



Creating accessible play spaces

A toolkit

November 2017

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Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.

Alison John and Associates (AJA) is a group of disabled and non-disabled trainers and consultants delivering disability awareness and challenging disablism training to all service providers. It specialises in delivering inclusion, equalities and play and early years training and consultancy which is participative, engaging and aims to inspire change.

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Working to remove barriers to play spaces to enable play to happen

Introduction

Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing and therefore to their families and to communities as a whole. All children have an inborn urge to play and research suggests that playing has an impact on the physical and chemical development of the brain – influencing children's ability to 'adapt to, survive, thrive and shape their social and physical environments'¹.

The right to play is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Play has been described as a vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood² and through play, children develop resilience and flexibility, contributing to physical and emotional wellbeing.

For children themselves, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives.

*'Really, what I want is to make friends and take part in what's going on where I live.'*³

Playing with or alongside other children provides a range of benefits for all children, such as:

- A sense of belonging
- Fun and enjoyment
- Skill development.

For disabled children, these benefits are particularly important because they support the development of other skills. When disabled children can participate with other children, all children develop a better understanding of the full range of abilities. These early experiences shape our tolerance and understanding of difference. A more inclusive environment makes it easier for children to assist one another, which reduces the need for adults to be overly present. Supporting children to access and use play spaces in the early years will support later independence and confidence in using public spaces.

All children are morally and legally entitled to play within their own community whatever their culture, impairment, gender, language, background, behaviour or need. Children and young people need and are entitled to quality places and time for play as part of their everyday life within their own community.

Some disabled children face isolation, exclusion and loneliness. This may be due to an environment that is poorly designed, attitudes which reinforce our differences or the effects of conditions and impairments which limit self-independence and participation.

*'Disabled children and young people face barriers from lack of provision, lack of support, poor access to buildings and negative attitudes which, notwithstanding legislation and policies, prevent them from participating like non-disabled children and young people.'*⁴

Removing barriers to quality play spaces:

- Ensures that they are accessible to the greatest number of children and their carers
- Supports children of all ages and abilities to play together
- Enhances the local sense of community and supports community engagement and wellbeing
- Enables children to benefit from all the positives of playing – contributing to their overall sense of health and happiness.

The current basis to removing barriers mainly focuses on the physical environment. This toolkit aims to focus on the sensory and social environments associated with playing. Considering physical, social and sensory factors increases the quality of play spaces for all children, offering a rich play environment for all.

Disabled children are children who experience discrimination on the grounds of their impairments. This toolkit aims to support stakeholders to take reasonable and anticipatory steps to ensure that children with impairments make good use of playgrounds and play spaces.

When we design spaces that get it right for disabled children, it follows that it will meet the play needs of most children and the wider community.

Who is it for?

This toolkit is intended to support local authorities, town and community councils, politicians at all levels, open space planners, housing associations and parks and playground managers to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 in terms of developing and upgrading accessible play spaces.

It is also intended to provide guidance to local authorities and their partners in meeting statutory play sufficiency duties with regards to securing play provision. It will also be useful for playground manufacturers, parents and community members to understand the opportunities and challenges.

Why has it been developed?

It has been developed by Play Wales and Alison John and Associates following a growing number of queries from parents and providers about providing accessible play opportunities for disabled children in their communities. A small focus group of parents, local authority play area managers, play development officers and representatives of children's organisations advised on the toolkit content.

What is it designed to do?

This toolkit is designed to provide clear and concise information that helps to create play spaces that enable all children to play in, along with friends and family.

It contains information intended to help understand and address issues of concern and it provides practical, step-by-step tools and templates for undertaking work linked with removing the barriers to accessing play space faced by disabled children and their families.

This toolkit focuses on spaces that have been designed specifically for play, such as playgrounds and play areas. However, it can be applied to many spaces throughout our communities and public space whether or not they have been specifically allocated for children's play.

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Play and play value



Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves – it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity.

Play value

The term play value describes the range and quality of play opportunities and experiences offered by a play environment. It is also used to describe the value a space, or piece of equipment, brings to children to help them extend their play. A space rich in play value creates opportunities for a variety of physical, social and sensory play experiences. It offers all children and young people the opportunity to freely interact with or experience the following:

- **Other children and young people** – with a choice to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, fall out, and resolve conflict
- **The natural world** – weather, the seasons, bushes, trees, plants, insects, animals and mud
- **Loose parts** – natural and man-made materials that can be manipulated, moved and adapted, built and demolished
- **The natural elements** – earth, air, fire and water
- **Challenge and risk taking** – both on a physical and emotional level
- **Playing with identity** – role play and dressing up
- **Movement** – running, jumping, climbing, balancing and rolling
- **Rough and tumble** – play fighting
- **Senses** – sounds, tastes, textures, smells and sights.

The importance of play spaces

Good spaces to play within a community show the people in that community that playing is important. They create a hub for a community, offering opportunities for adults and young people to become involved and socialise together. Children and families value quality play spaces, the relationships they make through them and the contribution they make to communities.

Play equipment can offer shared experiences and children with different abilities can play together in well-designed play spaces, and parents and carers who are themselves disabled should be able to gain access to play spaces when they accompany their children.

To make the most of a play space, children need to be able to adapt and shape it to meet their play needs and it needs to change over time and provide new opportunities for play. The addition of loose fill surfaces such as sand or bark, the inclusion of water, trees and bushes will provide a supply of loose parts that change with the seasons, which children will use in a variety of ingenious ways.

Loose parts are objects or components that can be moved around, adapted, built, demolished, mixed, or imbued with imaginary qualities – for instance:

Paper, stones, sticks, water, sand, leaves, feathers, tools, nails, boxes, fabric, ropes, wood, pots, animals, plants, metal, clay, mud, tables, chairs, blankets, everything and anything that can be moved or manipulated as part of play.

The best play spaces contain a wide variety of loose parts and children are free to play with them as they wish.

Key features of good play spaces or things to consider:

- Spaces are designed with the needs and characteristics of the local community in mind in identifying location and likely range of use and users
- Spaces have a distinct local character in terms of the particular design, material and features included
- The natural features, such as existing trees and natural puddles, of the spaces are respected and integrated
- The space and context as a whole is as important as individual play features in creating successful play spaces
- Spaces include play materials and play features that are non-prescriptive and therefore encourage imagination and suggest many different ways of being played on or with
- Spaces do not rely on manufactured play equipment for the play opportunities offered. Spaces use manufactured equipment to enhance what is on offer
- The design of the spaces ensures that when play equipment is used, it is integrated with and complements other features in the play space
- The spaces incorporate opportunities for children to encounter or create challenge and risk.

