Play England

Play England aims for all children and young people in England to have regular access and opportunity for free, inclusive, local play provision and play space. Play England provides advice and support to promote good practice, and works to ensure that the importance of play is recognised by policy makers, planners and the public.

Play England is part of NCB, and is supported by the Big Lottery Fund.

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NCB

NCB promotes the voices, interests and well-being of all children and young people across every aspect of their lives.

As an umbrella body for the children's sector in England and Northern Ireland, NCB provides essential information on policy, research and good practice for NCB's members and other partners.

NCB aims to:
- challenge disadvantage in childhood
- work with children and young people to ensure they are involved in all matters that affect their lives
- promote multidisciplinary cross-agency partnerships and good practice
- influence government policy through policy development and advocacy
- undertake high quality research and work from an evidence-based perspective
- disseminate information to all those working with children and young people, and to children and young people themselves.

NCB has adopted and works within the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Front cover image: Tree climbing at Crumbles Castle Adventure Playground.
Image: Play England/Alan Finlay.
Making it Happen: Implementing the Charter for Children’s Play
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The Charter for Children’s Play was first published in 1992 by the NCB. A slightly revised version, The New Charter for Children’s Play was published in 1998 and became the underpinning document for all the work of the former Children’s Play Council. The past 10 years have seen significant changes in the understanding of the value of play and informal recreation, and also in policy and planning for play opportunities. These changes prompted Play England to revisit the Charter for Children’s Play and ensure that it reflects the needs and aspirations of today’s children and young people.

During 2007 an extensive consultation took place with members of Play England, the successor to the Children’s Play Council; representatives from the play and related sectors, and children and young people themselves. This consultation showed that with minor changes, the charter should continue to be a guiding document for all those involved in providing opportunities for children and young people’s play and informal recreation.

In the updated version, some of the original charter statements have been incorporated into others, reducing the total number of statements from 10 to 8. However, the intention and meaning of the revised charter differs little from the original – clarifying and simplifying some of the original statements.

This guide is intended to be used as a practical tool for those using the charter, showing how it can be promoted and implemented.

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Introduction

The Charter for Children’s Play sets out a vision for play and aims to be a catalyst for individuals and organisations to examine, review and improve their provision for children and young people’s play and informal recreation.

The charter may also serve as a guide and framework to all those involved in developing, revising and implementing play strategies and developing or reviewing Sustainable Community Strategies and Children and Young People’s Plans.

The charter can also be used by children, young people and their families to support their arguments for more and better things to do, and places to play in their local neighbourhoods.

Using the charter

The charter defines children as anyone under the age of 18 years. This definition draws on that used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the United Kingdom in 1991.

This guide suggests ways in which organisations and individuals can use the charter to take action to improve children’s opportunities to play. The eight charter statements are underpinned by possible actions for children, parents and carers, play service providers, planners and decision-makers.

Organisations whose services impact on children’s play, such as local authorities, voluntary organisations, groups and clubs, health, education and social service providers might use the charter in the following ways:

- Formally adopt the charter at elected member or governing body level in order to raise awareness of the importance of play. A suitable resolution would be: ‘to promote the Charter for Children’s Play, and to work to ensure that policies and practices across the organisation support and promote children’s access to a range of play opportunities and services.’
- Use the charter and underpinning actions as the basis for strategic planning of children’s and generic services as they relate to play.
- Use the charter to review all services and functions that have an effect on children’s play.

Children and young people, parents, community groups, play associations and politicians can use the charter to support the creation of better play opportunities in their area. This might include persuading local authority and voluntary sector services to adopt the charter as part of their organisational values.

To help illustrate the eight charter statements, this guide uses quotes from children and young people who participated in the consultation process.
The need for a Charter for Children’s Play

Children’s right to play

The right to play and informal recreation, for all children and young people up to 18 years of age, is enshrined in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the UK government in 1991. The government has a duty under this convention to protect and promote play opportunities for all children and young people.

What we mean by ‘play’

‘Play is what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons.’

Play is a generic term applied to a wide range of activities and behaviours that are satisfying to the child, creative for the child and freely chosen by the child. It has frequently been described as ‘what children and young people do when not being told what to do by adults’.

