



Opening school grounds for play

A toolkit for schools and partners

www.play.wales

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About this toolkit

Who is it for?

The *Opening school grounds for play* toolkit is designed to help head teachers, governors and local organisations to work together to consider making school grounds available to local children for playing out of school hours.

Why has it been developed?

This toolkit has been developed to support schools to offer opportunities for children to play on school grounds outside of school hours. It aims to dispel some worries and offer a starting point. It is intended to support the implementation of Welsh Government guidance regarding the use of school grounds for community use.

The purpose of the toolkit is to bring about change at two levels:

- putting children's right to play into practice at school and neighbourhood level
- raised awareness of the right to play at family level.

How was it developed?

This is a reviewed and updated edition of previous toolkits produced by Play Wales to support the use of school grounds for playing.

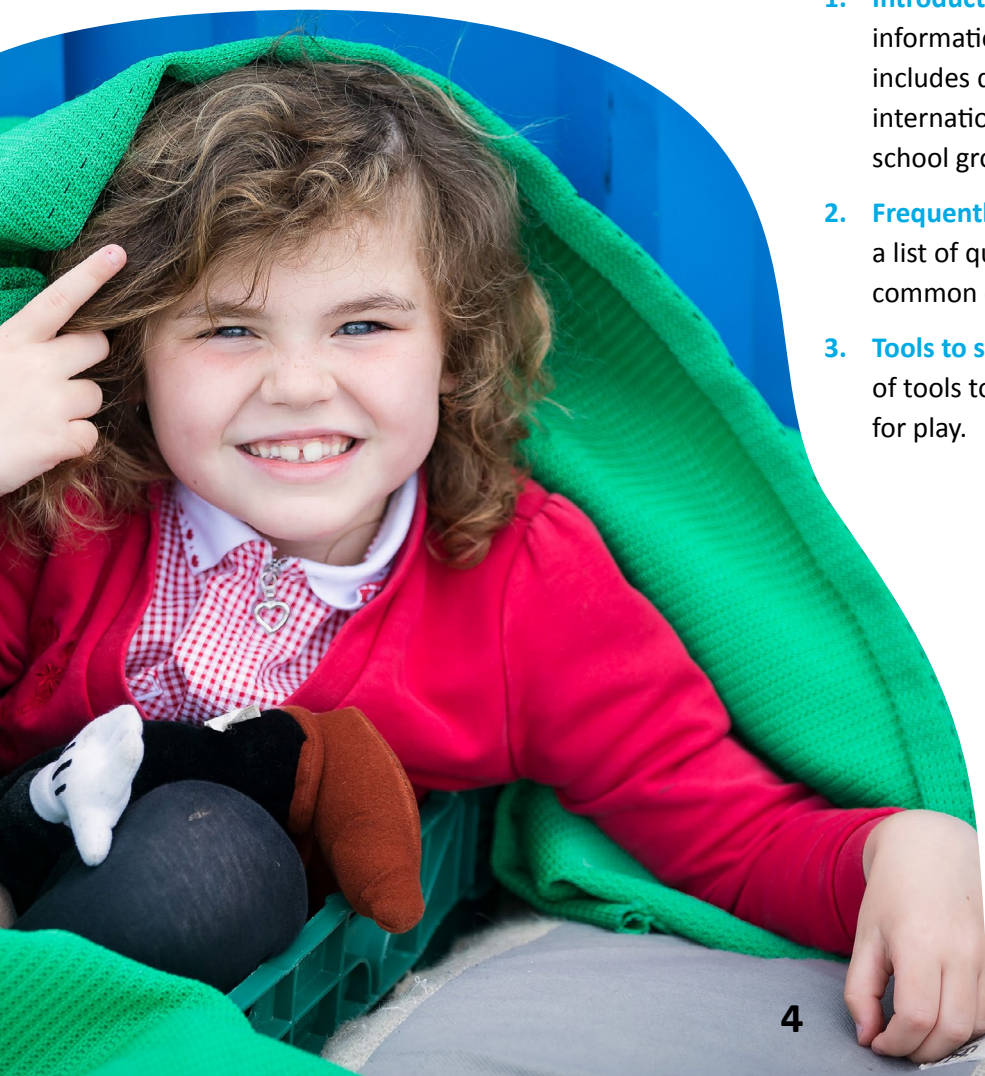
Funding from the Millennium Stadium Charitable Trust has enabled Play Wales to establish partnerships with local authority play development teams, community focused school teams and schools to develop this new edition of the toolkit.

To review and update the toolkit, Play Wales established and consulted with a focus group of head teachers, community focused schools officers and play development officers. This group helped to research a project which piloted a range of tools and templates. During the drafting process we used their questions, responses and their experiences to address the most significant issues associated with opening schools grounds for children to play.

Using the toolkit

The toolkit is made up of three parts:

1. **Introduction and background** – this part provides information about the importance of play. It also includes details about Welsh Government and international policy which supports the use of school grounds for play.
2. **Frequently asked questions** – this part offers a list of questions and answers to help address common concerns.
3. **Tools to support** – this part features a range of tools to assist in the use of school grounds for play.



Part 1: Introduction and background

All children need to play. This toolkit provides policy and practice related information to help school communities take a community focused approach to support children's right to play.

Play

Children have a right to play, as recognised in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Playing is one of the most immediate and important aspects of children's lives – they value time, quality places and freedom to play¹. When asked what is important to them, children consistently mention playing and gathering with their friends².

As an indication of the significance the United Nations places on children's play it has published General Comment no. 17 on Article 31. This document identifies that play has the key characteristics of fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity.

