

Time to Play

Guidance to support Cambridgeshire's Play Policy



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The Cambridgeshire Play Policy,

'Time to Play' makes links to, and

**contributes to other local and national
policies relating to children and young**

people. This guidance document explains

those links and details some of

the wide body of background research and

literature, which underpins the principles,

and policy statements of the policy.

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The Best Play Objectives

'Best Play' NPFA, Children's Play Council and PLAYLINK (2000); what play provision should do for children is a publication that sets out seven play objectives. These focus on the benefits that children gain from their play and the role of public provision in creating spaces and services that allow those benefits to be achieved. It looks at play provision in terms of 'outcomes' and from the point of view of children's needs and wishes in relation to their play.

The 'Best Play' Objectives

Objective 1

Extend the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.

Objective 2

Recognise the child's need to test boundaries and respond positively to that need.

Objective 3

Manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.

Objective 4

Maximise the range of play opportunities.

Objective 5

Foster independence and self-esteem.

Objective 6

Foster children's respect for others and offer opportunities for social interaction.

Objective 7

Foster the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.



"You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."

Plato





Health and Well-being

Children and young people's health and well-being are supported and promoted through the provision of good quality play opportunities.

'Time for Play – Encouraging greater play opportunities for children and young people' (DCMS - 2006)

The focus of this document is on Government action to encourage the promotion of greater play opportunities for children and young people. It concentrates on the importance of play, as well as some of the key issues relating to it.

Play Deprivation

The National Playing Fields Association report notes that play deprivation in children could manifest in the following ways:

- poorer ability in motor tasks
- lower levels of physical activity
- poorer ability to deal with stress and trauma
- ability to assess and manage risks is hindered
- poorer social skills
- difficulties in negotiating social situations such as conflict.

The report gives details of some research undertaken in Zurich in 1995 (Huttenmoser and Degan-Zimmermann, 1995) which identifies that when starting at kindergarten children who had been deprived of the opportunity to play freely near their home showed less advanced social and motor development than their peers who had been able to play out freely.

"Children who had been deprived of the opportunity to play freely near their home showed less advanced social and motor development."



Physical Health and Fitness

Currently there is a focus on childhood obesity and fitness levels. Research shows that children at play are as active as a child engaged in more formal forms of physical exercise.

The British Medical Journal reported in 2001 that there is "an obesity epidemic in young children and that the main solution should be to 'reduce television viewing and promote playing'. The report identifies that 'opportunities for spontaneous play may be the only requirement that young children need to increase their physical activity."

The British Medical Journal (Vol. 322) (10 February 2001)

"Children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity each day. At least twice a week this should include activities to improve bone health, muscle strength, and flexibility." This report supports the role of play in helping to achieve the 60-minute target through the accumulation of bouts of activity of varying duration throughout the day. Short periods of physical activity, as well as longer bouts, reflect the natural activity patterns of young children and includes:

"spontaneous play during breaks at school or close to home, walking to and from school" as well as programmed activity, such as PE, sport, swimming or games. **'At least five a week: Evidence on the impact of physical activity and its relationship to health' (2004).**

The British Heart Foundation supports active play as a valuable source of exercise, this includes spending more time out of doors and allowing friends over to play as well as taking children to local parks and playgrounds. **'Get Kids On The Go' (BHF, 2004)**

At any age, exercise boosts energy and concentration and helps provide a restful night's sleep. Being unfit, often leads to increased tiredness.



"Research shows that children at play are as active as a child engaged in more formal forms of physical exercise."





"It is essential for children to have opportunities to practise making and consolidating friendships and to deal with conflict."



Draft obesity guidance from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, published in November 2006, recognises that the environment in which people live, especially their access to safe spaces for play and physical activity, may influence their ability to maintain a healthy weight. It calls on local authorities to address the provision of cleaner, safer streets, and of safe spaces such as parks and playgrounds. It also calls on head teachers and school governors to undertake assessments of the school environment and of the impact of school policies on physical activity.

Department of Health – ‘Choosing Health’ White Paper (2004)

The Government’s White Paper sets out the key principles for supporting the public to make healthier and informed choices regarding their health.

Sport and physical activity are crucial if public health is to improve and ‘Choosing Health’ recognises the following as important:

- increasing exercise in reducing the risk of chronic diseases and premature death
- effective action on diet and exercise in tackling heart disease, cancer, diabetes, strokes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol
- the role of Physical Education School Sport Club Links Strategy (PESSCL) in increasing PE and school sport opportunities
- the benefits of cycling, walking and easy access to sporting facilities
- the setting up of new initiatives to promote awareness of the benefits of physical activity including the use of pedometers.

Mental Health

Research by the Mental Health Foundation (1999) recognises the importance of children being able to play and take risks and to use their own initiative. It also recognises it is essential for them to have opportunities to practise making and consolidating friendships and to deal with conflict – the basic skills needed in order to become “emotionally literate”, which increases their resilience to mental health problems.

Mental Health Foundation. ‘The Value of Children’s Play and Play Provision: A Systematic Review of the Literature’ (Cole-Hamilton, Harrop et al, 2001)

The Mental Health Foundation estimates that at any time 20% of children and young people experience psychological problems. Their report *Bright Futures* states, "Opportunities for risk taking in unsupervised play help children build self-confidence and resilience, key protective factors for mental health. The report also recognises the importance of supervised play opportunities."

