Loose Parts Play

A TOOLKIT BY THERESA CASEY & JULIET ROBERTSON



INSPIRING SCOTLAND

thrive outdoors

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Forewords



I would like to thank Inspiring Scotland and all those who have contributed to developing and updating the Loose Parts Play Toolkit, which is a fantastic resource for play practitioners in a wide range of settings. Play is critical to children's health and wellbeing and promoting the benefits of play for all our children and young people is key to realising Scottish Government's ambition to make Scotland the best place to grow up.

We have also worked closely with Inspiring Scotland to publish Scotland's Coalition for Outdoor Play and Learning position statement which commits the signatories to embedding playing and learning outdoors as an everyday activity and to celebrate it as a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland. This toolkit helps make outdoor play and learning a high quality, child-led experience.

The updated Toolkit provides a greater focus on helping adults develop the skills to support inclusive, all-weather outdoor play in Scotland and encourage them to allow children to play in a less structured and more imaginative manner.

Scottish Government has been funding Inspiring Scotland's Thrive Outdoors (formerly Go2Play) fund since 2010 and continues to do so through its Community Play fund and outdoor early years childcare programme. Together we have helped thousands of children access free play opportunities across Scotland, and this resource will strengthen and expand those opportunities even further.



Maree Todd

Minister for Children and Young People



Inspiring Scotland and Scottish Government have worked together to establish free play as a part of everyday life in communities across Scotland.

We have consistently emphasised the role of outdoor play in children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.

Through our Thrive Outdoors fund we have invested in some of the most exciting and effective play organisations in Scotland; this Toolkit is part of that effort. Loose parts play sparks children's imaginations and curiosity in a unique and powerful way, as evidenced by the adaptation of this publication by play organisations in Wales, Australia and New Zealand.

We are proud to provide an updated version of the Loose Parts Toolkit, and hope this enables more children's lives to be enriched by imaginative, outdoor free play.



Celia Tennant

Chief Executive of Inspiring Scotland

Introduction to the second edition

Welcome to the second edition of the Loose Parts Play Toolkit. Since 2016, when it was first published under Scotland's Play Strategy, we have seen a burgeoning of loose parts play in schools and nurseries, play, care, childminding and out of school settings. Across the country, education and play practitioners are building a body of knowledge from their experiences of facilitating play and, at the same time, managing an array of challenges that come from the introduction of loose parts.



In this edition, we have tried to reflect this changing context. Loose parts for play are a more familiar sight, but their introduction is still providing a learning and development experience for adults and organisations, as much as for children. With this in mind, this edition offers:

- a greater focus on skills that help adults to facilitate loose parts play sensitively and respectfully
- more starting points to link loose parts play with education, curriculum, wellbeing, social and care contexts
- a wider range of 'snapshots' and case studies illustrating real-life application of loose parts play theory in the field
- more pages to print, photocopy and share.

The first *Loose Parts Play Toolkit* found its way around the world and feedback shows it is part of an international movement for playing and learning. In this Toolkit, the references to policy and guidance are mainly in the Scottish context, which is on a path of embracing play-based pedagogies and outdoor playing and learning. We hope the Toolkit will be useful wherever you are and can be adapted to your context.

Toolkit aims

The Toolkit aims are to:

- increase the number of children and teenagers with access to loose parts play as part of their daily lives
- increase adults' confidence in introducing loose parts play within play, early learning and childcare, education, care, health, environmental and community settings
- raise awareness of the value of loose parts to children's play
- provide practical guidance about loose parts play to those who work with children and young people of all ages.

Who is the Toolkit for?

The Toolkit will be useful for:

- people working directly with children and teenagers, in many types of setting
- people in management and leadership roles
- play and community associations and networks.

Note for schools and early learning and childcare settings

Loose parts are about real world learning for all children and young people. The process of introducing them and of playing with them involves collaboration, sharing thinking, problem-solving and decision-making. The impact of embedding loose parts play is a positive cycle of improved health and wellbeing.

The first appendix provides information about how embedding loose parts play can be a core part of a school or setting's approach to Curriculum for Excellence. It enables many experiences and outcomes, particularly in Health and Wellbeing, to be effectively bundled together.



"A pupil spends 40 minutes working solidly on his creation, adding to it, adapting it. We notice pupils tying knots, inventing stories, counting change for transactions and examining bugs. This is our first session together. Immediately afterwards the teacher rearranges her timetable to take pupils back to the woods for loose parts play."

(Susan Humble, East Lothian Play Association (ELPA) with Loretto RC Primary School)



01

Loose parts play

In this section you will find:

- the theory of loose parts
- loose parts play – an embedded approach
- loose parts play – getting it right for every child
- storytelling with loose parts
- the benefits of loose parts play – a mind map
- play themes and loose parts play.







The theory of loose parts

Loose parts create richer environments for children, allowing them to do what they need to do, to follow their interests and go where their curiosity takes them.

Environments full of loose parts lend themselves to a blurring of distinctions between learning and playing, allowing children to experiment, enjoy and find things out for themselves.

The term 'loose parts' came into widespread use after the publication of Simon Nicholson's article The *Theory of Loose Parts: How NOT to Cheat Children*. Nicholson proposed that there was no evidence to suggest that some of us are born creative and inventive and some of us not. Instead he recognised children's need to make and build things, play with fluids, water, fire or living objects, and "all the things that satisfy one's curiosity and give us the pleasure that results from discovery and invention."

Nicholson described loose parts as 'variables' and provided examples such as *materials and shapes; smells and other physical phenomena, such as electricity, magnetism and gravity; media such as gases and fluids; sounds, music, motion; chemical interactions, cooking and fire; and other humans, and animals, plants, words, concepts and ideas. With all these things all children love to play, experiment, discover and invent and have fun.*

Nicholson captured the essence of these playful, very human phenomena, describing what he observed in children's behaviour and dispositions in ways that are both philosophically profound and eminently applicable to the environments we endeavour to provide to children.

Nicholson extends the theory of loose parts into the realms of community interaction and involvement, behaviour planning and design, curriculum development and environmental education. The theory has perhaps had its greatest influence in the field of playwork and, not by coincidence, emerged at a time of great interest in adventure playgrounds.



> **"In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it."**
>
> (Nicholson, S. 1971:30-34)

More loose parts play pioneers

Abundant loose parts for children to play with are central to the adventure playground ethos. They go back to the famous 'junk playgrounds' (*skrammellegeplad* or *byggelegeplad*) first created by landscape architect C. Th. Sørenson in Emdrup, Denmark in 1943.

In the post-war years, children were often to be found in derelict and brownfield sites where the junk provided endless play opportunities. From these roots, adventure playgrounds developed in the mid-twentieth century.

Inspired by Scandinavian examples, a network of adventure playgrounds began to grow in the UK in the late 1950s and 60s with Lady Allen of Hurtwood credited for the critical role she played, as well as her insistence on play opportunities for disabled children (IPA, 2011).

More recently, initiatives across the UK have demonstrated the play value of scrap material in school playground environments and provided a catalyst for the expansion of loose parts into schools at playtimes.

Early childhood theorists and pioneers over several centuries have been staunch advocates of the benefits of young children playing outside, accessing mud, sand, water and spending frequent time in nature. The expansion of outdoor nurseries is continuing this tradition and is actively supported by Scottish Government.

There is a long-standing tradition of using household items for play, using tools for gardening and woodworking and having 'tinkering' tables where children can experiment. For the very youngest children, heuristic play pioneered by Elinor Goldschmied offers treasure baskets of simple objects such as wooden spoons and cotton reels for babies and young children to explore with their hands and mouths.

Many education approaches such as Steiner Waldorf or Montessori advocate the need for real experiences in order to acquire life skills. Playing with a variety of loose parts assists with these approaches.

Loose parts in children's everyday environments

A list of possible loose parts is endless, as Nicholson's theory illustrates. In a practical sense, the kinds of things that tend to make up loose parts provision include:

- natural resources such as straw, mud and pinecones
- building materials and tools such as planks, nails and hammers
- scrap materials such as old tyres and off-cuts of guttering
- naturally occurring and disappearing phenomena like water, ice, snow, shadows, cobwebs, dappled light and rainbows
- people and living things
- random found objects.

See page 22 for lists of tried and tested loose parts.

One of the reasons for the fascination loose parts offer is that they aren't prescriptive; they offer limitless possibilities. For example, a stick may become:

- a fishing rod near real or imaginary water
- a spurtle to stir 'porridge' in a mud kitchen
- a tool to nudge a football that is stuck in a tree
- something to throw, float, snap, ping, bend, hide, add to a pile, burn, tie to something else, split, catapult or discard.

Natural environments such as mature woodland or beaches provide boundless loose parts with more play possibilities than many artificial play spaces such as a tarmac school playground or a tidy urban park. However, these spaces can be enriched by the regular addition of plentiful loose parts.

Affordance theory

When children play in a space or play with an object, they experience it in a unique way. Rather than its intended purpose, they may view it in terms of its 'affordances'. American psychologist James J. Gibson (1979) suggested that environments and objects within them have values and meanings that are unique to the person perceiving them.

The 'affordances' of an object or space are all the things it has the potential to do or be. For example, a brick wall may be built to make a clear boundary between a pavement and a garden but for many children it would offer something to sit on, walk along, balance on, hide behind or jump off.

The concepts of variables and affordances come to life outside. The interplay between children and the loose parts, landscape, elements and seasons creates an ever-changing, growing, evolving play space, especially in natural environments that are loved and cared for. Furthermore, children experience a sense of freedom, space and autonomy that connects them to the land in an intimate way.

Adults' role in loose parts play environments

For adults, facilitating and supporting loose parts play requires a sensitive role that recognises children's play process and resists the urge to step in too soon or too frequently.

There is no doubt that the introduction of loose parts play can mean changes from familiar roles and routines. Helena McHugh, Principal Teacher St Marys RC Primary School, Haddington, advises:

> **"Introducing loose parts play into school playgrounds can be a learning curve, even when it is introduced gradually. On our first few sessions we were taken aback by how boisterous the play was, to the point of thinking it was going too far. We managed to step back and watch.**
>
> **We did have a talk with the children class by class to remind them of the agreements about loose parts and our school way of doing things. It's understandable that new things in the playground raise excitement but it did settle down. Don't panic. Take a minute to assess, don't be too hasty or jump in straight away to intervene."**

Smart Play Network is a national organisation supporting play services and play providers in Scotland through its membership network, training programmes and the delivery of play projects. Mar Sanchez, training manager, observes:

> **"Playing outdoors has positive physical and emotional outcomes for teachers as well as pupils. We have observed that free play helps teachers see their pupils in a different light and strengthens bonds between them.**
>
> **Teachers acquire a 'playworker's frame of mind'. They learn to step back and intervene only when necessary, how to observe and act according to the pupils' behaviours and motivations and how to create challenging and engaging play spaces."**

See pages 33-39 for more on the adults' role in facilitating loose parts play.







Loose parts play – an embedded approach

In this Toolkit we recognise many links from Nicholson's core ideas. Play is not something that happens in only one place or at set periods of time. It is a process.

Play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live.

The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. Play can happen indoors or outdoors, with or without the oversight of adults, in everyday spaces, in environments designed for play and in places chosen by children and young people (Scottish Government, 2013: 10).

Playing and learning in a children's rights context

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) provides clear guidance that supports children's playing and learning (CRC, 2013).

Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child relates to the rights of children with additional support needs, and the Committee recognises the value of inclusive play, both as a right and as a means of achieving children's optimum development.

The right to play is expressed in article 31 of the Convention and articles 28 and 29 express children's rights to education.

The Committee emphasises that the article 31 rights are of positive benefit to children's educational development and rights. These encompass education directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to the fullest potential.

The Committee highlights that inclusive education and inclusive play are mutually reinforcing and should be facilitated during the course of every day, not just in early childhood education and care but also in primary and secondary school.

Linking children's article 31 rights to health, wellbeing, creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, participation and inclusion, the Committee recognises that:

> **'Play is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development.'** (2013:6)







Curriculum for Excellence

Play is a much-valued part of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, by teachers and practitioners as well as children. *Active Learning in the Early Years* (Scottish Executive, 2007) for example, recognises the need for children at the Early Level to have a curriculum that ensures sufficient time for children to play uninterrupted. Older children and teenagers also need downtime, to be themselves, socialise, and to be able to play for the sake of it.

The rationale for play can be embedded into a school or early years curriculum as part of the process for developing a play statement or policy.

See page 12 for the benefits of loose parts play mind map.

See page 10 for loose parts play – getting it right for every child.

EMBEDDING PLAY – WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

VALUES

- Our school is a place where children have a right to play.
- All children are able to experience and enjoy the essential and special nature of being outdoors.
- We value the contribution of all staff to ensure children have this right.

