

Playful Communities





There was a time when it was widely accepted that young children would go out and play in their local communities with friends and siblings. Children were seen as skilled enough to negotiate the outside world and play out and about in their neighbourhood freely. Unfortunately, over time, the age that children have been given this freedom has increased.

For most children, there has been a loss of access to the streets and outdoor areas near their homes. Their ability to move about their neighbourhood is restricted by traffic and fear, which means they spend much of their time indoors or at organised activities. The increase of vehicles on the roads, increased parental fears, and restrictions on children's freedom in the form of intolerance of children has reduced outdoor play opportunities for most children.

It is important to make sure our children have space, time and permission to play – these are the conditions that support play. When these conditions are right and in place, children will play.

Playful neighbourhoods everyday adventures

Children and teenagers need and are entitled to quality places and time for play as part of their everyday life within their own neighbourhood.

All children have a right to play as recognised by Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, there are barriers and challenges that can impact on the freedom and independence children need to play.

This guide aims to address those barriers and ensure that children have access to enough time, space and permission for play as part of their everyday lives. It sets out: what can be done and how it can be or has been done elsewhere in Wales.

'There is a need to 'create time and space for spontaneous play, recreation and creativity, and the promotion of societal attitudes that support and encourage such activity.'

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

'The Welsh Government places great value on play and its importance in the lives of children. We believe that children have a right to be able to play, and play is central to their enjoyment of life and contributes to their well-being. We also believe that play is essential for the growth in children's mental, physical, social and emotional development. There is much evidence to support this belief and an increasing understanding of play's contribution not only to children's lives, but also to the well-being of their families and the wider community. We aim to make communities more play friendly by valuing and increasing quality opportunities for play throughout the community'.

Wales – a Play Friendly Country



When neighbours don't know each other, there may be mistrust. Parents are likely to stop their children from playing out and other adults may not welcome children playing in outdoor areas near their homes.

Social relationships for both children and adults benefit when children are allowed to play out in their neighbourhood. Children who experience everyday life in their own neighbourhood have a greater sense of connection and belonging, and this in turn increases neighbourliness. Making children, parents and families more visible in neighbourhoods helps to remind everyone that playing out is a normal and happy part of childhood. Allowing children to play on the doorstep, in the front garden, or pavement helps you and your children to learn more about your neighbourhood and neighbours.

There's a lot you can do to make the place outside your home more playful and friendly. Small actions can be powerful and positive.

Things to try:

- Sit outside the front of your house with your children
- Let children bring toys outside the front of the house
- Leave chalk out or chalk some pictures together
- Get some bubbles or make your own
- Go for walks and let children take scooters, skates, bikes or skateboards around the neighbourhood
- Leave little items to encourage or inspire play – action figures, toy cars or animals inspire children to make potions, their own small worlds and invent games.

Playing near your own house

Opening streets for play

Fast-moving traffic in residential areas is one of the biggest dangers to children. Children say it is the main thing that stops them from playing outside.

In many towns and cities informal street play has largely been replaced by the car. As well as the number of cars increasing, improving modern car performance means drivers are able to accelerate quickly and easily. Evidence suggests that nearly half of all drivers exceed the limit on 30mph roads.

Things to try:

- If you live in a side street, you and other residents can discuss contacting your Council to ask if you can close the street to non-resident traffic for a few hours once a month. This reminds drivers to be cautious and allows children to play out confidently. Find out more about resident-led street play at: www.playingout.net

- Arrange pavement play – where residents agree a particular time to come out and semi-supervise children playing out on the pavement.
- If speeding traffic is a problem in your street, consider trying to get some traffic-calming measures put in place, or have a '20's Plenty' campaign. Find out more at: www.20splenty.org

Before you start any of these ideas talk to your neighbours, perhaps by holding an informal meeting. Make sure you have enough support and have tried to address any concerns. Have a look at the *How to organise playing out sessions on your street – a step by step manual* (www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/streetplayresources) for organising street play sessions.



Signage

Signs, such as No Balls Games ones, can put children and parents off using a space.

Although legally enforcing the signs is challenging, they stop children playing, prevent parents from allowing children to play out, and give power to others who don't think children should be playing.

However, there are examples of positive signs that encourage play. In Acton, Wrexham, the community council received concerns about children riding their bikes and scooters on the community centre car park. People were concerned that it wasn't safe, that children might get hurt or the cars scratched.