'Bright Futures: Promoting Children and Young People's Mental Health' (Mental Health Foundation, 1999).

"Unhappiness can be caused by stress, argues Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green, the Children's Commissioner for England, who is concerned about the numbers of unhappy children at school. With British children under constant pressure to achieve academically at school, Sir Al says a priority is to ask children what makes them happy at school, including their views on the curriculum. He strongly supports the government's Every Child Matters agenda, but says there has not been enough attention placed on children enjoying themselves." **London Play News (April 2007)**

Exercise releases natural chemicals such as serotonin into the brain and these can have a strong effect on mood; helping to reduce stress, anxiety and depression. Regular exercise has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression significantly.

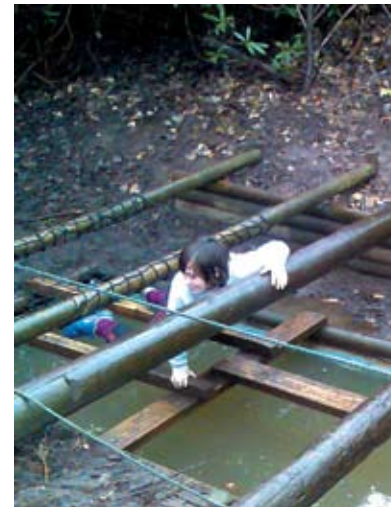
Anti-social behaviour

According to the Home Office, anti-social behaviour is any activity that impacts on other people in a negative way.

The government's 'Respect Campaign' encourages people to work together to create a society in which respect is shown towards one another and where they live together in peace.

The Respect Action Plan details how the government will encourage respect in communities, including stamping out anti-social behaviour, by:

- supporting or challenging anti-social households
- tackling truancy and anti-social behaviour in schools
- providing activities for younger people
- strengthening local communities
- strengthening measures to tackle anti-social behaviour.



"Regular exercise has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression significantly."





"Increased participation in organised physical activities contributes significantly to social cohesion."

"Increased participation in organised physical activities contributes significantly to social cohesion in a society that is becoming increasingly fragmented. It provides safe spaces for physical activity for children, increased opportunities to meet and mix for more transient sections of our community. A wide range of opportunities for physical activities, drawing on a wide range of cultures and traditions, also contributes to social inclusion and to positive engagement with young people and forms one of a range of strategies for reducing anti-social behaviour. Participation in sport, play and voluntary activities associated with sports and sports clubs, all contribute to community involvement and to civic pride and an engaged and active community is a major determinant in its regeneration."

(Adapted from Brian Sutton, London Play)

Department for Education and Skills – 'Youth Matters' White Paper (2005) This document is a new strategy for 'providing opportunities, challenge and support to young people.'

It aims to address four key challenges:

- engage young people in positive activities and empowering them to shape the services they receive
- encourage young people to volunteer and be involved in their communities
- provide better information, advice and guidance to young people
- provide better and more personalised intensive support for young people in trouble.



Equality and Inclusion

All children and young people are included in and have equal opportunity to play.

It is important to reach out to children, young people and their families that may not access play opportunities, by seeking to identify and address their needs. This may include children with a Learning Difficulty and/or Disability (LDD), Children Looked After (CLA), children for whom English is an additional language and children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. It is also important to recognise and meet the needs of children who may experience social, cultural, physical or emotional barriers to accessing play opportunities.

Inequality and Exclusion

Having a disability does not reduce the child's desire to play or explore the world around them. Opportunities for children to play are limited and the designs of play areas often do not cater for those with specific physical needs. This lack of opportunity to play can have a profound effect on children and their families by contributing to a feeling of isolation. Often parents and carers are unaware of the play facilities that are open to them.

"Inclusive play provision is open and accessible to all and takes positive action in removing disabling barriers so that disabled children and non-disabled children can participate."

Alison John for Kidsactive and the Better Play Awards (2003)

Under the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act it is unlawful to discriminate against disabled people and permanent physical adjustments must be made to allow access to the outdoor and indoors; leisure centres, adventure playgrounds, play areas in parks and playgrounds.

Inclusion is about valuing diversity and there is no single model of what inclusive provision should look like. Designers of play space and adults working with children at play have an obligation to ensure that play opportunities to meet differing needs.

National Playing Fields Association recommends an action plan for local authorities and outlines how to ensure consideration for the play needs of disabled children. **'Can Play Will Play' (NPFA, 2004)**



"Inclusion is about valuing diversity and there is no single model of what inclusive provision should look like."





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The needs of the British Minority Ethnic (BME) and English Additional Language (EAL) communities are identical in terms of need for suitable play facilities in Cambridgeshire as for all other families, but there are several reasons why we need to explore closely their ability to access and contribute to these opportunities. Issues around culture, language and poverty all come into this equation.