Play involves children doing as they wish in their own time and in their own way. Playing is central to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing. When they play, children contribute to their immediate wellbeing and to their own development.

There is a well-established body of solid evidence that shows the contribution that play, particularly self-organised play, can make to children's long-term and immediate wellbeing, to their physical health and to their mental health and resilience. Various studies³ have concluded:

- **Play supports socialisation:** when they play, children interact with others, develop friendships and attachments with peers, deal with conflict, and learn respect and tolerance.
- **Play builds resilience:** playing boosts children's emotion regulation, confidence, creativity, problem-solving skills and perseverance, enabling them to cope with stress and challenges throughout life.
- **Play is crucial for good health and wellbeing:** being active through play helps children physically and emotionally, contributing to their health and happiness.
- **Play supports children to feel part of their neighbourhoods and wider communities:** playing allows children to learn about the world around them, make connections, and develop a sense of identity and belonging.
- **Play supports learning and development:** building the structures of the brain and skills such as critical thinking.

Using school grounds

Children and teenagers need and are entitled to quality places and time for play as part of their everyday life within their own community. As highlighted in the Welsh Government's Community Focused Schools Guidance, school grounds often represent the largest single outdoor asset in many communities. Opening school grounds for play has a significant role to play in addressing the urgent need to ensure that more children can access outdoor play.

Throughout Wales many school grounds offer a significant resource for children's play.

In many areas, both urban and rural, school grounds offer neutral space in the local community. Having access to such a space can enhance the opportunities that all parts of the community around the school have for outdoor recreation and play.

Legislation, policy and initiatives

In 2010, Wales became the first country in the world to legislate for play through the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. This places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area. As part of statutory Play Sufficiency Assessments (PSA), local authorities across Wales must assess play within education and school policy.

The statutory guidance – *Wales – a Play Friendly country* – notes that schools provide an important opportunity for children to play during the school day, as well as before and after classes.

For more information about play sufficiency visit [our website](#).

As noted in guidance for the Welsh Government's Community Focused Schools programme, opening school grounds for play has a significant role to play in addressing the need to ensure that more children can access outdoor play. It recognises that for many communities, the best space for play are the school grounds, and increased access out of school hours would support those children and families.

As noted in the Welsh Government's *Ministerial Review of Play*, schools face several constraints which must be overcome if school facilities are used for activities other than the primary function of educating pupils. These include:

- school leaders and governors expressing a number of concerns, including insurance issues, security or safety and supervision
- possible issues with the facilities and layout
- opening up out of school hours can bring extra maintenance and operational costs.

However, the potential benefits in terms of:

- community engagement and wellbeing
- positive effects on children and teenagers' health and happiness
- enhancement of the local sense of community

make it worthwhile.

Findings from pilot projects

A key finding from the pilot projects that used school grounds for play out of school hours was that all the staff we interviewed realised that many of their fears were unfounded. As a result, they were happy to share control of the space, so fostering community links and a more trusting and democratic use of the space⁴.

Key findings from the various pilot projects include:

- participating schools were supportive, but benefitted from the support staff could offer at the beginning
- parents valued having time, space and permission to support their children's play
- parents also valued the informal networking with peers and supportive professionals.

The benefits of opening school grounds for play include:

- access to additional facilities and opportunities
- improved local availability of play opportunities
- better opportunities for children to play outside out of school hours
- improved collaboration with other agencies to promote better community facilities.

Pilot projects aimed to demonstrate that school play spaces might become absorbed into wider community life. The projects varied in model, but essentially, participating schools offered access to school grounds for younger children and their families. A few schools allowed the sessions to be open to any children who attend the school and their siblings. These schools stipulated that children under the age of eight must be accompanied by an adult.

Creating the conditions for play

Children's opportunities for playing in all settings – including schools – are dependent on a range of issues, which are arranged across three themes:

- **Permission:** fear, expectations, tolerance, and the way adults view childhood and play
- **Space:** the amount, design and management of space
- **Time:** how time is structured and the obligations children have on their time.

the most of the environment. Most schools will have a tarmac area, which will support active running games and sports, although, consideration should also be given to pupils who wish to socialise or contemplate alone. A well-landscaped green and natural space provides obvious positive features for play, such as places to hide and explore.

'The thought of actually benefiting the community by opening our gates and using our lovely field that we've got ... I just see that as one way that we can actually pay back to our community and the children...'

Teacher, pilot school

Ensuring permission for play

We talked with children involved in the pilot and their message is clear. They want to play, and they want their parents and carers to recognise that the restrictions imposed on their time and space to play prevent them from playing.

Parents and community members are asking for and looking for low-cost options to support their children to access opportunities to play. The pilot project provided parents with information and confidence to support their children to play in their communities. Parents and other community members have become advocates for play, playing and childhood.

'One of the parents said it felt more secure in a school than in a park because it's almost a sanctioned space so she feels that it's safe, that she can relax.'

Teacher, post pilot project

Creating time for play

Children's free time is increasingly scarce and opportunities for outdoor play are decreasing. Many children are prevented from gaining the most benefits from playing due to environmental and cultural barriers – particularly those who are disabled and marginalised. Having time to play with friends immediately after school contributes to children's fun and relaxation as well as their health and wellbeing.

During the pilot project, it was evident parents also benefitted from the sessions, most notably respite, socialisation, talking with others about play and sharing concerns about what is happening locally. We observed that parents, particularly those with larger families of young children, valued the time to engage with other parents whilst children played with their siblings and other children. Having the opportunity to observe their children having space to play out of school hours, and a place to gather and socialise with their friends on their own terms was powerful for some parents:

'It's been positive. I enjoyed how the children were playing. I was apprehensive whether I wanted to play with them or not, so at times I would have to consciously stop myself getting involved. It was good to see play among the children and them being imaginative and creative.'