TOTALITY OF THE CURRICULUM

- Play is a core part of our informal curriculum.
- We recognise the value of play for the sake of it.
- We take a sustainable, participative and enterprising approach to embedding play.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

- We support our staff to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of play.
- We support our children to learn through play when appropriate for meeting their needs.

EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES

- We recognise and can evidence learning which happens through play (See the first appendix).
- We recognise the benefits of nature and natural environments for providing rich play experiences that develop children's ecological identity.

Responsible

- We care for loose parts and the play environment.

Successful learners

- We are motivated, engaged and learn well through play.

Confident individuals

- We gain independence and confidence through our play experiences.

Effective contributors

- We are critical thinkers and problem-solvers who can transfer skills between formal learning and play.

ENTITLEMENTS

- Our children and teenagers have access to sufficient time and space to play. Outdoor breaks and lunchtimes take place in all weathers, all year round, where they access open-ended materials, structures and natural resources which encourage free play.

PERSONAL SUPPORT

- The benefits of play are recognised and used to provide targeted support where needed for individual children.
- As part of a holistic approach to *Getting it Right for Every Child*, loose parts play can support children and young people through each wellbeing indicator.

PRINCIPLES

- The curriculum design principles underpin our approach to play.
- Being outdoors allows children to experience choice, autonomy, risk and challenge.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

- We monitor and evaluate the quality, range and provision of play and play environments to ensure play is a great experience for all involved.

Loose parts play – getting it right for every child

Getting it Right for Every Child is a national programme that aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people. As part of a holistic approach to *Getting it Right for Every Child*, loose parts can support children and young people through each wellbeing indicator.

Safe

Having opportunities to develop personal safety skills and understanding, make our own decisions, cope with challenges and learn skills for life.

Active

Having freedom to fully engage in play, be physically active and use our bodies, muscles, stamina, dexterity and strength through playing with loose parts.

Healthy

Having daily opportunities for outdoor loose parts play with access to nature, all year round in almost all weathers, in an ethos that supports our overall wellbeing.

Respected

Having our right to play respected and supported; having opportunities to be actively involved in maintaining, evaluating and developing our loose parts play provision; feeling listened to however we communicate.

Achieving

Being supported to experience challenging, risky and adventurous play that allows us a sense of achievement, success and exhilaration; having opportunities for creativity including using problem-solving strategies, higher order thinking, communication and imagination.

Responsible

Having opportunities to collaborate with others and having to take responsibility for others, for resources and the environment.

Nurtured

Having spaces that have meaning, feel safe and where we gain a sense of autonomy, belonging and place-attachment; having adults around who support our play process respectfully and sensitively; having access to suitable outdoor clothing and footwear to enable all-year outdoor loose parts play.

Included

Being able to play in the way and at the pace that we choose, following our own interests; being allowed to play alone, in a small group, with children of other ages or as part of the whole community; having help and support to play in the way we would like to.

Storytelling with loose parts

Loose parts are really good for bringing story time and books alive for our youngest children at The Yard. The Yard offers adventure play, fun and friendship for disabled children and their families in the east of Scotland. Being physically active within a story holds their interest – they are not just looking at pictures in a book but going on an adventurous journey.

We read 'Not a Box' and had great fun with cardboard boxes, imagining we were robots and cars. We've been on several bear hunts creating snowstorms with shredded paper, dark gloomy caves with fabric and forests of twigs and bamboo.

Using loose parts in play fascinates the children, opening up a door to their imagination. At The Yard, using loose parts to tell a story encourages interaction, social development and friendships to form.

Our favourite loose parts are:

- **cardboard boxes**
- **different colours and textures of material**
- **containers for collecting treasure**
- **sensory plants like herbs and leaves**
- **old bits of carpet, astro turf or lino to change the texture of the surfaces in the play space.**

(Danielle Campbell, Early Years Play Team Leader, The Yard)

www.theyardscotland.org.uk



The benefits of loose parts play – a mind map

happier children

communication and negotiation skills

judgement

better behaviour

life skills

confidence

learning about risk and challenge

physical activity

fun and enjoyment

THE BENEFITS OF LOOSE PARTS PLAY

"Play is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development."

(UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013)

time in nature

mental health and emotional wellbeing

social development

cognitive development

early childhood development

children's rights

role play

creative and imaginative play

arts, culture, creativity

experiential learning

play as therapy

future scientists, builders, engineers

co-operative and social play

better able to focus working memory

caring for the environment

This Toolkit is full of examples of how children and the adults around them benefit from the introduction of loose parts play. Print or copy this page and add examples of the benefits you discover. You may need to stick this page onto a larger sheet of paper. You could add photos, quotes, observations and evidence from research.

- *Getting it Right for Play: The Power of Play: an evidence base.* Play Scotland, 2012
  http://www.playscotland.org/getting-right-play/getting-it-right-for-play
- *Play Types Toolkit - Bringing more play into the school day.* Play Scotland, 2017
  https://www.playscotland.org/playful-learning/play-types-toolkit-bringing-play-school-day/
- **https://www.childrenandnature.org**

Play themes and loose parts play

The concept of loose parts and their affordances can be interwoven with studies about how children play outside, particularly in natural environments. There appear to be patterns to children's play which emerge almost regardless of climate, culture, class, gender, developmental level or age. They link to how humans grow and their need for identity, attachment and a sense of connectedness to place and people. In our rapidly changing world, children need opportunities to develop this sense of belonging and being with nature.

Jan White (2014: 235-244) considered the work of Appleton (1975), Sobel (2008) and Pelo (2013). Noticing similarities in their ideas, from different decades and from work with children and young people of various ages, she proposed that the themes could be merged to provide a framework of reference.

This framework, developed from White's original work, can help to:

- increase adults' understanding of how children play
- suggest ways to support children's attachment to nature and place
- suggest engaging environments for playing with loose parts.



PLAY THEME	LOOSE PARTS PLAY PROVISION POSSIBILITIES
ADVENTURE	
Seeking out the unknown, stretching limits of possibility, taking calculated risks, anticipation, discovery and invention.	• exploring away from adult eyes (or perception of this) • establishing a culture where adventure and uncertainty is supported • creating spaces with many layers to discover • providing time to listen to and hear children's experiences, should they wish to share.
ENCLOSURE, DENS AND SPECIAL PLACES	
Creating space, shelter, security, hiding and secret places, refuge and territorial boundaries.	• resources for building dens • props for developing play within a den or secret place • scrap cardboard and writing materials for creating signs • nooks, crannies, trees and bushes or undergrowth to hide in or be alone • large cardboard boxes and pieces of material, both see-through and dark.
PROSPECT (HEIGHT)	
Searching out high places, views and lookouts, surveying the landscape and mapping areas.	• being high up – top of a hill • climbing trees, boulders and other objects • balancing on features • play on different levels • spyholes, gaps and see-through spaces, including windows and doorways.
PATHS AND JOURNEYS	
The need for exploration, mapping out an area in many ways, finding short cuts and secret routes, tunnels, knowing the local area, making one's mark in the landscape.	• map making and using opportunities – both real and through digital devices • trail making with natural resources and props such as ropes or chalk • freedom to explore and get to know a local area • finding your way.
HUNTER-GATHERER ACTIVITIES	
Searching, finding and collecting, stashing and hoarding, treasure hunts, traditional games like hide 'n' seek, foraging, bush craft skills, fire, tool use.	• time to invent and play games • collecting and using natural materials • containers such as pockets, bags, baskets and buckets • using real tools to create, make and take apart different objects • experiencing fire-making • bush craft type activities: whittling, fishing, foraging.

PLAY THEME	LOOSE PARTS PLAY PROVISION POSSIBILITIES
ANIMAL ALLIES	
Projecting self onto other living things, feelings for, and empathy with, plants and animals of all kinds, developing personal connections to wildlife through direct experience and fantasy, the significance of names.	• ensuring time and space to discover wildlife on children's terms • creating places to hide and watch wildlife, creating habitat piles, bird feeding stations and nesting boxes, etc. • simple props for dressing up and being animals.
IMAGINATIVE NARRATIVES (STORIES, IMAGINATION AND FANTASY)	
Making sense of the world through fantasy play, small world play and creating stories and accounts of experiences that connect and deepen friendships and relationships between each other and the places they play in, creating memories and reaffirming order and meaning.	• constructing and deconstructing miniature worlds outside or in • dressing up inside and out with open-ended props such as quick dry materials and simple, open accessories, marking or painting face and body • making and creating fantasy characters • listening to the stories children tell and recording them where appropriate • ensuring ample undisturbed time for play to spark and emerge.
MAKING RITUALS	
Deliberate, ceremonial, meaningful actions often with metaphysical or transformational intent, invented by and participated in by individuals or groups; honouring or celebrating events, places, features through art, music, dance and role play; giving and receiving gifts.	• attending to, honouring and supporting the development of the simple but significant rituals of children • providing space, time, freedom and space for children to dance, make music and explore art inside and out • celebrating play • re-visiting places regularly and frequently such as local greenspace.

Sit back and watch loose parts play in action

- East Lothian Play Association **http://elpa.org.uk/loose-parts-play/**
- Scrapstore Playpod® **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqH1KyjJeKg**
- Learning through Landscapes **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pot8EhKUdI&list=FLpswP_hu8apF1Sw1P15cRtA&index=3&feature=plpp_video**
- Playtime Revolution – a series of twelve videos that are part of a training package offered by Learning through Landscapes **https://youtu.be/u3yvHysI5Gc**



02

Practical guidance to get started

In this section you will find:

- getting started
- assessing current provision
- sample letter or leaflet to parents
- tried and tested loose parts
- acquiring plentiful loose parts
- storage
- checking loose parts before, during and after playing
- moving loose parts – lifting and handling guidance
- maintenance.

Getting started

- Consider the use of loose parts within your overall approach to play.
- Assess current provision. You can involve children and teenagers at each step in fun and interesting ways.
- Develop an action plan.
- Work out your approach to evaluation right from the start – it's helpful to have evidence showing the difference 'before' and 'after' the introduction of loose parts.
- Involve and educate staff, parents and carers about the use and benefits of loose parts. Online film clips, small study visits and presentations are all very useful.
- Access training to equip adults with knowledge, skills and confidence.
- Get your procedures in place for sourcing, managing and using loose parts. You will review these as time goes on.
- Work out where and how you will store your loose parts.
- Work on your risk-benefit assessment of loose parts play. See page 54. These are likely to be adjusted as you and the children gain experience.
- Gather your initial supply of loose parts and figure out how they will be replenished.
- Try some taster sessions, ideally with support from an experienced playworker or play organisation.
- Facilitate play opportunities in line with the Playwork Principles.
- Plan, do, review.

It's natural for challenges to arise along the way when you are introducing something new. These may be practical issues, or practice or team challenges.

In the long term, working through issues as a team helps to embed loose parts play even more firmly in the setting's way of working. Problem-solving together with the children can improve understanding of the loose parts play approach.

Assessing current provision

Before introducing loose parts for play, and at intervals after introducing them, it's helpful to assess your current provision. This ensures that everyone can see the impact of the changes that will follow.

It's important that information is gathered from all users of the play space as perspectives of what's on offer may vary widely between children or between children and adults. Children are well placed to gather as well as provide information, creating opportunities to develop their research skills.

What information would be useful to collect and understand?

- play features and affordances of the physical environment
- obstacles to play and underused space
- routines and rules and how they influence play
- roles and expectations of children and adults in relation to play
- resources available for play
- what children like to do outside.

How can we involve children and teenagers successfully?

- Discuss why information is being collected and how it will be used.
- Involve everyone in deciding what information should be collected and how.
- Establish a sense of trust and respect for each other's opinions.
- Use a variety of methods for collecting information that will appeal to children's varied strengths and interests, for example visual, creative, factual, data-driven, analytical methods.
- Carry out activities in the spaces you are gathering information about. For example, interview the playground supervisor in the area he or she usually covers; mark up site plans outdoors in the play space.

How can information be captured?

- Take photos or videos of features of the playspace and use them to prompt discussion or make comparisons between what happens in different places.
- Draw a simple plan or map of the play space. Make plenty of photocopies then ask everyone to mark them up from their point of view. They could be asked to draw, write, scribble or use stickers to identify things like:
  - my favourite place to play
  - 'trouble' spots
  - who does what where
  - underused spaces, etc.
- Take time-lapse photos (or simple snapshots at regular intervals) of the same area over the course of a play session to see what really happens there.
- Make an inventory of existing play resources. You can do this with visual methods such as photos, symbols and wall charts.
- Create a simple chart for monitoring things like first aid in the playground, playground incidents, or other data that can be routinely collected. This should help you assess the impact of introducing loose parts. This can be an interesting data handling challenge for children.