"About 54% of all human communication happens just through the movements we make – through the way we communicate ourselves through our movement and the ways we interact with others"
Jabadao – 'Building Relationships Through Movement' (2005)

Play represents, in its broadest context, the finest opportunity for BME and EAL children to meet and interact with their peers outside the highly literacy-focussed classroom; their skills and qualities within a play framework do not depend on fluency in English, and can be created in a way that is not culture loaded.

However, some of these children will not access play facilities simply because their families do not realise that such opportunities are both accessible and financially viable. The standard methods of advertising what we offer, may not reach certain BME and EAL families, and we need to reach out to them in a more proactive way.

In Wolverhampton, the 'Include Me Too' team discovered that in order to make access to facilities and opportunities for BME families, they needed to review and adapt their methods of advertising and promoting facilities. Key to their research was the power of using individual members of the BME community to both plan and advocate the services provided: only then did the families feel at ease with the system.

Through this consultation process many children, including those with disabilities, who might have been excluded through default, or deemed to be uninterested, became active participants.

This proactive and consultative approach to inclusion may at first sight be time consuming, but in the long term will result in play provision that is truly inclusive.

Stakeholders¹ must ensure that all children can access play equipment and spaces.

Stakeholders include: District and parish councils working to develop play services, local play networks, partnerships and associations, childcare providers, youth services, extended services, highways and transport services, educational establishments 0-19+, playwork and early years trainers, hospitals, prisons, arts and culture services, sport, leisure, open access play schemes, recreational activities, housing and regeneration and the voluntary sector.

Gypsy and Traveller Communities.

Cambridgeshire has the largest community of Gypsies and Travellers within the country and it is widely recognised that this group makes up the county's largest minority ethnic group.

It must be recognised that children and young people from all backgrounds, cultures and abilities have a need and a right to play.

Gypsy and Traveller children can have difficulty accessing good quality play opportunities because of limited space in homes for indoor play, storage of toys and equipment. The remote position of Traveller sites often means they are located at a significant distance from local public play facilities.

The experience of racism and social exclusion means that families don't always feel comfortable accessing public facilities. There is generally a lack of suitable accommodation for Travellers that offers safe outdoor play opportunities, sites are often located under pylons, near main roads and railway tracks or may be on dangerous ground.

In Cambridgeshire, The Children's Voices Project commissioned by the Ormiston Trust asked Gypsy and Traveller children about their experiences and consulted with them about their loves, hopes, fears and needs.

Children and young people said they loved to play. This consultation highlighted the lack of space on organised Traveller sites and the reluctance of some Traveller and Gypsy parents to leave the sites, and the reluctance of some local parents to allow their children to visit the sites to play with Traveller and Gypsy children.

"My friends in school always play with me but when we're here, down (on site), no one comes to play with me"

Thomas aged 7 years

The way to change attitudes and foster greater understanding of different cultures is to encourage the mixing of children in social situations. Through play this can be achieved.



"My friends in school always play with me but when we're down here (on site), no one comes to play with me."

Thomas, aged 7 years





"The opinions of children and young people are essential when planning services with and for them."



Consultation with Cambridgeshire's Children and Young People

Children and young people are adequately and meaningfully consulted with when developing play opportunities and spaces.

The opinions of children and young people are essential when planning services with and for them. Project leaders must ensure that consultation is meaningful and aim to reach all potential users.

Meaningful consultation takes the form of questions:

- where the answer is not already known
- that allow time to explore contentious issues
- that consider different approaches to consultation to allow children and young people full participation
- that offer a wide range of options beyond one model and give opportunities for hands on experience
- that manage expectations by making clear the possibilities
- that provide clear feedback
- that keep participants informed and part of the process throughout the project.

Quality Play

Children and young people are able to access varied and good quality play opportunities that are safe and offer challenge and risk.

Potential barriers to children's play

According to the Children's Play Council (CPC) parental and children's own fears about safety restrict their access to play areas. A reduction in the number of play spaces available to children is also a significant barrier.

Families on low incomes can be more likely to miss out on play time as many play facilities charge. Minority groups are also likely to be play deprived, according to the CPC "Too often the needs of different groups of children are overlooked. Older children, children who are disabled or have specific needs, children from black or minority ethnic communities, children in families with low incomes, children in rural areas and those in Traveller and refugee families, often have fewer play opportunities than others".

The following statistics are from a national opinion poll sponsored by the Royal Bank of Scotland (September 2004) of 1000 children aged 7- 12 years and parents across the UK.

- More than a third of children in the UK never play outdoors
- Nearly half of children in the UK spend more than 3 hours a day watching TV or playing computer games
- Two-thirds of parents in the UK are worried about letting their children play outside.

A 'Sport and the Family' MORI survey found that 80% of parents believed "children today get less exercise because parents are afraid to let them go out alone". Meanwhile, children report busy roads, car pollution or lack of playground equipment as barriers to outdoor play (**Hesketh et al, 2005**).

Additionally, protests from neighbours about noise are another hindrance to active outdoor play. The impact of these negative attitudes has seen a dramatic reduction in the freedom of children to play outdoors. The radius from home in which children can roam alone (their play range) has shrunk to a ninth of what it was in 1970 (Whewey and Millward, 1997). The net effect was that a child of 9.5 years was allowed to play outside to the same extent as a 7-year-old in a similar survey conducted 20 years earlier. **'The Healthy Living Social Marketing Initiative: A review of the evidence'. Department of Health (2007)**



"Two-thirds of parents in the UK are worried about letting their children play outside."