As children grow, they are more likely to describe these informal recreational activities in ways other than ‘playing’. Under the UN Convention, older children’s right to their own recreational and cultural lives is as important as younger children’s right to play. This charter applies equally to all ages of children and young people.

It also asserts that quality play provision is, by definition, inclusive; removing all barriers to children who might be denied opportunities to play with their peers, because of disability, ethnicity, social or economic background, or any other reason.

The essence of play is that it arises from children’s innate need to express themselves, to explore, learn about and make sense of their world. Its benefits for children derive from their making their own choices, following their own instincts. At play, children have a certain freedom and autonomy from adult direction. This freedom – to choose, to explore, to associate, to create, to move around, to challenge themselves and others – is an important part of their lives now; and vital to their development.

The charter, therefore, is underpinned by some key understandings:

- Play is an essential part of every child’s life – vital to his or her development. It is the way that children explore for themselves the world around them; the way that they naturally develop understanding and practise skills.

- Play is essential for healthy physical and emotional growth, for intellectual and educational development, and for acquiring social and behavioural skills.

- Play may or may not involve equipment or have an end product. Children play on their own and with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light-hearted or very serious.

- Children’s own culture is created and lived through their play.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 31

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Play today

Today’s children do not have the same freedom and space to play as their parents and grandparents had. Heavy traffic, fears for their safety, and poorly kept public spaces limit the opportunities for children to play outside in their own neighbourhoods. Spaces and facilities, where children feel safe enough to play outside without adults are often hard to find for some children and young people.

At the same time, growth in childcare services for working parents and formal out-of-school classes and activity clubs has limited the amount of free, staffed, open-access play provision available in many areas.

This has been accompanied by a rapid growth in electronic, indoor, and sedentary forms of play – attractive to many children. The advent of the internet and computer games, and their introduction into the majority of homes, has run in parallel with a tendency for society across the UK to become increasingly protective of children’s safety.

Today’s children are more watched, measured, tested and contained than ever before. There is also fear amongst play service providers of litigation if children hurt themselves whilst playing. As a result, much play provision has, over time, lost its element of risk and challenge and some children seek out opportunities for exciting play in more dangerous, unmanaged places.

Overall, these changes have had detrimental consequences for children, families and communities. Children lose out on the enjoyment, freedom, confidence and developing independence that free play brings; parents and carers are concerned that their children are not safe and not benefiting from the experiences free play offers them; and communities lack the positive experience of seeing children and young people playing in public spaces.

In recognition of these issues, in December 2008, the government published a 10-year national Play Strategy for England, injecting funding into local provision and making a commitment to support the development of better play opportunities for all children and young people.

Providing for play

In most areas today, local authorities and their partners need to ensure there are sufficient and suitable spaces and facilities for children to play freely and free of charge in their local neighbourhoods. This includes creating safer streets, parks and open spaces; offering free, open access play provision staffed by trained playworkers, and ensuring that people working with or having contact with children as part of their work understand the value and importance of play.

Ensuring this provision is an important element in the achievement of broader, strategic goals such as developing and sustaining healthy, safe communities, ensuring social cohesion and improving local living environments. In addition, establishing more widespread opportunities for play means that children will be seen enjoying themselves in public – reinvigorating communities.
Play and children’s policy

In December 2008 the government published a national Play Strategy for England. As well as funding new and refurbished play provision in every local authority, the 10-year strategy contains proposals and some resources for embedding play provision in local authority planning and services, supporting the voluntary and community sector, and increasing training for people involved in playwork and in planning and managing the public realm. Crucially, the Play Strategy acknowledges the value of children’s play for play’s sake, as well as for its contribution to other outcomes for children.

The Play Strategy contains significant government policy commitments to improve children’s play, £235m of new money to build or renovate play areas, and funding to enable playworkers to gain a professional qualification. The government is also working with local authority planners to create more child-friendly public spaces and is encouraging transport planners to introduce more 20mph speed limits in residential areas and introduce more home zones. Wider policy measures described in the Play Strategy aim to make the outdoor world safer and more welcoming for children.

