



# Creating accessible play spaces

A toolkit

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

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## About this toolkit

### Who is it for?

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

### Why has it been developed?

This is a reviewed and updated edition of a previous toolkit developed by Play Wales and Alison John and Associates. A small focus group of parents, local authority play area managers, play development officers and representatives of children's organisations advised on the original toolkit content.

This updated edition of the toolkit responds to *Including Disabled Children in Play Provision*,<sup>1</sup> a joint statement from the Children's Play Policy Forum and UK Play Safety Forum.

The statement addresses the need to uphold every child's right and need to play.

### What is it designed to do?

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

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

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



## Section 1 – Introduction

### The importance of 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 play.<sup>2</sup> When asked what is important to them, children consistently mention playing and gathering with their friends.<sup>3</sup>

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 studies<sup>4</sup> 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.

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

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

'I am disabled and use a wheelchair. Most places don't have good enough paths for my wheelchair so it's difficult to get out on my own.'





#### Removing barriers to quality play spaces:

- ensures that they are accessible to the greatest number of children and their carers
- supports children of all ages and abilities to play together
- enhances the local sense of community and supports community engagement and wellbeing
- enables children to benefit from all the positive benefits of playing – contributing to their overall sense of health and happiness.

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

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

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

'I am severely disabled, non-verbal, etc. It's very difficult for me to go out in the community anyway and my parents struggle to take me places which are suitable. There are no parks or open spaces nearby that cater to mine or any disabled child/young adults' needs.'



## Section 2 – Issues to consider

### Play and play value

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

### Play value

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

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

‘Something will have high play value if children are able to play with it in many different ways, integrate it into their play or use it to expand on their own ideas and actions.’<sup>5</sup>





## The importance of play spaces

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

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

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

Loose parts are 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, animals, plants, metal, clay, mud, tables, chairs, blankets – everything and anything that can be moved or manipulated as part of play.

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

Key features of good play spaces or things to consider:

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



## Useful definitions

### Designated play space

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

The following definitions have been taken from the glossary of terms within *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*,<sup>6</sup> statutory guidance to local authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas:

- **Door-step:** a play space, within sight of home, where children, especially young children can play within view of known adults.
- **Local:** a larger space which can be reached safely by children beginning to travel independently and with friends, without accompanying adults and for adults with young children to walk to with ease.
- **Neighbourhood:** a larger space or facility which children and young people, used to travelling longer distances independently, can get to safely and spend time in play and informal recreation with their peers and have a wider range of play experiences.
- **Playable space or shared public space:** a place where children can play that is not specifically designated for play and which does not have play as its principal or only function.
- **Destination play areas:** a play space within a key site, such as a park. It is aimed at attracting families and similar groups for longer visits and tends to be the same size or larger than neighbourhood sites.
- **Peripatetic playwork (play rangers) project:** an open access, often short term project staffed by a small team of trained playworkers, visiting a different place, a park, estate play area or other public space, once or twice a week for a couple of hours. They will be equipped with ideas and equipment, and will work to help children access places to play in their local area, and to reassure parents that it is safe for children to play out.
- **Playwork:** a highly skilled profession that enriches and enhances children's play. It takes place where adults support children's play but it is not driven by prescribed education or care outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

### Play or playground equipment

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

### Inclusive play

An inclusive play space provides a barrier-free environment,<sup>8</sup> with supporting infrastructure, which meets the wide and varying play needs of every child. Disabled children and non-disabled children will enjoy high levels of participation opportunities, equally rich in play value.

### Accessible play space

An accessible play space is a space which is barrier-free, allows users access to move around the space and offers participation opportunities for a range of differing abilities. Not every child of every ability will be able to actively use everything within an accessible play space.

### Universal design

The term 'universal design' was coined by Ronald Mace to describe the concept of designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability or status in life.<sup>9</sup>

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

### Impairment

An injury, illness, or congenital condition that causes or is likely to cause a long-term effect on physical appearance and/or limitation of function within the individual that differs from the commonplace.<sup>10</sup>

### Disabled children and teenagers

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

## Balancing risks and benefits

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published a high-level statement to promote a balanced approach to managing risk in children's play.<sup>11</sup> The statement emphasises that when planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to consider the risks and the benefits.

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

A policy framework provides the context for making risk-benefit assessments. Risk-benefit assessment brings together an informed analysis of both risks and benefits. *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*<sup>12</sup> sets out a descriptive form of risk-benefit assessment that allows providers to state in writing all the relevant considerations behind a given judgment or procedure. The HSE was consulted in the production of this publication. It endorses the sensible, proportionate, reasonable and balanced advice to play providers on managing participant safety set out in the guidance.