"There are great benefits to having playworkers in the community as they can oversee the day-to-day safety of a space or play area."



Playwork and Training

Playworkers are people who work professionally with children and facilitate play. It is their role to enhance the environment, creating opportunities for children to play in different ways with minimal intervention. They ensure that children are safe and able to take on challenges and risks to stretch children's abilities. They provide a valuable service to children. Playworkers can be found practising in hospitals, immigration reception centres, prisons, out of school childcare, early years settings, mobile play services, holiday play schemes and open access schemes. There are great benefits to having playworkers in the community as they can oversee the day-to-day safety of a space or play area. They can also ensure that all children have access to the space. Children enjoy and need to play away from constant close supervision, however, they express the need to feel that there is someone not too far away whom they can call and rely on.

Cambridgeshire's Workforce Development Strategy 'Better Together' outlines how to develop and retain the workforce, through continuous professional development and qualification training. The strategy applies to all sectors, including Playwork, that provide services for children and young people. The Cambridgeshire Workforce Development Strategy 'Better Together' contributes to the fulfilment of Cambridgeshire's Children and Young People's Plan 2006-2009. It is adopted by the Cambridgeshire Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and is implemented by all sectors in working with children.

It promotes:

- safe practice
- recruitment
- retention and development
- pay and rewards
- inter-agency multi-agency team working and workforce remodelling
- leadership, management and supervision
- the establishment of a skills framework
- equality and diversity.

Cambridgeshire County Council is committed to 40% of all playworkers in out of school childcare having a Level 3 qualification or above in playwork by 2008. It is recognised that trained playworkers make a valuable contribution to achieving the Every Child Matters outcomes.

Quality Assured Play

The local authority is committed to reflective practice so that playworkers and those working with children can ensure that the Every Child Matters outcomes are met.

It is recognised that there are also benefits when play settings engage in self-evaluation through quality assurance schemes.

Providers of good quality play spaces

Support children and young people in their play by:

- allowing them choice and control of their play
- offering freedom to play
- creating access to a wide range of play opportunities, which are inviting and extend experiences and develop skills
- supporting their exploration to extend their understanding of diversity including disability and social, cultural and religious beliefs
- building confidence and self-esteem and empowerment
- ensuring that play offers challenge and risk
- promoting and ensuring health and well-being
- having a conscious awareness and understanding of individual needs when planning play provision
- observing children's rights
- actively and meaningfully consulting with children and young people when deciding on matters that will affect them
- actively encouraging the community to engage
- providing consistency
- ensuring that play is inclusive and offered equally.

Safety, Challenge and Risk

It is important that children, young people and their families can be confident that play spaces and facilities are safe places. Play opportunities also need to offer creative and exciting challenges and risk in order for children and young people to develop risk assessment skills, stretch physical skills and enable confidence building. In order to deliver this there must be safeguards in place.

This means ensuring that:

- equipment and play spaces meet the required standards
- staff are properly trained, qualified and insured
- staff are properly vetted
- risk management*and child protection policies are in place and adhered to
- adequate safety checks and maintenance routines are in place.

(For further information see pages 22-27)

*Risk management systems must ensure that the social benefit and value of any play opportunity or activity is considered throughout the risk assessment process.



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"There is a strong need to acknowledge that children's play will take place outside of 'designated' or designed areas and this shouldn't be seen as 'antisocial'."



Communities

Children and young people's play is valued in the wider communities to which they belong.

Places of play

Children and young people will play in a variety of places.

"Children play wherever they are. This might be indoors or out. Children play in their homes, at school, in childcare and play provision and in the public and private places they visit with their friends or with adults. For many children the primary outside play spaces are the streets and other open spaces near their homes."

"Where children play depends on a whole range of factors. Whether and how they play out-doors is influenced by their own age, interests, experiences and influences; the equipment and resources available to them; their parents' feelings about their safety and security; the area and surroundings in which they live; the accessibility of the open spaces they might want to use; the variety and attractiveness of potential play places and current play fads and fashions."

"Younger children tend to play around their homes where they are most likely to feel secure and comfortable. As they grow older the distances children go away from home to play begin to vary more widely. Whilst some children continue to choose to play indoors or near their homes, others spend much of their time playing out, exploring and moving about. They tend to seek out their friends, finding places where they and their friends can be together. As they grow up and begin to feel more independent, playing further away from their homes and using the wider neighbourhood as their outdoor play space is a vital part of their developing independence and self-confidence."

"If children are not provided with the sorts of play spaces and opportunities they want they will either miss out on these important developmental opportunities or will seek them elsewhere, often in places felt by adults to be inappropriate." **'Where Do Children Play?' Fact Sheet (2002) Children's Play information Service**

There is a strong need to acknowledge that children's play will take place outside of 'designated' or designed areas and this shouldn't be seen as 'antisocial'. Children do not only play on commons, meadows and other informal green spaces but also in areas such as tree belts, landscaping and scrub planting, which has been designed for another purpose. Often these areas are of great benefit and value to the child and should be seen as the child exploring and appropriating landscapes and places for their own enjoyment and interpretation/ understanding of the world. These areas can be used more frequently than a play area that has been provided by adults.