- Organise for children to interview each other and adults. Preparing questions, asking them, listening and recording answers are great exercises in communication. Interviews can be recorded on paper, with audio or video.
- Check your playground rules, policies and procedures. Think about what they tell you about how play is perceived and valued.
- Review the expectations and job descriptions of people who are involved in supporting play in your setting. Do they reflect what is required to support play?
- Be brave! Find out what the children really think about how adults are supporting or hindering play through their actions.
- Re-visit each activity once loose parts play has got going so that you can gauge the impact.

How can we organise these activities?

- One class or group could take the lead role in making a plan of activities and then allocate them to different children, classes, adults or groups to carry out.
- A number of classes or groups could each take one aspect of the assessment and report back.
- The same activities or focus could be given to children of different ages and stages to reveal different points of view and what they have in common.
- Some activities may be more appropriate for adults or staff, such as reviewing policies, but even these could usefully involve children.
- Some play organisations offer help to run or support assessment activities.
- Some organisations (play and others) can offer help in including the views of very young children or children and teenagers with additional support needs.

What do we do with what we find out?

- Gather the information together and look for themes, priorities, opportunities.
- Use it to answer questions such as: How could we make better use of the space we have? Are there areas valued by children that we hadn't noticed before? Are there groups of children for whom we should be doing more to make sure they have fair opportunities to play outdoors? Do adults need to do things differently?

"Hidden behind some fabric, Nina spends a long time sorting shells. Staff hear her identifying colours and sizes, "whether smooth or rough". When I take the fabric down, I find elaborate patterns made with string and elastic."

(Susan Humble, ELPA at Whitecraig Playgroup)







ASSESSING CURRENT PROVISION – A TOOL TO HELP PLAN ACTIVITIES

WHAT DO WE WANT TO FIND OUT ABOUT?	WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES COULD WE CHOOSE FROM?	WHO DO WE THINK COULD DO THIS?
• Play features • Affordances (what the space offers children the chance to do, e.g., lie rolling down hills, balancing on a log, chatting in a bush) • Things that get in the way of playing • Space that isn't used or could be used better • What do children like to do outside	Choose some activities from the suggestions above or add your own, for example: • *Photos or videos* • *Site maps* • *Time-lapse pictures*	For example: • *Mr M's class – draw site plans and photocopy them* • *All classes do a map marking activity with them* • *After school club – take photos and put them on the noticeboard*
• Routines and rules and their impact on play	For example: • *Interviews* • *Check playground rules, policies and procedures*	
• Roles and expectations of children and adults in relation to play	For example: • *Expectations and job descriptions* • *Children's views*	
• Resources available for play (stuff to play with)	For example: • *Make an inventory* • *Find out what is used most and who likes to use what*	
• Identifying themes, priorities and opportunities from the information we have found out	For example: • *Review all the information that has been gathered* • *Ask questions to help make some conclusions*	
• What else do you want to find out?	• What other activities would you choose?	• Who else can help?

Further reading and templates

- Play Wales: Play space audit template
  http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit
- Shackell, A., Butler, N., Doyle, P. and Ball, D. (2008) *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*. London: Play England.
  http://www.playengland.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/design-for-play.pdf
- *The Good School Playground Guide* (2013) Learning through Landscapes and *The playtime revolution. Developing school play times to support the curriculum and nurture happy, healthy children* (2012) Learning through Landscapes
  https://www.ltl.org.uk/free-resources/?swoof=1&po_subject=play

Sample letter or leaflet to parents

Introducing loose parts play

This term we are introducing loose parts play. 'Loose parts' are things like cardboard boxes, tyres, crates, tarpaulins, wooden planks and plastic guttering. Loose parts let children play in many different ways – anything from making a pirate ship to an assault course or den.

Add a picture of some loose parts you'll be using here	Add a picture of some loose parts you'll be using here	Add a picture of some loose parts you'll be using here

Loose parts play will happen in and out of class time.
It will be a chance for children to:
• play freely with friends • investigate • discover • explore • create

Our preparation for loose parts play. Staff and children have:

- prepared together to introduce the loose parts to the playground
- received training on practical and safety issues
- agreed some guidelines
- put plans in place to check all the loose parts for safety on a regular basis.

Dress for the weather!

Please ensure your child is dressed for the weather so they can join in properly. In cold weather they might need warm boots, waterproof jackets and gloves. In warmer weather sunscreen, and hats etc. Let us know if you need any help with these items.

Parents and carers

Would you like to come and see what's happening? Get in touch and we'll arrange a suitable time.

Do you have loose parts to donate? We will need a supply of loose parts to keep things interesting. Currently we are looking for:

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

Please let us know if you'd like someone to collect any loose parts.

Tried and tested loose parts

Natural

- Wooden pennies (slices of wood about three inches thick)
- Logs of different heights and widths
- A variety of lengths of wood
- Willow or hazel rods at least 1.5m long
- Sticks – various lengths
- Stones, pebbles, cobbles.

Manufactured wood

- Whisky barrel planters for mixing and collecting
- Pieces of decking.

Surfaces and features

- Planted willow tunnels, dens and hedges
- Water supplied from an outside tap, a barrel pump, water butt or jerry cans with taps
- Sand (and resources for sand play and maintenance – including sieves, buckets, spades, trowels, long handled sturdy brooms, brushes, rakes etc.)
- Pebbles, pea gravel or other small stones
- Bark chips
- Mud
- Long grass
- Trees – plant now for future generations of children
- Fire pit (temporary or permanent).

Man-made

- Quick drying materials such as organza, fleece blankets and shower curtains
- Tarpaulins (various sizes, types and colours)
- Milk and bread crates
- Wooden pallets – tough ones in good condition
- Tough buckets
- Cable drums or reels
- Tubes, guttering and funnels, hosepipe, bore pipes and other pipes
- Ramps and lengths of plastics and other materials such as corrugated transparent plastic
- Nets
- Tyres – bicycle, motorbike, go-kart and car tyres
- Large shallow tray
- Trolley to aid tidying up
- Wheelbarrow
- Old suitcases or wheeled shopping bags
- Baskets for collecting and transporting
- Steering wheels
- Computer keyboards
- Old clothes for dressing up, for example, jacket suits, waistcoats and handbags
- Portable seats and things to sit on: aluminium bubble-wrap, camping mats and gardening mats.

More temporary

- Chalk
- Straw bales
- Cardboard boxes and tubes – various sizes and shapes
- Leaves, feathers, shells, pine cones
- Air drying modelling clay
- Tree brashings
- Leaves
- Cones and seed pods
- Seaweed
- Plastic bottles and containers.

Useful little bits

(some may be kept by adults in pockets or bags)

- Velcro straps
- Fence clamps and hooks
- String, paracord and high visibility guy ropes
- Karabiners (from climbing or camping shops)
- Pegs of different sorts, including tent pegs
- Duct tape and masking tape.

Useful for play in the dark

- Torches, head torches
- Hi-vis jackets
- Glow in the dark things
- Reflective markers such as traffic cones
- Lanterns – battery powered, wind-up or solar powered, camping lights, fairy lights
- Whistles and horns
- Candles, tealights, matches – all to be used with appropriate supervision
- Tactile, smelly and other sensory items.

Loose parts for babies and toddlers

- Baskets
- Pots and pans
- Wooden spoons
- Natural items like pine cones, seashells, and pebbles
- Curtain rings, jar lids
- Cardboard tubes
- Empty cotton reels.

For more ideas for babies and toddlers **https://www.playfulchildhoods.wales/**

Always be aware that small items can be choking hazards for babies and young children.

Loose parts that will fit into a rucksack or trolley

- Chalk
- String
- A ball
- Newspaper
- Matches, fire-steel and cotton wool, baking tray – mini fire-making pack
- Lightweight fabric
- Rope
- Swivel pulleys
- Hammock
- Trowel
- Accessories: old tights, gloves, etc
- Waterproof sheet or blanket
- Useful little bits as above.







Acquiring plentiful loose parts

The vast majority of loose parts for play can be sourced free of charge. The main costs are in time taken to source and collect, fuel costs if you have to pick them up, and the cost of printing posters and letters. Using social media is a great way to reduce those costs further.

Part of the beauty of the whole approach is that loose parts are mainly cheap or free and add random, surprise qualities to play depending on what turns up.

Some people have a natural talent for acquiring loose parts. Once you start, spotting loose parts wherever you go can become a life-long habit.

How can we acquire loose parts?

- Let people know the kinds of things you are looking for and see what comes in. This is the easiest and often the single most successful way to acquire loose parts.
- Try social media posts, emails, posters and letters. If you have too much of one thing and not enough of another, let people know. It's a great way for parents, carers and the community to be involved in your project.
- Visit local companies, building site offices, factories and shops to explain about loose parts play and how they could help. Take information or pictures so they understand the idea.
- Send a letter or email as an introduction or follow up – try to address it to a named individual if possible.
- Ask – if you see some possible loose parts such as gas pipes or building offcuts, go and ask in person.
- Join a scrapstore if there is one in your area.
- Join forces with other groups of settings and share and swap loose parts.
- Visit charity shops and jumble sales for unusual items.

How many loose parts do we need?

The number of loose parts should be proportionate to the size of the play area and the number of children. As a rough guide, multiply the number of children by four or five to work out how many items of loose parts you might need. You will soon get a sense of popular items to replenish frequently and, on a day-to-day basis, the types of loose parts that are currently in demand from the children.

> **Respect children's right to choose the resource they want to use by:**
>
> - **making sure there are enough resources for the number of children playing with them**
> - **asking children to use the resources until they are finished or done and then pass them on to whoever asked for them**
> - **asking children to 'swap' or negotiate using a resource, by offering something of theirs in return**
> - **asking the children if they think they can work out a solution to the problem themselves."**
>
> (Louise Caldwell, Play Development Officer with Edinburgh City Council)

Tips to keep your supplies of loose parts topped up

- Set up a cupboard or area where children can deposit materials from home so that they can be checked and prepared for play.
- Add reminders to newsletters, social media and websites.
- Find out which parents work or have hobbies likely to produce a good supply of loose parts – builders, plumbers, farmers, designers etc. Ask them to look out for things that could be donated.
- Make friends with your local builders, countryside rangers and tree surgeons.
- Make sure people know you are looking for loose parts and supplies are likely to come!

A note about tyres

Old tyres have fantastic value on play spaces both as loose resources and for making semi-permanent structures. Commercial companies pay to dispose of old tyres so are happy to give them away. However, they can present particular hazards to be aware of:

- Tyres present a fire hazard and should be stored safely away from buildings in line with any local fire guidance that may exist.
- Most tyres have steel bracing; they should be checked for protruding wires and not used if they have any.
- Tyres fixed in place should have holes drilled for drainage (loose tyres can also hold stagnant water and animal life so need to be emptied daily).
- Tyres fixed together to create structures must not create wedge trap points.
- Nylon brace tyres are safer for swings, where their impact-absorbing qualities are important.

See page 22 for a list of tried and tested loose parts.

"At Historic Environment Scotland we have been donating items such as hard hats, rope, cardboard tubes and broken keyboards to the Loose Parts Play project in East Lothian. By donating items directly for play, we have saved a lot of emissions from the transport and recycling processes. It means we can reduce our environmental impact and the associated costs. It also means that we can see the positive impacts our waste can create. Take hard hats for example: the safety guarantee expires after five years so they have to be replaced and are difficult to recycle. The hats would otherwise have been stripped of their parts and transported for recycling. Seeing how children can use these items to explore their imagination and creativity, construct and invent, encourages our staff to seek re-use opportunities for other items they come across. This partnership was a catalyst for us to sign up to an online redistribution network called Warp It, which helps us to reach out to more charities and projects to donate other surplus items. The most unusual loose part we've been able to redirect to play is the bright red rope that we use to cordon off events at Edinburgh Castle!"

(Katie Carter, Circular Economy Project Officer, Historic Environment Scotland)

Storage

How to store loose parts is an early consideration for organising your project. In some settings storage is in sheds and containers, in others open-sided shelters, and in others there is minimal storage for certain items while other loose parts are left outside. Storage could also simply be an area in a porch or reception area, a wheelie bin of resources, items kept in a trolley or cart, or even just a rucksack containing essentials.

Storage considerations

- Discuss which storage options are suitable for the location and scale of your project.
- Make sure the children or teenagers can access the storage as independently as possible.
- Make sure the doors are wide enough – double doors on the longest side of a large container work well.
- Consider how to lay out the inside of the storage for ease of access. Try open boxes or bays against the sides to allow materials to be sorted easily.
- Create child-friendly signage to show what is stored where.
- Consider installing ramps, hard surfaces such as tarmac or paving immediately outside the storage and a canopied front for additional shelter.
- Think about whether wood or metal storage is appropriate to your setting.
- Think aesthetics too, for example, a mural designed and painted by children, storage made multipurpose with the addition of a climbing wall, storage masked by planting.