A note on specific equipment

When the severity of the child's condition or impairment means they need specific equipment, it is likely that the equipment needs to be specific to them as an individual.⁵ This is a very small number of children. It is important for us to recognise that there is not a 'one size fits all' approach to meeting the needs of all children. It is also necessary to ensure children can play with their friends in the play space and that play is enhanced by specific pieces of equipment.

Specialist equipment can provide a valuable opportunity for some disabled children to experience the sensation of swinging and spinning, but often this equipment is very costly. In the case of some equipment, in particular wheelchair swings, some people are concerned that, due to their design, they may promote segregation and are not inclusive because they are generally fenced and locked.

Swinging is a very popular activity in play spaces. If swings are accessible by wheelchairs, stable enough to get onto and offer a choice of seat designs and support, they can be accessible for many children.

Where it has been determined that children would benefit from the installation of specialist equipment, we should consider:

- The costs and the benefits, particularly of a wheelchair swing compared to other alternatives. For instance, would more communal swings add value to a larger number of children's experiences?
- The seating on swings. Is it flat and firm? Are seats wide enough, strong and flexible for an adult to sit on? Is there back support? How easy is it to make the transfer from a wheelchair? Does the seat have handles to aid swinging?
- Placing the equipment on an interesting route within the play space, and close to where other children are playing.

- If fenced, can we make the equipment accessible for everyone by not locking it?
- If fenced, could we use a lower fence and use material that does not block the equipment from view.

It is not practical to provide a full range of facilities at every play space. Play spaces will vary in size and accessibility as they will be designed to serve different users travelling from different distances.

What is important is that decisions are made based on up to date information. Investing in quality and accessibility in the variety of spaces across a local authority area has a positive impact on all children.



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Useful definitions

Designated play space

A place that has been designated specifically for children's play. It might include traditional playground equipment or natural features such as sand, logs, water and rocks. It may also contain other amenities or facilities such as bins, toilets and seating.

From the glossary of terms within *Wales: a Play Friendly Country*, statutory guidance to local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas:

- **Door-step:** A play space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.
- **Local:** A larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.
- **Neighbourhood:** A larger space or facility which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.
- **Playable space or shared public space:** A place where children can play that is not specifically designated for play and which does not have play as its principal or only function.
- **Destination play areas:** A play space within a key site, such as a park. It is aimed at attracting families and similar groups for longer visits and tends to be the same size or larger than neighbourhood sites.
- **Peripatetic playwork (play rangers) project:** An open access, often short term project staffed by a small team of trained playworkers, visiting a different place, a park, estate play area or other public space, once or twice a week for a couple of hours. They will be

equipped with ideas and equipment, and will work to help children access places to play in their local area, and to reassure parents that it is safe for children to play out.

- **Playwork:** A highly skilled profession that enriches and enhances children's play. It takes place where adults support children's play but it is not driven by prescribed education or care outcomes⁶.

Play or playground equipment

Equipment that is designed for playing – such as swings, slides and climbing structures.

Inclusive play

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.

Accessible play space

A play space that is designed with no unreasonable environmental barriers to the space or movement within and around it. There is ease of access to the play opportunities within it. However, it does not remove acceptable challenge, which is an important feature of quality play space. An accessible play space can be used by more than one child at a time in more than one way. There are a variety of ways to move through the space and a selection of pieces of equipment to be used and tried.

Universal design

The term 'universal design' was coined by Ronald Mace to describe the concept of designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability or status in life⁷.

Universal design focuses on creating a space that meets the needs of the greatest number of people possible. A play space based on universal design means that all people can use the majority of features. Moving around the space is easy and allows access to equipment with minimal effort. There is plenty of space to move around features and equipment.

Impairment

An injury, illness, or congenital condition that causes or is likely to cause a long-term effect on physical appearance and/or limitation of function within the individual that differs from the commonplace⁸.

Disabled children and young people

Those who experience discrimination on the grounds of their impairment and/or medical condition. Discriminatory practices such as negative attitudes, inaccessible environments and institutional systems can make it difficult and sometimes impossible for disabled children and young people to experience the play process fully.



Balancing risks and benefits

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), in conjunction with the Play Safety Forum (PSF), has issued a joint high-level statement to promote a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play.⁹ The statement emphasises that when planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to consider the risks and the benefits.

Risk management in play provision involves balancing risk and benefits in a strategic way. So, it is vital for providers to have a clear, explicit policy framework for play provision that states overall service goals, that informs the approach to risk and safety, and that underpins the reasons for decisions. A policy that makes explicit the need for challenging play opportunities, with an acceptable degree of risk, will help providers resist unjustified negligence claims. A risk management policy template is included in the 'Tools to assist' section of this toolkit.

A policy framework provides the context for making risk-benefit assessments. Risk-benefit assessment brings together an informed analysis of both risks and benefits. *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*¹⁰ sets out a descriptive form of risk-benefit assessment that allows providers to state in writing all the relevant considerations behind a given judgment or procedure. The HSE was consulted in the production of this publication. It endorses the sensible, proportionate, reasonable and balanced advice to play providers on managing participant safety set out in the guidance.

When play spaces have the right equipment and materials, in the right place, with the right policies and procedures in place for inspection and maintenance, then the play provision will be as safe as is reasonably practicable, which is what the law requires. It is important to put issues of safety and risk into context. Many children and young people actively seek adventurous, exciting play experiences with a degree of risk.



‘Too much energy and focus is placed on physical risk. Risk assessment forms fail to acknowledge that play exposes all children and young people to more than just physical risk. As responsible adults, we have a responsibility for keeping children safe but this extends to supporting all children and young people to manage risk for themselves, not just physical risk but also the intellectual, social and emotional risk they expose themselves to.

We can all remember the times as a child when we felt unsure how or if we could do something, of being afraid that we might be making a fool of ourselves in front of our peers or feeling upset or angry because we hadn’t been included in something by our friends. But we learnt to deal with the risks and yes, sometimes it hurt physically or emotionally and we made the wrong decisions but we learnt from it and rarely made the same mistakes again.

Disabled children and young people have few opportunities to play independently, and let’s face it we all took more risks as children when adults weren’t around. Consequently, disabled children and young people are much less likely to be given the chance to experience the emotional, intellectual and social risks that enable children to master challenges and deal with their emotional responses to them.

Is risk, riskier for disabled children?

As parents, carers and loving human beings, it is completely understandable that we want to keep children safe at all times.

When we are responsible for the care and welfare of a disabled child, we may have been told by health professionals and society at large, even by our own sense of guilt, that we must take more care of, and take responsibility for ensuring the life of this disabled child is as easy as possible.