Education

Play is a vital part of the learning process. It is recognised that due to the structure and demands of the National Curriculum allowing children to play in the school day is a challenge. Some classrooms and outside areas are not well designed or equipped to provide a conducive environment for quality play opportunities. Some schools in Britain are removing playtime hours in order to try and tackle difficulties that can occur during the playtime / break time periods.

PLAYLINK has worked with schools in highlighting the value of the play / break time periods. This work was as a response to being approached by schools requesting recommendations about play equipment. The schools indicated that they had concerns about bullying and an awareness that the play / break times were not working very well.

PLAYLINK identified "The break time period might have a positive contribution to make to children's development, that it offered a potential space for children to learn by different means – to learn what cannot be taught – that it need not simply be a time for 'letting off steam', appeared not to be considered. Break time was just that. A time for teachers to take a well earned break, to meet each other, have a coffee or eat their lunch. A period for children to move about, refuel, be outside (weather permitting) or be trapped inside in inclement weather."

'Play At School' (PLAYLINK, 1999)

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) is supporting the improvement of play opportunities in schools and is calling it 'Life Long Playing'. It states; "All schools should support and facilitate children and young people's play. Play and learning are not separate; play is part of learning and learning is part of play. Learning through play supports and enriches learning throughout formal education."

"Children are not magically divorced from or inoculated against the pressures and pleasures they encounter in their out-of-school hours. Schools are part of, are affected by and have an effect on, the wider world children inhabit. If children are denied play opportunities, this will have an impact on school life as a whole.

Increasingly, the non-school environment is perceived as unsafe for children's play. Schools are one of the few places left where parents still feel it safe to send their children. This offers schools the opportunity to be part of the process of reawakening both parents and children to the possibilities and benefits of play." **'Time To Play' (NUT play policy, 2007)**



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Extended Schools

An Extended School acts as a focal point within its community for a range of services. The Government's ten year strategy 'Choice for parents, the best start for children; making it happen' commits to extended services in every school, including special schools, by 2010.

Schools can work with local providers, agencies and other schools to provide access to what the Government calls a "core offer" of support consisting of:

- childcare 8am – 6pm all year round
- parenting and family support
- a varied menu of activities including sport and music clubs
- swift and easy referrals
- community use of facilities.

Playwork and play settings can contribute to all the elements of the core offer.

Childcare, including before and after school as well as holiday schemes of high quality, are child-centred play environments employing staff that are appropriately trained.

A well-designed play programme offers a varied menu of activities. Play will take place inside and outside and will involve games and sports as well as creative activities including arts and crafts and gardening.

Parenting support can be achieved through play. It brings parents and children together. A good quality provision will have a policy on how to involve parents and can act as a non-threatening point of contact.

Referrals for specialist support can be made to a play environment, as play can help a child work through difficult times and is well known for its therapeutic benefits.

Play spaces should be created as part of a school offering wider community access. In some communities, the school playing field provides the only green space for miles.

With the lengthening of time potentially spent at school, it is crucial that sports, study support, and other activities are not offered at the expense of play opportunities. **Adapted from 'Playwork in Extended Services' (Skills Active, 2006)**

Cambridgeshire County Council is committed to providing and maintaining playgrounds, habitat areas, formal playing fields, and informal grass and recreation areas in all new and existing school sites. To enable maximum educational and social benefit children and young people's play needs should be considered.

Children's Centres

Children's centres enable children under 5 years old and their families to access seamless, holistic, integrated services, information and support from multi-disciplinary teams of professionals.

The Government is committed to delivering a children's centre for every community by 2010.

Children's centres offer an integrated approach to services for children and families. They can provide or signpost to local early years foundation stage provision, health services and family support. They act as a service hub within the community for parents and providers of childcare services for children of all ages.

Youth Provision

Young people do not call their free time activities "play" they are more likely to describe it as "hanging out with mates". It is important that this time is recognised as valuable. Young people and children do not need to be constantly occupied in order to be benefiting from an experience.

Young people:

- want to be heard
- need to be with friends
- need to feel safe and welcome
- want to feel free to occupy their own time
- like to be in control.

Like play provision, youth provision strives to offer these things.

'Youth Matters: Next Steps' (2006); forms part of the wider Government youth offer that includes better support for families, more youth friendly accessible health services and greater access to sports, culture and the arts. As part of the Youth Matters framework, local authorities are expected to develop new and innovative ways of delivering services to young people and it is hoped that, together, we can share these new ways of working with others to bring about real and positive changes for young people.



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Communities and sustainability

The Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' aims to give local people and local communities more power and influence to improve their lives.

The Cambridgeshire Play Policy (Time to Play) relates to this as it has a key role in creating better services, better places and improving community cohesion.

The white paper specifically mentions:

- local government as a strategic leader and place-shaper
- community safety
- health and well-being
- vulnerable people
- children, young people and families
- economic development, housing and planning.

These areas of focus are relevant to the sustainability of Cambridgeshire's play services.