The location of the storage space

An early discussion with those responsible for the maintenance or management of your outdoor space will help to decide on the appropriate space.

Some things to consider:

- Can the storage be sited in or near the area where the loose parts will be used?
- Would several small storage areas work better than one large one?
- Would it make tidying up easier if the storage was sited on the route the children take to leave the play space or to go back into a building?
- Is access kept clear for emergency vehicles?
- Are there any manholes, drains, water hydrants or other services to avoid?
- Have you checked the location of underground pipes and services?
- Are any permissions required before building or installing storage?
- Will the storage inadvertently create easy access to a roof or a boundary wall?







What can be left outside?

Natural play materials such as sand, stones, bark chips, twigs and vegetation are generally best left out as part of the play environment. In many locations, other general supplies of loose parts are unlikely to be tampered with or stolen, but the team on the site will be best placed to decide.

> **"Most of the loose parts are left out overnight in the garden and local children come in to play. In the mornings we are delighted to see the wonderful structures they have made."**
>
> (Julie Steele, Burnbrae Primary School, provision for children with complex needs)

Some options to consider

- Take a low-key tolerant approach to children playing with loose parts out of hours, providing no damage is done.
- Put up some signs letting children or teenagers know you are aware they are playing with loose parts out of hours and that you are happy with that as long as nothing is damaged.
- Think whether storage might become the most likely target of vandalism, especially if locked.
- Consider if some loose parts can simply be left out at little risk of harm or theft.
- Ask friendly neighbours or local dog walkers to keep an eye on the play space informally and alert you or the police if they see any problems.
- Consider if problems are seasonal, for example more chance of things being set alight around bonfire night or more teenagers hanging around on long summer evenings. If so, you might simply need temporary solutions.
- Use your local knowledge to make a judgement.

Problem solving

It can be disheartening if your project suffers from vandalism and there is no answer that fits every situation. Sometimes you simply have to persevere until problems settle. Schools or groups that have a strong place in the community tend to experience fewer problems. Involving children, teenagers, neighbours and community members in activities can help. Youth services and local safety partnerships may also help in engaging with young people. Your local crime prevention officer may be able to offer some site specific advice.

Tidying up tips

- Trolleys, barrows and carts can make gathering loose parts up more fun and less labour intensive for adults and children.
- Large loose parts can be quicker to tidy away than lots of small ones.
- Little loose parts like cones and shells can easily get scattered outside – they'll need less gathering if they are incorporated in the outdoor environment, for example, a cone pit in a raised bed.
- On wet days, quick-dry materials such as tarpaulins and organza can be easier to manage than heavy cotton-based materials.
- Sorting as you go along can be a fun incentive, for example, you can ask one group to fill a trolley with pipes and another to fill a cart with wooden things.

See page 30 for tips on lifting and moving items safely.

See page 40 for more on play routines.







Some environmental, social, ethical and financial benefits of loose parts

- Loose parts for play are usually free of charge or very cheaply obtained.
- Re-used scrap slows down the rate at which it ends up in landfill or is recycled.
- Adults and children can develop awareness and understanding of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code in order to have an environmentally sensitive approach to gathering natural loose parts.
- Unexpected and unusual donations stimulate play in new and exciting ways.
- Loose parts tend to be free from gender, social and cognitive bias. Anyone of any age, ability, background and class can pick up a stick and use it in their play, in their own way.
- 'Real life' resources enable children to make connections to their family interests, local culture, natural heritage and the world of work.
- Loose parts can reflect the local community and culture, for example a harbour town might acquire an old boat, fishing nets, boxes, buoys, seaweed, shells and lobster creels.

Minimising the environmental impact of play

Any space designated for play, be this a school ground, public park, beach or wood, is likely to be well-used by children in a range of ways that adults may not always anticipate. Children need a playspace where they can develop a sense of ownership, not only of their play, but of the landscape too. You will need to set time aside to consider common sense approaches to managing the environmental impact of the play sessions. These could include:

- children seeking advice from the janitor about how to look after an outdoor space
- everyone sticking to the expectations in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code about everyone's rights and responsibilities when off-site. **https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/practical-guide-all**
- organisers proactively engaging with the landowner or manager of the site. Have a look at Scottish Forestry's *Forest Kindergarten Guidance for Landowners* which provides advice about choosing and using a woodland site for learning and play. It has a range of checklists, *Leave Less Trace Play Principles* and practical considerations to minimise the environmental degradation of a site whilst ensuring children can freely play. It is applicable to many natural environments in addition to woodland. **https://www.owlscotland.org//resources/resource-library/?channel=resources&resourcecat=5&type=6&keywords**
- children and staff undertaking simple acts of environmental stewardship. This may be a two-minute litter pick, a check of the area for dog mess, being eyes and ears for the landowner and reporting vandalism, graffiti, overflowing bins, etc.
- adults modelling appropriate values, attitudes and actions towards caring for the environment where play is facilitated
- adults considering the environmental impact of resources they introduce, especially outside. For example, glitter and other synthetic small items are difficult to clean up; playdough and human food could cause harm to wildlife if ingested
- everyone actively seeking to source loose parts in a sustainable approach.

Further information

- Scottish Government (2018) *Out to Play: Practical Guidance for Creating Outdoor Play Experiences in Early Learning and Childcare.* See Section 4.5 and 4.6 and the Appendices. **https://www.gov.scot/publications/out-play-practical-guidance-creating-outdoor-play-experiences-children/**
- Learning for Sustainability Scotland **http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org** There is a range of support materials to help educators and playworkers think about the values, ethos and actions.

Check loose parts before, during and after playing

The loose parts need to be safe enough for children to use. Set up a system to check all new items, regardless of where or how they were sourced. Common sense will be your best guide.

NEW LOOSE PARTS ARRIVE

Check for potential hazards including:

- loose bits which may come off, creating choking hazards or splinters and sharp edges
- electrical concerns – wires and circuits, plugs, etc.
- sharp items
- likelihood of splintering or shattering, especially under pressure or temperature changes
- flammable materials
- bacterial infection through damp, wet storage or stagnant water
- items that are likely to cause fingers, head or body to become trapped or crushed
- chemical concerns – batteries, leaky components, etc. (Remove from play immediately.)

If you find hazards that can be fixed immediately

Take appropriate action such as:

- Sand down sharp edges or splintery wood.
- Remove protrusions such as wire, staples or nails.
- Check pockets and lining of second-hand clothing and accessories.
- Remove loose bits or secure.
- Wash and clean resources.

MAKE AVAILABLE FOR PLAY

If you find hazards that can be fixed, but not immediately

Take appropriate action such as:

- Ensure the item is not accessible to children.
- Identify a specific place or container where children and adults can put broken or worn items.
- Keep a record book of items for repair and tick when the item has been returned to play.
- Use a sticker system to mark items requiring repair.

If you find an item that is beyond repair or the hazards can't be fixed

Take appropriate action such as:

- Remove the item promptly.
- Add plant material to compost heaps/systems.
- Contact your local authority waste disposal or recycling centre for advice.
- Encourage children and adults to put broken or worn items into a specific place for removal.

REMOVE FROM PLAY

Remember that your organisation is responsible for the management, maintenance, supervision and disposal of any loose parts from the moment they are acquired.

Moving loose parts – lifting and handling guidance

If you are moving big, heavy or awkward loose parts it's important to keep yourself and others safe. Simple reminders can be shared with children and adults to avoid back problems or painful experiences of things being dropped on toes. This advice is especially useful when getting items in and out of storage and during any building projects.

Basic principles for good handling

Stop and think

- Plan the transfer or lift – where is the load to be placed?
- Use appropriate handling aids or equipment.
- Is assistance required with the load?
- Prepare the working environment – remove obstacles.
- For a long lift, plan resting mid-way through.

Position feet

- Feet apart, approximately shoulder width, giving a balanced and stable base.
- Leading leg as far forward as is comfortable.

Adopt a good posture

- When lifting from a low level, bend the knees, without over flexing.
- Keep back straight.
- Keep shoulders level and facing same direction as hips.

Get a firm grip

- Try to keep the arms within the boundary formed by the legs.
- The best position and type of grip will depend on the circumstances.
- Refer to the risk assessment.

Keep close to the load

- Keep the load close to the body for as long as possible.
- Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the body.

Don't jerk

- Lift or transfer smoothly, keeping control of the load.

Move the feet

- Do not twist the body when turning to the side, reposition the feet.

Put down then adjust

- If precise positioning is required, put down first, then slide into desired position.

Don't lift or handle more than can be easily managed

- There is a difference between what people can lift and what they can safely lift. If in doubt, seek advice or get help.

See http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/manual.htm

Maintenance

Daily maintenance includes the outdoor space where the children play. Like checking the loose parts, you have a number of options to deal with any hazards found.

- Take immediate action to clear up litter, broken glass, dog fouling etc.
- Cordon off or mark clearly any hazards that can't be dealt with on the spot.
- Note any concerns which need to be addressed and pass them to the person responsible for health and safety, if you can't deal with the hazard there and then.
- Have an alternative area earmarked for use, if necessary.

Involving children and teenagers in maintenance.

Some of the tasks involved in maintaining loose parts can be fun learning opportunities for children. They can learn to identify items that need action taken, undertake maintenance tasks (such as those in the flow chart on page 29) and be involved in record keeping.

Involving children and teenagers in maintenance of loose parts:

- encourages a sense of ownership and responsibility
- gives a different way to be involved in the project
- provides opportunities to practice real-life skills.

Certain aspects of loose parts play require specific maintenance measures, for example, sand pits require sand to be swept up and to be raked over regularly. Items used in mud play will need to be hosed down from time to time. Health Protection Scotland have produced guidance, *Infection Prevention and Control in Childcare Settings*. This includes cleaning approaches and schedules for resources. Check this if it applies to your organisation.

The key is to be systematic. Work out what needs to be done and who is responsible, and ensure your system keeps going.

> **"We support schools to create 'maintenance crews' with older children. The 'crew' carries sand paper and tape and children know to approach them if they come across anything they think needs attention – the responsible older children will attempt to repair and highlight the issue to the playground staff in attendance."**
>
> (Lesley Fox, Smart Play Network)

Further reading

- North Lanarkshire Council (undated) *This Place is Like a Building Site* **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNXOfS_vjVM**
- Scottish Outdoor Access Code **www.outdooraccess-scotland.com**
- Potter, D. (1997) *Risk and Safety in Adventure Playgrounds*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.



03

Facilitating loose parts play

In this section you will find:

- the role of adults
- facilitating play – skills to put into practice
- observation
- play cues
- taster play sessions
- setting up loose parts play routines
- keeping the momentum going
- making simple changes to the play space to keep the play going
- using tools
- Tinkertown case study
- semi-permanent play structures
- using loose parts during formal teaching times.





The role of adults

Understanding adults have a crucial role in the successful introduction of loose parts. Sensitive support to children at play can enhance children's experience, without undue interference. The *Playwork Principles* are a professional and ethical framework providing useful guidance.

All children and young people need to play.

Space can be physical but also time for play and permission to play.

Children's play process is given priority.

Adults and children can create space for play together.

The style of intervention should enable children and young people to extend their play.

> **"Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons."**
>
> (Playwork Principles, 2005)

The main focus is to support and facilitate children's own process of playing.

Adults have an impact on the play space.

Children and young people's play has an impact on adults.

Up-to-date knowledge of the play process underpins reflective practice.

Risks and developmental benefits should be balanced (see page 54).

Putting play at the centre goes beyond those who work at the frontline.

- Managers and head teachers create the overall framework for play.
- They should invest in time and support for staff working directly with children.
- Policies should point out that play should never be withdrawn as a punishment or sanction.
- Buildings and land managers should enable rather than restrict play.
- All adults who work with children also have the responsibility of being a role model. Children observe the behaviour, words and actions of adults in their lives.

 # Tip: Refer back to the definition of play frequently. Doing so enhances reflective practice. If you need to figure out the appropriate thing to do in a given situation, referring back to the definition helps to keep the response play-focussed.

Playwork Principles **http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples**

> **"Playworkers and play rangers turn physical spaces into places of opportunity, imagination and belonging. For many children in many places, investing in hardware will never be enough. The best opportunities to play are shaped by people – the 'software' of play."**
>
> (Beunderman, J. 2010 xviii-xix)

Facilitating play – skills to put into practice

On this page, you will find prompts to help you consider your own or team responses to children's play.

Wait to be invited to play.

Are you sensitive and careful not to take over? Do you organise play activities only when children want you to?

Enable play to occur uninterrupted.

How do you protect children's space and time for play? Do you think hard before you interrupt the flow of play?

Enable children to explore their own values.

Do you support play in a way that recognises that children explore and understand values through playing and sometimes make mistakes?

Leave children to develop skills at their own pace.