Parent, post pilot project

Providing space for play

Children tell us that they want to play more outside, with their friends. Parents are seeking better play spaces for their children. Some schools feel that the grounds have little to offer pupils if there is no fixed play equipment on the grounds. However, giving time, space and permission to play supports pupils to make

Part 2: Frequently asked questions

We acknowledge that every school is different and is ideally placed to be sensitive to the needs of its particular community. Using information from our various pilot projects, here we address some of the common challenges and concerns about using school grounds for community play. This section provides an overview of possible solutions.

What about the risk of damage?

If vandalism is already an issue, it must be noted that the causes of vandalism outside of teaching hours are often the result of a problem outside of the school boundary. So, the issue of vandalism is a community issue that requires a community solution. Often, the root cause of community vandalism can be attributed to poor provision for older children and teenagers in the local area.

The issue of vandalism is more of a risk to some schools than others but for all schools there is a difference between protecting the school buildings from misuse and deliberate damage and protecting the wider school grounds.

Opening school grounds for playing will immediately increase the presence of people in the area. Communities will value the space if it provides a place for them and the presence of people is a well-known deterrent to vandalism.

Opening school grounds can result in local communities feeling more involved in the school either by informal arrangements or by organised community agreements. It follows that the potential risk of people from outside the community causing problems can also be reduced. Allowing limited access to school grounds can be a solution. This can be achieved by opening part of the school grounds to allow public access.

'Allowing community access to the grounds has actually added security for us.'
Deputy Headteacher, pilot project



Who will supervise the children and our school grounds?

Although staff are responsible for the supervision of children and teenagers during the school day – during playtimes, break times and lunchtimes, and when in supervised after school clubs and activities – this is not necessarily the case at other times of use. Some schools have allocated a staff member to be a point of contact for out of school hours play sessions. These have included teachers and learning support assistants (as part of their afterschool offer), family liaison and engagement officers and caretakers.

In instances where communities have been supported to use the grounds independently, it is made clear to children and parents that provision is unsupervised and a risk-benefit assessment has identified and removed hazards. In this instance, existing insurance policies can be extended to cover unsupervised use.

This is how local authorities gain insurance for un-staffed public playgrounds.

Partnership arrangements with other departments in the local authority and/or voluntary sector organisations can provide specialist support and sometimes staffing for provision. The play service within some local councils, and many local voluntary sector organisations, have teams of playworkers who visit different locations during school holidays and during early evenings in term time. They will sometimes facilitate play sessions in school grounds to promote wider use. Having staff on site for a limited time may help your school to establish its use of school grounds and help to address parental and community concerns.

What if children or their parents want to use the toilets?

Many local play areas, playgrounds and other public open spaces where children play, do not have toilets. As many of the children using the school grounds will live locally, they have the option of going home if they really need to. Information for children and parents regarding the use of school grounds can explicitly state the situation regarding toilets.

What about health and safety?

Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach, the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) high level statement promotes a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play.

Risk management in play provision – including at schools – involves balancing risks and benefits in a strategic and practical way. So, it is important to have a clear, policy framework that:

- explains the play provision
- informs the approach to risk and safety
- underpins the reasons for decisions.

A policy that clearly explains the need for offering play opportunities will help school leaders offer a service which meets the play needs of local children. Templates for a risk management policy and assessment are included in the [Helpful resources](#) part of this toolkit.

When schools have the right equipment, which has been installed correctly, maintained and inspected regularly, with the right policies and procedures in place, then the space will be so far as reasonably practicable safe for those using the grounds outside of school hours. This is what the law requires.

It is important to keep the risks associated in perspective. We face all types of risks all the time and we mitigate the likelihood of injury by ensuring adequate control measures are in place – often through sufficient information, instruction and supervision being provided by well trained staff and volunteers.

Many children and teenagers seek adventurous and exciting experiences when they are playing. Allowing access to local school grounds out of school hours can potentially contribute to keeping children safe. Providing facilities can help to reduce accidents overall by offering experiences in well-managed environments that are safe from traffic and other serious hazards.

And litigation?

There is no specific legislation on play safety, but there are legal considerations that schools adhere to already:

- **Duty of care:** schools have a legal responsibility to ensure the safety of children on their grounds. This includes providing a safe environment, adequate supervision and risk assessments for activities.
- **Occupiers' Liability Act:** this act requires schools to take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of those on their premises, including children in the playground and other outdoor spaces.
- **Health and Safety at Work Act:** this act ensures a safe environment for employees and, by extension, children in schools. Schools must maintain playground equipment and surfaces to prevent accidents.
- **Negligence:** if a child is injured due to a school's failure to meet these legal obligations, the school could face litigation for negligence.

There are some things which can lead to litigation, such as:

- unsafe, damaged or poorly maintained equipment
- unsafe surfaces or obstacles
- inadequate supervision
- lack of risk assessment.

To avoid litigation, schools:

- regularly inspect and maintain playground equipment
- assess the level of supervision needed for the provision being offered
- conduct thorough risk assessments for activities taking place in the space
- ensure any environment is safe and free from hazards
- comply with all relevant legislation and local regulations.

Playing does present risks, to children and adults through accidents and injuries, and also to providers through the risk of liability. However, school grounds are comparatively safe places and have been so for some years, if not decades.

Local authority risk managers and insurers report that claims from playground injuries represent a very small proportion of their caseload, and there is no evidence of any dramatic increase in numbers in recent years. This pattern should follow if school grounds were made more accessible for children out of school hours.