The Play Strategy measures include:

- greater responsibility on local authorities to prioritise play in spatial planning
- a national indicator measuring children’s own satisfaction with the play provision in their area
- training for those who plan, manage and supervise public space to promote understandings about children’s play and access needs
- more professional playworkers to run supervised play services, like staffed adventure playgrounds, in the most deprived and built up areas.

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Every Child Matters

The Children Act 2004 requires all those working with and on behalf of children to consider and review their work and to combine and develop collaborative working partnerships. Local authorities are required to ensure the provision of services to children and their families help children to: be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being. Play contributes to these outcomes in complex and comprehensive ways.

Be healthy: Playing is part of a child's physical, social and psychological development and is crucial to children's health and well-being. Playing helps children develop resilience, while offering opportunities for 'positive stress', helping them develop appropriate responses to unusual situations. Play can also be therapeutic, helping children deal with difficult or painful circumstances, such as emotional stress or medical treatment.

Stay safe: Given the opportunities through their playing, children will take physical, emotional and social risks and challenge themselves. This enables them to think through decisions and gain increased self-confidence and resilience.

Enjoy and achieve: Play gives children the opportunity to be independent and have fun. Play enables children to find out about themselves, their abilities and their interests. Play allows children to be creative and use their imagination freely, developing their own ideas and on their own initiative, contributing to the achievement of their potential.

Make a positive contribution: Play fosters social inclusion. It helps children understand the people in their lives, to learn about their environment and develop their sense of community. Play also assists children in shaping their own culture of childhood.

Achieve economic well-being: Play promotes children's development and emotional intelligence; they learn to have empathy and an understanding of group dynamics. Play also promotes creativity and independence thus contributing to children's future well-being. In communities where levels of deprivation are prevalent, playwork provision especially, can contribute to developing a sense of well-being and purpose for those involved.
Children have the right to play

All children and young people have the right to play and need to play: free to choose what they do—lively or relaxed, noisy or quiet—with the chance to stretch and challenge themselves, take risks and enjoy freedom. The right to play is enshrined in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
Messages for children:

• Make the most of the right to play.
• Play is about choice and freedom.
• Playing is what children do for themselves when adults are not telling them what to do.

Action points for parents and carers:

• Take time to think about how you played as a child, and compare that with children today in order to appreciate how important freedom to play really is.
• Stand up for children’s right to play when others are challenging this.

“ The best thing about playing is the messing about.”

• Respect the right of children to choose how they want to play, where they want to play and who they want to play with.
• Make sure that children have the opportunity to take part in different types of play where they can gain confidence, develop and learn in their own way.
• Encourage children to create and explore their own ideas for playing.
• Allow children to test and challenge themselves while playing, if it is what they want to do.
• If there is nowhere local that feels safe for children to play, contact local councillors or a local authority play champion if you have one.

“ We only play on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.”

Action points for play providers:

• Make sure all staff understand the importance of play in children’s lives.
• Emphasise that all children need places to play that are free of charge and accessible for all.
• Involve children and young people when planning play and local informal recreation facilities.
• Support and encourage children’s own ideas and decisions about what they do and how they do it.
• Be aware that some children, for example those who are disabled or have specific needs and interests, may need more support than others to realise their right to play.

• Develop universal inclusive play provision in every locality to ensure the right to play for all children.
• Create play environments that challenge children and enable them to assess and manage potential risk and danger.

“ It was rubbish... because they said we would get to have a camp fire but then we didn’t because they said it was too dangerous.”

• Manage the inherent risks in children’s playing but do not let risk reduction be the guiding principal when creating play spaces and facilities.
• Make sure children have the opportunity to experience different types of play to support all their interests and aspects of their development.

“ Some of the others like playing in the dark but it is a bit scary.”