The term ‘mollycoddling’ usually springs to mind when we think about disabled children being exposed to risk. Not just the physical types but the emotional, intellectual and social opportunities of experiencing: losing, rejection, succeeding and getting things wrong.

There is an argument that suggests the more adults mollycoddle, the more children will push the boundaries. Whether us adults like it or not, both disabled and non-disabled children will seek out opportunities to take risks and push boundaries.

As I reflect on my own childhood, I smile to myself and recall the many times I would deliberately go looking for dangerous and naughty things to do. For me it was about the thrill of getting away with it. Would I be caught? What would happen if I got caught?

I vividly remember waiting for the night nurse to finish doing her round, getting out of bed, crossing the dormitory, and helping my best friend Jenny into her wheelchair. Then we would sneak off to the boys’ dormitory, to give them all a goodnight kiss in exchange for cigarettes.

As I look back on this and identify the different kinds of risk I took, are they any different to the risks that non-disabled children take? Didn’t I just want that similar thrill of being scared, caught, being told off, having power, breaking the rules? These feelings and challenges we experience through play, are needed to equip all of us for life.

All children need and want to take risks as they play, enabling them to test their limits, undertake new experiences and develop their skills. Children would never learn to ride a bicycle, swim, climb a tree or use a skateboard unless they were intrinsically motivated to respond to challenges that involve the risk of failing or being injured.

Disabled children have a greater need for play providers to provide opportunities to take risk as they are often not given the choice or opportunity to enjoy the same range of risks as those enjoyed by their non-disabled peers.’

Adapted from an article written by Alison John, an equality, inclusion, and play advocate and trainer. It first appeared in the Spring 2016 issue of Play for Wales magazine.

Feedback from children and parents

What parents have said

Parents of children with various conditions and impairments identified a range of issues that they encounter when attempting to access some play spaces:

- Facilities not designed to include parents and carers
- Inappropriate surfaces
- Difficulty in navigating paths and getting to features
- Lack of accessible support facilities such as accessible toilets, change areas, seats, car parking and fencing
- Not being able to participate due to the design of equipment
- Not being able to participate due to the popularity of the equipment
- Not feeling welcome or belonging
- Difficulties in monitoring and meeting the needs of other children in their care.

Priorities for parents of disabled children include:

- An accessible path of travel to the park and in and around the space
- Features or things to do beyond fixed equipment
- Enjoyable for children with a range of ages and abilities
- Space that encourages interaction with other children and family members
- Accessible amenities and support facilities.

What children have said

A Bevan Foundation survey found that although visits to the park were mentioned as regular activities that disabled children enjoy, more than a third said they rarely or never visited a park¹¹.

Informal discussions between Play Wales and disabled children and young people reveal that they:

- Are fearful of bullying or teasing
- Don't feel welcome in parks, play areas and open spaces
- Find the spaces for playing and socialising boring and without enough choice
- Feel that they are overprotected by the adults in their lives
- Are worried about trying something new
- Feel that people are nervous around a person with disabilities
- Feel embarrassed because sometimes they are 'stared at'.

*'I'm normally over protected and it was good to do something that felt out of control.'*¹²



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Tool 1: Steps we can take to develop inclusive play spaces

Review and assess all of the play spaces within the local authority area and identify if they provide a range of diverse opportunities for children and families. Identify deficits.



Determine a budget (which includes longer term costs).
This should include anticipatory activity – what budget will be needed to update and improve the area?



Undertake a community profile. Consider: population data, how children and families will travel to the site, is there local space which can be used or improved (such as school grounds).
Use Tool 2: Play space audit to help identify local playable space and use Tool 3: Play space access assessment to consider access requirements.



If engagement activities are part of the plan, be sure not to raise expectations and be honest about what can be achieved.



Determine the location. Consider: play value and attractiveness, and access for all potential users.



Based on the community profiling and engagement, determine other facilities to be included, such as:

- Seating
- Shelter and shade
- Cycle storage
- Toilets and changing facilities
- Parking and other access routes
- Litter bins
- Signage.



Revisit and revise budget (which includes longer term costs). This should include anticipatory activity – what budget will be needed to update and improve the area?



Develop a design brief and appoint designer. Include the requirements for design which includes opportunities for physical, social and sensory experiences:

- Physical activity
- Sensory stimulation
- Quiet spaces
- Social spaces
- Shelter
- Natural features
- Risk and challenge.

Ask the designer to clearly identify the accessible features of the design. In particular, when assessing design submissions, look for:

- Play value
- Accessible paths to and through the space
- Natural elements
- Loose parts and other materials
- How disabled children might use the space (see Tool 5: Anticipating equity and planning reasonable design)
- How, through contract administration the designer proposes to engage with contractors to ensure good communication.



Build or install the play space.



Maintain and review usage. Identify how it might be improved.

Tool 2: Play space audit

Site name:				Site observation made by:	
Site observations:	Observation day and date:	Observation period (e.g. half term/after school/ during school day/weekend/ evening):	Time of observation period:	Weather:	
Key features of site:	Brief description of main features including access points (such as slopes, trees, shrubbery, vantage points, areas to hide, things to climb up or clamber over, seating and gathering points, level areas; as well as any manufactured play equipment features that may have been installed). Note any specific areas of usage shown, for example by worn grass, broken branches, bike tracks, litter or graffiti. These can be further detailed below in any activity observations made				
Usage by children and adults: (numbers)	Male:	Female:	Approx. age (e.g. under 5, 5-8, 8-13, 13-15, 15+):	Total:	
Children/young people in a group:					
Solo children/ young people:					
Accompanied by adults:					
Adult only:					
Activity observed by presence of children and young people:			If not present, record of signs of children and young people being there and making use of site:		
Walking, travelling through the space:					
Sitting, gathering, hanging out:					

Riding bikes, scooters and skateboards:		
Use of natural features (e.g. trees, bushes, mounds and hills):		
Playing with elements (water, earth [mud], fire and air):		
Use of senses (taste, smell, sight, sound and texture):		
Movement (e.g. running, jumping, climbing, balancing and rolling):		
Rough and tumble:		
Risk and challenge (physical):		
Playing with props or loose parts:		
Playing with identity:		
Use of motorised vehicles (e.g. motorbikes or quads):		
Dog walking:		

Play space action plan

Recommendations for developing and enhancing the site to increase ‘playability’, including any actions for protecting the way that children and young people are currently using the site, making reference to activities observed.