Strategic leaders need to consider the role of Local Area Agreements and other funding streams to develop and sustain play provision. During 2006/7 the Big Lottery Fund Programme for Children's Play has enabled Districts, Boroughs and Unitary Authorities to submit play project portfolios to receive grants for play provision.

Play in Special Circumstances

Play is a vital tool in supporting troubled or traumatised children. Play acts as a medium by which the child can express feelings or anxieties. The act of playing can be therapeutic in nature helping the child to come to terms with difficult experiences.

Careful thought given to the play needs of children and the provision of play space and play things, can alleviate feelings of unease and anxiety in strange or difficult surroundings such as social work offices, hospitals, prison visiting rooms.

Sport

It is unlikely that a child or young person would be concerned if what they were engaged in were sport or play, as long as they enjoyed it. The benefits of both play and sport are beneficial for children and young people, it is important that they can enjoy both.

Sport England describe informal sport as being "...an activity that displays many of the characteristics of 'formal sport' but does not involve structured competition governed by rules."

Sport England South West Regional Plan Bulletin No6 'Active Play and Sport' (2006)

Three children in a park kicking a ball around may not be playing football because they are not playing universally recognised rules. Playing a football match requires some level of organisation and planning where as a kick-about can happen freely and could be defined as play.

The need for children and young people to be involved in physical activity to combat health issues has increased the focus on sport. Sport however, does not appeal to everyone due to the pressure of performing the skills required and the element of competition. It is essential that those in a position to tempt children and young people into sporting activities are aware of the benefits of promoting an ethos centred around fun.

The government give relevance to play and sport in Fair Play. "Play, physical education and sport complement each other. Play is unorganised whereas sport is organised and usually played with structured rules. Play is what children do of their own volition, often making up their own informal rules. But it is through play that children often have their first experiences of sport and develop basic sporting skills such as kicking a ball around, racing their friends, or climbing."
'Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy' (DCSF DCMS 2008)



"The benefits of both play and sport are beneficial for children and young people, it is important that they can enjoy both."





"Fear of litigation is leading many play providers to focus on minimising the risk of injury at the expense of other more fundamental objectives."



Legal Requirements and Good Practice

Children and young people's play facilities comply with all legislative requirements.

Cambridgeshire providers will meet all sector specific legal requirements including British Standards and will observe good practice in all work done to improve and sustain play opportunities for children and young people.

'Managing Risk in Play Provision: A Position Statement' Play Safety Forum

"We consider Managing Risk in Play Provision to be an important document that will contribute to the debate on the provision of children's play." **Health and Safety Executive**

Introduction

The Play Safety Forum, a grouping of national agencies involved in play safety, has produced Managing Risk in Play Provision to support the work of those involved in play provision of any kind (for example play areas, playgrounds, adventure playgrounds, play centres and holiday playschemes). These include local authorities, voluntary organisations, play equipment manufacturers and inspection agencies. The statement has relevance to other settings and environments in which children play such as childcare provision, schools, parks and public open spaces. It will also be of interest to those involved in insurance and litigation in relation to play provision.

The statement has equal relevance to children and young people of all ages from 0 to 18, and it uses the term 'children' to cover the whole age range. It focuses on physical injuries resulting from accidents. However, the overall approach, namely that a balance should be struck between risks and benefits, is also relevant to agencies concerned with other issues such as the personal safety of children. The statement is in two forms: a summary and a full statement. The summary aims to state the key points of the full statement in a more accessible form, for a non-technical audience.

Context

There is growing concern about how safety is being addressed in children's play provision. Fear of litigation is leading many play providers to focus on minimising the risk of injury at the expense of other more fundamental objectives. The effect is to stop children from enjoying a healthy range of play opportunities, limiting their enjoyment and causing potentially damaging consequences for their development.

This approach ignores clear evidence that playing in play provision is a comparatively low risk activity for children. Of the two million or so childhood accidents treated by hospitals each year, less than 2 per cent involve playground equipment.

Participation in sports like football, widely acknowledged as 'good' for a child's development, involves a greater risk of injury than visiting a playground. Fatalities on playgrounds are very rare – about one per three or four years on average. This compares with, for instance, over 100 child pedestrian fatalities a year and over 500 child fatalities from accidents overall. In response to this situation, and in order to ensure that children's needs and wishes are properly acknowledged, the Play Safety Forum has prepared this statement.

The Full Statement

In any human activity, there is an element of risk. Three factors are central to determining whether or not the level of risk is acceptable or tolerable:

- the likelihood of coming to harm
- the severity of that harm
- the benefits, rewards or outcomes of the activity.

Judgements about the acceptability of risk are made on the basis of a risk assessment. Risk assessment and management are not mechanistic processes. They crucially involve making judgments about acceptability based on an understanding of the balance between risks and benefits. Even where there is a risk of fatal or permanent disabling injury, this risk may sometimes be tolerable. For instance, going paddling at the seaside involves an unavoidable risk of fatal injury, but this risk is tolerable for most people because in most circumstances the likelihood of coming to harm is very low and there are obvious benefits. Social and psychological factors are also important in risk assessment. Risks that are acceptable in one community may be unacceptable in another and policies should take this into account.