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





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

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

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

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

### **Is risk, riskier for disabled children?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Feedback from children and parents

### What parents have said

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

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

Priorities for parents of disabled children include:

- an accessible path of travel to the park and in and around the space
- features or things to do beyond fixed play equipment

- enjoyable for children with a range of ages and abilities
- space that encourages interaction with other children and family members
- accessible amenities and support facilities.

### What children have said

An analysis of responses from nearly 7,000 children and teenagers in Wales<sup>13</sup> where they tell us about what's good and what's not so good about the play opportunities in their local area and how satisfied they are about when, how and where they can play reveals that disabled children and teenagers:

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



## Section 3 – Tools to assist

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## Tool 1: Steps to developing inclusive play spaces

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



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



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



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



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



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

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



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



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

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

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

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



Build or install the play space.



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

## Tool 2: Play space audit

<b>Site name:</b>			<b>Site observation made by:</b>	
<b>Site observations:</b>	Observation day and date:	Observation period (e.g. half term/ after school/ during school day/weekend/ evening):	Time of observation period:	Weather:
<b>Key features of site:</b>	Brief description of main features including access points (such as slopes, trees, shrubbery, vantage points, areas to hide, things to climb up or clamber over, seating and gathering points, level areas; as well as any manufactured play equipment features that may have been installed). Note any specific areas of usage shown, for example by worn grass, broken branches. These can be further detailed below in any activity observations made.			
<b>Usage by children and adults: (numbers)</b>	Male:	Female:	Approx. age (e.g. Under 5, 5-8, 8-13, 13-15, 15+):	Total:
Children/teenagers in a group:				
Solo children/teenagers:				
Accompanied by adults:				
Adult only:				
<b>Activity observed by presence of children and teenagers:</b>			<b>If not present, record of signs of children and teenagers being there and making use of site:</b>	
Walking, travelling through the space:				
Sitting, gathering, hanging out:				
Riding bikes, scooters and skateboards:				
Use of natural features (e.g. trees, bushes, mounds, hills):				
Playing with elements (water, earth [mud], fire and air):				
Use of senses (taste, smell, sight, sound and texture):				



Movement (e.g. running, jumping, climbing, balancing and rolling):		
Rough and tumble:		
Risk and challenge (physical):		
Playing with props or loose parts:		
Playing with identity:		
Use of motorised vehicles (e.g. motorbikes or quads):		
Dog walking:		



## Play space action plan

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

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

## Play needs action plan

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

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

## Tool 3: Play space access assessment

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

### Type A

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

### Type B

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

### Type C

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

### Type D

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

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



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

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

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



Play value	✓	✗
The play area looks inviting and exciting in a way that encourages play		
Planting, for example bushes, trees and shrubs add play value		
Natural features, for example banks, dips and dry stone walls add play value		
Equipment has been adapted to be accessible to children with impairments, for example extra strong swing seats with safety straps or harness, ground level roundabouts to enable wheelchair access		
There are sufficient spaces between equipment for manoeuvring wheelchairs		
The surfaces in the play area enable a wheelchair user (whether parent or child) to move around the play area, for example there are paths without steep gradients made out of tarmac or wet-pour (grass is a difficult surface for wheelchair users)		
Play equipment has sufficient space around it to allow children to play and move safely between activities		
The site/play equipment meets the needs of pre-school children aged 1 to 3		
The site/play equipment meets the needs of primary children aged 4 to 11		
The site/play equipment meets the needs of young people aged 12 to 16		
Seating is available for parents and carers		
Seating is available for children aged 1 to 10		
Children can sit on top of or under equipment or natural features		
There are areas that provide shelter and shade		
There are opportunities for the following types of play:		
Social play with others		
Playing alone		
Running		
Jumping		
Swinging		
Sliding		
Balancing		

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

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

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

Welsh Government (2025) *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*, Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Play Wales (2021) *Developing and managing play spaces*, Cardiff: Play Wales.

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

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

### Accessibility: design considerations

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

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

**Features column:** sets accessibility features.

### RAG status

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

Criteria not met	
Criteria partially met	
Criteria fully met	

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

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

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

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





Features	RAG status	Evidence to support strengths	Shortfalls	Identified actions
<p>To what extent can children and their families get to the space and move around it?</p> <p>The publication <i>Inclusion by Design</i>,<sup>14</sup> contains useful guidance on how to make play facilities as accessible as possible to all children</p>		<p><b>Things to consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is easy to get from the street or a car</li> <li>• Everyone uses the same entry points</li> <li>• There is good access through the space and to the main activities</li> <li>• There is good headroom so that users can fit under equipment</li> <li>• Changes in levels are manageable</li> </ul>		
<p>To what extent are there opportunities to play with others?</p>		<p><b>Things to consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are able to be included even if they may not be able to do what others are doing all of the time</li> <li>• There are a range of activities and features</li> </ul>		
<p>To what extent does the space meet the needs of the variety of its users?</p>		<p><b>Things to consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are a range of activities and features (see key features of good play spaces on page 8)</li> </ul>		
<p>To what extent is the space welcoming and appealing?</p>		<p><b>Things to consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are a range of opportunities (see key features of good play spaces on page 8)</li> <li>• Users and their families do not feel uncomfortable or embarrassed and that unnecessary attention is on them</li> <li>• The space offers opportunities for exploration, creativity and socialisation</li> <li>• There are spaces to gather and rest</li> </ul>		