Actions for developing and enhancing playable space:	Actions for protecting playable space:
For example – Children are making use of the raised wooded area alongside the play space for building dens and playing tip. Access to this area is currently blocked by a wire fence that has been pushed down – explore formalising access to this space.	For example – The existing swings are in need of refurbishment but are extremely well used. Refurbish and incorporate into new space design. Consider more natural safety surfacing (sand or bark).

Play needs action plan

How do the observations contribute to evidence about what children/the community want?

Evidence of need	Actions
For example – Observations show that children enjoy climbing trees at the edge of the site.	For example – Ensure that design brief asks play designer to maintain access to the trees.

Tool 3: Play space access assessment

Designated play space – a place that has been designated specifically for children’s play

Type A

Door-step space or facility: a small space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.

Type B

Local spaces and facilities: a larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.

Type C

Neighbourhood spaces and facilities: a larger space or facility for informal recreation which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.

Type D

Open space: land laid out and used for the purposes of public recreation or has public value.

Name of site:	
Type of site (A, B, C, D)	
Key features of site: Brief description of main features including access points (such as slopes, trees, shrubbery, vantage points, areas to hide, things to climb up or clamber over, seating and gathering points, level areas, as well as any manufactured play equipment features that may have been installed). Note any specific areas of usage shown, for example by worn grass, broken branches, bike tracks, litter or graffiti	
Date of assessment:	
Time:	
Weather:	
Name of assessor:	

Signage	✓	✗
Signs include the name of the site operator		
Please record details of the site operator below whether on the sign or not		
Sign includes contact details of how to report damage or accidents such as contact telephone number		
Sign has location of nearest public telephone for contacting emergency services (not essential)		
No Dogs signs present (recommended)		
No Kite Flying message on sign if overhead electric cables nearby (recommended)		
Road signs to warn motorists of the presence of a playground / 20mph zone		
Signage clear and easy to read including for those with visual impairments		
Signs to welcome disabled children and families		
No Smoking message on signs		
Any further comments on signage		

Location	✓	✗
Situated in an easily accessible location		
Well signed so it is easy to find		
Evidence of lighting, for example street or other lamps		
Entrances and exits to the play area are accessible by a wheelchair – gates are easy to navigate and open and close for a person in a wheelchair plus minimum width of 82cm (32 inches)		
There are no sudden changes in heights of paths making them hard to navigate with a buggy or wheelchair		
Hand rails are provided where they might assist a person with mobility difficulties		
Surfaces are clear and slip/trip free to access play area		
The site is near to a car park or parking bays		
Nearby pavements have dropped kerbs for wheelchairs and buggies		
Controlled vehicle access to the site would improve access for those with mobility issues (for example if the play area is a long walk from nearest parking area)		
There are toilets on or nearby the site		
There is shelter on the site		
There are public transport connections near to the site		

Care and maintenance	✓	x
Equipment on the site is well maintained (list below)		
The site is well maintained		
Gateways and entrances are working properly		
Litter bins are provided		
If provided, litter bins are properly maintained		
The site is tidy and no litter is visible		
There is no broken glass on the site		
There is no evidence of dog fouling on the site		
There are bins for dog waste in areas close to the site		
Toilets are provided on or near the site		
If provided, toilets are clean and well maintained		
If provided, shelter or seating is in good working order		
List equipment on site:		
Further comments on site and equipment:		

Play value	✓	✗
The play area looks inviting and exciting in a way that encourages play		
Planting e.g. bushes, trees and shrubs add play value		
Natural features e.g. banks, dips and dry stone walls add play value		
Equipment has been adapted to be accessible to children with impairments (e.g. extra strong swing seats with safety straps or harness, ground level roundabouts to enable wheelchair access)		
There are sufficient spaces between equipment for manoeuvring wheelchairs		
The surfaces in the play area enable a wheelchair user (whether parent or child) to move around the play area e.g. there are paths without steep gradients made out of tarmac or wetpour (grass is a difficult surface for wheelchair users)		
Play equipment has sufficient space around it to allow children to play and move safely between activities		
The site/play equipment meets the needs of pre-school children aged 1 to 3		
The site/play equipment meets the needs of primary children aged 4 to 11		
The site/play equipment meets the needs of young people aged 11 to 16		
Seating is available for parents and carers		
Seating is available for children aged 1 to 10		
Children can sit on top of or under equipment or natural features		
There are areas that provide shelter and shade		
There are opportunities for the following types of play:		
Social play with others		
Playing alone		
Running		
Jumping		
Swinging		
Sliding		
Balancing		

Rolling		
Rough and tumble		
Ball games		
Wheeled play equipment such as bikes and scooters		
Role, identity or imaginative play		
Nooks and crannies for hide and seek or den making		
Trails through bushes or trees		
Loose parts to make dens		
Elemental play with fire		
Elemental play with sand or earth		
Elemental play with water		
Ball games are allowed		
Wheeled play equipment is allowed on the play area		
The play space has been designed to complement the site		
There are features which allow for risk and challenge		
The play area is well used by children, for example evidence of well-worn paths and worn patches under equipment		
Further comments on play value:		

This access assessment draws on materials developed and piloted by RAY Ceredigion. It has been developed using the following resources:

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (2004) *Signs for Play Areas*. Birmingham: RoSPA.

Welsh Government (2012) *Creating a Play Friendly Wales – Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on assessing for sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas*. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Play Wales (2015) *Developing and managing play spaces*. Cardiff: Play Wales.

Play England (2009) *Tools for evaluating play provision: the local play indicators*. London: Play England.

Goodridge, C. (2008) *Inclusion by Design – a guide to creating accessible play and childcare environments*. London: KIDS.

Tool 4: Self-assessment – designing and providing an accessible play space

Accessibility: design considerations

Accessibility to play space should be designed in at inception or addressed in any improvement plans. The following needs to be considered:

- Approaching and use of the space
- Gates and other entrances
- Paths and routes around the space
- Surfacing
- Play equipment, materials or features that encourage inclusive play
- Access to spaces for gathering and socialising
- Facilities (such as parking and toilets)
- Sensory features (plants, sounds, tactile, interesting things to look at and explore).

Features column: sets accessibility features.

Red, Amber, Green (RAG) Status is a tool to communicate status quickly and effectively.

RAG status

Criteria fully met	Green
Criteria partially met	Amber
Criteria not met	Red

RAG status column: to be used by an organisation to show its assessment of whether that feature is fully met, partially met, or not met.

Evidence to support strengths column: use to provide the reason for the chosen status and how the evidence is held.

Shortfall column: use to explain the areas in which the organisation does not fully meet the criteria.

Identified action column: use to show the intended action to identify shortfalls.



Features	RAG status	Evidence to support strengths	Barriers	Identified actions
<p>To what extent can children and their families get to the space and move around it?</p> <p>The publication <i>Inclusion by Design</i>¹³, contains useful guidance on how to make play facilities as accessible as possible to all children</p>		<p>Things to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is easy to get from the street or a car • Everyone uses the same entry points • There is good access through the space and to the main activities • There is good headroom so that users can fit under equipment • Changes in levels are manageable 		
<p>To what extent are there opportunities to play with others?</p>		<p>Things to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are able to be included even if they may not be able to do what others are doing all of the time • There are a range of activities and features 		
<p>To what extent does the space meet the needs of the variety of its users?</p>		<p>Things to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a range of activities and features (see key features of good play spaces – page 8) 		

<p>To what extent is the space welcoming and appealing?</p>		<p>Things to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a range of opportunities (see key features of good play spaces – page 8) • Users and their families do not feel uncomfortable or embarrassed and that unnecessary attention is on them • The space offers opportunities for exploration, creativity and socialisation • There are spaces to gather and rest 		
<p>To what extent do the facilities meet various support needs identified within the community profile?</p>		<p>Things to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users can use the toilet in privacy • Users can use changing facilities in privacy • There is dedicated accessible parking • Cars are not parked near or on dropped kerbs • There is seating and shelter 		
<p>What action has been planned or taken to address shortfalls? What are the achievements?</p>				

Tool 5: Anticipating equity and planning reasonable design

It is important to remain mindful of the range of individual, multiple or a combination of medical impairments and conditions, which need consideration for children, siblings, family members and those who might be accompanying them.

Mobility issues

- Dependant on a wheelchair
- Use of mobility aids
- Have low levels of stamina
- Need to be manually lifted
- Restricted use of arms or hands.

Things to consider

Limited ability to move freely affects participation and independence. Design may require someone to assist, accompany or transfer children to and from play equipment and features.

What might a reasonable design be?

- A good path into the space from the path, street or car park
- Ease of travel to spots for socialising
- Surfaces that are able to be 'wheeled on' and allow access to as many structures and features as possible, but still offer variety and fun
- Items that support interaction and that can be reached from wheelchair height, such as sand or water trays and musical items
- There is head room under structures
- There are turning spaces for wheelchairs, especially in areas for socialising
- There are items, such as loose parts play materials, to play with at ground level
- There are opportunities for those that use a wheelchair to get out and reach items such as sand, water, loose parts and other items that are easy to manipulate and don't require fine motor skills or strength

- Access to natural elements
- There are tunnels that a person can be wheeled through or navigate through with some independence
- There are good handgrips and rails
- Adequate facilities for assistive or service dogs
- Consider tactile features
- Narrow paths through unmown areas of grass can help exploration.

Cognitive processing conditions

- Developmental delay
- Learning difficulties
- Challenging behaviour.

Things to consider

Some children have more than one medical diagnosis and so have a set of conditions that are unique to them. Physical or emotional effects may accompany learning disabilities. Children with cognitive conditions may require more supervision.

Some impairments will affect the ability to perceive danger or unacceptable challenge. Some children will be attracted to features further afield and may run towards them. Children who are chronologically older may benefit from activities traditionally aimed at younger children and may require larger equipment. Others may have difficulty in social situations, and in particular, may find it difficult to interpret situations.

What might a reasonable design be?

- The space is designed so that it is easy to understand how to get around and use it
- Signage, when needed, is clear and uses symbols or pictures
- Provide choice in spaces – ones that are busy and active and quieter ones

- The use of natural boundaries to help prevent wandering off
- Consider fencing some spaces, particularly if they are close to hazards
- A good range of physical challenges so that children can identify what feels right for them
- Equipment that enables side-by-side activity for those that require a greater level of supervision
- Spaces which support children to be 'on their own' without stigma attached.

Mental health conditions

- Anxiety disorders
- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Depression
- Post-traumatic stress disorder.

Things to consider

All children benefit from a sense of security and stability, which can come from good community resources and play spaces. These can facilitate trust, respect, self-esteem, and independence.

What might a reasonable design be?

- A range and choice of different types of activity within the space, such as active and quiet, enclosed places and open spaces
- Natural features
- Spaces which support children to be 'on their own' without stigma attached
- A range of loose parts play materials to support exploration, creativity and contemplation
- Sensory features, such as water, sand and loose fill.

Sensory impairments

- Deaf
- Hard of hearing
- Blind
- Partially sighted
- Deafblind.

Things to consider

Hearing impairments, visual impairments and multisensory impairments affect the ability to communicate and to get around. Communication often requires a great deal of concentration and effort and can be tiring.

Children with a visual impairment benefit from cues to help them move around the play space and find bits of it that they enjoy. They may also be more vulnerable to hazards that might be clear to others and some may use a cane or other aid to move around.

Children who are deaf or have a hearing impairment may sometimes find balancing difficult and can find socialising challenging.

The environment, such as lighting and background noise, should be considered to assist those with sight and hearing impairments. Sensory qualities are important, but overloading with these should be avoided – too many different sounds, scents and images can be confusing.

What might a reasonable design be?

- Planting that stimulates the sense of smell and touch
- A mix of materials that offer a range of textures and shapes to touch
- Careful consideration of surfacing so that it is not acoustically overwhelming
- Raised edges and textures can help with direction

- Strong cues of colour at level changes, steps and on hand grips
- The use of strong colours and light
- Features, resources and materials that offer sound and gentle vibration
- Quieter spaces shielded from excessive background noise
- The opportunity to explore elements such as sand, water and other natural features
- Features that block out the noise of wind and passing traffic
- Clear and concise information on any signage
- Adequate facilities for assistive or service dogs.



Tool 6: Site design considerations

Feature	Advantages	Challenges
Surfacing – loose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readily available • Looks attractive • Has a natural appearance • Can be played with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular maintenance is required and involves raking and topping up • Concerns over litter, syringes and animal fouling • Makes approach difficult for some
Surfacing – synthetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides accessible access for people with mobility issues • Colour can be added to provide visual cues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be costly • Repairs can be difficult • Can create a 'sterile' environment and does not provide access to dirt, water or sand
Surfacing – grass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost effective • Looks attractive • Has a natural appearance • Can be played with • Can be landscaped to offer different heights and areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make approach difficult for some
Fencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to support children who wander off or can't hear when they are called • Helps adults feel more comfortable if there are hazards (water or roads) nearby 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limits where playing can happen • Child lock features on gates can be difficult to reach • Child lock features on gates can be expensive to replace • Fences may be used as a reason to not supervise children

<p>Ramps</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides challenge for some children • Provides accessible path of travel • Can be a play item • Enables children to reach a height • Enables some children to look out over the space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant cost • Should have features at the top that are interesting • May require safety features, such as guardrails which include texturing • May be difficult for adults to reach children who need help
<p>Provision of loose parts play materials</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low cost • Provides children with the resources they need to extend their play • Environments can be manipulated, things move and can be moved • Provides opportunities for children to play and explore • Encourages collaboration • Provides a range of textures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storage needs to be considered • Needs to be checked for suitability and for damage • Risks being taken away from sight • May encourage users to leave or dump unwanted litter
<p>Natural features and access to the elements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing with the elements contributes to children's knowledge and appreciation of the world around them • Features such as tree trunks, grassy mounds, sand, gravel and natural planting change naturally with the seasons to provide different play experiences throughout the year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance issues • May require greater levels of supervision
<p>Sensory features</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sand and water is fun and can be manipulated • Planting provides smells, colour and texture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thought needs to be given to location so the widest number of children can access • Drainage and cleaning issues

Tool 7: Planning for reasonable design when refurbishing play spaces

There may be opportunities to consider accessibility when existing play spaces are being changed or upgraded.

Things to consider include:

- Assess and improve the general play value through the provision of natural elements or loose parts play materials that can be accessed easily by the largest number of children
- Include and improve paths and in particular, provide access to popular activities
- Provide opportunities for socialising and for children to play together
- Build in shade
- Consult the community profile and assess the need for features such as toilets and boundaries
- Assess the value that current users apply to play items and features. It may be that some features will be retained even if they cannot easily be made accessible

- Determine if the adjustment achieves a number of goals such as participation, challenge and play value.

Factors to take into account when deciding whether a design feature is reasonable:

- Whether taking any particular step would be effective in preventing the substantial disadvantage
- The practicability of the step
- The financial and other costs of making the adjustment and the extent of any disruption caused
- The extent of the financial or other resources needed
- The availability of financial or other assistance to help, such as partnership funding
- The type and size of the provider
- The potential impact on the range of users.

Adjustment being considered	Explanation / rationale	Decision

Tool 8: Undertaking an options analysis

Following an assessment and review of existing spaces, the use of an options analysis can help providers determine the best decision, model and approach to take with regards to removing barriers and making play spaces more accessible.

The advantages and disadvantages for each option can be listed – scoring 1 point for each advantage and -1 for every disadvantage (a few examples have been included).

Option 1: Installing one large accessible play space and then improving the accessibility and value of others			
Things which might be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a designated budget for a large scale installation • There is evidence that families will travel to the space • It is easy to include a range of support amenities 			
Option 2: Addressing key issues across all play spaces			
Things which might be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving accessible paths of travel to most spaces • Add more natural elements • Add a new piece of equipment 			
Option 3: Identifying where the population of disabled children live, and seeking to improve their key local spaces			
Things which might be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The population data is readily available • There are existing spaces nearby • Children are already accessing the site 			

Option 4: Implement a peripatetic/outreach playwork (play rangers) project

Things which might be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a local organisation or department that can provide skilled playworkers • Parents would benefit from a playwork project to help them support children's play • Children would benefit from the presence of sensitive and skilled adults 			

Option 5: Identifying partners (such as schools) which already have accessible space and negotiating with them to make their playgrounds available outside of teaching hours

Things which might be considered:	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of children who attend the school and live nearby • The other support amenities available for families who travel to the site • The feasibility of incorporating the school playground into the council's planning, maintenance and inspection processes 			

Useful resource

Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours – a toolkit designed to help head teachers, governors and local organisations to work together to consider making school grounds available to local children out of teaching hours.

It is designed to provide clear and concise information for school communities and their partners to assess the feasibility of making

school grounds available for children's play out of teaching hours.

The toolkit considers a range of issues that need to be taken into account. It includes quotes from head teachers and case studies that demonstrate a range of models.

The toolkit is available to download for free at: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit

Tool 9: Play value – information for parents

Children's play areas are far from being the simple provision of a swing, a slide or a climbing frame. Landscaping, planting and natural features, for example, can offer a good deal of play value, sometimes more so than a piece of equipment. A combination of good landscaping, access to sensory features (such as sand, water and sound) often complement one another within the overall design for an area.

These features can create a good sense of place, allow children the opportunity to access a range of play experiences, and these benefit all children, their families and the wider community. Equipment should be part of an overall design rather than the only feature or focus in a play space.

Successful play spaces offer enjoyable play experiences to disabled children and young people, and to those who are non-disabled, whilst accepting that not all elements of the play space can be accessible to everyone. Children with different abilities can play together in well-designed play spaces, and parents and carers who are themselves disabled should be able to gain access to play spaces if they are to accompany their children.

Though many play providers focus on equipment that is wheelchair-accessible, it is important to recognise that this may meet the needs of a specific group of children. Non-prescriptive equipment, which can be used flexibly – such as a 'nest' swing – might be interesting to large numbers of children with different needs and abilities.¹⁴

Things to look out for when visiting play spaces

- Opportunities for social interaction, such as seating and other spaces with open ended possibilities (logs, stumps, walls and art features)
 - Creates a sense of belonging
 - Encourages communication for all children
 - Supports a co-operative and tolerant attitude
 - Provides participation for children unable to take part in more physical activity
- Opportunities to play cooperatively
 - Sand and water at raised level
 - Loose parts play materials to move and create with
 - Equipment which can accommodate groups of children
- Opportunities for sensory experiences
 - Shading and lighting
 - Gentle sound and music
 - Quiet spaces.

Tool 10: Promoting the play space

Easy to understand information about particular play spaces will help children and their families make best use of what is on offer.

Marketing materials and information might include:

- Address and location map
- Description of the space and its key features
- Type of space – neighbourhood or destination (see definition of terms on page 10)
- Public transportation links and active travel information
- Car parking facilities
- Description of support facilities
- Fencing or other boundaries information
- Nearby facilities.

There is also potential to include general information about play and play value to support parents to think more creatively about what might feature in a play space.

It may be useful to remind parents and carers about the range of ways that children can benefit from an accessible play space beyond the traditional activity of swinging, sliding and climbing. Providing information regarding the wide benefits of play may help parents to view the play space in a more holistic and realistic way.

Through play, children:

- Have fun
- Problem solve
- Manage and master challenge
- Explore, create and use their imagination
- Gain gradual independence
- Interact socially
- Are active
- Have access to nature and natural materials.



Tool 11: Risk management policy

Based on Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Framework: Policy, Routine and Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment¹⁴

Below is a template risk management policy that can be adapted for our own use. The policy sets out the risk-benefit approach to managing risks and allows us to input our own procedures, for example frequency of inspections and routine maintenance programme. Having a risk management policy goes beyond requirements for conducting a risk assessment, to give a robust framework for how organisations manage risks over time and use the knowledge gained to update and improve operational (paper-based) risk assessments.

Risk management policy

This policy has been developed to provide a coherent, consistent and balanced approach to the management of risk at _____ to ensure greater clarity of understanding around this issue.

In doing so, the policy aims to present some challenge to the existing risk averse nature of our society which can limit children's play experiences. The policy is supported by the High-Level Statement produced by the Health and Safety Executive and the Play Safety Forum. The High-Level Statement – *Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach* statement makes clear that:

- Play is important for children's wellbeing and development
- When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits.
- Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork
- Accidents and mistakes happen during play – but fear of litigation and prosecution has been blown out of proportion.

Risk management systems

Risk management in this policy is used to refer to all elements involved in the management of risk that can, and should, incorporate much more than paper risk assessments alone.

Where all these elements are appropriately supported there is potential to develop more robust and better informed risk management systems.

Providing for risk and challenge in play provision

_____ recognises that childhood is full of new experiences, which necessarily involve some degree of risk taking, whether it be physical or emotional. Childhood is a continuous process of trial and error with the potential for achievement, but also the inevitability of accidents. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving risk of injury. We have a duty of care to try and protect individuals accessing our services and facilities from the potentially, longterm, damaging effects of being exposed to serious and unreasonable physical and emotional harm.

However in doing this we must not overlook, or seek it at the expense of, also enabling children to actively participate in their own personal development of health, wellbeing and resilience, as a result of engaging in situations with uncertain outcomes.

Risk-benefit assessment

Decisions about what is reasonable and the desirability of children's engagement and involvement will be made using a risk-benefit approach. This process involves considering the potential benefits afforded by an opportunity alongside any potentially negative outcomes and then making a judgement about whether the potential for injury is proportional to the benefits. That is, do the potential benefits justify allowing risk of injury to remain?

For the purpose of risk-benefit assessments, benefits can be physical, emotional, social or environmental (and are likely to be a combination of all of these). Risk of injury can be identified by considering the likelihood of any potential injury occurring together with the potential severity of that injury.

Reasonable controls

During the risk-benefit process it may be necessary to identify control measures to reduce risk of injury to an acceptable level. However, the control measures that can reasonably be implemented will depend on the resources available. The cost of any potential control measures must be justified by being proportional to the risk of injury involved.

Prior to the implementation of control measures consideration should also be given to any potentially negative impacts that may result from making that intervention. For example, it is important that children's need to use their environment in novel and unexpected ways is not constrained in the search for providing absolute protection from injury.

Key points:

- There is intrinsic value in children experiencing uncertainty and personal challenge through their play.
- Children need to feel free to experience risk and challenge of their own choice. They will only be able to do this if we allow some degree of uncertainty to remain.

- The play provision we create aims to support children to experience reasonable levels of risk for themselves.
- There is a need for balance between ensuring appropriate levels of protection and preserving reasonable levels of uncertainty.
- We aim to manage risk so that whenever reasonably possible the risk of injury children are exposed to is proportional to the potential benefits associated with the situation.
- Controls will be reasonable and realistic whilst ensuring unnecessary risks are minimised.
- Risk management incorporates a number of different elements which work together to form a continuous cycle, improving our practice.
- Children are capable of managing some risk for themselves and their competency will develop as their experience grows.



Tool 12: Key considerations for new play areas

Produced by City & County of Swansea and developed by the Play Network's Play Spaces and Access Groups

Integrated play space guidance

The following guidance has been produced to guide providers of play equipment and the local authority in considering the needs of all children and young people when developing new play spaces or the updating of existing provision.

Having a 100% accessible playground is not possible as disabled children and young people have a wide variety of needs and satisfying the needs of one group of children may make the playground inaccessible to others.

To ensure that play spaces within the City and County of Swansea are as inclusive and accessible as possible this good practice guidance has been developed by Swansea Play Team in consultation with Swansea Play Access Group, parents/carers of disabled children, young people and disabled young people.

The recommendations made are modest in cost and can be reasonably considered in meeting a design brief, however we welcome the inclusion of innovative ideas.

Equipment

Key themes – generic

- Flush to floor roundabout with seat and space for wheelchair or buggy
- Double width slide – wide enough for two for example parent/carer and child. Variety of access to accommodate different needs and abilities.
- Swings to include at least two basket type swings wherever possible as well as a choice of others.
- Low level and high level sensory experiences – be imaginative for example tactile, audio, visual.
- Rocking, spinning and bouncing experiences to suit varied sizes and abilities.

- Climbing experiences to include low level experiences not just height driven. Include multi level experiences.

Access

Key themes – generic

- Surfacing must be wheelchair and buggy friendly.
- Gates wide enough and manageable for wheelchairs and buggies.
- Fencing to be installed only when there is an existing hazard adjacent e.g. car park, busy road, deep water or steep slope.
- Seating for all to be near play equipment, some with table.
- Adequate space around and easy access to the equipment.

Issues for local authority consideration

- For 'destination parks' specialist disability equipment to be considered in consultation with Play Access Group
- Disability parking spaces nearby
- Park wardens
- Mixed variety of play areas with and without boundaries – for choice – can be imaginative for example low level boundaries or boundaries that can be used for balancing
- Signage – respect for example other people to have a turn
- Public transport nearby
- Link with local access groups with regards to parking and other access issues
- Toilets and changing facilities – nearby at least
- Shaded areas from sun and rain.

References

¹ Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2008) *Play for a Change – Play, Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives*. London: National Children's Bureau for Play England.

² United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) *General Comment No. 17 on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31)*. Geneva: Committee on the Rights of the Child.

³ Young Ambassador, Play our Way project, Mencap Cymru.

⁴ Winckler, V. (2011) *Fair play for disabled children and young people in Wales*. Ebbw Vale: The Bevan Foundation.

⁵ John, A. and Whewey, R. (2004) *Can Play Will Play. Disabled children and access to outdoor playgrounds*. London: National Playing Fields Association.

⁶ SkillsActive (2010) *SkillsActive UK Play and Playwork Education and Skills Strategy 2011-2016*. London: SkillsActive.

⁷ *General Comment No. 17*.

⁸ Disability Wales (no date) *An Introduction to the Social Model of Disability*.

⁹ Health and Safety Executive (2012) *Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach*.

¹⁰ Ball, D., Gill, T. and Spiegel, B. (2012) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*. London: National Children's Bureau for Play England on behalf of the Play Safety Forum.