Almost any environment contains hazards or sources of harm. In many cases the existence of hazards can be justified, perhaps because they are impossible to remove or perhaps because their removal would have undesirable consequences or be too costly. Where the existence of a hazard can be justified, measures should be in place to manage it. In a controlled environment such as a workplace or a playground, those responsible are required by law to identify, and make informed judgements about, the hazards to which people are exposed. They must take steps to ensure that the risks are managed and controlled, so far as is reasonably practicable, while allowing the potential benefits to be delivered.



"Fatalities on playgrounds are very rare – about one per three or four years on average."





"Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury."



Children and Risk

All children both need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury. Children with disabilities have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers.

It is the job of all those responsible for children at play to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children are given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop their abilities without exposing them to unacceptable risks. This is part of a wider adult social responsibility to children. If we do not provide controlled opportunities for children to encounter and manage risk then they may be denied the chance to learn these skills. They may also be more likely to choose to play in uncontrolled environments where the risks are greater.

Any injury is distressing for children and those who care for them, but exposure to the risk of injury, and experience of actual minor injuries, is a universal part of childhood. Such experiences also have a positive role in child development. When children sustain or witness injuries they gain direct experience of the consequences of their actions and choices, and through this an understanding of the extent of their abilities and competences. However, children deserve protection against fatal or permanently disabling injuries, to a greater degree than adults. Children have a range of physical competences and abilities, including a growing ability to assess and manage risk, which adults arguably tend to underestimate. However, children typically have less experience than adults of assessing the broad range of risks and hazards that they may encounter. So it is important to give them appropriate, controlled environments in which they can learn about risk.

Play Provision and Risk

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision, and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. In the words of the play sector publication *Best Play*, play provision should aim to 'manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm'. While the same principles of safety management can be applied both to workplaces generally and play provision, the balance between safety and benefits is likely to be different in the two environments. In play provision, exposure to some risk is actually a benefit: it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about the real consequences of risk-taking.

Therefore it is acceptable that in play provision children may be exposed to the risk of minor and easily healed injuries such as bruises, grazes or sprains. On the other hand, play provision should not expose children to significant likelihood of permanent disability or life-threatening injuries. However, it may on occasions be unavoidable that play provision exposes children to the risk – the very low risk – of serious injury or even death. But this would only be tolerable in the following conditions:

- the likelihood were extremely low
- the hazards were clear to users
- there were obvious benefits
- further reduction of the risk would remove the benefits
- there were no reasonably practicable ways to manage the risk.

For example a paddling pool, even if shallow, involves a very low but irremovable risk of drowning (even with parental supervision), but this is normally tolerable. The likelihood is typically extremely low; the hazard is readily apparent; children benefit through their enjoyment and through the learning experience of water play; and finally, further reduction or management of the risk is not practicable without taking away the benefits.

Providers should strike a balance between the risks and the benefits. This should be done on the basis of a risk assessment. Crucially, this risk assessment should involve a risk-benefit trade-off between safety and other goals, which should be spelt out in the provider's policy. Given children's appetite for risk-taking, one of the factors that should be considered is the likelihood that children will seek out risks elsewhere, in environments that are not controlled or designed for them, if play provision is not challenging enough. Another factor is the learning that can take place when children are exposed to, and have to learn to deal with, environmental hazards. Play provision is uniquely placed to offer children the chance to learn about risk in an environment designed for that purpose, and thus to help children equip themselves to deal with similar hazards in the wider world.

Good Practice

Clear, well-understood policies, together with procedures that put these policies into practice, are the key to good practice in risk management in play provision. Policies should state clearly the overall objectives. Procedures, including risk assessment, should state how these policies are put into practice, giving guidance but also recognising the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and other goals. Such judgements are clearly multidisciplinary in nature. For example, while they may contain an engineering dimension, of equal or greater importance is likely to be a knowledge of child development and play itself. The Children's Play Information Service (see References) has information on sources of authoritative, relevant guidance on good practice.



"Play provision is uniquely placed to offer children the chance to learn about risk in an environment designed for that purpose."





"Play provision is first and foremost for children, and if it is not exciting and attractive to them, then it will fail, no matter how safe it is."



One valuable approach to risk management in play provision is to make the risks as apparent as possible to children. This means designing spaces where the risk of injury arises from hazards that children can readily appreciate (such as heights), and where hazards that children may not appreciate (such as equipment that can trap heads) are absent. This is particularly useful in unsupervised settings, where the design of the equipment and the overall space has to do most of the work in achieving a balanced approach to risk.

Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play provision is first and foremost for children, and if it is not exciting and attractive to them, then it will fail, no matter how safe it is.

Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgement, not of mechanistic assessment. The judgements should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children's enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents.