‘When we were developing the site for use by the community out of teaching hours, there was concern that developing the space would increase the potential for claims and increase liability. However, one of our governors reminded us that the fact remained that this was always the potential and given the lack of maintenance of the space prior to the development, the school was potentially at more risk of a claim to occur. In short, we realised that the issues of liability and potential claims are the same, whether the space is open or locked.’

Headteacher, pilot project



You will already have a risk assessment for your school premises which can be a basis for expanding the use of school grounds. It is important to note that most playground accidents do not result in litigation.

What about insurance?

Insurance plays an important role because it provides a financial safety net in the event of accidents or other losses. However, insurance is not intended to prevent accidents or losses. Risk-benefit assessment should be discussed with insurers, to ensure an agreed approach and to assist both schools and insurers to understand what the school is offering.

Most schools are insured via the local authority through a group insurance scheme. Where schools successfully open their grounds for playing, specific insurance cover has been arranged to allow community use out of school hours.

Our play equipment cannot be used at the moment or we don't have any. Where will children play?

Some schools feel that the grounds have little to offer children and teenagers if there is no fixed play equipment. However, given time, space and permission to play children will make the most of the environment. A well-landscaped green and natural space provides obvious positive features for play. However, a flat tarmac area can provide a good space, free from danger, where children and teenagers can ride bikes and scooters.

An example list of equipment and things to consider is included in the [Helpful resources](#).

The best play spaces contain a wide variety of loose parts and children are free to play with them as they wish. Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials, therefore can be used in any way that children choose and can be adapted and manipulated in many ways. Loose parts can be natural or synthetic.

Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways, for instance: paper, stones, sticks, water, sand, leaves, feathers, tools, nails, boxes, fabric, ropes, wood, pots, plants, metal, clay, mud, tables, chairs, blankets, everything and anything that can be moved or manipulated as part of play.

Rich play environment and play value

Children play wherever they are and in all sorts of places, but some spaces have been created with the particular intention of supporting children's play. Specialist play equipment isn't necessarily needed. Natural spaces such as woods, beaches, community gardens and rivers also support children's play. Water, trees and bushes change with the seasons and children can use them in a variety of ways, getting a lot out of playing with what is there naturally.

A rich play environment is varied and interesting. It is a place where children:

- can play in their own way
- can make a range of choices
- have many possibilities to create and develop their own play.

In *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*, the Welsh Government states:

'A rich play environment is one which is flexible, adaptable, varied and interesting. It maximises the potential for socialising, creativity, resourcefulness, challenge, and choice. It is a trusted public space where children feel free to play in their own way, in their own time, on their own terms.'

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 the opportunity to freely interact with or experience the following:

- other children
- the natural world
- loose parts
- the four elements
- challenge and uncertainty
- changing identity
- movement
- rough and tumble
- the senses.

Part 3: Helpful resources

This section includes a range of helpful resources to support schools to make their grounds available for local children to play out of school hours.

Project planning chart

This chart demonstrates the steps to take to implement opportunities to play using the school grounds out of school hours.

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<p>Establish the model to use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See Options analysis for suggested models <p>Engage with governing body</p> <p>Engage with all staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play space audit tool (see page 21 of A play friendly school) Risk-benefit assessment <p>Identify key member of the staff team</p> <p>Develop a school play policy</p> <p>Identify potential partners and agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example residents' groups, Parent and Teacher Associations (PTA), play providers and local community groups to discuss involvement 	<p>Engage with children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with school council See the Reading list for links to resources such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Right to play workshop</i> <i>A play friendly school</i> <p>Engage with parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet with friends or parents' group Information to parents setting out the project See Template – Letter for parents for family session See Information session for parents <p>Engage with community</p> <p>Grounds to be open for play at times planned by the school and its partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stuff for play: toys, games and equipment Easy games to play with a group of children 	<p>Analysis with all partners to identify how the project went</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What were the benefits and challenges? Use questions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you think it is important to facilitate this opportunity for play? Why? What were the benefits of allowing children to use the school grounds out of school hours? What particular benefits of children's play do you think allowing use of the grounds fulfilled? Were there any challenges to allowing children to use the school grounds out of school hours? How were these challenges addressed? What needs to change to make it work? <p>Work with all partners to identify how the opportunities to play can be sustained</p>

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<p>Issues to be explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of play • Benefits and challenges • Locking gates • Balancing risks and benefits • Supervision • Legal context, litigation and insurance • Availability of toilets • Play equipment • Parents and local residents' perception 	<p>Continue engagement with school community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers, care takers, governors, children and parents <p>Issues to be explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of play • Benefits and challenges • Locking gates • Balancing risks and benefits • Supervision • Legal context, litigation and insurance • Availability of toilets • Play equipment • Parents and local residents' perceptions 	

Template – Play project planning: things to consider

A bit of background

As highlighted in guidance for the Welsh Government's Community Focused Schools programme, school grounds often represent the largest single outdoor space in many communities. It notes that opening school grounds for play has a significant role to play in addressing the need to ensure that more children can access outdoor play. The guidance recognises that for many communities, the best space for play are the school grounds, and increased access out of school hours would support those children and families.

Out of school hours play sessions are intended to be free of charge and open to any children who attend the school and their siblings.

Pilot projects as part of the toolkit review aimed to demonstrate that school play spaces might become absorbed into wider community life. The projects varied in model, but essentially, participating schools offered access to school grounds for younger children and their families. A few schools allowed the sessions to be open to all children who attend the school and their siblings. These schools stipulated that children under the age of eight must be accompanied by an adult.

Information schools shared with parents

What parents and carers need to know

- It is not a childcare service
- Children remain the responsibility of their parents while on school grounds
- Children get freedom of choice and the chance to play with their friends
- This is an outdoor play session – the school will not be open.