Do you support play in a way that recognises that children develop their own skills, abilities and judgement? Are you conscious of allowing children to play at their own pace and to learn through trial and error?

Leave the content and intent of play to the children.

Do you avoid directing and shaping the content of children's play?

Let children decide why they play.

Do you respect that play is behaviour without goals or rewards? It is a process. Do you steer clear of offering prizes or inducements for play?

Enable children to decide what is appropriate behaviour, within safe limits.

Do you enable children to explore and develop boundaries? Have you discussed safe limits, what these are and how you judge? Do you steer clear of complex rules in favour of shared understanding and simple guidelines?

Only organise when children want support.

Do you avoid organising children's play? Are you ready to help invent something to do or find resources when children need you to?

Thinking about our responses to children's play

- **STOP** yourself before you respond to, or stop, children's play.
- **LOOK AND LISTEN** to what is happening. What are the children doing?
- **THINK** – are the children managing any risks? What might be the impact of adult involvement on children's play?
- **ACT** – now you can respond in a thoughtful way, rather than by reflex.
- **REFLECT** – was your action the correct one? What have you learned?

This page was adapted from *Access to play for children in situations of crisis: Play: rights and practice* (2017:25) **www.ipaworld.org**

Observation

Unobtrusive observation provides insights into children's play and is an essential skill to practise and develop.

Observing children at play helps to:

- gain knowledge of children's strengths and preferences
- understand how the environment is working for children – does it support their play and provide the potential for a wide range of experiences?
- understand how children are using the loose parts
- look out for things like play types which can give a richer understanding of what is happening during children's play.

Some observation methods:

- noticing – for example, making mental notes
- photographic – for example, taking pictures as and when things happen
- timeline – for example, identifying a child or area and checking in every 10 minutes?
- frameworks – for example, checklists or looking for characteristics
- focussed – for example, looking at a specific area or child for a period of time
- written – for example, an account or detailed 'story'.

Skilled practitioners observe all the time and one of the most important forms of observation is 'noticing'. Noticing is about paying attention to the subtleties of what children are doing and saying. This informal and on-going approach is an essential part of tuning in to and supporting children's learning.

Noticing is a key part of responsive planning, where responses to children are made 'in the moment' and successfully support and extend learning.

> **"The children built a den using crates, tarpaulin sheets, pots and pans. They created a soup kitchen and invited everyone in. Soup was served in a pot filled with mud and sticks. Some of the children joined in this symbolic play. Deniz just frowned when he was offered the soup and turned away. The tarpaulin touched his head as it was fluttering in the wind, he smiled and started jumping up and down banging the tarpaulin with his hand. This highlighted the different stages of engaging in play, but children also playing happily alongside each other."**
>
> (Julie Steele, Burnbrae Primary School, provision for children with complex needs, Bonnyrigg)







Play cues

Understanding and recognising play cues is another important skill that supports practice, especially inclusive practice. Adults can gain a better understanding of children's play by looking out for play cues and responding appropriately.

A **play cue** can be verbal, a gesture or an action and invites others to join the play. A **response** to a play cue creates a **play frame**.

Children generally respond to each other's play cues naturally but for adults, understanding and recognising play cues is a useful skill to ensure we respond appropriately to children's play.

A **play cue** is a hint or an invitation to someone to join in and play. Children communicate these invitations to play in different ways, sometimes verbally but often through gestures, posture or expressions.

For example:

- tap on shoulder and run away laughing
- make a funny face at someone
- wink
- throw a ball to someone
- move closer to someone with things to play with
- allocate roles e.g. "you can be the dragon"
- make space in a group for someone else to join.

"The introduction of loose parts play parts in the playground helped Ellie both in the classroom and out. She is a very active, creative little girl and is on the autistic spectrum. Play that requires following 'rules' or roles or complex communication can be difficult for children to find their place in. The loose parts give her something to do and engage with in the playground. This enables her to build friendships with other children, who were interested in playing with loose parts with her, when before she was often shadowed by or playing with an adult.

We feel more confident to step back and allow her to play independently as we can see she is engaged in play and less likely to run off. When she comes into the classroom after loose parts play, she is more settled. She loves to build and use her imagination in class.

The other children have a good understanding around her so if she sometimes plays in a way that is different or a little heavy-handed, they are able to accept this. It reflects the ethos of the school which nurtures a strong sense that everyone is valued and we treat each other fairly."

(St Mary's RC Primary School, Haddington)

The return

The **return** is a positive and equally playful response to a recognised cue, which can also act as a further cue – an indication to take the play further.

The **frame** can be:

- **physical** – a place or space, which could be as small as a cardboard box or as large as a playing field and which might be visibly indicated by mats, stones, rope, tyres, clothes, a hedge or fence, or a structure, platform, den, room or corridor.
- **narrative** – a new or a favourite storyline, a song or a piece of music, or a set of agreed rules. Any of these can give the reason for playing and hold the play together.
- **emotional** – when play is exploring a feeling such as fear, grief or triumph, so the props, the action, the place and the story can keep changing because it's the experience of the feeling that holds it all together.

Carrying out observations specifically on play cues can really help adults to understand play better. For example, some children have difficulty recognising cues or responding to them in the way other children might and so inadvertently get left out of play or repeatedly upset other children because they have misread the cues. By understanding play cues, adults are more able to recognise these types of situation and support them sensitively.

The concept of the 'play cycle' containing 'play cues' and returns within a 'play frame' was developed by Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else (1998).

> **"There is a bunch of hula hoops out on the playground that I see used in endless ways. A group of six younger children trap an older pupil in two hoops and he allows them to shepherd him about the playground. Another runs around collecting as many hoops as he can before placing them over the head of another child. When a hoop gets stuck in a tree an older child problem solves, trying to retrieve it with a skipping rope while younger children watch with interest."**
>
> (Max Alexander, ELPA with Loretto RC Primary School)

Further reading and viewing

- The *Play Ranger Toolkit* provides information and guidance for workers in 'detached' community settings. **https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Play-Ranger-Toolkit-March-15.pdf**
- **www.playwales.org.uk** and **www.playfulchildhoods.wales** are great sources of practical information on skills to support play.
- For more on observation see Education Scotland **https://education.gov.scot/** and Carterhatch Infant School videos **https://youtu.be/DupP16PTErc** and **https://youtu.be/efeIzNuuEo0**
- For more on play types **https://www.playscotland.org/playful-learning/play-types-toolkit-bringing-play-school-day/**

Taster play sessions

Organising some introductory play sessions can help children, parents and staff understand what introducing loose parts is all about. Starting with a small group of children often works best. In a school, have a couple of classes or a mixed age group involved rather than the whole school.

You will need:

- a group of children
- a large enough selection of loose parts for the number of children playing
- a place to play
- a calm heart, a cool head and a willingness to give it a go.

Optional:

- Playworkers or play organisation to run or help you run the taster sessions.

Preparing to facilitate the taster sessions

Work out in advance who will be part of the team facilitating the loose parts play and discuss your roles. See the pages on the adult role, observation, play cues and risk-benefit assessment to assist you with this.

You could talk through a few 'what if' scenarios as relevant to your setting.

For example:

- What do we do if two children want the same loose parts?
- What do we do if they ask us to make something for them?
- When would it be ok to ask them to stop doing something?
- When would it be ok to get involved in the play?

Facilitate a few sessions

It is common for the children to be excited about the range of resources initially and for the play to be quite energetic and the resources tested. Almost all children settle into deeper play, given sufficient time. It's worth giving the taster sessions a bit of time before deciding what's working and what's not. You might also want to wait until things have settled in a bit before inviting in visitors such as parents or people you want to persuade of the benefits.

Raise awareness of the sessions

Ensure everyone knows what loose parts are and the purpose of their introduction. Letters, posters and newsletters can be used. Parents and carers should be informed and asked to ensure that their child has suitable clothing and footwear, if your organisation is unable to provide this.

Ensure adults see children playing

Seeing children playing with loose parts and how play is facilitated, often brings about that all-important 'lightbulb' moment when people start to understand all the benefits and the pleasure of loose parts. In schools, make sure all staff can be involved so that they can see what is happening and witness first-hand the benefits of free play with loose parts.

Have a debrief afterwards with children and adults

Discuss what worked well and what needs to be remembered when embarking on loose parts play. This is a good time for concerns to be raised and to think of ways to address them. This can be followed up with a further session to create an action plan.

> **Rough and tumble play was initially seen when the play pods were introduced but "all schools reported that this phase did not last and that at some point construction play 'suddenly' began."**
>
> (Armitage, 2009: 26)

Moving on to regular sessions

Some starting points to consider for regular sessions. You could:

- Begin with a play session in one part of your outdoor space for a small mixed-age group once per week until adults and children are accustomed to the loose parts, and the routines around tidying up.
- Introduce loose parts gradually, starting with the older children, working down the school or setting and then integrating everyone. If the older children feel some ownership, it can lead to eagerness to support the younger children to use the items and play with them (although they shouldn't take charge of younger children's play).
- Introduce one or two types of resource at a time, for example begin with tyres and crates, then add in logs, then den-building resources.
- Employ a qualified playworker to work alongside staff to model good practice and help embed the routines.



Setting up loose parts play routines

Zoning your outdoor space

Without being too rigid, it can sometimes be helpful to identify an area within the grounds or play space for loose parts play. Doing so can protect space so that children can immerse themselves in loose parts play without coming into conflict with or being displaced by other interests such as football. Tidying up might also be quicker. In time, this can change as loose parts become part of the fabric of everyday play. In an early years outdoor space, a variety of loose parts need to be readily available within and across all the zones.

Mixed age play

Loose parts play lends itself to all ages playing together, with children accessing the loose parts when they wish to, rather than being restricted by a rota or suchlike. Children are naturally drawn to playing with children who are older or younger than they are. There are many developmental, learning and social benefits to mixed age play, including:

- children gaining motivation and new ideas from each other even when not playing directly together
- children having the chance to play in ways they wouldn't be able to with only children their own age
- children helping each other because they can – maybe they need someone taller, stronger, thinner etc.
- older children getting the opportunity to show care and kindness to younger children.

> **"Age mixing fosters creativity in older children... age-mixed play is generally less competitive and more creative – in short, more fully playful – than is same-age play. When children of widely different ages play a game together, the focus shifts from winning to having fun. There is no pride to be gained by the older, larger, more-skilled child in beating the much younger one, and the younger one has no expectation of beating the older one."**
>
> (Professor Peter Gray 2011:516)

Playing out in all weathers

Playing outside should be encouraged all year round. This allows children to further experiment and use the elements to their advantage. Think ahead about clothing, footwear and the management of wet gear. If your organisation does not have outdoor shelters, then consider opening a room indoors so there is a choice available for children who wish to remain inside.

Agreements about use of the loose parts

Children should be fully involved in setting up agreements and expectations about playing with and managing the loose parts. Complex or hard-and-fast rules may not help you as much as simple, understandable prompts to make managing loose parts easy.

Tidying up and gathering in

In most settings, gathering loose parts back in is part of the process that enables loose parts play to happen on an ongoing basis. It's an ideal topic for children to get involved in and make decisions about.

Often, settings agree that there will be a signal such as ringing a bell to let children know they need to wind up what they are doing and to start to tidy up.

There are advantages to leaving loose parts out between play sessions so that children can return to things they have played with earlier. Children often gain inspiration from the other children's half-made or abandoned creations and use them as a jumping off point for their play. There is also an argument that children benefit more from the immersion in play and so tidying up is less important than the play benefits.

Think about the practicalities and what's reasonable in your setting.

See page 26 for more on storage, leaving things outside and tidying up.

Keeping the momentum going

As with all activities, interests wax and wane. Sometimes there is a flurry of den building over several weeks and this is replaced with another interest such creating obstacle courses and so on. Most children will happily initiate and generate ideas without any prompting.

However, items can be added to the core collection of loose parts to celebrate the seasons, cultural events or specific child-led interests. This can be a way of involving children in gathering additional resources from home and the local community.

Here are some examples:

- Develop themed collections based on colours, light, smell, textures, sounds, water, mud, sand, constructions, etc.
- Leave grassy areas unmown to grow dandelions, buttercups and daisies. These are plants with high play value that can withstand being picked.
- Save up donations of things like tin foil, aluminium and foil 'space' blankets for a 'metal week'.
- Bring in some hay bales – these are fantastic for construction play and defining spaces. Be prepared for hay to end up scattered around. It can be gathered and used as mulch or compost in due course.
- Have a 'Challenge of the Week' using children's ideas which can be announced in assembly or at the start of the session, for example, *I wonder who can build a robot and what would it do...*
- Put a request out for real Christmas trees to be donated after the holidays so that they can be used for making dens or pretend forests.
- Keep the long plant stalks and other dead plant material after a winter garden clearance.
- Put a call out for leaves in autumn.

