

Play Policy: February 2016

Play is fundamental to the quality of life of children. Playing is fun: it is how children enjoy themselves. Children's development, learning, imagination, creativity and independence are promoted through the act of play. Play can help to keep children healthy and active. It allows children to experience and encounter boundaries, learn to assess and manage risk in their lives; both physical and social.

Children have a right to play. The right to play and formal recreation, for all children and young people up to the age of 18, is contained in article 31 of the UN convention on the rights of the child, ratified by the UK government in 1991. The government has a duty under this convention to protect and promote play opportunities for all children and young people.

The Value of Play

Play enables children to learn through experience that cannot be taught. Through exploring and testing ideas children learn:

- About how to make new friends and communicate with other people.
- About how to play new games and learn new skills including physical skills like tree climbing.
- About how to get along with other people, learn how to negotiate, share and work as a team.
- About how to stay healthy and build energy levels.
- About taking risks and keeping safe.

As a federation we recognise the value of play and aim to develop a wide range of outside play environments to meet the needs of all of our children. We believe that play is satisfying and freely chosen by the child. Play may or may not involve equipment or have an end product. It may be serious or light hearted. It may be done simply for its own sake. We aim to ensure children's choice over their experiences is promoted through the provision made in our grounds.

Aims

- To ensure play settings provide a challenging and stimulating environment.
- To allow children to take risks and build confidence.
- To provide opportunities for children to develop their skills of getting on with each other.
- To aid children's physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cognitive development.
- To provide a range of environments which will encourage children to explore and play imaginatively.
- To provide a range of environments which will support children's learning across the curriculum and learning about the world around them.

- To promote independence and team work.

Commitments:

Play is so critically important to all children in their overall development that we will foster every opportunity to support it. To this end we will:

1. Extend the children's choice and control over play and their involvement in the decision-making
2. Seek to find out children's views on the play environment to provide high quality play provision that is appropriate, stimulating and challenging
3. Recognise the need for all children to test boundaries and respond positively to that need
4. Ensure that the adults who supervise play, support the play process, increase play opportunities and ensure their work is informed by Playwork Principles (appendix 1)
5. Adopt a benefits/risk approach to managing the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe. In this we will be principally guided by the H&SE Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision (July 2012)
6. Maximise the range of play activities and provide a rich and diverse environment for outdoor play and learning.
7. Foster independence and self-esteem, respect for others and offer opportunities for social interaction
8. Foster well-being, healthy growth, development, knowledge and understanding.
9. Work to provide rich and fulfilling play for all of our children including equal access for disadvantaged and disabled children. In this we are informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Articles 12 and 31).

Managing Risk in Play Provision

Children need and want to take risks when they play. Our play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, our play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.

An essential element of exploration within the medium of play is the opportunity for children to experience freely-chosen activities, where they can take acceptable risks and challenge themselves beyond their existing capabilities. Allowing children to take acceptable risks develops their ability to independently judge risks and learn new skills.

'Without opportunities to take acceptable levels of risk children's development is inhibited, undermining their capacity to deal with the wider unsupervised world.'

It is our responsibility to strike a balance between the risks and the benefits of play. This policy sets out how we ensure children take acceptable risks in their play. The federation recognises the challenge that this new thinking brings and follows the guidance provided by specialists in the area.

Carefully considered and comprehensive risk assessments of all play provision within the federation will be reviewed on an annual basis, or whenever significant change/development in play provision/equipment or child circumstances take place.

This policy will be reviewed every two years

Playwork Principles

The idea of **spontaneous play** is integral to playwork and all playwork settings aim to give children and young people choices about how to spend their leisure time, as well as providing children with a safe place to play freely.

Play should be fun, but it should also help children to learn and develop. Playworkers may find themselves involved in imaginative play, sports, drama, music, outdoor activities, cooking or creative activities. Playworkers enable children to experiment through play and learn more about themselves and the world around them. Play can help children to socialise and boost their confidence.

Skills and personal qualities

Playworkers should:

- be able to build good relationships with children, their parents and carers
- be good at listening to, and socialising with, children
- understand the needs of children and young people
- provide a stimulating but safe environment
- be aware of health and safety issues
- be able to work well as a member of a team
- have good communication skills
- be flexible and adaptable
- have a sense of fun
- be patient and tolerant
- have a reasonable level of physical fitness.