Why we are supporting this

- Playing is important to and for children.
- We want to provide a space for playing that is neighbourhood based and nearby to where pupils live.
- We hope that we will be able to expand this project.

There are some key findings from the pilot:

- Participating schools were supportive, but benefitted from the support that staff could offer at the beginning.
- Parents valued having time, space and permission to support their children's play.
- Parents also valued the informal networking with peers and supportive professionals.



Things to consider

What other facilities/spaces for free play are available in the neighbourhood	
What other spaces are available to play?	
Is it safe for children to travel independently to the school?	
What after school programme of activities is currently on offer?	
What resources are available for a play project?	
What resources are needed for a play project?	
Does the school have an identified member of staff to be a point of contact?	
Are there any concerns about particular spaces in the school grounds?	

Use the above information to consider options for making the school grounds available for playing out of school hours. Consider: space to be made available, ages, parent involvement, days and times for sessions.

Options analysis

The use of an options analysis can help schools to determine the best model and approach to open the school grounds for play. The advantages and disadvantages can be listed – scoring 1 point for each advantage and -1 for every disadvantage. A few examples for consideration have been included.

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Option 1: Allow the space to be used by children of all ages with supervision provided by staff or a partner organisation			
Issues to be considered	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
What other facilities/spaces for free play are available in the neighbourhood?			
What resources are needed?			
How many days a week can you provide this?			
At what times will the session run?			
Is it safe for children to travel independently to the school?			
What are the views of community members?			
What is the impact on community relations?			
Narrative:			

Option 2: Allow the space to be used by children of all ages without supervision (to a specific time)

Issues to be considered	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
What after school programme of activities is currently on offer?			
How many days can you provide this?			
At what times will the session run?			
What resources are needed?			
What other spaces are available to play?			
What are the views of community members?			
What is the impact on community relations?			

Issues to be considered	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
What after school programme of activities is currently on offer?			
How many days can you provide this?			
What times will the session run?			
What resources are needed?			
What other spaces are available to play?			
What are the views of community members?			
What is the impact on community relations?			
Narrative:			

Option 5: Do nothing			
Issues to be considered	Advantages (+1)	Disadvantages (-1)	Total
What resources are needed?			
What other spaces are available to play?			
What are the views of community members?			
What is the impact on community relations?			
Narrative: <div></div>			
What will the impact be if we do nothing? <div></div>			

Decision and action plan – describe the decision and actions for implementation

Template – School play policy

Adopting a school play policy will make a significant contribution to providing a rich play environment for children. A school play policy states the value that the school places on children's play and commits itself to supporting children's play opportunities. The policy can be shared with children, staff and parents and be included in the school prospectus.

School play policy

This school recognises the importance of all children who attend having sufficient time and good places to play freely as part of their day.

To children, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. Playing contributes to children's health, wellbeing and happiness as well as to their learning and their ability to learn. Some children only have the opportunity to play with their friends at school.

We can make a positive contribution to children's lives by valuing their urge and desire to play and by providing a broad range of play opportunities within the school playgrounds before, during and after the school day.

This school recognises that children will naturally create and seek out challenging situations. While making the most of their play some children may have accidents, get dirty or wet, or upset. We recognise that any potential risk of harm to children needs to be balanced with the potential for good that may come from their taking part in a particular form of play. We will do our best to avoid children coming to serious physical or emotional harm by carefully managing the play opportunities that we provide.

This school believes that adults' attitude towards, and understanding of, children's play behaviour will have a significant effect on the quality of the play opportunities offered within and outside the school. This school will therefore seek out training opportunities and support research among its staff so that the team is confident to facilitate children's freely chosen, self-directed play.

Template – Out of school hours play plan

This plan is designed to help schools document the details of how it organises and implements an out of school hours play project, organised and provided by the school. This plan should be a written document that can be shared with and understood by school staff, pupils and parents.

Out of school hours playtime plan

Vision for out of school hours playtime

At (name of school), playtime is an important part of the school day. It is important for every child who attends to have plenty of time and good places to play freely as part of their day.

Policies which inform this plan

- School play policy
- Risk management policy

Supervision

The session is staffed in the following way:

- Describe the supervision structure
- List and describe each person's roles and responsibilities.

Schedule

The playtime schedule is:

- Describe the days and timings for all sessions.

Implementation

The procedures for implementing (list and describe the practice for the following and other issues identified by the school)

- Preparation, beginning and ending times
- Use and storage of equipment
- Access to toilets and water
- Outdoor spaces available (list and describe or include map)
- Other (list and describe).

Arrangements for inclement weather

Weather guidelines for out of school hours use have been developed by (identify person or group).

Weather guidelines will cover the following situations (provide details for each situation):

- Heat-related conditions
- Cold-related conditions
- Extreme weather conditions.

Weather guidelines will be shared with school staff, pupils, parents and others in the following way (describe how guidelines will be shared).

Safety

The school recognises that children will naturally create and/or seek out challenging situations. While making the most of their play some children may have accidents, get dirty or wet, or upset. We recognise that any potential risk of harm to children needs to be balanced with the potential for good that may come from their taking part in a particular form of play.

Regular inspections of spaces and facilities are undertaken by (identify individual or group). This inspection is done (indicate frequency, such as daily or weekly).

In particular, inspections will examine (describe what the person or group is looking for).

Problems with spaces and facilities should be reported to (identify person or group).

The following process is used to correct problems and ensure that standards are met: (indicate how problems are handled).

Monitoring

Describe how the school monitors the out of school hours play sessions.

Describe how and who reviews the information collected.