Installing signs to deter children from playing there was considered, but in a community council meeting, it was pointed out that as the car park is flat, fairly large and only used for parking at certain times, it is quite a good place for children to play. It is probably safer than riding on the pavements or roads, especially for younger children who often have their parents with them.

The council decided that the space could have more than one use and that it could be shared. To support this, the community council agreed that signage informing drivers to expect children to be playing on the car park should be installed. Drivers will now park at the top, leaving the bottom of the car park free for children to play.

Things to try:

- Get in touch with your council or housing association to find out how to challenge negative signs in your area. Have a look at this film produced in Conwy: <http://cvsc.org.uk/en/cvscplaydevelopment/no-ball-games-signs/>
- Get in touch with a local councillor or town and community council and ask about installing more positive signs that promote play and the presence of children.

**CYMERWCH OFAL
PLANT YN CHWARAE**



**TAKE CARE
CHILDREN PLAYING**

The presence of rope swings in neighbourhoods is a low-cost way of letting children and neighbours know that children's play is welcome.

A rope swing also acts as a landmark for children to gather and meet with friends. Rope swings have been part of children's play for generations. There aren't many neighbourhoods where you can't find, or at least see signs of, children making rope swings.

Children experience the exhilaration, the rush of swinging higher and the feeling of being out of control, yet they are still in control of their experience. Children may have playgrounds in their community with swings, but in their play on rope swings, they can master their environment and they experience more challenging adventures. Children often make their own rope swings, using their own ideas to meet their own needs and desires to access more exhilarating experiences. Having swings to call their own gives children the sense of achievement and ownership that is so important to gain from playing out.

Things to try:

- **Contact your local council.** Tell them you would like to put up a rope swing to make the neighbourhood more play friendly. Ask what mechanisms are in place to support your idea.
- Identify a good place in your community – for guidance about trees and fall heights, see <http://bit.ly/childrensplayswings>
- Get inspiration and some helpful hints at: www.monkey-do.net/content/tree-swings

Rope swings





Stuff for play

Children like having a range of things to play with and these do not need to be expensive toys. Stuff like boxes, tubes, rope and old sheets can often make the best playthings.

These sorts of everyday items are called loose parts and children can use them to create their own interesting play experiences. Besides offering these items for play in homes, they can also be made available in neighbourhoods. Having loose parts to play helps children to extend their play by giving them resources they need. Spaces which can be changed – where things move and can be moved – open worlds of possibility for children to play and explore.

Things to try:

- **Play Box project** – These are large containers that are put into a space and filled with loose parts. The boxes are opened and cleared away by volunteers such as parents and community members.

In Conwy, the Play Development team worked with Cartrefi Conwy Housing to speak with residents and identify a space.

Parents were supported in unlocking the box and using the resources, and volunteers acted as key holders to the box. Training was delivered to the volunteers and other interested community members as part of the development work surrounding the installation of the box.

In Wrexham, the boxes were placed in primary schools and afterschool clubs. Alongside the provision of play boxes, the Play Development team facilitated a programme of mentoring sessions which included training around play, planning for play, risk management and reflective practice.

- **Play Stop project** – a community and school initiative developed across the Vale of Glamorgan in a partnership project led by the Play Development team. The Play Stop is a wheelie bin filled with loose parts. The bins are located in communities that have taken a keen interest in supporting children's play and are willing to take responsibility for taking the bin in and out at agreed times of the day.

Most school grounds in Wales have features which are good for children's play.

They often have open space, bits of play equipment, natural features and tarmacked areas for skating and scooting. But, many are not available when the teaching day ends.

Things to try:

- Encourage your local school to consider the options to make their school grounds available for play after school and at weekends.
- Using the Play Wales *Use of school grounds for playing out of teaching hours* toolkit (www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/schoolsgroundstoolkit), approach the head teacher, a governor, or a parent committee to discuss the need for the school to consider the idea. Point out

the lack of space in the neighbourhood or emphasise how parents might feel happier allowing their children to play in a place they find safe.

'Schools provide an important opportunity for children to play during the school day and for periods before and after classes. They can also provide valuable play space at weekends and during holiday periods.'

Welsh Government

Opening school grounds for play





Community events are great opportunities to meet with other people of all ages in a fun and friendly way within the neighbourhood.

Making sure that community events are playful means that children and adults can meet and spend time alongside each other in a relaxed way. A playful event does not need any specialist equipment, such as bouncy castles. The aim is to provide time, space and permission to play.