Ultimately the basis of these judgements should be made clear in the policies of the play provider as written down in policy documents. These policies should in turn be understood and embodied in practice by all the key stakeholders. **'Managing Risk in Play Provision: A Position Statement' (3 August 2002)**

References

Ball D (2002) 'Playgrounds – risks, benefits and choices,' Contract Research Report No. 426/2002, Health and Safety Executive.
British Standards Institute (1998) BS EN 1176-1 Playground Equipment – Part 1, British Standards Institute

National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and PLAYLINK (2000), 'Best Play: What play provision should do for children' (available from National Children's Bureau)

Information on these and other relevant publications, and contact details for Play Safety Forum members, can be obtained from:

Children's Play Information Service,
National Children's Bureau,
8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE
(tel: 020 7843 6303, e-mail cpis@ncb.org.uk,
website www.ncb.org.uk/library/cpis)

The Play Safety Forum

The Play Safety Forum brings together the main national organisations in England with an interest in safety and children's play. Members include representatives from providers, regulatory bodies and expert agencies. The aim of the Play Safety Forum is to build consensus on issues around risk and safety in relation to play provision. It is an independent body hosted by the Children's Play Council at the invitation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Play Safety Forum Members

Association of Play Industries
Child Accident Prevention Trust
Children's Play Council
Health and Safety Executive
Institute for Sport and Recreation Management
Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management
Kidsactive
Local Government Association
National Early Years Network
National Playing Fields Association
National Family and Parenting Institute
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
PLAYLINK
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
Adviser: David Ball, Centre for Decision Analysis and Risk Management, Middlesex University
Observer organisations: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Play Wales

Health and Safety Executive / Local Authorities Enforcement Liaison Committee (HELA) Local Authority Circular

Safety in Children's Playgrounds

This SIM provides information on the physical standards expected in children's playgrounds, the management systems play providers should have in place and the relevance and status of applicable European Standards.

Background

- 1 Every year there are a significant number of accidents to children in playgrounds due to fixed play equipment (approximately 41,700 in 1998). There is one fatal accident every 3 to 4 years on average.



"Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul."

Fredrick Froebel





"It is becoming increasingly clear through research on the brain as well as in other areas of study, that childhood needs play."

Tina Bruce - Professor
London Metropolitan University



- 2 The main locations where equipment-related playground accidents occur are public playgrounds, parks, schools and public houses or restaurants.
- 3 There is considerable public interest and concern surrounding this area and both the Food and Entertainment and Services Sectors receive a significant number of queries from the field and other sources every year.
- 4 The Play Safety Forum, sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has been charged with taking forward the public debate on safety in children's playgrounds. The Sector is a member of the Forum. HSE has also commissioned research into playground safety and the report is expected to be available late 2001.

European Standards

- 5 There are 2 European Standards of particular relevance to this area. BS EN 1176 Playground equipment covers the requirements for the design, manufacture and installation of playground equipment. BS EN 1177 Impact absorbing playground surfacing specifies the requirements for surfacing to be used in children's playgrounds and the methodology for its testing. In common with other standards, these are not retrospective and are not legally binding. However all play providers should have them in mind when making decisions regarding playgrounds and equipment.

Impact-absorbing Surfacing

- 6 Impact-absorbing surfacing (IAS) covers a range of materials, for example, manufactured tiles, in-situ formed materials, loose particles and natural materials such as turf, bark and sand.
- 7 It should be noted that the installation of IAS is not a complete solution to the potential for injuries in a playground. Impact-absorbing surfacing is tested for its efficacy in reducing head injury severity and it may not be effective in reducing other injuries. The efficacy of IAS in reducing overall numbers of injuries is not proven. Of equal importance is maintenance of properly designed and installed equipment.

Action by Play Providers

- 8 All play providers (eg local authorities (LAs), parish councils) installing or significantly refurbishing existing play facilities (this includes the equipment and the site) should ensure that they meet the requirements of the EN Standards above.
- 9 Providers should also carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment on the play facility as simple compliance with the EN standards does not guarantee compliance with health and safety legislation. They should take account of the siting of the playground for instance. Bodies such as RoSPA can assist with this process.

10 Providers also need to ensure that there are appropriate management systems in place to ensure that facilities are maintained in good order and that damage is repaired promptly.

11 Where providers are responsible for older facilities, they should carry out a risk assessment. They should use the results of the assessment to prioritise any renewals, refurbishment or removal of equipment. They should also consider the installation of IAS as part of the assessment process.

Action by Inspectors

12 It is unlikely that inspectors will have the necessary experience or specialist equipment to inspect fixed playground equipment against current European standards. Such prescriptive equipment inspections must be carried out by a recognised competent person. Good evidence of competence would be membership of the Register of Play Inspectors International Ltd (RPII). Inspectors should satisfy themselves that play providers have suitable management systems in place to: prioritise and action the areas of concern which fall out of regular inspections; carry out risk assessments; and implement the controls indicated by the assessment. This includes maintenance of equipment and any IAS provided. If such systems are absent or are inadequate then enforcement action should be considered in the normal manner.

13 Where play providers have carried out assessments and have prioritised items for action, these should be actioned within a reasonable time frame, attending to the areas of highest risk first and as a matter of urgency. Providers should consider temporary removal of a facility until remedial measures are taken. If action plans are not present or the timescale is unreasonably long, then enforcement action should be considered.

14 The presence of non-impact-absorbing surfacing in the impact area (see BS EN 1176) would be a matter of significant concern and enforcement action should be considered. The Sector view is that enforcement solely on the provision of IAS is inappropriate and should be combined with enforcement action on management systems.



"The child's right to play is the citizens' first claim on the community."

David Lloyd George



NOTES

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Early Years and Childcare Service**

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