Describe how it uses the information to modify the out of school hours school playtime plan.

Describe what information will be collected and how it will be collected.

Consider:

- The number of pupils and ages
- The number of staff/partner supervisors
- The number of parents
- Weather
- Sorts of spaces where children are playing
- Types of playing observed
- Resources used (what is available, how pupils are using them, are there enough?)
- Incidents.

Describe any other information being collected such as classroom attention behaviour, attainment, and disciplinary actions.

Top tips – Communicating with parents

Once the school community has decided on the best option for the use of the school grounds out of hours, it is important to identify the best mechanism to communicate the nature of the project to parents and caregivers.

Key messages

About the project

Describe the project:

- If it will be staffed, reinforce that the role of staff will be to support freely chosen play and supervise the children when they are on the school grounds.
- Explain that the play sessions will be child-led and that this means that children can follow their own ideas and interests.
- Include the dates and times that the school grounds will be open and contact details for a named person should there be any questions or queries.

Who can attend

- Reinforce that the play sessions are free of charge.
- Be clear about the ages or year groups of children who can attend without being accompanied. If younger children can attend as long as an adult accompanies them at all times, remember to mention this.
- If the play sessions are open to children who live locally and attend other schools, make sure it is understood that they are also welcome to use the grounds for playing.

What parents and carers need to know

Clarify:

- if children can come to and leave the school grounds on their own
- that it is not a childcare service
- whether or not children are supervised while on the school grounds
- that children have freedom of choice and the opportunity to play with their friends
- whether or not children have access to toilets or other parts of the school (such as cloak rooms)
- that it is necessary that parents and children agree between them practical matters such as how children make their way home.

If there is supervision provided by the school without parents, you may wish to provide children with a registration form to take home. Parents should be requested to complete it and ask their child to return it to the school. The information provided will help to meet the needs of participating children.

Why we are supporting the project

Use this as an opportunity to promote to parents and carers the importance of the project. Statements such as these may help:

- Playing is important to and for children.
- We want to provide a space for playing that is neighbourhood based and nearby to where pupils live.
- Our school grounds are already open for community use during out of school hours and we wish to promote this locally, and to our pupils.

Template – Letter for parents for a family session



(School name) will be taking part in a pilot project involving the use of our school grounds by children for playing out of teaching hours.

The project

The sessions will be child-led. This means that children can follow their own ideas and interests.

We are inviting families to stay and use the (insert school location) from (insert time) to (insert time) on the following dates:

- Insert dates

Who can attend

Suggested options:

- The sessions are free of charge and open to any families with children in nursery, reception, years 1 and 2. Younger and older siblings can attend with their parents.
- The sessions are free of charge and open to any children who attend the school and their siblings. Children under the age of eight must be accompanied by an adult.

- The sessions are free of charge to children who attend the school, their siblings and other children who live locally. Children under the age of eight must be accompanied by an adult.

What parents and carers need to know

- It is not a childcare service.
- Children remain the responsibility of their parents while on school grounds.
- Children get freedom of choice and the chance to play with their friends.
- This is an outdoor play session – the school will not be open.

Why we are supporting this

- Playing is important to and for children.
- We want to provide a space for playing that is neighbourhood based and nearby to where pupils live.
- We hope that we will be able to offer more opportunities for children to play out of school hours.

Template – Community agreement

When considering the options for opening school grounds, it is likely that a number of individuals and groups will come together to plan the arrangements. A community agreement offers a way for sharing an understanding of what is proposed to open school grounds for community use. The community agreement doesn't need to be a complicated document. It is important to ensure that it is clear what each party or person is tasked with and who takes overall responsibility for critical elements such as insurance, maintenance and inspection.

'We've managed to open part of our grounds because we worked with an established Community Network. This group of people is both keen and used to taking on responsibilities. They have good community links, but also support staff which has helped maintain continuity.' **Headteacher, pilot project**

Community agreement

Introduction

The aim of the project is to work together to ensure that the grounds of (name of school) are suitable and accessible for children and teenagers in the community to use for playing out of teaching hours.

(Insert school name and address)

Purpose of the community agreement

The purpose of this community agreement is to define the method of working and roles and responsibilities of individuals working in partnership to oversee, support and ensure the maintenance of contributing to its longer-term sustainability.

The role of the partnership is to support (name of school) to ensure that the space is able to continue to support and be effective at meeting the play needs of children. Through making risk-benefit assessments any unnecessary hazards that may arise will be minimised by supporting the required actions needed to do so, including making checks, repairs and environmental modifications.

Participants making the agreement

List names

Methods of working

1. All participants will attend an initial meeting to agree the scope and details of out of school hours play project. Items to be determined:
 - a. Days, dates and times the sessions
 - b. Space to be used
 - c. Ages of children/families the project will be open to
 - d. Resources needed
 - e. Confirmation on who is responsible for packing equipment away.
2. (Name of school) will take primary responsibility for the management of the school grounds and will work with partners to ensure it is well maintained and suitable for access to support children's play needs.

3. (Name of school) will provide a caretaker to ensure a daily/weekly visual inspection of the school grounds. This will include the removal of any unnecessary litter and a visual inspection of any play equipment installed for wear and tear. Any concerns will be recorded appropriately, with identified actions needed. This will form part of any risk-benefit assessment made.
4. Risk-benefit assessments will be made and held on record by (name of school) and identified actions shared with appropriate staff and external participants or groups supporting the project.
5. Appropriate external parties will be required to contribute to any risk-benefit assessments made.
6. Appropriate external parties will contribute to the project by ensuring identified specific actions are made (for example removing rubbish, checking equipment).

