that neither they nor others cause harm to children and to report and record all concerns related to a child being harmed.

Children's rights Children's entitlements under law and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, this includes play and their involvement in decisions that affect them.

Children We use this term to encompass all children and teenagers up to the age of 18 regardless of impairment, their gender, race, religion or belief, language, sexuality, health, economic or social status and any other individual characteristics.

Discrimination Make unjust distinctions or fail to recognise support needs resulting in failure to acknowledge an individual's right to participate in play and exercise freedom of choice.

Inclusion Ensuring that play provision is open and accessible to all and takes positive action in removing barriers so that all children can play

Loose parts Materials that can be used flexibly for play – they can be moved around, manipulated, used as props or to change the environment.

Play deprivation If children do not play they will lack experience that is developmentally essential and this may lead to them being biologically and socially disabled.

Playwork is something that takes place whenever adults set up and facilitate a space where children go to play. Playwork is about facilitating and enriching opportunities for all children to play. Playwork is about observing how children use different bits and pieces and identifying the play value of these things in order to maintain and continue to facilitate the play process

Playwork Principles The professional and ethical framework for playwork.

Risk The possibility of a hazard actually causing harm.

Risk-benefit assessment An assessment of risk which also takes into account the benefits of the activity to the playing child.

(Definitions taken from [Play Wales Glossary of Playwork Terms](#))

Induction into your new role as a Playworker

As a new member of the staff team you will be given a job description and a copy of the settings policies. You will also undergo an induction process and be given a mentor to help you settle into your new role.

As part of the induction, your mentor will discuss and talk through the settings practices. The following table help you to understand what you need to know to be an effective Playworker and a valued member of the team.

By the end of day one you will have:	Signed by staff / date	Signed by manager / date
▪ Had a meeting with your line manager, and discussed ○ The job role responsibilities ○ The aims and mission statement ○ Confidentiality ○ The history and governance structure ○ Your personal mentor ○ Safeguarding and child protection ○ Human Resources ▪ Induction process ▪ Training and continuous professional development ▪ Grievance and disciplinary matters ▪ Sickness Absence notification ▪ Holidays how to book them ▪ Supervision and Appraisal System ▪ Had a tour of the setting, and briefly discussed ○ Setting security including doors and boundaries ○ Indoor and outdoor play spaces, including which areas are accessible for children ○ Location of resources and equipment ○ Car parking, break facilities, toilets, lockers/facilities for personal items during work hours ○ Notice boards and where to find key information ○ Routines, daily timetables ○ Health and safety information ○ Fire evacuation procedures and exits ○ First aid facilities ▪ Been introduced to your colleagues and briefly discussed their roles, including ○ Your mentor ○ Designated person for safeguarding ○ Designated person for special educational needs ○ Designated person for equalities ○ First aiders ▪ Been provided with keys/passes and/or alarm codes (if applicable)		

By the end of week one you will have:	Signed by staff	Signed by manager
▪ Spent time with your mentor, and discussed ○ All club policies and procedures ○ Daily routines, e.g. how to answer the telephone, arrivals/collections, and the processes that need to be followed ○ Health and Safety including setting boundaries, fire evacuation, first aid ○ The location of accident and incident forms and how to use them ○ How to engage with parents/carers ○ Playwork and best practices, e.g. how, and when, to engage with children ▪ Met with the setting Designated Person for Child Protection, and discussed ○ the setting safeguarding policies/procedures ○ the location of specific forms and how to record concerns about children or adults ▪ Been booked on to Basic Child Protection training (that provides information on local procedures) preferably with the Local Authority ▪ Met the designated person for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and discussed ○ Policies and Procedures ○ Individual children's specific needs ○ Medication ○ Allergies ▪ Met with Equality Needs Co-coordinator, and discussed ○ Policies and procedures ○ The location of prejudice related incident forms and how to use them		

By the end of month one you will have:	Signed by staff	Signed by manager
▪ Ongoing support from your mentor, Including discussion, job shadowing, effective peer-on-peer observation, to gain confidence in all areas of your role ○ Growing confidence to engage appropriately with children, knowing when you should stand back and when to interact ○ Growing confidence to discuss and implement the setting policies ○ Growing confidence to discuss the aims, vision and governance structure of the setting and be aware of the statutory requirements that it needs to follow ○ Identify and celebrate your successes ○ Identify areas for development and actions to support your CPD, including qualifications ▪ Met with the setting Designated Person for Child Protection, and discussed ○ Your understanding of safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures ○ The signs and indicators of abuse and neglect ○ How to record concerns about children or adults. ▪ Met the designated person for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and discussed ○ Yours understanding of relevant policies and procedures ○ How to support individual children with SEND so that they are able to engage in all areas of the setting ○ Administering medication and considering allergies to keep individual safe ▪ Met with Equality Needs Co-coordinator, and discussed ○ Your understanding of relevant policies and procedures ○ How to support the setting to accept difference and be fully inclusive ○ Your understanding of prejudice related incidents and how to record them ▪ Undertaken a monthly probationary review with your line manager and set up regular monthly meetings		

By the end of month six you will have:	Signed by staff	Signed by manager
Ongoing support from your mentor, Including discussion, job shadowing, effective peer-on-peer observation, to build upon your confidence and expertise in all areas of your role ▪ Acquired full knowledge of all essential policies and procedures. ▪ Identified key people for on-going support/networking, e.g. designated persons ▪ Undertaken a three, four month and five month review with your line manager. ▪ Achieved key objectives set during your induction to the standard required. ▪ Demonstrated capability to meet the requirements of the role to the standard set. ▪ Following successful completion of probationary period, undertaken an appraisal with line manager and devised key objectives and an on the job training plan for the next 6-12 months		

All about me by _____

What I enjoy doing at home:

Things I enjoy doing at school:

Experiences I have had with my family:

At out of school club I would like to:

Anything I am worried about: