

# Play for Wales

Play news and briefing from  
the national charity for play

Issue 55 Spring 2020



Play and being well



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## Thank you

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to this magazine – we couldn't do it without you.

This issue of *Play for Wales*, as well as previous issues, is available to download at [www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

# Guest Editorial

**All of you, I know, have been bombarded with instructions: stay home, stay apart, stay well. But I want to give you one more piece of advice.**

As a child psychiatrist, I can assure you that play is essential for the physical, psychological and social development of healthy children. Even in times like these, when it is hard enough to survive the present, let alone think about the future.

Play is fun. That's a strange thing to talk about amidst all our anxieties, but children need to see life as happy and exciting. So perhaps you can set your own worries aside for a while and play with your children or the children in your care, in games, in drawing and painting, in just messing about. Who knows, it might make you feel better too.

Play is the context in which children find out about themselves and other people. That is difficult while we are all having to spend

much more time in our homes – but children can still make connections with their peer group through social media. We worried quite rightly before, about the amount of time they spent on their screens instead of getting out to play together, but now it seems a saving grace for staying connected.

Play is the way in which children take risks and find that they can overcome them, with a few bumps and bruises along the way. Of course, we must keep them safe in the face of all the dangers around us, and children will need to have the reasons behind the restrictions carefully explained. But children will want to push their play to the limit, to find that they can master the risks and build up their self-confidence. However, with hospital emergency departments struggling to cope we need to step in sooner rather than later when there is a risk to injury. It will be a difficult balance to strike.

Play is unpredictable, like life itself. One of the things we can give our children when they are off school, is the comfort of routines – mealtimes, homework if they've been given any, sitting down to learn things together. But they need room in all that structure for imagination too. Allow them to experiment, to go off on a track of their own, to break the routines occasionally, to surprise themselves, and you. Be amazed.

Play gives children the opportunity to try on different versions of themselves, like fancy dress. To discard some and hold on to others. This is me – this is what I want from life. But life is uncertain at the moment and none of us is sure where we will all end up. Children need to be assured that all this will be over one day, and that they can still rehearse their dreams for the future.

So good luck and thank you – for helping children to have fun, to stay connected, to take risks within an envelope of safety, to expand their imagination, and to keep their dreams alive. Through play.

**Dr Mike Shooter,  
Chair, Play Wales**



## News

# Supporting our sector

Across Wales practitioners are adjusting to working in a different way to support children's play during the coronavirus pandemic. There's been very little time to prepare and plan for this, but we will all want to continue to support children during this time of uncertainty.

To help practitioners we have developed a range of resources to support the play and playwork workforces.

### Playing actively in and around the home

This resource pulls together information about how playing actively makes a crucial contribution to children's health and well-being during times of stress. It also explores what the UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines say and provides a selection of simple play ideas to help all the family stay active at home.

### Top tips: Play, schools and coronavirus

School staff, childcare providers and playworkers are working hard to care for a number of vulnerable children or those of critical workers. These suggestions aim to help staff and the children in their care to support play during times of stress.

### Top tips: Playworking and coronavirus

Some playworkers may not be working face-to-face with children at this time. But, there are lots of practical

and useful ways to continue supporting children and advocating for play – from keeping in touch with families, to thinking about available resources, to catching up with some continuing professional development.

[www.playwales.org.uk](http://www.playwales.org.uk)

### ... and for parents and carers

We have developed a new indoor play section on our *Playful Childhoods* website to inspire parents and carers when children may need some play ideas. The section includes fun, easy playful ideas for children to enjoy in and around the home – from making indoor dens, to playing in the dark, to old school games such as hide & seek. The section also includes tips for playful parenting and getting involved in children's play.

We are also adding new posts to the *Playful Childhoods* blog regularly – the latest article features the reflections of an experienced home-schooling parent.

[www.playfulchildhoods.wales](http://www.playfulchildhoods.wales)

# Ministerial Review of Play – update



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

The Welsh Government has put the Ministerial Review of Play on hold for the short term. This allows the Welsh Government to focus resources to support the immediate response to the coronavirus pandemic. It also seems unlikely that the large numbers of stakeholders involved would be able to commit their time to the project under the current circumstances.

The Ministerial Review of Play is still a priority for the Welsh Government and it is expected to be reformed as soon as reasonably possible. The Welsh Government would like to thank the review's Steering Group members for their significant input into this work which has contributed towards understanding the issues and developing options for supporting children's play across Wales.

[www.gov.wales](http://www.gov.wales)

# Playday 2020



Playday 2020 will take place on Wednesday 5 August. We are delighted to announce that the theme for this year's Playday is ... *Everyday Freedoms Everyday Adventures.*

The Playday 2020 theme aims to highlight the importance of giving children and teenagers the freedom to play and have everyday adventures. As well as celebrating children's right to play, the Playday 2020 campaign recognises the impact of government restrictions and physical distancing on children's mental health and opportunities to play freely. This year we want to focus on the unique characteristics of play that we know help children make sense of the world around them and can alleviate their stress and anxiety, particularly during challenging and uncertain times.

- **Playing** is fun and is central to children's happiness
- **Playing** helps children's physical, mental and emotional health and well-being
- **Playing** boosts children's resilience, enabling them to cope with stress, anxiety and challenges

- **Playing** supports children to develop confidence, creativity and problem-solving skills
- **Playing** contributes to children's learning and development.

As in previous years we are calling on families and carers to support children to play in carefree ways, on Playday and everyday! Children will play wherever they are and whenever they can – as adults we can support this by making play a part of our daily life.

For the latest updates on this year's campaign follow us on Facebook and Twitter – and share your plans with us using the #Playday2020 hashtag.

[www.playday.org.uk](http://www.playday.org.uk)

*Playday is coordinated by PlayBoard Northern Ireland, Play England, Play Scotland and Play Wales*

## Playworks **Holiday Hunger** project

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and after discussion with the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, Julie Morgan AM, the Welsh Government has taken the decision to put the Playworks Holiday Hunger project on hold. The project was due to be rolled out across Wales during the 2020 school holidays starting with Easter.

Social distancing rules mean play settings cannot currently operate and putting the project on hold enables the Welsh Government to provide immediate support for vulnerable children and those who receive free school meals whilst schools are closed to the majority of pupils.

The Welsh Government is looking at childcare and play options for the future when social distancing and social mixing rules are relaxed. Holiday Hunger and other play initiatives will be considered as options to support the childcare and play sector to provide services going forward, taking into consideration children's mental



**Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government**

and physical health and well-being as well as families' childcare needs.

As with all sectors the current situation is having an impact on the childcare and play sector. The Welsh Government Childcare, Play and Early Years Division is continually working to look at how best to support childcare and play settings at this time. The Division is also liaising with colleagues in the Education Division to ensure that families whose children receive free school meals and other vulnerable children are fully supported.

[www.gov.wales](http://www.gov.wales)

# Access to play in crisis

The coronavirus pandemic is having an impact on children around the world. To support the heightened need to support children's right to play, the International Play Association (IPA) has developed new resources for parents and carers.

*IPA Play in Crisis: support for parents and carers* provides information and ideas to support children's play. Topics include the importance of playing in times of crisis and how to respond to children's play needs. The resources also provide information about issues that may concern parents and carers, such as children playing with difficult themes of loss, death and loneliness. The development of the new resources was led by Play Wales, for IPA - from the initial idea to the final production. They will form part of a wider set of IPA resources, to which Play Wales has also contributed.

## IPA Play in Crisis: support for parents and carers

ipa international play association  
promoting the child's right to play



President of the IPA, Robyn Monro Miller said:

*'The International Play Association recognises playing as a basic and vital part of the pleasure of childhood. We also see it as an essential part of all aspects of children's development. During crisis, play has a significant therapeutic role, helping children recover a sense of normality and joy.'*

[www.ipaworld.org](http://www.ipaworld.org)

# Play Sufficiency in Scotland



Scotland is following Wales' lead by legislating for children's play. We asked Play Scotland's Chief Executive, Marguerite Hunter Blair for an update:

The Planning (Scotland) Act received royal assent in July 2019. It places a statutory duty on local authorities to undertake Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSAs) as part of their strategic planning and for children to be consulted on local place plans. Alongside the Scottish Government's commitment to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law by 2021, these developments represent a game changing moment for children and young people in Scotland.

Play Scotland is working with the core group on the requirements in the Act around PSAs and Open Space Strategies and the links between them (in terms of the process and types of spaces covered), and the potential opportunity to take a holistic place-based approach. PSAs must be carried out by planning authorities for evidence

reports. The form and content of these will be outlined in secondary legislation. Good practice of how PSAs can be carried out will be covered in the accompanying Guidance. It has been incredibly helpful to be able to draw on the fantastic progress made in Wales in assessing play sufficiency.

Work is also in progress on a fourth National Planning Framework and Scottish Planning Policy (or NPF4), which will be the principal vehicle for this new legislation. The Scottish Government is aiming to lay both sets of regulations in Parliament in summer 2021, with prior consultation on both PSAs and Open Space Strategies in tandem, in September 2020.

[www.playscotland.org](http://www.playscotland.org)

# About this issue



Play Wales has put together this issue of *Play for Wales* to highlight the importance of play during times of uncertainty. Playing:

- helps to give children a feeling of normality and joy during an experience of loss, isolation and trauma
- helps children to overcome emotional pain and regain control over their lives
- helps children make meaning of what has happened to them, and enable them to experience fun and enjoyment
- offers children an opportunity to explore their own creativity.

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic means we had to deal with uncertainties and unknowns very quickly and with little preparation. But, against a backdrop of change, we have seen wonderful things happening as organisations repurpose themselves to come together to offer help and support. From online storytelling, sharing daily indoor play activities and providing children with play resources, play and children's organisations across Wales have shown their resilience and commitment to the right to play, making sure it remains high on everyone's agendas.

Most of our recent efforts in supporting a greater understanding of play, well-being and resilience focuses on the role that playing has in enabling children to create attachments with peers, places and neighbourhoods. Recent restrictions requiring physical and social distancing means we need to rethink what this means. There are valid concerns about how we might lessen the potential negative impact that prolonged social distancing might have on our children.

And it is here that we need to pause and stop and do our best to trust in children and their capabilities to find moments of playfulness. This will not go away during times of stress if adults continue to make sure that they value playing. Children have always needed effective coping skills. Our changing world brings many advantages and more recently, some unknowns



and new ideas. The need to provide time, space and permission to play is as important as ever, as highlighted by children in this issue of the magazine.

Some children can rise above adversity to adapt to serious challenges, stress and risks without much help. In times of uncertainty, some children might find this less easy and they will need the support of others to make the most of the environment around them. It is important to remember that playing is something that children do whenever they have the chance. It is their way of supporting their own health and well-being. Understanding this helps us to advocate for a rights-based approach to support children's play and the importance it holds for them in their immediate lives and their everyday experiences.

# Safe places to play improves well-being

Having a safe area to play in their community greatly improves child well-being, according to children themselves. This is what a HAPPEN study has found – the researchers tell us more about their findings.

## About HAPPEN

Health and Attainment of Pupils in a Primary Education Network (HAPPEN) is a network which brings together education, health and research in line with the new curriculum proposals for health and well-being. The network aims to develop a better understanding of school needs and have a more collaborative approach with schools when developing school-based interventions to improve health, well-being and education outcomes of children.

## HAPPEN

As part of a recent HAPPEN study children filled in an online questionnaire about their health and well-being, which was developed by children. Responses from over 3000 children aged between 8 and 11 years old were analysed to understand what influenced their well-being. To limit the influence of their own adult bias on the analysis, the researchers used an artificial intelligence method for the analysis. The researchers used a method called decision trees which looks at what things can discriminate a child who has high well-being from a child who has low well-being, using all the data available.

## Safe play area

The question, 'How safe do you feel playing in your area?' was the one that best identified children with good well-being. In total, 94 percent of children who felt safe playing in their area had high levels of well-being.

If a child reported to not feel safe playing in their area, then the next most important question was if they felt 'nobody likes me'. If a child lived in an area that they felt unsafe to play in and felt no one liked them, then only 23 percent reported good well-being. However,



if they felt liked (but lived in an area that felt unsafe to play) then 43.3 percent (twice as many) had good well-being.

But, the bottom line is that in areas where children do not feel safe to play, the majority of children have poorer well-being. Having a safe area to play in the community is the single most important factor in children's self-reported well-being.

## Influence of coronavirus

The data was collected before coronavirus, therefore does not consider the impact of the physical distancing and isolation restrictions put in place. However, it is likely that additional strain will be experienced by children, as many of their support networks (playing with friends, family and support in school) will be disrupted. This study identified that when a child has a safe area to play in their community, it is of great significance to their well-being. After the restrictions came into force, the ability to play with others in a safe space will be even more important for children's well-being.

## Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Health Data Research UK, an initiative funded by UK Research and Innovation, Department of Health and Social Care (England) and the devolved administrations, and leading medical research charities.

To find out more about HAPPEN visit:  
[www.happen-wales.co.uk](http://www.happen-wales.co.uk)

# Play and being well

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It is generally accepted that well-being is the result of a positive physical, social and mental state. Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and well-being. It is essential for a happy and healthy childhood.

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Play involves children doing as they wish in their own time and in their own way. It has the key characteristics of fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity, as defined by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. For children, playing is one of the most immediate and important aspects of their lives – they value time, freedom and quality places to play.

It is clear that playing has a positive impact on multiple important health outcomes including increased physical activity, reducing childhood obesity, improving well-being in children and helping to develop resilience. However, it is vital that playing is also recognised as worthwhile for the enjoyment it brings to children and their families in their immediate lives. Being up to date with current guidance and research helps us to ensure that our advocacy work is based on the growing body of solid evidence that supports both the long-term and immediate benefits of providing for children's play.

The four UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines recognise the importance of play for children's development. Modern life has made things comfortable for us and many of us spend a long time being inactive at home and at work – this doesn't burn off the energy we are consuming.

The physical activity guidelines for children and teenagers aged 5 to 18 years recommend that:

- All children should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity (MVPA) for at least 60 minutes every day.
- Children should engage in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity every day to develop movement skills, muscular fitness, and bone strength. Activities can include hopping, skipping, and swinging using body weight or working against resistance.
- Children should aim to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary, and when possible should break up long periods of not moving with at least light physical activity.

## Making sense of the guidelines

- Moderate intensity activities, such as cycling, make us warmer, breathe harder, and our hearts beat faster, while still being able to talk.
- Vigorous activities, such as running fast, playing tag and scooting, have similar but greater effects, and make talking much harder.
- Muscle- and bone-strengthening activities such as hopping, skipping, and swinging involve using body weight or working against resistance.
- Sedentary behaviour is activity with very low energy expenditure, primarily sitting or lying down. Sedentary activity includes screen-time (watching television, computer use, video games), sitting to read, talk, do homework, or listen to music.

## Benefits of play

The added responsibility of physical and social distancing means that we find ourselves taking part in more sedentary activities. During changing and challenging times, it is important that children are supported to get up and about. This is good for both their physical and mental well-being.

Participation in regular physical activity can increase self-esteem and reduce stress and anxiety. Children begin and maintain their active lives through playing. Physical activity through playing allows children to have a better outlook on life by building confidence, managing anxiety and depression, and increasing self-esteem and mental skills.

Playing allows for peer interactions that are important components of social and emotional well-being. In times when it is harder for children to socialise with friends, it is important to remember that playing alone has important benefits, too. When playing alone, children begin to recognise their own emotions, feelings, and thoughts, as well as how to control them. Children also learn to feel comfortable with being by themselves and learn ways to manage their boredom on their own.

Through playing children experience a range of emotions including frustration, determination, achievement, disappointment and confidence, and through practice, can learn how to manage these feelings.

Playing is the most natural and enjoyable way for children to be active, keep well and be happy. Playing can contribute to improved well-being for everyone during times of uncertainty.



## How playing contributes to children's physical well-being:

- Prolonged and wide-ranging physical activity develops stamina (informal sports, chase games, climbing, building). Research suggests that children can gain more physical exercise in regular informal play than in a weekly sports activity.
- Climbing develops strength, co-ordination and balance, while jumping contributes to bone density.
- When children repeat an action as part of their play they are often in the process of calibrating – learning to manage growing bodies – as well as developing agility, co-ordination and confidence.

## How playing contributes to children's emotional well-being:

- Creating and encountering risky or uncertain play opportunities develops children's resilience and adaptability – and can contribute to their confidence and self-esteem.
- Fantasy play allows for imagination and creativity, but it can also be a way of children making sense of and 'working through' difficult and distressing aspects of their lives.
- Socialising with their friends on their own terms gives children opportunities to build emotional resilience, to have fun and to relax.

These resources are freely available on our website:

- *Play: health and well-being*
- *Playing actively in and around the home*

- *Play: mental health and well-being.*

**For information to support parents visit our *Playful Childhoods* website: [www.playfulchildhoods.wales](http://www.playfulchildhoods.wales)**

# Playing and resilience

**Resilience is often defined as how well we respond and adapt to events and experiences in our lives – both the good ones and the very challenging and worrying ones.**

It is well-established that children's play provides a primary behaviour for developing resilience, thereby making a significant contribution to children's well-being. Across several literature reviews, Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell note that evidence suggests that play contributes to developing resilience through a number of interrelated systems including:

- Emotional regulation
- Pleasure and enjoyment of promotion of positive feeling
- The stress response system and the ability to respond to uncertainty
- Creativity and the ability to make new and different connections
- Learning
- Attachment to people and place
- Problem solving.

The generally accepted social, physical and cognitive benefits of

play help make the case that playing is an important element in helping to build resilience. Having enough time, space and permission to play helps children to:

- Develop a sense of self sufficiency and independence
- Feel that they have a sense of control in their world
- Feel connected to others and their community
- Experience a range of emotions including frustration, determination, achievement, disappointment and confidence, and through practice, can learn how to manage these feelings
- Develop imagination and creativity
- Make sense of and 'work through' difficult and distressing aspects of their lives.

Play has specific features that allow children to try out, in relative safety,

new strategies and solutions to challenges. Play promotes both physical and emotional flexibility through the rehearsal of new and unexpected behaviours and situations.

Play is a key mechanism for developing resilience and dealing with stress and anxiety. It provides effective strategies for dealing with uncertainty and contributes to good physical and mental health. A child who has developed their resilience can respond and adjust more effectively to difficult circumstances. They are more able than other children to overcome adversity, and of course what we adults do to help them on the way is vitally important.

**For more about play and resilience, read our *Building resilience – the importance of playing* information sheet: [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/information sheets](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/information sheets)**

# Playworking and coronavirus

As part of the co-operative response to coronavirus, playworkers across Wales have been busy collaborating with others and working in different ways to support children's play.

## Supporting the care of children

In some instances, playworkers are working hard to care for a number of vulnerable children or those of critical workers.

Torfaen Play and Short Breaks Services is providing 24 playworkers on a daily basis to deliver play sessions in four primary school hubs in the county. The playworkers are working alongside teaching staff, sports development workers, youth workers and early years workers to provide holistic provision for children. The play sessions operate seven days a week and children are provided with breakfast, lunch and an afternoon snack by the local authority catering team.

A variety of activities are provided to enable children to play freely but safely at a time when playing is so integral to a child's mental health and well-being. Traditional games and play activities have been adapted to incorporate the recommended two metre physical distancing guidelines, with playworkers using cones and markers to space children out. To help with keeping a distance during free play, the playworkers and children have adopted a chant – *'Don't be a fool use the two metres rule'* – to keep the need to stay apart fresh in everyone's mind.



For some children, attending provision at an unfamiliar school has been helped by seeing the familiar face of a playworker. In these difficult times, the Play and Short Breaks Service has also provided a wealth of play resources for residential children's homes and care homes. Additional playworkers were sourced to cover the two-week Easter holiday period at the school hubs.

## Food deliveries

A small team of playworkers from Cardiff Children's Play Services is operating a Food Pantry from Splott Play Centre. This builds on work developed by the local Play Team in partnership with Cardiff Community Housing Association and FareShare Cymru to provide food to community members in need. With the housing association providing funding to pay the FareShare Cymru membership fee, food is delivered to the play setting and feeds 70 families in several surrounding neighbourhoods.

Through the housing association, FareShare has provided a range of food items for the Play Team to put together shopping bags for families to collect.

The Play Team has contacted local families and safely distributed food bags to the community through collections from the play centre, ensuring physical distancing, and that hygiene and safety regulations are adhered to at all times. Through the Cardiff Community Housing Association/Flourish Project volunteer delivery drivers have been able to make collections from the play centre and deliver to families and individuals in need.

The Play Team has been able to expand on the communities they reach, rotating the provision of food bags each day. Playworkers have also successfully partnered with two supermarkets which will deliver food twice a week for local distribution. One has even provided flowers, which may not be practically helpful but added

some cheer to those receiving food bags.

The team has been overwhelmed with the positive messages it is receiving from the community.

*'To all the staff at Splott Play Centre I'd like to thank you all for the help of your pantry. It's really helped and I really appreciate it. Having four kids off school they eat a lot so thank you, you are all amazing. I really do appreciate it though ... not just the food but the support with everything too. Me and the kids, don't know where I'd be without the play centre.'*

## Getting outdoors

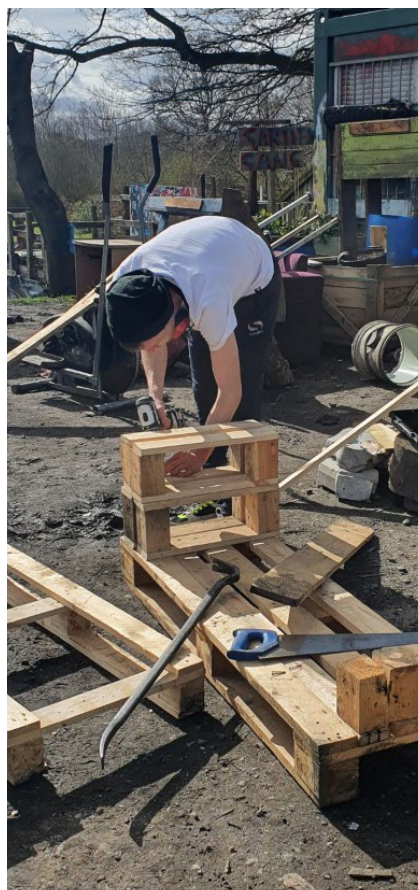
Recognising the importance of staying home and staying safe, playworkers in Plas Madoc in Wrexham have identified a way to support children playing and to help the wider community to feel supported and connected during this difficult time.

Although currently closed to children, The Land Adventure Playground is being used by playworkers to think of ways to enhance the health and well-being of local families by enriching their use of time and enhancing opportunities at home.

The majority of people in the community are fortunate in having an outdoor space, a garden which can be thought of as an extension to their homes, an outdoor room.

The playworkers want people to have a positive relationship with the outdoors and are running a number of projects to support this.

Using reclaimed wood from local businesses the playworkers are busy designing and building benches for members of the community. All the benches are unique and made with the recipient in mind.



The playworkers emphasise that having a place to sit outdoors is of utmost importance – it helps to create a better quality of life, helps residents remain connected with the community and also to the natural environment ... which brings us nicely onto the planters.

The team recognises the importance of children (and adults) interacting with the natural world and the positive impact this has on health and well-being.

The playworkers tell us that from their experience on The Land, children have a natural love for the living world. The children on The Land love to engage with the elements – they dig, they love to garden and eat the herbs or strawberries they've grown. Children gain a sense of competence, a sense of pride and a lot of the children are engaging in a process that previously they may have seen as only for adults.

A member of the team at The Land said:

*'Like all playworkers, we advocate that children are masters and when given the opportunity to interact with the natural world they will play and explore to fulfil their play needs. We wanted to support children to continue to access the natural outdoor environment to ease the pressures of social distancing.'*

Alongside the benches, playworkers are designing and building trough planters from reclaimed wood. Once built, sanded and painted they will be distributed to children and families. These will give children the opportunity to work with nature – to be outdoors in the fresh air, have a chance to calm themselves and to relax.

# The therapeutic superpowers of play

We asked Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist and Play Therapist, Maggie Fearn to tell us about how playing can help children to make sense of their experiences and the world around them, particularly in times of uncertainty and stress. This is what Maggie had to say about the power of play.

## Superpower 1: Play is the child's preferred medium of communication

Play therapists understand the superpowers of play. Play therapists call on these powers to connect with children in distress, to make them feel safe and to co-regulate them by providing sensory play materials that soothe and stimulate. Also, to give the child the space and the time to make sense of their experiences using the symbols and metaphors of imaginative and pretend play.

A characteristic of play is the intensity, and absorption in the present moment. Children are preoccupied when they play, playful experiences are deeply impressive and what is more, if something happens to the child that is confusing, overwhelming or misunderstood the child will act it out symbolically in play to try to make sense of it, rearranging the experience in her own terms.

### For example:

Ellie<sup>1</sup> (aged four) has a stick, whacking a tree stump: *'I'm getting the monster!'*

*'You're getting the monster,'* I remark.

*'Green monster I saw when Mam went out. We watch Tom and Jerry before I go to sleep. Get the monster! It's green!'*

The tree stump becomes the monster. She whacks it hard, talking all the time, and I pay close attention, quietly tracking her every movement. She calms down and pokes the end of the stick into leaves and gives them to me one by one.

*'You're giving me leaves,'* I say.

She sticks the stick into the ground. *'This is my stick, it stays here. No one else can use it.'*

She then sits on the monster.

In her imaginative play Ellie actively confronts her terrors, and as brave as any mythical heroine she overcomes them. Children can act out their experiences in play to make sense of the world, using symbol and metaphor – this gives the therapist insight into understanding the underlying forces driving the child's nonverbal and unconscious communication.

## Superpower 2: Healing happens through play

Children play whenever they can. Whilst playing, children grow and develop in all aspects: physically, emotionally, psychologically and cognitively. As children move through life, through play, they integrate their experiences in manageable narrative sequence, establishing neurobiological patterning, each developmental stage building incrementally towards maturity. Intrinsic learning happens at each stage, providing the foundation for what comes next.

Trauma impacts on the flow of development, resulting in profound confusion and distress – the traumatised child is overwhelmed and cannot function to her full potential. Research into play deprivation reveals that children significantly deprived of opportunities to play are more likely to be aggressive, repress emotions, lack social skills and have an increased tendency towards obesity.<sup>2</sup> Chronic, long term deprivation results in depression, withdrawal and decreased neuro-endocrine activity in the brain and nervous system.<sup>3</sup> If children don't play they suffer.

Not all children need play therapy, but all children need to play. It is an unconscious, self-regulating process oriented towards independence, integration and health. Children who do need therapeutic help can find healing through play. As Ellie demonstrates, a child can manifest her fears as a green monster, which is also a tree stump, and act out her real and urgent need to rise up and

overcome it: a small child discovering her power to manage her feelings by herself. No one planned this for her, or taught her how to do it. In the safety of the therapeutic relationship, she draws on her innate ability to heal herself through play.

### Superpower 3: Play is a reflection of the child's inner world

Play therapists know that a child's inner world is communicated through their imaginative play. When Ellie sees the tree stump as a green monster, she operates simultaneously on two levels. She is involved in her fantasy, focusing on the make-believe meaning of objects and her actions, at the same time she is still aware of her own identity and the real life meaning of things. In play, children can flow back and forth between fantasy and reality in a way that most adults have lost.<sup>4</sup> In play every child naturally acts out his or her experiences. All imaginative play forms a link from the child's inner world to the outer world and visa versa: fantasy is the bridge that connects us symbolically with our shared reality.

The outer world is not independent, freestanding and solid. Every one of us creates our own conception of reality in the relationship between our sense of self and our environment, our culture, and the significant people in our lives. Our sense of self as adults continues to evolve in response to life's challenges and is influenced by the resources we had available when we were children, including our ability and opportunity to access the super powers of play.

**Maggie is also a Senior Lecturer MSc Play Therapy at University of South Wales and visiting lecturer at the Children's Therapy Centre, Ireland. She also works for The Windfall Centre as a play and filial therapist and clinical supervisor.**

1. This is not the child's real name, and other significant details have been changed to disguise their identity.
2. Manwaring, B. and Taylor, C. (2006) *The Benefits of Play and Playwork*. Research paper for CYWU. London: SkillsActive.
3. Gaskill, R. and Perry, B.D. (2014) *The Neurobiological Power of Play. Using the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics to Guide Play in the Healing Process. From Creative Arts and Play therapy for Attachment Problems.* by Cathy A. Malchiodi and David A. Crenshaw. New York: Guilford Press.
4. Cattanach, A. (1997) *Children's Stories in Play Therapy*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publications.



# Playing at home

Children and teenagers still want and need to play whilst we are all spending more time at home. Here is a small selection of how children are making the most of playing and having adventures in and around their homes.

*'At home I have been building a den for me and Bella my dog. I used wood stuff and hammers and tools. I have been talking over the fence and I have places where I can talk over the fence to my friends. We have been drawing chalks at the front of the house. I made a planter for runner beans and peas and sunflowers – three sunflowers. I have been on a hunt to find some painted stones and hiding them around the estate.'*

**Geraint, aged 6**



*'During the school closure me, my brother and two sisters have been keeping busy by playing and being creative. We have decorated magnetic tiles, painted stones and rocks, playing ball games and having facetime dance offs with our cousins. On our daily walks, we have been collecting sticks and wood to bring home to make bird houses. We have nails, hammers, saws, paints and bird food ready. We are using our phones and tablets to stay connected with family and friends.'*

**Harley, aged 11**

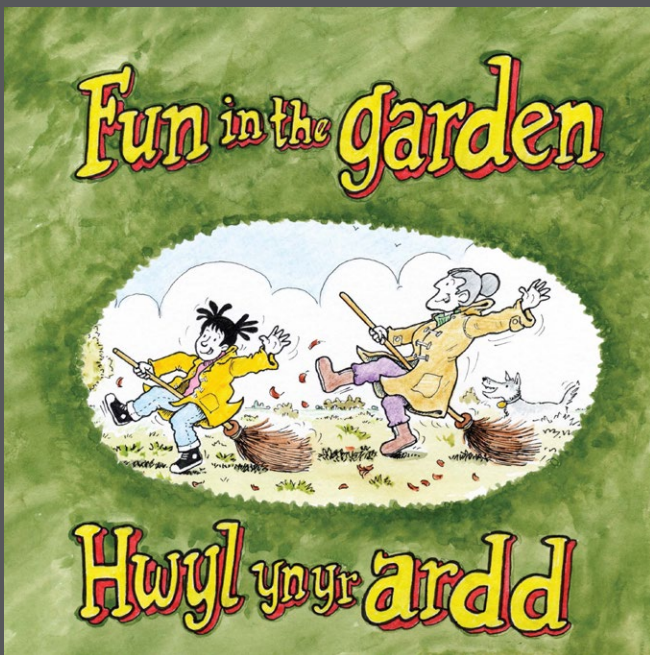


*'Thanks to my mum and dad our play has changed. We have been playing lots of family games like payday, hide and seek in the dark and pool in the garden. We were also allowed to paint our shed with bright colours. I miss my friends but I'm enjoying getting to spend lots of time with my family.'*

**Aliyah, aged 13**

# Fun in the garden – a new storybook

Inspired by the marvellous reaction – by children and parents alike – to our first storybook about children’s right to play, we are back with a new story.



*Fun in the garden* is written by children for children and this time we worked year 6 children at Charles Williams Primary School in Caerleon. Supported by author and poet Mike Church, Class Afan created an imaginative and playful story. Their ideas and drawings were shared with our illustrator Les Evans, who brought their story to life.



Although this is a standalone sequel to *Fun in the dungeon*, we see the return of some memorable characters. Over several weeks, the class considered the *Fun in the dungeon* story and came up with creative ideas and words exploring why the central character in the first book, the Queen, was so negative towards play.

*Fun in the garden* reminds us beautifully about how all adults in children’s lives can either support or hinder the right to play. It captures the importance of supportive and tolerant communities in helping children to realise their right to play.

The bilingual storybook is for primary school children and parents, supporting children to access their right to play and for parents to advocate for local play. It’s also a useful resource to support those working with children and families.

## How can I get a copy of *Fun in the garden*?

If you would like a free copy of the book you must:

1. Be working or living in Wales
2. Sign up online to either the Play Wales or Playful Childhoods mailing list
3. Provide your details, including a postal address, by email to [admin@playwales.org.uk](mailto:admin@playwales.org.uk)

*Fun in the garden* has been developed in partnership with Petra Publishing, an established community-based publisher.

## *Fun in the dungeon*

To coincide with the launch of the new book we are making the original storybook – *Fun in the dungeon* – available online for all to read. The storybook is free and will only be available for a limited time.

To read *Fun in the dungeon* online, visit:

[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/funinthedungeon](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/funinthedungeon)

Since it was published in 2018, we have distributed over 6000 copies of *Fun in the dungeon* to families and professionals across Wales. We have a limited number still available – if you haven’t already received a copy and would like one, please get in touch: [admin@playwales.org.uk](mailto:admin@playwales.org.uk)

## Workforce development

# Shared Values for the play workforce in Wrexham

The Statutory Guidance, *Wales – a Play Friendly Country* (2014) clearly defines the play workforce as ‘anyone employed whose role has an impact on children playing – those who may either directly facilitate their play, design for playing or those with the power to give permission for children to play, or not’. It can be challenging to influence this incredibly diverse group of people and local authorities have undertaken a range of development work, facilitated conferences and provided information to ensure that the play workforce really understands their role in securing play sufficiency.

Mel Kearsley from Wrexham County Borough Council’s Play Development Team updates us on a long-term piece of work to develop a set of principles, or ‘shared values’, for the play workforce in Wrexham.

### Background

Whilst completing the local authority’s second Play Sufficiency Assessment in 2016 it became clear that the way in which people think about children, their capabilities and childhood in general, varied and had a profound impact on their approach to working with children. It is also likely that professional development opportunities based on different understandings of childhood will promote significantly different messages to practitioners. As a consequence, Wrexham’s 2016-17 Play Sufficiency Action Plan included an action to: *Develop and agree a set of guiding principles that can be used to underpin professional development opportunities for the play workforce.*

### Development process

Starting in 2017, the Play Development Team facilitated five workshops which encouraged professionals to explore the way in which they thought about children, their childhoods and their play. Forty-two professionals attended – from strategic directors, to service managers to front line staff. The workshops promoted positive discussions as most people involved recognised that there needed to be an improved focus on children enjoying their childhoods. But, the discussions also revealed that practitioners felt constrained by an outcome driven accountability culture

and disproportionate health and safety concerns.

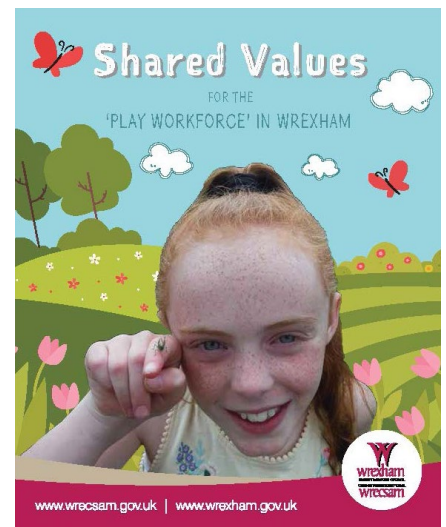
A small steering group was formed to collate and sort the comments gathered at the workshops. This group included representatives from playwork, youth work, early years, childcare, education psychology, public health, higher education and the business community. Following much discussion, the steering group developed a set of eight draft values which were sent out for consultation with all those that attended the initial workshops.

In addition, an online survey was set up to consult practitioners on the draft values. In total 76 people responded to the survey, including practitioners who work directly with children and those that do not, practitioners who are also parents or grandparents, representatives of schools, students, childcare and social workers. An additional workshop, based on the survey, was also facilitated with 16 young people from Young Wrexham (youth parliament).

Following feedback, the steering group acknowledged the need to clarify the intention of the shared values and therefore developed an introduction which emphasises the need for balance between the concerns, interests and rights of both children and adults. The steering group felt that high-level support for the shared values could go some way to addressing these concerns and further inform policy and practice.

### Implementation

The Wrexham Public Service Board endorsed the Shared Values in September 2018, demonstrating its



support for practitioners to adopt this positive way of thinking about children and their childhoods. The Council Executive Board approved them and agreed that the values would be the mechanism for implementing the Wrexham County Borough Council Play Pledge in July 2019.

Two workshops have taken place with over 40 members of the Wrexham Flying Start team to further embed the values into their way of working.

### Launch

The values – *Shared Values for the Play Workforce in Wrexham* – were formally launched at a Valuing Childhood conference in Wrexham in February 2020. Over 60 professionals from the play workforce attended the event and the feedback was extremely positive. Martin King-Sheard, Workforce Development Officer for Play Wales, who attended the event said:

*‘This piece of work is a fantastic example of upskilling the wider play workforce. It demonstrates that culture change can take time but with consistent focus led by the Play Development Team we can get all stakeholders involved with the play sufficiency duty to think innovatively and differently about how to improve opportunities for playing across a local authority.’*



# Playwork and coronavirus – just keep learning!

During these difficult times many playworkers will not be able to continue working face to face with children while play development staff and play sufficiency leads may be working from home. Playwork learners will have found themselves with courses postponed. So, we want to encourage you to take advantage of this time to build or refresh your playwork knowledge.



Reading and staying up to date with current practice is something we often struggle to find time for but continuing professional development (CPD) is often highlighted as a priority for practising playworkers and their employers. Fortunately, the internet is a fantastic resource for our CPD with online forums, YouTube channels and websites dedicated to building our knowledge around play and playwork. Here is an overview of some of the resources available on Play Wales' website to help with your playwork learning.

## Top tips

Short, informative guides on a range of useful subjects around play and playwork. A good place to start – *Top Tips: Continuing Professional Development*.

## Toolkits

Intended as complete guides with information and practical tools and templates to support improving play for children in a range of contexts. We have toolkits covering developing and managing play spaces, using

loose parts, making use of school grounds out of hours, accessible play spaces, working on gypsy and traveller sites and developing street play projects.

## Information sheets

We now have a large library of relevant info sheets on a range of subjects and these are regularly updated. Check out the back catalogue and look out for some of the newest information sheets: *Play and gender*, *The Welsh Play Sufficiency Duty and the roles of playworkers* and *Older children play too*.

## New publications

We are in the process of producing new playwork publications that will be available in the coming weeks and months. The focus of these publications is to share some of the content from our highly regarded training materials in four downloadable playwork resources. There will be two volumes covering playwork knowledge: *Childhood, play and the Playwork Principles* and *Practising playwork* – and two volumes for running settings: *Managing staff* and *Managing playwork projects*.

**You can find all of our publications at:**  
[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications)

# Playful communities

## Outreach play sessions in Conwy

The Met Office declared February 2020 as the wettest February on record, with police departments in parts of Wales declaring critical incidents as they and other emergency services worked to protect property and residents. Hundreds of homes were flooded as water ran off saturated hills and fields along the western half of the UK.

**Nathania Minard, Principal Play Officer at Community and Voluntary Support Conwy (CVSC) tells us about a partnership project which supported children who had experienced flooding.**

During February half term there were many families affected by flooding across Conwy and in particular, the town of Llanrwst. Our Play Development Team teamed up with Cartrefi Conwy, a registered social landlord, to provide drop in open access play sessions across six areas in the county to support children and families affected by area flooding.

The play sessions, staffed by the Play Development Team and Cartrefi Conwy's Community Involvement Team, operated in community spaces such as parks and children could attend as and when they wished. The sessions were advertised across social media and families were encouraged to turn up and come and play.

Staff provided resources and children took to building dens, playing in the mud kitchen and with loose parts, and cooking on the fire. The sessions also included arts and crafts and sports activities.

To further support families in affected areas and building upon other play development workshops that had

operated in Llanrwst, the Conwy County Borough Council Family Support Team and CVSC Play Development Team hosted a cardboard city play event in the local family centre. The event provided time and space for children to play and recapture the joy in the world through their play while parents could access other vital support. The family centre was providing support such as food, clothing and financial advice, to families who had lost their homes or been affected by the flooding.

The aim of the play sessions was to provide rich play opportunities for children during a time of crisis and uncertainty. We were able to help children find places to play in their local area, offering a range of rich play opportunities that were fun and new to some of them.

Parents were thankful and reported feeling reassured that their children were happy and safe whilst they had an opportunity to access support. Although family workers and social workers were at the event and lots of other work was going on, the event remained very focused on children having time and space for playing. Families played together and took resources home to carry on the fun! Lots of cardboard boxes could be seen walking down the road at the end of the event!

**For more examples of playful communities in Wales visit:**  
[www.playfulchildhoods.wales/about-playful-communities](http://www.playfulchildhoods.wales/about-playful-communities)