<p>To what extent do the facilities meet various support needs identified within the community profile?</p>		<p><b>Things to consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users can use the toilet in privacy</li> <li>• Users can use changing facilities in privacy</li> <li>• There is dedicated accessible parking</li> <li>• Cars are not parked near or on dropped kerbs</li> <li>• There is seating and shelter</li> </ul>		
<p>What action has been planned or taken to address shortfalls? What are the achievements?</p>				

## Tool 5: Anticipating equity and planning reasonable design

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

### Mobility issues

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

### Things to consider

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

### What might a reasonable design be?

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



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

### Cognitive processing conditions

- Developmental delay
- Learning difficulties
- Challenging behaviour.

### Things to consider

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



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

### What might a reasonable design be?

- The space is designed so that it is easy to understand how to get around and use it
- Signage, when needed, is clear and uses symbols or pictures
- Provide choice in spaces – ones that are busy and active and quieter ones
- The use of natural boundaries to help prevent wandering off
- Consider fencing some spaces, particularly if they are close to hazards
- A good range of physical challenges so that children can identify what feels right for them
- Equipment that enables side-by-side activity for those that require a greater level of supervision
- Spaces which support children to be 'on their own' without stigma attached.

### Mental health conditions

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

### Things to consider

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

### What might a reasonable design be?

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

### Sensory impairments

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

### Things to consider

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

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

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

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

### What might a reasonable design be?

- Planting that stimulates the sense of smell and touch
- A mix of materials that offer a range of textures and shapes to touch
- Careful consideration of surfacing so that it is not acoustically overwhelming
- Raised edges and textures can help with direction
- Strong cues of colour at level changes, steps and on hand grips
- The use of strong colours and light
- Features, resources and materials that offer sound and gentle vibration
- Quieter spaces shielded from excessive background noise
- The opportunity to explore elements such as sand, water and other natural features
- Features that block out the noise of wind and passing traffic
- Clear and concise information on any signage
- Adequate facilities for assistive or service dogs.



## Tool 6: Site design considerations

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

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



## Tool 7: Planning for reasonable design when refurbishing play spaces

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

Things to consider include:

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



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

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

Adjustment being considered	Explanation/rationale	Decision

## Tool 8: Undertaking an options analysis

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Useful resource

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

It includes helpful resources, such as:

- information about relevant legislation, policy and initiatives
- a school play policy template
- an out of school hours play plan template
- top tips on communicating with parents.

The toolkit is available in the Resources library on our website: [www.play.wales/resources-library](http://www.play.wales/resources-library)

## Tool 9: Play value – information for parents

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

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

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

Though many play providers focus on equipment that is wheelchair-accessible, it is important to recognise that this may meet the needs of a specific group of children. Non-prescriptive equipment, which can be used flexibly might be interesting to large numbers of children with different needs and abilities.<sup>15</sup>

### Things to look out for when visiting play spaces

- Opportunities for social interaction, such as seating and other spaces with open ended possibilities (logs, stumps, walls and art features):
  - create a sense of belonging
  - encourage communication for all children
  - support a co-operative and tolerant attitude
  - provide participation for children unable to take part in more physical activity
- Opportunities to play cooperatively, for example:
  - sand and water at raised level
  - loose parts play materials to move and create with
  - equipment which can accommodate groups of children
- Opportunities for sensory experiences, such as:
  - shading and lighting
  - gentle sound and music
  - quiet spaces.



## Tool 10: Promoting the play space

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

Marketing materials and information might include:

- address and location map
- description of the space and its key features
- type of space – neighbourhood or destination (see definition of terms on page 9)
- public transportation links and active travel details
- car parking facilities
- description of support facilities
- fencing or other boundaries details
- nearby facilities.

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

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

Through play, children:

- have fun
- problem solve
- manage and master challenge
- explore, create and use their imagination
- gain gradual independence
- interact socially
- are active
- have access to nature and natural materials.