Things to try:

- If there is already a community event in your diary, have a look at the Play Wales information sheet – *Making community events playful* (www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/information sheets) for simple low-cost ideas.
- If you wish to plan a play event, get a planning group together to decide on a date and venue. Events can be held anywhere – open spaces in your neighbourhood like a park, village green, grassed area.
- Be part of a UK wide campaign. Playday is the national day for play in the UK, traditionally held on the first Wednesday in August. On Playday, thousands of children and their families get out to play at hundreds of community events across the UK. Playday is celebrated by each community in a way that suits them. Find out more at: www.playday.org.uk

Neighbourhood playscheme projects are normally open access which means children can come and go as they please.

The aim of these projects is to compensate children for a reduction in opportunities to play freely in their community by providing them with an interesting play environment, staffed by playworkers. Because the project is staffed, things like salaries, training, resources and volunteers need to be considered and funded.

How to get started:

- Identify a local organisation that might be able to set up a new project
- Set up a voluntary committee with interested community members. For advice, get in touch with your local county voluntary council: www.wcva.org.uk/funding/advice/cvcs
- If there is a town and community council, get in touch with them as a possible funder.

When the lead organisation has been agreed:

- **Choose a location** – think about where children would most like to play, how easy it is to get to and how visible it is.

In Coedpoeth, Wrexham, a small, donated shipping container with loose parts has been placed in the neighbourhood and staffed by play and youth workers. It has enhanced how children, teenagers and other members of the community use the open space.

- **Choose timings** – consider things such as what else is going on in the area so as not to duplicate. Think about how often the sessions run. Although there is a tradition of playschemes running for a few weeks during a school holiday, it is worth thinking about running sessions throughout the year. Running even just one session a week gives strong messages about play and shared space.



Neighbourhood playschemes



Enhancing community play spaces

Play areas or play spaces come in many shapes and sizes. They can be as simple as a favourite spot under a tree on a street or a local playground that's been around for years.

While designated play spaces are important, so is the opportunity to play in other public open spaces. There are often plenty of potential play spaces in a neighbourhood that are unused as children and parents may think they are not allowed or that it is private land. There are many ways to enhance a play space without investing large amounts of money on equipment.

Things to consider:

- Is there unloved and unused space in your neighbourhood?
- Who does it belong to? Are there already any other plans for it? Are there any restrictions to developing it?
- Is it easy to get to, and is it safe and suitable for playing?
- Does it already have features that are good for playing, for example mature trees, hills and slopes?
- Is there a local organisation that can help with funding, planning, design, installation and maintenance?
- Get more information on the Playful Childhoods website: www.playfulchildhoods.wales/Pages/Category/planning-your-play-area-things-to-do

Every child has the right to play. This is recognised throughout the world in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The convention lists the 42 rights children and teenagers (under the age of 18) have, including the right to play. The right to play is highlighted in Article 31 of the convention.

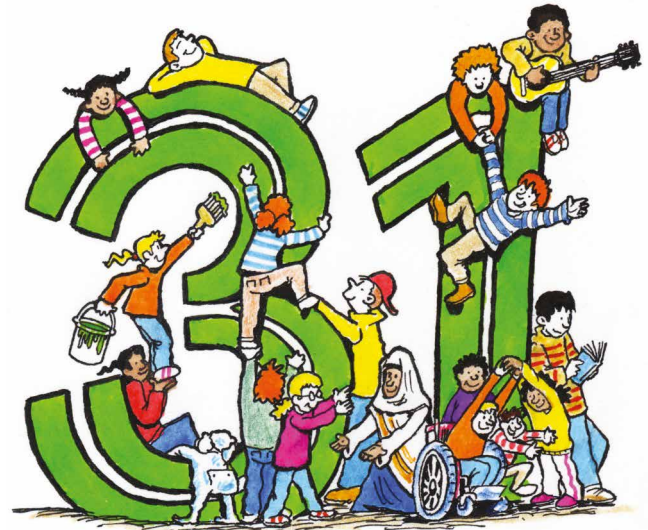
Playing is your child's right wherever they are – at home, in childcare and at school.

Other children's rights include:

- the right to have a say and be listened to
- the right to meet with friends and join groups and clubs
- the right to learn and go to school.

This convention applies to all children and teenagers, whoever they are, wherever they live and whatever they believe. So as parents and carers, it's important to make sure your child has the space, time and company of others to play.

Children's right to play



Contact:

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Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.

www.playwales.org.uk