Roles and responsibilities

Participant	Role – what?	Responsibility

Declaration

We the undersigned agree to the arrangements in this document.

Signed:

Date:



Template – Risk management policy

As part of responsibilities relating to inspection and maintenance of the play space, it is necessary to conduct regular operational (paper-based) risk-benefit assessments. It is likely this will be a condition of the insurance.

This is a risk management policy template that can be adapted to meet the needs of the school. The policy sets out the risk-benefit approach to managing risks and allows the inclusion of school procedures, 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 schools 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 (name of school) to ensure greater clarity of understanding around this issue.

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 (HSE). The high-level statement – *Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach* – 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

(Name of school) 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 pupils and staff from the potentially, long-term, 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 opportunities we create aim 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.

Template – Risk-benefit assessment

This benefit-risk assessment example is designed to include value-based risk-benefit assessment as described in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) endorsed *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*.

School:				Date:			
Completed by:				Review date:			
Area/description: Den building							
Benefits	Risks	Relevant local features	What are you already doing	What further action is needed	Action by whom	Action by when	Date action completed
Pleasure and fun. Physical play and problem-solving opportunities. Exploring environment. Team building. Development of self-confidence and wellbeing. Co-ordination. Achievement of end result. Social inclusion. Engagement with natural environment and natural elements. Potential for incorporation into imaginative games. Mixing between different age ranges.	Cuts, grazes, bruises from constructing and handling of materials. Cuts, bruises, broken bones from falling/collapsing objects.	Only a small budget exists for increasing the play offer at the school. Building on experience of imaginative play in school time. Local housing and road nearby to call for help.	Providing lightweight material				

Information session for parents

Aim: To promote the out of school hours play project.

Outcomes:

- Parents feel more equipped to support play
- Parents understand their role in facilitating an out of school hours play session
- Parents gain easy low-cost ideas for play.

Time	Description and activity	Activity	Resources
5 minutes	Welcome and introductions Introduce the aim and the outcomes of the session	Discussion	
20 minutes	Why play is good for children	Pin up images of play around the room beforehand Walk to each photo and discuss what children are doing and what the benefits are	Five images of play showing creativity/friends/climbing/messy/dens
10 minutes	About the project	Discussion	Notes which describe the project that will be provided
10 minutes	Stuff for playing – idea share	Provide a range of play equipment and share ideas for playing	Ball, cardboard box, sheets and fabric
10 minutes	Finishing remarks	Paper carousel <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What excites you about this?• What are you worried about?• What else do you need?	Flipchart and pens

Stuff for play: toys, games and equipment



One aim of opening up the school grounds for playing when the teaching day ends is to enable free, child-led play. You shouldn't need to buy or organise anything special, although it is helpful to have some resources to help children make the most of their time to play.

Here are some things to consider:

- What type of storage is available?
- What are the ages of the children?
- How many children are expected to attend?
- What are the plans for supervision?
- Are there any accessibility issues that we need to be aware of?
- Who is responsible for tidying away?

Possible play kit resource ideas:

- Parachute to enable large groups of children to play together
- Plenty of pavement chalk
- Plenty of low-cost den building resources (for example sheets, lightweight string, clothes pegs, fabric such as organza)
- Larger stuff like bits of rope, tyres and tarpaulin
- Small world play items (such as toy cars and vehicles, animals, dinosaurs)
- Skipping ropes – one large one encourages parents to get involved
- Non descriptive playballs (some schools prefer foam and lightweight balls)
- Hula hoops
- PE equipment such as cones and bean bags to encourage obstacle races.

Easy games to play with a group of children

Group games are a great way for children or teenagers to make new friends. They can help children who don't know each other feel at ease. Lots of games are suitable for children of different ages and abilities, and adults can play too. Group games are great to play on school grounds, in the park, or at events like picnics or parties.

Here are a few games to get you started

Tag

Tag is a chasing game played all over the world.

- One person is 'It'.
- 'It' counts to 10 before chasing the other players.
- When 'It' touches someone they shout 'tag'.
- The person they touch becomes 'It' and starts doing the chasing.
- The game can go on for as long as everyone wants to play.

There are lots of variations on tag games. Here are a few examples:

- **High tag** – you can't be tagged if your feet are off the ground, for example, if you are standing on a wall or hanging off the branch of a tree.
- **Hop tag** – you can only hop, not run.
- **Tunnel tag** – if you are tagged you stand with your legs apart or your arms out wide until another player frees you by crawling under your legs.
- **Shadow tag** – 'It' tags you by standing on your shadow instead of touching you.

An easy game that helps children learn each other's names

- Find something to throw – for example, a ball, balloon, soft toy, rolled-up scarf or a lemon.
- Get into a circle.
- Pass the item around the circle.
- Ask each person to say their name when they get it and then pass it to the next person.
- Once everyone has held the item at least once, ask the person who has the item to say the name of any other person in the circle and to throw the ball to them.
- When that person catches it, they choose someone else, say their name and throw the ball to them, and so on.
- Keep going for a few throws and then add another item, which someone else can start throwing.
- Add more items one by one, until you have several items being thrown back and forth.

Catch the dragon's tail

- Find two scarves or bits of fabric to use as 'tails'.
- Make two groups.
- Ask each group to make a line, with each person holding onto the waist of the person in front. Each line is a 'dragon' and the person at the front of each line is the dragon's head.
- Tuck the scarf loosely into the waistband of the person at the back of each line. This is the tail.
- Get the dragons to face each other but not too close.
- Shout, 'catch the dragon's tail'.
- The dragons now have to run around – with the people in each dragon continuing to hold onto each other – so the person at the front (the dragon's head) can try to catch the tail of the other dragon without their own dragon falling apart.