A calendar of play dates

- **Outdoor Classroom Day – around 23rd May.**
  Freedom to play outside the classroom.
- **World Play Day – 28th May.**
  Toy Libraries worldwide invite you to celebrate play.
- **Play on the Longest Day – 21st June.**
  Keep the play going long into the evening. (Shortest day in the Southern hemisphere.)
- **International Mud Day – 29th June.**
  Invite parents to join in!
- **UK Playday – first Wednesday in August.**
  Perfect for summer holiday fun.
- **Universal Children's Day – 20th November.**
  Celebrate the right to play in the autumn.
- **Play on the Shortest Day - 22nd December.**
  A perfect opportunity to play in the dark. (Longest day in the Southern Hemisphere.)

Making simple changes to the play space to keep the play going

The set-up of a space and how the resources are presented can affect how children perceive the play possibilities. With some groups of children, often those who are very young or who have additional needs, an invitation to play may be required. This needs to be undertaken sensitively to ensure children have freedom and autonomy over their play. It is not about directing play but opening the children's minds to possibilities for creative explorations and investigations.

Whilst a session is in full swing, subtle changes to the environment can support how children play. For example, the addition of guttering to a fence, with a water source nearby, may invite water to be poured.

Take a three-dimensional view of any space and make the most of its affordance for all types of play. This means reviewing the environment to ensure a range of:

Levels

- Go below ground level, e.g. by digging a hole or jumping in a puddle.
- Work at ground level: perhaps sit-upons or pieces of fabric can help.
- Work at waist height – at a table or on a wall.
- Experiencing height, including stretching or stepping up to reach, e.g. to pour water down through a water wall.
- Objects hanging down – from a rope line, tree branches or constructions such as mobiles which involve building downwards, or a bottle of water that is hung on a string to create a pendulum.

Surfaces

- Mix horizontal and vertical, e.g. water in a bucket on the ground next to a water wall.
- Work on either side of a vertical palette or above or below a surface, e.g. under as well as on top of a bench or picnic table.
- Include slopes or inclines and think about how the angle can be changed, e.g. a water slide on the flat surface, to one on a gentle hill, or moving guttering up and down some steps.
- Change the surface: grass to tarmac or have different materials available.







Ways to transport objects, materials and self

- Bring in a variety of containers: big containers are especially useful for children to get into. They can also provide a clear place for materials to be transported to and deposited.
- Add wheels: bring along wheelbarrows, trolleys, suitcases and pulley systems.
- Have materials around which can be transported or moved: leaves, water, soil, etc.
- Provide space to run and move about.

Holes

- Holes are useful for posting stuff through, poking tubes through, adding guttering, and playing games. This includes cardboard or wooden frames, bore pipes and a variety of hoses.
- Creating or poking holes into containers so that water or dry sand leaks out. Holey fabric provides a different way of hiding and looking out. Drill holes into wood.

Partitions and flaps

- Create entrances and exits – pieces of material hung up, etc.
- Build dams and places that stop the movement of water, sand or other materials.
- Make partitions: dens can have rooms, vertical palettes create partitions children can peek and communicate through, and so on.

Are loose parts toys?

The BS EN 71 Directive defines a toy as *'any product designed or intended, whether or not exclusively, for use in play by children under 14 years of age.'* There are some exceptions to this, such as Christmas novelties. With loose parts, confusion may arise because the materials are not manufactured as toys. For instance, a bread crate is designed and manufactured to be used as a bread crate. It was never designed to be used as a toy, therefore, the Toy Safety Standard BS EN 71 does not apply. There are lots of resources and products that are used in schools and homes which are not toys – paper, pencils, wooden spoons, cardboard boxes are not toys – yet we give them to children to use on a daily basis. Children need to experience using such products and resources. It is necessary to learn how to live in a world which is ungovernable by safety standards for every facet of our lives.

"Loose parts play in the P1 classroom. When we first introduced loose parts in the classroom the children still gravitated to familiar items such as commercial construction toys. We tried removing them and the children began to use the loose parts more. We have large items like carpet tubes and small items like cones, corks, twigs, strings of beads, play dough lids. Play is integrated into the day, linking to maths, literacy, health and wellbeing and so on. Now they use both traditional play items and loose parts together. For example, when the children discovered that a marble could roll through the spiral of a shell, they included the shell in their marble run."

(Emma McManus, St Marys, RC Primary School, Haddington)

Links and further reading

- Sand and Water Tables **http://tomsensorl.blogspot.co.uk** – the advice above is adapted from Tom Bedard's Design Elements which can be found on his website. His work is based on an indoor early childhood context.
- What makes a brilliant mud kitchen? Creative STAR Learning article: **http://bit.ly/2GMzaHd**

Using tools

The use of tools is a natural progression within loose parts play. Tool use increases the range of play possibilities and allows children to develop skills that support independence, creativity and confidence. Tools can be used for:

- textile work
- woodwork, metal work and construction
- bushcraft
- cooking – inside in a traditional kitchen, over a tea light or on a camping stove or campfire
- gardening
- bicycle repairs, tinkering and so on.

You need to consider the competency of the adults to facilitate the play and the developmental ability and interests of the children and teenagers. Tools should be thoughtfully introduced, managed, stored and looked after and should include risk-benefit assessment of procedures and processes.

> **"The Care Inspectorate supports taking a positive approach to risk in order to achieve the best outcomes for children... For example, we encourage services to use risk assessment to support children to enjoy potentially hazardous activities such as woodwork using real tools, exploring nature and playing in the mud and rain. We do not expect written risk assessments to be carried out for daily play activities."**
>
> (The Care Inspectorate, 2016:18)

Useful links and further information

- Play Wales, Information Sheet, *Creativity and tool use in play settings.* **www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/informationsheets**
- Outdoor and Woodland Scotland (OWLS) have guidance on using fires and tools with groups **https://www.owlscotland.org**
- Forest School Association **https://www.forestschoolassociation.org** provides information about Forest School.
- Children in Permaculture **http://childreninpermaculture.com** encompasses a broad range of gardening and construction play possibilities based upon the principles of people care, earth care and fair shares.

Tinkertown case study

"Tinkertown is The City of Play's adventure playground-inspired, 'make-space' initiative. We provide huge quantities of unwanted pallets and scrap timber, as well as tools – toolbox saws, claw hammers, measuring tapes, nails, safety gloves and goggles and some safety instructions. Then we observe as swathes of children make, destroy, and play as they like.

The outcomes, actions, creations and experiences for each child are uniquely different; the pallet wood, scrap timber, and the forms and spaces created, fuel each child's imagination, creativity and confidence.

The open nature of Tinkertown offers children the opportunity to explore and experience a different kind of play. It enables children to investigate their imagination and ideas, learn about risk (within a managed situation), build physical and social skills and produce a piece of work which is inhabitable, autonomous and of their own making.

On tools and children

When providing tools for a large number of children of a wide range of ages – particularly if young children are involved – we take the same attitude towards tools as we would with loose parts: we need to accept that they will be tested and abused, so we use budget tools that can be easily replaced without too much stress or expense.

Children are generally very responsible, careful and competent with tools. They are aware and appreciative of the responsibility they have been given. We have only ever experienced problems when adults ignore the rules and try to deny children that responsibility and autonomy. We have heard the repeated joke that children will thump each other over the head with a hammer or lose a limb to a saw. It doesn't happen... and it would be incredibly difficult to saw your own arm off, right? If you nick yourself with the teeth of a saw, you are going to jump out of your skin, and you are not going to let it happen again!

However, supervision is necessary to:

- ensure that the safety equipment is being worn
- be on hand when asked for help
- intervene or help should tensions or frustrations arise – pallets are hard to cut.

The level of supervision or support for each child can generally be assessed pretty quickly dependent on their attitude, confidence and capability. Given the opportunity, most can quickly grow to work and create independently.

We are not flippant about safety: we believe that children are safer and better off having had this type of experience."

(Grant Menzies co-founder and lead designer, The City of Play)

www.thecityofplay.co.uk

Semi-permanent play structures

Often children and adults want to make semi-permanent structures which provide children with opportunities to learn life skills such as planning, design and construction. The use of real tools and the time spent working alongside competent adults is a valuable and memorable experience for many children and young people.

Opportunities for children to build structures with real materials and tools go back to the original adventure playground concept of the 1940s and the ideas of the Danish landscape architect Carl Theodor Sørensen. Simon Nicholson in *How NOT To Cheat Children* (1971) pointed out that children enjoy playing a part in the design process including measuring, drawing, model-making, mathematics, construction, evaluation and destruction.

> **"It is not enough to talk about a design methodology; the methodology must be converted into four-dimensional actions, or it is useless."**
>
> (Nicholson, 1971:33)

Practical considerations when creating play structures with children:

- Let the project be driven by the children's needs and interests.
- Consult the landowner or manager beforehand and seek permission, if off-site.
- Find out whether there are any public liability, access, health and safety or engineering and structural matters which need to be addressed.
- Check there are no underground utilities such as water pipes which may be affected by your plans.
- Consider whether your organisation has the appropriate staffing, resources and competences to undertake the project. If not, find out who can assist in either a paid or voluntary capacity and ensure that safeguarding measures are in place.
- Risk assess the building or installation as well as the management and use of the structure once it has been made.







Using loose parts during formal teaching times

Since the publication of the first edition of this toolkit, there has been a growing interest in using loose parts within a formal curriculum context. This can happen in a range of ways as an approach to learning.

Possibilities for using loose parts during formal teaching times include:

- Organising taster sessions when introducing loose parts into playtimes. See page 38.
- The teacher observes the class playing and uses the opportunity to find out what useful skills children may wish to learn that would help them develop their play. For example, learning how to tie a range of knots and create lashings can be useful skills for den building.
- Having play sessions during class times. Afterwards, the children reflect on the learning that has happened and document it accordingly. This could be as simple as building up ideas around technology or developing a mind map about the maths that is happening.
- If a class has a shared responsibility for maintaining a loose parts collection, then skills such as how to sandpaper, file or fix items with duct tape become essential. They can test their skills in a class play session before putting them into wider use.
- The use of loose parts as a resource in a range of lessons, e.g. for team building activities, or to explore the properties of three-dimensional objects. Whilst this is not play, the loose parts are a real, relevant resource to children.

"I was keen to explore the potential of our loose parts collection as a relevant context for exploring square numbers, properties and perimeters of 2D shapes and 3D objects. My aim was to increase engagement in and enjoyment of maths, leading to more a focused approach and better attitude and mindset in the classroom. The children enjoyed being outdoors and looked forward to the sessions. The children made connections between numeracy concepts and the loose parts, such as recognising 2D shapes and their properties and how they were represented within the collections of objects. Even during free play there were many opportunities for informal learning using maths knowledge, developing and extending maths vocabulary, and problem solving."

(Simon McMahon,
St Andrew's Primary, Dundee)



04

Plans, policies and procedures

In this section you will find:

- developing a play statement or policy
- steps in developing a play statement or policy
- developing an action plan
- play champions
- risk-benefit assessment for loose parts play
- benefits of risk adventure and challenge in play
- monitoring and evaluating the impact of your loose parts play provision
- references.

Developing a play statement or policy

Developing a play statement or policy can help to:

- make a clear statement about children's right to play and the benefits of play
- give context to introducing loose parts play
- allow the voices of children to be heard
- create a shared understanding of play in the setting
- help new staff and families to understand your approach to play
- make your case to potential supporters and funders.

Often the process of developing a statement or policy is valuable in itself, helping to identify shared ideas, concerns and priorities. It's an opportunity to consider the place play really has in the life of the setting or community and to find a shared way of expressing that.

Do you need a statement or a policy or both?

Think about what you need and how you will use it. Do you simply want to be able to say play is really important in your setting and why that is? If so, you might need a short statement, presented in plain English, perhaps in different formats for different purposes – for example postcards, website, posters, social media posts and videos. You might like to present it from the point of view of the children, using their words. You could use images or inspirational quotes.

Do you want to establish a broad vision for play, priorities and principles? In that case it sounds more like a policy. A policy is a working document that helps to galvanise people into action and gives you something to measure progress against.

Recommended reading

- *Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision* **http://www.gov.scot/resource/0042/00425722.pdf**
- *Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan* **http://www.gov.scot/resource/0043/00437132.pdf**
- *Play Map Guide for Community Planning Partnerships* **http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00491653.pdf**
- *Position Statement: Scotland's Outdoor Play and Learning Coalition.* **https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Scotlands-Coalition-for-Outdoor-Play-and-Learning-Position-Statement.pdf**

Use the search boxes on local authority websites to find out if your authority has a play policy. Here some examples:

- **www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/services/leisure-culture-and-parks/play-policy-and-strategy**
- **www.eastlothian.gov.uk/playpolicy**
- **http://www.playmidlothian.org.uk/pages/playstrategy**

Steps in developing a statement or policy

Do some basic groundwork

- Have a look at the wording of the UNCRC, article 31 on the right to play.
- Have a look at other statements and policies to see what you like about them.
- Find out if your local authority has a play policy – if so, it might help you to reference it or echo some of the same wording.
- Have a look at Scotland's national play strategy – again, it might help you to reference it or echo some of the same wording.