¹¹ *Fair play for disabled children and young people in Wales*.

¹² Young Ambassador, Play our Way project, Mencap Cymru.

¹³ Goodridge, C. (2008) *Inclusion by Design – a guide to creating accessible play and childcare environments*. London: KIDS.

¹⁴ Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Group (2009) *Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Framework: Policy, Routine and Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment*.



Appendix 1: Policy and legislation that underpins the toolkit

Policy

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) includes 54 articles that define how children and young people have a right to be treated and how governments around the world should monitor the UNCRC. There are three articles in particular that are useful when considering inclusive and accessible play spaces.

Article 2 (non-discrimination)

The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities, whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. It doesn't matter where children live, what language they speak, what their parents do, whether they are boys or girls, what their culture is, whether they have a disability or whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

Article 23 (disability)

'Children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support so that they can lead full and independent lives.'

UN General Comment No. 9 on Article 23 states: *'Play has been recognised as the best source of learning various skills, including social skills. The attainment of full inclusion of children with disabilities in the society is realised when children are given the opportunity, places, and time to play with each other (children with disabilities and no disabilities).'*

Article 31 (play)

'Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.'

UN General Comment No.17 on Article 31 states:

'Multiple barriers impede access by children with disabilities to the rights provided for in article 31, including exclusion from informal and social arenas where friendships are formed and where play and recreation take place; isolation at the home; cultural attitudes and negative stereotypes which are hostile to and rejecting of children with disabilities; physical inaccessibility of, inter alia, public spaces, parks, playgrounds and equipment, cinemas, theatres, concert halls, sports facilities and arenas; policies that exclude them from sporting or cultural venues on the grounds of safety; communication barriers and failure to provide interpretation and adaptive technology; lack of accessible transport.'

Investment in universal design is necessary with regard to play, recreational, cultural, arts and sports facilities, buildings, equipment and services, consistent with the obligations to promote inclusion and protect children with disabilities from discrimination. States should engage with non-State actors to ensure the implementation of universal design in the planning and production of all materials and venues, for example, accessible entrances to be used by wheelchair users and inclusive design for play environments, including those in schools.'

A General Comment is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that seems to require further interpretation or emphasis. The aim of a General Comment is to raise the importance of an Article and increase accountability among countries that have signed up to the Convention.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 30

Ensures that children with disabilities have equal access to other children to participation in play, recreation, sporting and leisure activities.

Pro-active measures are needed to remove the barriers and promote accessibility to and availability of inclusive opportunities to participate in all these activities.

Legislation

Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

All local authorities are required to assess and secure the sufficiency of play opportunities for children within its area. *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*, statutory guidance states that local authorities should aim to offer play opportunities that are inclusive and encourage all children to play and meet together if they wish to.

Local authorities should identify barriers that some children may face in taking part in the range of play opportunities in their area. This could be due to disability or impairment, children's own communities' cultural values or other environmental or attitudinal factors. The play sufficiency assessment should cover the extent to which:

- Play opportunities are accessible to and inclusive of disabled children and may include support to access play opportunities
- Specialised provision is available for disabled children if there is a clearly identified need for this
- Community planning covers the requirements of disabled children to access play opportunities.

Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in all aspects of society. It replaces previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act, making the law easier to understand and strengthening protection in some situations. It sets out the different ways in which it's unlawful to treat a person.

Here we focus on disabled people, which includes disabled children.

Legal definition of a disability

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on someone's ability to do 'normal' daily activities.

- Substantial is more than minor or trivial. For example, it takes much longer than usual to complete a daily task like getting dressed.
- Long-term means 12 months or more. For example, a breathing condition that develops as a result of a lung infection.

Reasonable adjustments

Equality law recognises that bringing about equality for disabled people may mean the removal of physical barriers and/or providing additional support for disabled people. This is the duty to anticipate and make reasonable adjustments. The aim of the duty is to make sure that, as far as is reasonable, disabled and non disabled people have equal access to services and facilities.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is anticipatory – it requires providers to think ahead and make adjustments so that disabled people can participate in the whole play space and to avoid any disadvantage that might otherwise occur.

Play space providers should not wait until an individual disabled person or their parent or carer approaches them before considering how to meet the duty. It should be planned ahead and the needs of disabled visitors to play spaces and

the adjustments that may be needed should be anticipated.

The Equality Act doesn't state that providers have to anticipate the needs of every prospective user, but there is a requirement to think about and take reasonable and proportionate steps to overcome barriers that may impede people with different kinds of disabilities.

Public sector equality duty

The public sector equality duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) applies to public bodies and those carrying out public functions. It supports good decision-making by ensuring public bodies consider how different people will be affected by their activities. It also helps them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective, accessible to all, and which meet different people's requirements.

The equality duty requires public bodies to consider the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who are covered under the equality act and people who are not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic (for example race, disability or religion) and people who do not share it.

Having due regard means consciously thinking about the three aims of the equality duty as part of the process of decision making, including the provision of a robust health and safety management system.

How disabled people can be discriminated against

Types of discrimination:

- **Direct discrimination** – treating a disabled person less favourably than others
- **Indirect discrimination** – putting rules or arrangements in place that apply to everyone, but puts a disabled person at an unfair disadvantage
- **Harassment** – unwanted behaviour linked to a disabled person that violates someone's dignity or creates an offensive environment for them
- **Victimisation** – treating disabled people unfairly because they've complained about discrimination or harassment.

It can be lawful to have specific rules or arrangements in place, as long as they can be justified.



Useful websites and resources

Websites

Children in Wales

www.childreninwales.org.uk

Disability Wales

www.disabilitywales.org

Fields in Trust

www.fieldsintrust.org/wales_fit.aspx

Learning Disability Wales

www.ldw.org.uk

Mencap Cymru

<https://wales.mencap.org.uk>

Mental Health Foundation

www.mentalhealth.org.uk

National Deaf Children's Society Wales

www.ndcs.org.uk/family_support/support_in_your_area/wales/

RNIB Cymru

www.rnib.org.uk/wales-cymru-1

Scope Cymru

www.scope.org.uk

Sense Cymru

www.sense.org.uk/content/sense-cymru-touchbase-wales

The National Autistic Society

www.autism.org.uk

Resources

Davis, L., White, A. and Knight, J. (2009) *Nature Play: Maintenance Guide*. London: National Children's Bureau for Play England.

International Play Association (2015) *The Play Rights of Disabled Children IPA Position Statement*. Farringdon: IPA.

Play Wales (2013) *Play: inclusive provision*. Cardiff: Play Wales.

Welsh Government (2016) *Wales Children in Need Census 2016*. Open Government License.

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Torfaen Play