Action points for planners and decision-makers

• Establish the Charter for Children’s Play as a key reference document to support the development of play policies and ensure the widest possible appreciation of the value of play across all communities.
• Undertake research and consultation with children, parents and carers and involve children in defining specifications and planning processes.
• Make sure local authority strategic planning provides children and young people with access to a sufficient variety of quality spaces and facilities for free play and informal recreation.
• Ensure that policy development, planning and decision making supports children’s play across housing, education, children’s services, arts, health, sport, leisure and recreational activities.
• Discuss with health and safety officials, legal officers and insurers how local authorities can best manage the inherent risks in children’s playing without letting risk reduction to be the guiding principle when creating play spaces and facilities.
Every child needs time and space to play

All children and young people – disabled and non-disabled – whatever their age, culture, ethnicity or social and economic background, need time and space to play freely and confidently with their peers, free of charge, indoors and outdoors, somewhere they feel safe. Play provision should actively include the widest range of children and seek to engage with those from minority groups.
Messages for children:

- All children should be able to enjoy free time playing and spending time with their friends.
- If bullying is stopping children from playing, it is very important to tell someone who can help. Bullies should not be allowed to stop children from playing.
- If it feels unsafe where children want to play, they can ask adults to help make it feel safer.

Action points for parents and carers:

- Recognise that all children, whatever their circumstances, need to play and spend free time with other children.
- Try to ensure that children have the opportunity to meet a wide range of other young people and can choose who they play with.
- Accept that individual children have different play needs and expectations and try to find ways of meeting these.
- Find out about the local play places where children, whatever their age, ability, beliefs or interests can feel safe and play together.
- Join with others in the neighbourhood to get places established where children and young people feel safe to play.

“'My cousin can't play because she is disabled, she is bigger than me but can't go out and play, like me.'”

“This girl in my street can’t read or write. She wanted to come out and play but her mum and dad won't let her because she gets bullied and beaten up.”

Action points for play providers:

- Ensure that play opportunities for children are genuinely inclusive, and promote equality and diversity.
- Always welcome and value all children as individuals and support the development of inclusive attitudes and behaviour amongst staff and management.
- Create and facilitate opportunities for all children to have a variety of play experiences and to play with others. This does not mean all children always being able to do the same things.
- Ensure there is a variety of play opportunities for disabled children or those with specific needs and interests to improve their enjoyment and opportunity to meet and make friends.

“We are a group, all different ages of boys and girls.”

“'We are too old to play games like hide and seek, but it depends where you are playing – it’s OK in the woods or in the graveyard.'”

Action points for planners and decision-makers:

- Ensure the availability of places where diverse children can play freely and free of charge in their own neighbourhood.
- Encourage people across the local authority and its partner organisations to understand the central role of play and informal recreational activity in the lives of all children, families and communities.
- When planning play provision, embed equal opportunity policies in management structures, employment practice, training, service delivery, equipment and resources.
- Embed planning for play opportunities in the development of all services for children and families, paying particular attention to children who are disabled or have other specific needs, children living in economically deprived areas, children in refugee or asylum-seeking families, children looked after by local authorities and those finding themselves in other vulnerable or exceptional circumstances.
Adults should let children play

Parents, carers and other adults can support children's and young people's play by respecting the value and importance of all types of play, playing with their children and by creating opportunities and allowing time for children to play independently with their friends, inside and outside the home.
Messages for children:

- Children letting parents know where they are going, who they are playing with and that they understand any risks involved, can help reassure parents that children are safe playing outside.
- Children asking parents and carers to play with them can be fun for everyone, and children can learn new games and ways to play.
- If adults try to stop children playing, talking to the adults reasonably, listening to them and explaining what is happening can help. Asking adults to listen to the child’s viewpoint, and vice versa, and trying to make an agreement to play without upsetting or annoying others can help win adults over.

“I was allowed to go to the park on my own but this girl I knew she had to go there with her older brothers and sisters.”

Action points for parents and carers:

- Allow and encourage all children to play, walk and cycle outside, in a variety of places including natural environments, so they can enjoy the independence of playing freely with their friends.
- Support children in facing challenges, taking risks and learning by their mistakes when they are playing.
- Make time for play activities with children, wherever and whenever you can, especially when they are young.
- Let children choose what to play when playing with parents, carers or other adults.
- Encourage children to learn new games and ways to play from adults talking about what they did as children.

Action points for play providers:

- Give parents, carers and other adults information about the vital importance of play to children and how children’s opportunities for play have diminished over recent years.
- Encourage parents and carers to support their children’s play, both within and outside the home.
- Be aware that parents of disabled children and young people or those who have specific needs may require more support than others in encouraging their children to play freely with their friends.
- Be sensitive to the fact that there will be differences in parents’ approaches to play for their child.

“I would like to stay out as long as I like without my mum phoning me.”

Action points for planners and decision-makers:

- Ensure there are places for children to play where their parents feel they will be safe.
- Consult with, and provide information for, parents and children about play opportunities in their local area.

“The law stops you playing freely – always shouting at you. One said, ‘I don’t like the look of you’, but the law is good, because if it wasn’t there you wouldn’t feel safe.”

- Invite and encourage the participation of parents, carers and their children in shaping the places for children’s play.
- If adults complain about the location of play areas, investigate the situation and negotiate with them before shutting down play areas or stopping children from playing.
- Organise local events aimed at increasing understanding between young and older people.
Children should be able to play freely in their local areas

Children have the same right to use and enjoy public spaces as others. Local streets, estates, green spaces, parks and town centres should be accessible for children and young people to move around in safety and offer places where they can play freely, experience nature, explore their environment and be with their friends.
Messages for children:

- Children and young people have as much right to be out and about in public spaces as anyone else.
- Playing outside is good fun and gives children the opportunity to meet local people and get to know the area where they live.
- Natural places, where there are trees, grass, earth and even sand or water can be great play places.

“People park their cars in the way and we can’t play in the street. We want streets where there are no cars so we can play.”

Action points for parents and carers:

- Talk with children about the local places where they feel safe when playing and encourage them to play outside as much as possible.
- If local streets do not seem safe enough for children to play out, talk with neighbours about ways of changing them. Ask children how they think the neighbourhood can be made a better place for playing and encourage them to join in trying to get local improvements.
- Agree with friends and neighbours to keep an eye out for children and discuss how to improve the area with local community groups.
- Teach children road safety skills from a young age.
- Walk or cycle with children to local places rather than drive them, and find the safest routes to your nearest parks and playgrounds.
- Stand up for children’s right to play in their local neighbourhood and, if people object, listen to their concerns and try to find solutions together.

“When I go over two miles from home on my bike, the phone beeps to warn me not to go any further.”

Action points for play providers:

- Whenever and wherever possible, ensure that children and young people can use local streets and public open spaces for free play and informal recreation.

- Locate places specifically designed for children and young people’s play and informal recreation within view of houses or close to busy paths and public spaces.
- Discuss with the local authority how residential streets and neighbourhoods can be made to feel safe for play and safer from traffic.
- Wherever possible, make use of the natural environment for children’s play space.
- Make sure that parks and green and open spaces feel safe and offer children and young people a variety of different ways to play, including contact with nature.
- Recognise that children need a range of play places, particularly outdoor play areas, where they can have some independence from adult scrutiny but still feel safe.
- Encourage adults to recognise the difference between play and anti-social behaviour.

Action points for planners and decision-makers:

- Make public spaces available for children to play near their homes and schools.
- In planning and redeveloping housing areas, put the location and quality of public spaces for children’s play at the heart of the process.

“Build some small parks next to your house rather than a big one that is far away.”

- Ensure that public spaces are play-friendly, offering children and young people different types of space for play and informal recreation.
- Give children access to the whole environment, not only designated play areas.
- Encourage and support ‘Friends of the Park’ and other community groups to be developed and be trained to support children’s play.
- Wherever possible, put the needs of children before the needs of motorists in residential streets: make wider use of traffic calming, home zones and other measures to reduce traffic levels; reduce signs that deter children from playing, and increase those that indicate to children good places to play.
Children value and benefit from staffed play provision

Children should have access to a choice of staffed facilities where children’s play rights and needs are the first priority, such as adventure playgrounds, play centres, holiday play schemes, after-school play clubs, breakfast play clubs, playgroups, toy libraries, play buses, and play ranger services.
Messages for children:

- Children may feel safer playing in staffed play provision; that is a space specially designed for play where there are trained adults to look out for them.
- Most areas have playschemes or staffed play provision that is often free and children can come and go when they feel like it.
- If there is no staffed play provision in the area, children can talk to the council about what is needed. They can ask for support from friends, parents and other adults.

Action points for parents and carers:

- Find out if there are free local staffed play services for children when they are not at school. For many children, especially those with no local outside places to play where they feel safe, the best place to play may be staffed provision.
- Encourage children to use local staffed provision.
- Work closely with the people who run local play services to ensure that children’s play needs and expectations are met.

Action points for play providers:

- Recognise that while children often play without adults present, skilful adult intervention can enrich children’s play.

“The best thing is when we do stuff outside; even when it rains.”

- Ensure that children have time and space to play outdoors as well as a varied indoor play environment.
- Try to keep a good balance between the need to offer risk and challenge, and the need to keep children safe from serious harm.

- Carry out risk–benefit assessments on environments where children are likely to be playing.
- Challenge children if their behaviour is detrimental to others.
- Operate the service within clearly defined policies and procedures and an approved quality assurance system.

Action points for planners and decision-makers:

- Ensure that all children and families in deprived areas or with specific needs can have access to staffed play provision where children can come and go freely, that is free of charge and where children are free to play as they wish.
- Make sure that good practice is identified and incorporated into the planning of all staffed play services.
- As the development of play provision requires sustainable funding and resourcing, ensure this is built into local budgeting processes.
- All staff planning or working in areas where children might play should have knowledge of play and playwork principles and skills.
Children’s play is enriched by skilled playworkers

Qualified, skilled playworkers are trained to put children's play needs at the centre of their work in a variety of settings, enhancing the range and quality of play experiences for all children. They are the best people to run staffed play provision for school-aged children. The role of the playworker is as important as that of any skilled professional working with children and should be respected and rewarded accordingly.
Messages for children:
- Playworkers can give children the space, time, environment and freedom to play with their friends.
- If adults are running play provision or after-school clubs, children can ask if they have been trained as playworkers to do this important work.
- Playworkers can check an area to make it possible for children to play in ways that may be exciting or challenging, enriching play.

Action points for planners and decision-makers:
- Plan strategically for the development and expansion of qualified playworkers.
- Ensure that the main focus and core purpose of playwork, to support and facilitate play, informs and underpins the development of play policy, strategy, implementation, training and education.

Action points for parents and carers:
- Ask if individuals who are involved in play provision are qualified in playwork and regularly updated about developments in their profession.
- Where possible, try working alongside professional playworkers. There is a lot to learn from them about children and the value of play.
- Look for opportunities to become trained and qualified in playwork.

Action points for play providers:
- Ensure that you are regularly updated and informed about developments in the playwork profession and that all staff working with children know and understand the Playwork Principles (see page 26).
- Support training and qualifications for people working with children to develop playwork skills and understanding.
- Ensure the setting has a training and development action plan for all staff.
- At all times, ensure that playworkers support all children to ensure they feel welcome and can enjoy spending time with each other.
- Support playworkers in achieving the balance between the need to keep children safe and the crucial opportunities for children to experience challenging and sometimes risky play.
- Ask parents, carers and older children to provide feedback on the quality of professional playwork and to provide insights into skills, competence and behaviours.

You can have jokes with all the workers here. If they weren’t here it would be boring

You can have jokes with all the workers here. If they weren’t here it would be boring

“ The staff are really nice, they make it really easy to come here and play”

• Make playwork training and qualifications accessible and transferable – acknowledging that some specialist areas of work may require additional training and qualifications.
• Provide training and continuous professional development for those with children in play and related settings.
• Ensure training and qualifications are based on the principles of reflective analytic practice.
• Develop a workforce which is graduate-led, providing parity with other comparable children’s workforce professions.
Children at school need time and space to play

The school day should allow time for children to relax and play freely with their friends. Young children learn best through play and, as they get older, play supports and enriches their learning. Children learn best if teaching is creative and enjoyable. In school, time and space for play and outdoor learning is as important as formal teaching. School grounds should be good places to play.
Messages for children:

• Children should be free to play how they want during playtime and be able to have a say about how the playground is laid out.
• Invent new games to play in the playground and ask adults and older children to pass on some games they have played can make playtime more fun.
• If someone tries to ban a playground game children can ask why, and if it does not seem reasonable, discuss it with them.

Action points for parents and carers:

• Remember that young children learn best through play.
• Remember that playing helps children learn about things that interest them at their own pace.
• Understand that, as children get older, having time and space to play at school helps them to enjoy school more and learn better.

"We would like to play in the big field behind the school but the dinner ladies don't let us."

Action points for planners and decision-makers:

• Make the Charter for Children's Play a guiding document for play provision in nursery, primary and secondary schools.

"When it is lunchtime, we play sleeping lions, and once Jack actually fell asleep."

Action points for schools, early years and play providers:

• Recognise that young children learn best through play and make sure that there are suitably trained staff and environments for this.
• Discuss with staff the vital contribution of play in the school day.
• Relate the principle 'play is learning and learning is play' to the school curriculum.
• Build time for play, and learning through play, into primary and secondary school curricula.
• Involve children in deciding how and when play happens in the school day.
• Do not reduce children's access to break times: play should not be seen as a reward or as a punishment.

• Try to avoid banning games in the playground without first discussing the reasons with the children who are playing them.
• Promote the development of lunchtime playworkers, playground staff and other ancillary staff, through offering training and opportunities to work with local play services. Think of playground staff as facilitators, not supervisors, of children's play.
Children sometimes need extra support to enjoy their right to play

Children and young people living away from home or visiting unfamiliar or controlled environments such as hospital, prison, immigration centres and residential homes and schools, sometimes experience fear, anxiety and discomfort. For these children it is especially important to ensure they have good play opportunities facilitated by trained staff and volunteers.
Messages for children:

- Playing with familiar toys and games can help some children feel more comfortable in difficult situations.
- Children visiting or staying in a place that is unfamiliar or uncomfortable may feel better by taking a favourite toy or game to play with.
- Children asking parents and carers questions about where they are going and what to expect, and checking if there will be somewhere to play, can help make difficult places and situations feel less frightening.

Action points for parents and carers:

- Remember, for children spending time in unusual situations, playing with familiar things and with others can be a great help and support.
- Ask for play provision to be provided where children will be spending time.
- Don’t be afraid to be seen to play with children in places that feel uncomfortable or awkward. It helps them.
- If there is a specialist playworker available, ask for information and advice about suitable forms of play for the child or children.

Action points for play providers:

- Recognise that play can help alleviate the impact of stress on a child.
- Be aware of places in the local area where children and young people might find themselves in difficult or traumatic situations, and work with managers to ensure play opportunities with skilled staff are provided.
- Work closely with other professionals where play provision has not traditionally been provided, and ensure playworkers have the appropriate skills and knowledge to support the children using the service.
- Ensure that children spending time with their parents on an occasional basis and in institutionalised settings have access to age-appropriate resources for play.

Action points for planners and decision-makers:

- Ensure that the play needs of children in exceptional and unusual circumstances are recognised and addressed in local play strategies.
- If planning or running specialist services for children and young people make sure their play needs are integral to all care and service plans.

“We come and sit out here, all our memories are here, we have been crying and talking: this is our memory corner.”

- Listen to the views of the children in your care and plan to ensure specialist playworkers and resources are available to them.
- Where children spend time in provision primarily designed for adults, make sure services offer suitable environments, resources and staff to support children’s play.

Images: Royal Manchester Children’s Hospital.
Supporting documents

The Charter for Children's Play can be used alongside other key play sector documents.

Best Play: What play provision should do for children

Best Play: What play provision should do for children is a fundamental document for the play sector. It describes how children benefit from a variety of play opportunities and how play services and spaces can provide these benefits. The seven objectives described in Best Play apply to all play provision. The objectives are broad statements, intended to set out how play values and principles should be put into practice.

The seven play objectives
1. The provision extends the choice and control that children have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it.
2. The provision recognises the child's need to test boundaries and responds positively to that need.
3. The provision manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from harm.
4. The provision maximises the range of play opportunities.
5. The provision fosters independence and self-esteem.
6. The provision fosters children's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction.
7. The provision fosters the child's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

Playwork Principles

Playwork Principles establishes the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people. The principles are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.
2. 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, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult-led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker’s response to children and young people playing is based on a sound, up-to-date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people’s play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

SkillsActive, the Sector Skills Council for playwork, endorses Playwork Principles.

KIDS Inclusion Framework for Local Authorities

‘Inclusive provision is open and accessible to all, and takes positive action in removing disabling barriers so that disabled and non-disabled children can participate.’