Find out about play from different points of view

- Consult with children, teenagers, parents, staff, community members etc. depending on your setting.
- Think about who will do this research – could the children do it?

Use existing information

- Revisit your play assessment activities – what has been the impact of the changes made? What improvements have happened?
- Link to the self-evaluation approaches used by your organisation.

Think about the important things you want to be able to say. These might include:

- All children have a right to play.
- Outdoor play and loose parts play are part of the overall ethos and approach to learning and teaching.
- Risk and play relate through risk-benefit assessment.

Bring it together

- Think about the overall framework and subheadings to make sure they link logically together (see below).
- You might choose to have one person or a small group sift through what you have identified and start to make a draft.
- You could run a workshop to involve people in thinking about and discussing what's important.

Possible headings

- What is play?
- Why support children's play?
- Balancing risk and benefits in play.
- Playing and learning.
- Your vision for play, aims and principles.
- What do children and adults you've consulted say about playing?
- Your priorities and main steps you plan to take.
- Important reference points.

Consider how you want to present it

- Child-friendly documents and formats are often really popular with everyone.
- You could have a main document plus summaries or headlines.
- Make sure people know your statement or policy exists by presenting it at meetings and events and using it as a tool.

Developing an action plan

Introducing loose parts play can be a significant undertaking in an organisation such as a school so an action plan is a necessary tool. Involve children as much as possible in action planning.

Here are some possible elements of an action plan. Remember you don't need to have every point decided from the start – plans evolve.

- What is the intended outcome? Have a clear vision. Refer back to the assessment activities (see page 18).
- What needs to be done, by whom and by when? Think about specific actions, broken down into achievable steps. Refer back to the relevant pages in this toolkit.
- Where will the loose parts be stored?
- Where will the loose parts be used?
- Are any modifications to the space required?
- How will loose parts be acquired?
- How will you check incoming loose parts in a systematic way?
- How will you maintain the loose parts – what routines need to be put in place?
- How will the loose parts play sessions be introduced?
- How will you put risk-benefit assessments in place and who will keep them up-to-date?
- Who will monitor and refine the loose parts play sessions and how will it be done?
- When will the original assessment be revisited and how will you evaluate the impact?
- How will you keep loose parts play going?
- Who will facilitate loose parts play taster sessions and how will they be trained and supported?
- Who will facilitate loose parts play on an ongoing basis and how will they be trained and supported?
- What challenges may need to be overcome and what strategies will be used to address them?
- How will you communicate a rounded picture of what's happening? (Challenges, actions, success stories, learning etc.)
- How will everyone who needs to be involved have an opportunity to have their say?
- Do you need to link the action plan to wider improvements within your organisation and current local or national initiatives?
- What will be needed to ensure this provision becomes embedded into the life of the organisation?

Action plan format

You could use a simple format such as this to record and update actions. Paper copies in a ring binder or a spreadsheet would work well.

ACTIONS	BY WHEN (ACHIEVABLE DATE)	COMPLETE?	NOTES/ FURTHER STEPS
1. Where will the loose parts be stored?			
Example of an action: Mrs. D's class to compare storage units in other local schools and find out the pros and cons			
2. Where will the loose parts be used?			

Play champions

When loose parts play was launched in St Marys RC Primary, the Head Teacher asked the children how they wanted to be involved. Primary 6/7 decided they didn't just want to be helpers or buddies, they wanted to be 'play champions'.

This idea was developed into a pilot project working with the children to co-create the play champion role. The pilot linked rights respecting schools, article 31 and the curriculum.

PLAY CHAMPIONS JOB DESCRIPTION WRITTEN BY THE CHILDREN

JOB PURPOSE

- To promote how important play is and tell everyone that it is a right under the UN convention article 31.
- To make sure everyone is having fun and staying safe.
- Supporting the other students to make sure they are included and happy.
- Work as a team.

MAIN DUTIES

- Support the younger children.
- Help them tidy up.
- Look for people that might be sad or left out and help them.
- Make sure people are included in play.
- Help make imagination run wild.
- Make sure people have a great lunch.
- Make sure people are not fighting.
- Help make sure people are playing safely.
- Look for fun, even when loose parts are not available.
- Make sure people are having fun and have a smile on their face.
- Help the adults with the opening and closing of the loose parts pod.
- Make sure everyone helps with tidy up (or say time to put things back where they belong).
- Make sure bullying does not happen.
- Help find ideas of where to get more loose parts and recycle things for play.
- Encourage children to make their own choice of how and what to play.

DAILY TASKS (BREAK TIME & LUNCH TIME)

- Communicate with people who might be left out.
- Check people are having fun!
- Give examples of games to play.
- Help people carry things if they are struggling.
- If two people want to play with the same thing, help them to take turns or share or come up with another idea.
- Listen to any problems or concerns they might have, they might just want to talk.
- Remind people about the "scrap on scrap" rule and that hitting is not acceptable.

When helping with the pod

- Help the students make a queue so it doesn't get too crowded.
- Make sure the centre is clear, so people don't trip.
- When showing the signs for 5 minutes and tidy up, or giving them to other helpers, make sure they know to hold the signs high so people can see them.
- Thank helpers with a high five or praise or maybe stickers if they did a very good job.
- If we see something that is serious like bullying or an accident, ask an adult for help. Always report any concerns.
- Keep an eye out for danger, we are all responsible for our own safety but sometimes the younger people might need help.
- Look for any loose parts that might have to be recycled or binned if they are broken and no longer safe to use.
- Help make tidy up a fun game to encourage everyone to take part.
- When bell goes for lining up, it is important we go and line up on time.

AT ANY OTHER TIME

- Tell children what a play champion is and what it might mean for them.
- Tell adults how important play is.
- Visit other schools or perhaps talk at assembly about the right to play.
- Gather some stories about the examples of play we see so we can share that with people.

(Kelly Clarke, Loose Parts Play Development Officer, East Lothian)







Risk-benefit assessment for loose parts play

Playing with loose parts all year round in almost all weathers provides children with experiences which cannot be replicated indoors. Alongside this comes the opportunity to enjoy challenging experiences and develop a range of skills which prepare children for life.

Risk-benefit assessment is an approach to risk management which considers these benefits alongside the risks. It is about taking a balanced and proportionate approach to the risk assessment process.

It's an approach supported by the Health and Safety Executive (2012) in their high-level statement, *Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach* and the Care Inspectorate's position statement *Positive approach to risk in play (2016:18)*.

Risk-benefit assessment – a definition

> **Risk-benefit assessment means that the play provider weighs, with equal consideration, the duty to protect children from avoidable serious harm and the duty to provide them with stimulating, adventurous play opportunities to let children take risks when they play without putting them in undue danger of serious harm.**
>
> (Ball et al, 2012:16)

A typical risk-benefit assessment covers points such as:

- benefits of the activity or experience
- risks
- any local factors, precedents and comparisons, to take into account
- the decision taken for the acceptable balance of risk and benefits
- actions and how the ongoing management of the risk will be dealt with.

Written risk-benefit assessments help to clarify the thought processes before arriving at a decision. Decisions might include:

- increase the possibility of risk and challenge
- do nothing
- monitor the situation
- mitigate or manage the risk
- remove the risk.

Things to take into account when making a decision:

- the unique context of each setting
- the differing physical, social and cognitive abilities of children and young people
- how well you know the children
- prevailing weather conditions
- the physical environment.

While written risk assessments can be done in advance for predictable activities, environments or use of equipment (and bear in mind, the Care Inspectorate does "not expect written risk assessments to be carried out for daily play activities"), much risk assessment is done dynamically as play happens.

Dynamic risk assessment

This is where the professional judgement of an adult is needed to decide if any intervention is necessary.

At any one time there will be many things happening in a play space. The adults will be observing and should be ready to intervene if required. Making the decision to intervene and how to 'pitch' that intervention is a considerable skill.

If a child is likely to come to a serious level of harm, then a rapid response is necessary. For most other occasions a steadier approach is required. Children who are new to a setting may initially need a closer eye kept on them than children who know the resources, routines and procedures. With children you know well, you can predict much better their usual abilities and dispositions.

Some options to draw on

- Remember to stop, look and listen, think, act, reflect (see page 34).
- Continue to observe from a distance.
- Observe more closely, quietly letting the children know you are there – this can change behaviour in itself.
- Step in with a question such as "I wonder what might happen if..."
- Introduce a new possibility, "If we tried using this, what do you think might happen?"
- Give a more direct message, "I'm concerned that..."

Some tips for developing confidence in dynamic risk-benefit assessment

- Reflect on the role of personal experience – someone who loves extreme sports may have a different attitude to risk to someone who is scared of heights. Reflect on how you can make objective decisions despite your own dispositions.
- Discuss real situations and decisions in staff meetings – what range of options were available to the adult? What considerations influence the decision they make?
- Use reflective questions to examine situations – for example, did my interventions increase opportunities for children to play? Did my intervention support children to manage risks for themselves? Should I have intervened when I didn't?
- Remember that children are also risk-assessing as they play in the same way we risk-assess unconsciously as we drive a car, walk down a busy street or play a sport.

"At a playground staff meeting, a concern was raised about pointy sticks and a child with a visual impairment not being able to see them. This led to a lot of positive suggestions:

- **Could the sticks have little bells on them?**
- **Could the ends be painted a bright colour that the child can see?**
- **Could they be stored in the magic garden or hideaway so the child knows the approximate vicinity of their use?**
- **Should we ask the child and the other children?**

This demonstrated just how far the staff have come on their journey to embedding loose parts play outside. Less than a year previously, the playtimes were structured activities. Now the sticks are no longer an issue."

(Linda Reed, HT, Garnetbank Primary School, Glasgow)

"The staff team needs to be open and honest with each other. Everyone will have different ideas on what is an acceptable level of risk, but the team or organisation has to have a standpoint on what they deem to be acceptable. This shouldn't stop staff members asking each other and getting a second opinion or some advice."

(Nathan MacGillivray, Family and Community Development, West Lothian)

Children and risk assessment

Children can be involved in risk-benefit assessment but how they are involved matters. It should be appropriate to the level of understanding (and interest) of the child. It must be meaningful to them.

Risk-benefit assessment can be participative. As well as getting different points of view, it will ensure greater support and understanding from the whole community.

It should be a positive approach that uses common sense, appropriate language and is pitched at an appropriate level. For example, the phrase *"What do we need to remember when playing with..."* is a useful opener that avoids overtly focusing on the risks.

When children raise a concern, adults can ask for their advice about managing this concern, thus promoting the value of children being capable of problem solving and taking responsibility for themselves and looking out for others.

Keep things up-to-date

Keep the written risk-benefit assessments up-to-date. Encourage everyone to help keep them fresh, especially if a minor accident or near miss occurs. They need to be living, working documents that accurately reflect procedures and practice. Think about where they need to be displayed or kept, to ensure this happens.

If your play provision is run or managed by a local authority or larger organisation, then you will have to follow their risk assessment procedures. They may not include reference to the benefits. In this situation, attach the benefits as a separate sheet or add an extra column to the standard risk assessment forms you use. This can be done in several ways:

- stating the general benefits of outdoor play
- stating the specific benefits of using loose parts
- stating the specific benefit in relation to the specific risk, for example the benefits of children playing when it is wet or icy outside.

> **"Health and safety is more than paperwork. It's about effective communication, personal responsibility and looking out for each other."**
>
> (Canadian Forestry Industry)

Further reading and templates

- *Positive approach to risk in play* **http://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/guidance/9-professional/2961-positive-approach-to-risk-in-play**
- *Children's play and leisure – promoting a balanced approach* **http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf**
- Learning through Landscapes has produced a series of generic risk-benefit assessments for their work which also follow this also approach: **www.ltl.org.uk/understanding-risk/**
- Play Wales: This risk-benefit assessment template/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*. **www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit**
- Play Wales: Info sheets **http://playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/informationsheets**
- Ball, D., Gill, T. and Spiegal, B. (2008) *Managing Risk in Play Provision*. London: Play Safety Forum. **www.playengland.org.uk**

Benefits of risk, adventure and challenge in play

Children and young people enjoy challenging, adventurous play.

They can test themselves and extend their abilities.

Some risk in play is beneficial, if not essential!

What are the benefits of risk and challenge in play?

- the chance to learn how to assess and manage risks for yourself
- fun and excitement
- making choices for yourself
- self-confidence
- learning through experience
- learning through trial and error
- resilience and learning ways of coping
- perseverance
- friendship
- teamwork
- getting to know yourself.