Mini treasure hunt

You can hold treasure hunts in places like schools, parks or gardens without any preparation.

- Think of a few 'treasure' ideas (see ideas below) and write them on pieces of paper – or you can make it up as you go along.
- Ask the children to think up ideas.
- Let the children decide if they want to search for the treasure individually, in pairs or teams.
- Make time to ask about all the treasures the children find.

A few ideas of 'treasure' that children could search for:

- a shiny leaf
- a smooth stone
- something red
- something smelly
- something sparkly
- something that makes you happy
- something that reminds you of your holidays.

Some other games that don't need any (or much) equipment

- Hide and seek
- Simon says
- Dodge ball
- Grandmother's footsteps
- What's the time, Mr Wolf?

Tips for playing group games

- Include everyone
- Ask if anyone else has a game to share with the rest of the group.

If you are outside:

- Respect nature
- Check the area for dog poo, broken glass or any other hazards
- Decide if there are limits to how far children can go – for example, no further than a particular fence, tree or other landmark.

For more play ideas visit the [Playful Childhoods website](#).



Out of school hours play session monitoring form

School:	Date:
Number of children:	Staff in attendance:
Estimated ages of children:	
Number of parents:	Weather:
Play/activities observed	
Reflections on the session (What happened? How do you feel about it? What might you have done differently?)	
What worked well?	
What could have been better?	
Actions for follow up:	

Reading list

In the [resources library](#) our website, we have a range of resources to support play in schools, for example:

A play friendly school – Guidance for a whole school approach

This guidance is designed to enhance the good work already being done to provide good play opportunities in schools. Developed to respond to Estyn's *Healthy and happy – school impact on pupils' health and wellbeing* report, which notes the importance of school play and break times, the guidance provides a range of resources help school communities take a whole school approach to supporting children's right to play.



Right to play workshop

Designed for facilitation in schools to raise children's awareness of their right to play, the *Right to Play workshop* pack includes a workshop plan, as well as supporting materials and resources. It has been developed to support the local promotion, participation and advocacy of the right to play and to support children to become advocates for play.



Thinking about loose parts in school

This information sheet aims to provide practitioners in the education sector with advice about the use of loose parts play materials. It looks at the use of loose parts play at playtime and in the classroom and offers examples and tips about how using loose parts in a school setting supports child-led learning. It also contains a useful appendix with research about how playing supports children's learning, development, physical activity, health and wellbeing.



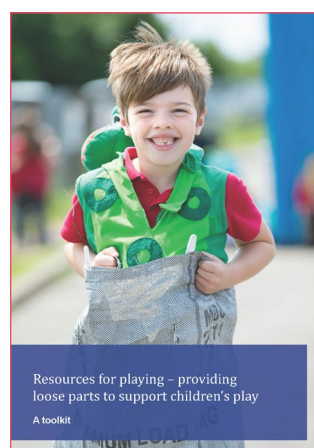
A reading list for teachers

A reading list of recommended resources for thinking about children's play in school. The reading list is a starting point for reflection and Continuing Professional Development for those with an interest in improving children's opportunities for playing at school.



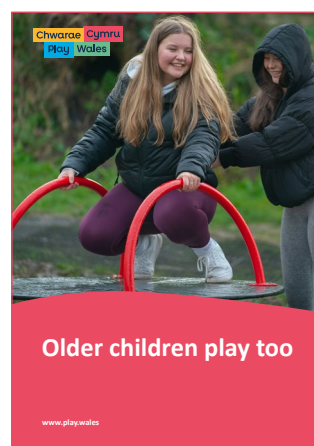
Resources for playing – providing loose parts to support children's play

This toolkit has been developed to support those working in play, early years and education settings to provide loose parts play. It includes examples from settings that are using loose parts as part of their play provision. These come from a range of settings, including schools, early years and childcare, and community-based projects.



Older children play too

This information sheet explores the play of older children (particularly those aged 11 to 16 years old), and how to avoid assumptions based on age. It also looks at the play behaviours of older children, the barriers to play and the social consequences for teenagers if they feel unwelcome in their communities' public spaces.



References

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² *What children say about play in Wales: 2022*.

³ See Russell, W., Barclay, M. and Tawil, B. (2024) *Playing and being well – A review of recent research into children's play, social policy and practice, with a focus on Wales Literature Review*, Cardiff: Play Wales.

⁴ Mannello, M., Connolly, M., Dumitrescu, S., Ellis, C., Haughton, C., Sarwar, S. and Tyrie, J. (2019) *Opening the School Gates: facilitating after-school play in school grounds*, in Alcock, S. and Stobbs, N. (eds) *Rethinking Play as Pedagogy*, London: Routledge.



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- Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Play Officer
- Monmouthshire County Council Community Focused Schools Lead
- Monmouthshire County Council Play Development Lead
- Swansea Council Play Services team.

Article 31 is important to Children and Young People



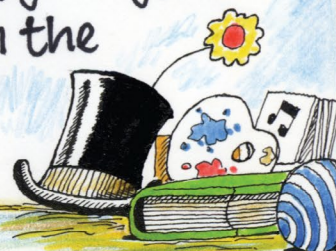
- We must have space and time for play, recreation and relaxing



- Playing helps us stay safe healthy and happy



- Governments MUST find ways to get rid of the things that get in the way of time for play



- We must have opportunities to explore and understand our own culture

- We should be involved in cultural and artistic activities and be able to go to places like museums, festivals, theatres, concerts and libraries

- Governments must make sure that none of us are left out



- If Governments take all of this seriously, our lives will be happier and healthier

iipa

Promoting the Child's
right to play





www.play.wales

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.