In the charter, inclusive provision refers to provision that removes barriers to children often excluded from local mainstream provision because of disability, ethnicity or social or economic background, or any other reason.

Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces

Play England, together with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), have published this guide which will help transform the design of play spaces in the future by making them more appealing to children. The guide, endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive, introduces the concept of a design cycle and 10 design principles that put play value at the heart of provision with the aim of ensuring play spaces do justice to children’s capacity for challenge, adventure and imagination.

Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide

Also published jointly by DCSF and DCMS, this guide details an approach to risk management that allows children to enjoy challenging play opportunities while ensuring that they are not exposed to unacceptable risk of harm. The guide updates the Play Safety Forum’s influential position statement, first published in 2002, with specific guidance showing how providers can replace practice with an approach that takes into account the benefits to children of challenging play experiences as well as the risks. Managing Risk in Play Provision is endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive and RoSPA.

Both guides are available free of charge from www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications or can be downloaded from www.playengland.org.uk

Play for a Change: Play Policy and Practice: A review of contemporary perspectives

Play for a Change offers a comprehensive review of the evidence underpinning current thinking on play. It provides a detailed analysis of research and literature published since 2001 that underpins contemporary understandings of the importance of play and how this relates to social policy and practice. Authored by Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell of the University of Gloucestershire, the research is published in three formats: a 270-page full research report, a 60-page summary, and a 4-page introductory briefing paper.

The review can be downloaded from www.playengland.org.uk or can be purchased from NCB Books www.ncb.org.uk/books

Play Shaper

Play Shaper is a national training programme that helps the professionals who plan, design, build and manage our communities to understand the importance of play and their role in creating child-friendly public spaces. By March 2011, every top-tier local authority in England will be offered the cross-professional training. Furthermore, two specialised modules will be offered to those who plan, design and build our public spaces, and to those supervising the places where children play, such as the police.

Play Shaper brings together a cross-section of professionals including:

• Planners and developers
• Landscape architects and designers
• Highways and transport
• Health
• Regeneration and housing

• Schools and children’s services
• Police
• Parks and leisure
• Community engagement
• Voluntary and community sector.

Play Shaper is being delivered by a national partnership led by Play England with Playwork Partnerships and SkillsActive. Play Shaper is funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and is a commitment from the government’s national Play Strategy.

For further information email playshaper@ncb.org.uk or visit www.playshaper.org.uk

Quality in Play

Quality in Play is a quality assurance system developed by playwork practitioners to support supervised school-aged play and childcare provision in the voluntary, public and private sectors to improve their policy and practice in supporting children’s play. The system has been tested in practice by providers for over a decade and has recently been updated. The fourth edition manual has been radically rewritten to reflect and embed developments in play policy and practice learnt over ten years. The new programme has been simplified, with just 11 quality areas grouped in three sections and there is now a single level of achievement rather than the previous three levels.

Quality in Play is managed by Play England and is being rolled out as the leading nationally recognised quality assurance scheme for play providers. For further information, please contact the Quality in Play team

Email: qualityinplay@ncb.org.uk
Web: www.playengland.org.uk/quality
Promoting the charter

Charter for Children’s Play

The four-page charter is a vision for play encapsulated in eight charter statements and explains why play is important for all children and young people. It is the underpinning document for Play England’s work, and was reviewed recently to ensure that it reflects the needs and aspirations of today’s children and young people.

Children and young people’s version

This pocket-sized, fold-out version has been produced to help children and young people understand how the charter statements work to protect their right to play. This version has been designed so that children can carry it around easily and refer to it when needed, and provides an excellent tool to support consultation with children and young people about play.

Poster

This colourful A2 poster highlights each of the eight charter statements in a child-friendly and engaging format. The eye-catching poster can be used to highlight children’s right to play to a wide audience.

How to order: Download the order form from www.playengland.org.uk/charter
Or contact Central Books Tel: 0845 458 9910
Email: ncb@centralbooks.com

Each charter format is available to order in bulk so that organisations can actively promote the Charter for Children’s Play. These are charged at minimal price to cover Play England’s costs and therefore ensure the widest dissemination possible.