Did you know? Small accidents and injuries are not necessarily a sign of problems. When children play, it's natural they will have some bumps and bruises. Without some risk and challenge in play, children cannot gain many of the experiences and skills they need in life.





Monitoring and evaluating the impact of your loose parts play provision

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of loose parts ensures your efforts are effective. It helps you work out if and how the children and teenagers are benefiting, what's working well and what needs to be improved. If you follow the guidance in this toolkit from start to finish, then you should be able to capture a lot of evidence to this effect.

It's important to capture baseline information about what is happening before you begin and to establish a clear set of outcomes. Children can be actively involved throughout.

Monitoring and evaluation help to share what you are doing with various stakeholders and provide evidence for funding applications.

When considering the effectiveness of your loose parts play provision, it can be helpful to think about:

1. **The quality of the current provision. You may seek to measure the impact of current practice on:**

- the children's experiences and wellbeing
- schools which may also need to find out about achievements and attainment of individuals or key groups and if introducing loose parts play has made a difference.

2. **The quantity of provision. This is about equity of access and entitlement.**

- Is loose parts play available to all children and teenagers?
- Can all children access loose parts play on a frequent and regular basis in a way which meets their needs?
- Does this include sufficient opportunities and time outside?

3. **The range of provision. You need to review and ensure systems are in place to keep the loose parts provision fresh and interesting.**

- Are there sufficient amounts and diversity of loose parts? For example, is the size of your sandpit sufficient for the numbers of children who choose to play there?
- Are you making the most of variables and a broader definition of loose parts? This includes the opportunities for interplay with the weather, seasons, materials *in situ* and other variables.

4. **The environment in which loose parts play happens. Children read the social and physical landscape of a place.**

- Do the playworkers reflect honestly about the rules and routines? Does this match the children's and teenagers' perceptions?
- Do children have sufficient freedom and autonomy over where and how the loose parts are used? Much of this is based around the attitudes and values of the staff who facilitate the play.
- Is the physical environment loved and cared for by the playworkers and the children and teenagers? What strategies are in place to manage the environmental impact and to help develop an ethic of care and stewardship?

See page 18 for more on assessing current provision.

What to do with the information you gather

It is helpful to present the evidence you have gathered in ways that are useable, useful and persuasive to funders, supporters, parents, regulators and other stakeholders.

- Statistics gathered could be presented visually. This helps the audience see the quantitative differences.
- Photo journeys – capturing the state of play, before and after the introduction of loose parts. These need a brief explanatory note so that the reader knows what they are looking at. This is also useful for school grounds improvements.
- Evidence gathered from research articles. This helps stakeholders understand the reasons behind the need for loose parts play and its benefits. Your evidence is likely to substantiate the research.
- Quotes from a range of people. Most importantly, these should include the voices of children, teenagers and staff.
- Storybooks and videos – the children telling the story of what happened from their perspective, and the benefits. These can be scribed stories.
- Formal reports. Schools and early years and childcare settings must report formally on their attainment and achievements as well as self-evaluate against national quality indicators. Charities may have to report to funders on the impact of their investments.

> **"Since we started loose parts play there has been a significant drop in the number of incidents of misbehaviour and 'falling out' at breaktimes and lunchtimes. As well as creating a happier school, this has two positive impacts on our curricular learning: firstly, school managers are not needing to spend time interviewing children to find out what went wrong, and secondly, class teachers don't need to spend class time sorting out what happened. Happy children will start work quicker without worrying about unpleasant incidents or their consequences."**
>
> (Iain Devereux, Principal Teacher, Yester Primary School)







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05

Appendices

In this section you will find:

- developing loose parts play – experiences and outcomes
- Scotland's Coalition for Outdoor Play and Learning position statement
- acknowledgements
- about the authors.





Developing loose parts play – experiences and outcomes

The following experiences and outcomes dovetail with the *Loose Parts Play Toolkit*. Enabling play for the sake of play matters. Ensuring children and young people have daily access to free play with loose parts can be an essential part of embedding the *Curriculum for Excellence* at all levels, particularly regarding aspects of health and wellbeing. At the Early Level, the availability of loose parts benefits children by providing a range of learning contexts across all curriculum areas. The experiences and outcomes listed have been bundled into key themes, to save time referencing and cross-linking.

- **1. Introducing loose parts contributes towards developing children's understanding and experience of citizenship.**

- HWB 0-09a / HWB 0-10a / HWB 0-11a / HWB 0-12a / HWB 0-13a / HWB 0-14a / SOC 0-16a
- HWB 1-09a / HWB 1-10a / HWB 1-11a / HWB 1-12a / HWB 1-13a / HWB 1-14a / SOC 1-16a / SOC 1-17a / SOC 1-18a
- HWB 2-09a / HWB 2-10a / HWB 2-11a / HWB 2-12a / HWB 2-13a / HWB 2-14a /
- HWB 3-09a / HWB 3-10a / HWB 3-11a / HWB 3-12a / HWB 3-13a / HWB 3-14a /
- HWB 4-09a / HWB 4-10a / HWB 4-11a / HWB 4-12a / HWB 4-13a / HWB 4-14a

- **2. If the adults working with children and young people are facilitating loose parts play in line with the Playwork Principles, then their interactions will support children to acquire the skills to express their emotions in appropriate ways when playing.**

- HWB 0-01a / HWB 0-02a / HWB 0-03a / HWB 0-04a / HWB 0-45a
- HWB 1-01a / HWB 1-02a / HWB 1-03a / HWB 1-04a / HWB 1-24a / HWB 1-45a
- HWB 2-01a / HWB 2-02a / HWB 2-03a / HWB 2-04a / HWB 2-24a / HWB 3-04a /
- HWB 3-01a / HWB 3-02a / HWB 3-03a /
- HWB 4-01a / HWB 4-02a / HWB 4-03a / HWB 4-04a / HWB 3-24a

- **3. Play enables children to develop friendships and learn how to create relationships, be considerate of others, cooperate, take turns and develop a sense of fairness.**

- HWB 0-05a / HWB 0-08a / HWB 0-19a / HWB 0-23a / HWB 0-44a / HWB 0-44b / HWB 0-45a / HWB 0-45b / RME 0-02a / RME 0-05a / RME 0-09a / SOC 0-17a / SOC 0-18a
- HWB 1-05a / HWB 1-08a / HWB 1-19a / HWB 1-23a / HWB 1-44a / HWB 1-44b / HWB 1-45a / HWB 1-45b / RME 1-09a / SOC 1-17a
- HWB 2-05a / HWB 2-08a / HWB 2-19a / HWB 2-23a / HWB 2-44a / HWB 2-44b / HWB 2-45a / HWB 2-45b /
- HWB 3-05a / HWB 3-08a / HWB 3-19a / HWB 3-23a / HWB 3-44b / HWB 3-45a / HWB 3-45b
- HWB 4-05a / HWB 4-08a / HWB 4-23a / HWB 4-44b / HWB 4-45a / HWB 4-45b

- **4. Free play with loose parts facilitates children's ability to listen and talk in informal situations and when engaging with others. This includes turn taking, when to talk, listening to others and acknowledging differences of opinion.**

- LIT 0-02a / ENG 0-03a
- LIT 1-02a / ENG 1-03a
- LIT 2-02a
- LIT 3-02a
- LIT 4-02a

- **5. Children and young people learn how to take care of themselves, develop self-awareness and personal safety through their free play with loose parts.**

- HWB 0-16a / HWB 0-17a / HWB 0-33a / HWB 0-42a / HWB 0-46a
- HWB 1-16a / HWB 1-17a / HWB 1-42a / HWB 1-46a /
- HWB 2-16a / HWB 2-17a / HWB 2-42a
- HWB 3-16a / HWB 3-17a
- HWB 4-16a / HWB 4-17a

- **6. Children and young people have daily opportunities to be physically active, playing in ways that suit their developmental needs. Playing in natural spaces can be particularly effective for developing movement skills.**

- HWB 0-21a / HWB 0-22a / HWB 0-25a
- HWB 1-21a / HWB 1-22a / HWB 1-25a
- HWB 2-21a / HWB 2-22a / HWB 2-25a
- HWB 3-21a / HWB 3-22a / HWB 3-25a
- HWB 4-25a

- **7. Children learn experientially about beliefs and values and their impact on behaviours and actions through free play, including those around sustainability and caring for the environment.**

- RME 0-07a / SOC 0-08a / TCH 0-02a
- RME 1-07a / RME 1-08a / RME 1-09b / RME 1-09c / SOC 1-08a / / TCH 1-02a
- RME 2-08a / RME 2-09d /RME 2-07a /
- RME 3-07a / RME 3-08a / RME 3-09c / RME 3-09d
- RME 4-07a / RME 4-08a

- **8. Creative expression in many forms arises during free play. This can include art, drama, dance and music, where the loose parts are the stimuli in conjunction with the space.**

- EXA 0-02a / EXA 0-05a / EXA 0-12a / EXA 0-13a / EXA 0-14a / EXA 0-18a
- EXA 1-05a / 1-12a EXA 1-13a / EXA 1-18a /
- EXA 2-05a / EXA 2-13a / EXA 2-18a

- **9. Children design and build constructions frequently during loose part play. This requires skills such as critical thinking and using problem solving strategies to achieve success.**

- EXA 0-06a / TCH 0-01a / TCH 0-11a / TCH 0-12a / TCH 0-14a / TCH 0-15a /
- EXA 1-06a / TCH 1-01a / TCH 1-01c / TCH 1-11b / TCH 1-14a / TCH 1-14b /
- EXA 2-06a / TCH 2-01a / TCH 2-11b / TCH 1-12a / TCH 2-14a / TCH 2-14b

Scotland's Coalition for Outdoor Play and Learning position statement

Playing outdoors is fundamental.

All children and young people have the right to play and the right to learn as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Children.

Playing outdoors enhances learning and is fundamental for children and young people to thrive in health, wellbeing and development.

It is our shared responsibility to support and enable all of Scotland's children and young people to access our diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purposes of playing and learning. We commit to working together to meet these responsibilities.

Playing and learning outdoors is life-enhancing.

- It improves the physical health of children and young people by increasing physical activity and equipping them with the skills and attributes essential for living a healthy and active life, thereby contributing to reducing health inequalities and supporting the aims of national health policies.
- It promotes mental, social and emotional wellbeing by helping to reduce stress, increase self-esteem and confidence, develop emotional resilience, and build children and young people's confidence in their own capabilities and ability to manage risks and deal with uncertainty.
- Importantly, it is fun! And through that fun, it promotes the development of essential social skills, helping children and young people to develop compassion and empathy and to build lasting and loving relationships.
- It supports wider learning by helping to boost creativity, imagination and understanding. These benefits are enhanced further when playing outdoors in diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes, particularly when the play is led by the child or young person. This provides multiple and enjoyable challenges and creates and enhances learning opportunities. It can also prepare children and young people for more structured learning, thereby supporting the aims of national education policies.
- It brings people together, connecting children and young people with their local areas and communities and helping to develop a sense of place and feeling of belonging and inclusion. It provides a wealth of opportunities for intergenerational activity, enhancing community cohesion, reducing social isolation, and helping to build inclusive, resilient communities.
- It is a powerful tool through which children and young people learn to understand the world around them and their place in it, creating a sense of ownership of all of Scotland's landscapes. Playing and learning outdoors is essential for our children and young people to understand, value, enjoy and protect our natural world. It connects them to their environment, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of its physical properties and diversity.



We commit to life-enhancing outdoor play and learning for all of Scotland's children and young people by:

- Widening access to the high-quality, diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes that exist throughout all our communities to ensure that all children, young people and families have easy, local access to excellent outdoor play.
- Opening up more of our communal and publicly-managed spaces for playing and learning outdoors, ensuring that children and young people know they are entitled to access these spaces and feel safe and comfortable using them.
- Enhancing and enriching urban greenspace and built environments to be inviting, play-friendly places, offering easy access to the outdoors and nature close to home.
- Empowering every adult involved in the lives of our children and young people with the confidence, enthusiasm and skills to encourage and support them to play and learn outdoors.
- Generating and sharing knowledge and evidence-based research to promote better understanding of the benefits of playing and learning outdoors.

We will work together to embed playing and learning outdoors as an everyday activity and we will celebrate it as a fundamental part of growing up in Scotland.

The full statement can be found at: **https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Scotlands-Coalition-for-Outdoor-Play-and-Learning-Position-Statement.pdf**

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Inspiring Scotland strives for a Scotland without poverty or disadvantage. Inspiring Scotland works with people, their communities, charities and public bodies to develop solutions to some of the deepest social problems. Inspiring Scotland has worked in partnership with the Scottish Government successfully supporting the development and expansion of free play in disadvantaged communities across Scotland.

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