## Tool 11: Risk management policy

Based on *Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Framework: Policy, Routine and Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment*<sup>16</sup>

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

### Risk management policy

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

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 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

\_\_\_\_\_ recognises that childhood is full of new experiences, which necessarily involve some degree of risk taking, whether it be physical or emotional. Childhood is a continuous process of trial and error with the potential for achievement, but also the inevitability of accidents. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving risk of injury. We have a duty of care to try and protect individuals accessing our services and facilities from the potentially, 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 provision we create aims to support children to experience reasonable levels of risk for themselves.
- There is a need for balance between ensuring appropriate levels of protection and preserving reasonable levels of uncertainty.
- We aim to manage risk so that whenever reasonably possible the risk of injury children are exposed to is proportional to the potential benefits associated with the situation.
- Controls will be reasonable and realistic whilst ensuring unnecessary risks are minimised.
- Risk management incorporates a number of different elements which work together to form a continuous cycle, improving our practice.
- Children are capable of managing some risk for themselves and their competency will develop as their experience grows.

## Tool 12: Key considerations for new play areas

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

### Integrated play space guidance

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

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

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

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

### Equipment

#### Key themes – generic

- Double width slide – wide enough for two for example parent/carers and child. Variety of access to accommodate different needs and abilities.
- Spinning units that children can lay on or sit in.
- Swings to include at least two basket type swings wherever possible as well as a choice of others.
- Low level and high level sensory experiences – be imaginative for example tactile, audio, visual.
- Rocking, spinning and bouncing experiences to suit varied sizes and abilities, not just height driven. Include multi-level experiences.

### Access

#### Key themes – generic

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



### Issues for local authority consideration

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





## References

<sup>1</sup> Children's Play Policy Forum and UK Play Safety Forum (2022) *Including Disabled Children in Play Provision* joint position statement.

<sup>2</sup> Dallimore, D. (2023) *What children say about play in Wales: 2022*, Cardiff: Play Wales.

<sup>3</sup> *What children say about play in Wales: 2022*.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> *Including Disabled Children in Play Provision*.

<sup>6</sup> Welsh Government (2025) *Wales – a Play Friendly Country*, Cardiff: Welsh Government.

<sup>7</sup> SkillsActive (2010) *SkillsActive UK Play and Playwork Education and Skills Strategy 2011-2016*, London: SkillsActive.

<sup>8</sup> *Including Disabled Children in Play Provision*.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013) *General Comment No. 17 on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31)*, Geneva: Committee on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>10</sup> Disability Wales (no date) *An Introduction to the Social Model of Disability*.

<sup>11</sup> Health and Safety Executive (2012) *Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach*.

<sup>12</sup> Ball, D., Gill, T. and Spiegel, B. (2012) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*, London: National Children's Bureau for Play England on behalf of the Play Safety Forum.

<sup>13</sup> *What children say about play in Wales: 2022*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Goodridge, C. (2008) *Inclusion by Design – a guide to creating accessible play and childcare environments*, London: KIDS.

<sup>15</sup> Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Group (2009) *Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Framework: Policy, Routine and Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment*.

<sup>16</sup> *Conwy & Wrexham Risk Management Framework: Policy, Routine and Dynamic Risk-Benefit Assessment*.



## Appendix 1: Policy and legislation that underpins the toolkit

### Policy

#### The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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

##### Article 2 (non-discrimination)

The convention applies to all children, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status

##### Article 23 (disability)

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

UN General Comment no. 9 on Article 23 states:

'Play has been recognised as the best source of learning various skills, including social skills.

The attainment of full inclusion of children with disabilities in the society is realised when children are given the opportunity, places, and time to play with each other (children with disabilities and no disabilities).'

##### Article 31 (play)

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

UN General Comment no. 17 on Article 31 states:

'Multiple barriers impede access by children with disabilities to the rights provided for in article 31, including exclusion from informal and social arenas where friendships are formed and where play and recreation take place; isolation at the home;

cultural attitudes and negative stereotypes which are hostile to and rejecting of children with disabilities; physical inaccessibility of, inter alia, public spaces, parks, playgrounds and equipment, cinemas, theatres, concert halls, sports facilities and arenas; policies that exclude them from sporting or cultural venues on the grounds of safety; communication barriers and failure to provide interpretation and adaptive technology; lack of accessible transport.

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

A General Comment is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the UNCRC that seems to require further interpretation or emphasis. The aim of a General Comment is to raise the importance of an article and increase accountability among countries that have signed up to the convention.

#### The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

##### Article 30

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

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

## Legislation

### Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

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

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

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

### Equality Act 2010

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

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

#### Legal definition of a disability

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

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

### Reasonable adjustments

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

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

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

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

### Public sector equality duty

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

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

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who are covered under the Equality Act and people who are not



- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic (for example race, disability or religion) and people who do not share it.

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

### How disabled people can be discriminated against

Types of discrimination:

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

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

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## Notes

## Notes



[www.play.wales](http://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.