

# Making Play Matter



**A play policy for the children and young people of Bristol**



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## The play policy

Whether it is fun or serious, polite or mischievous, children and young people love to play. It's how they connect with the world around them and how they learn to value themselves and others. Play is most often activity for it's own sake, but it is also a vital preparation for the future.

### In Bristol we're taking play seriously.

Making Play Matter combines the ideas, experiences, and energy of many different types of play provision across the city. Through dialogue with voluntary agencies, local communities, and the children and young people of Bristol themselves, we have produced an exciting blueprint for the future of play in this city.

# Appendix 2

## Planning Policy References

- Bristol City Council (1997) Bristol Local Plan.
- Bristol City Council (2000) Bristol Local Transport Plan and Appendices incl Cycling, Walking, Safer Routes to School and Road Safety Strategies.
- Bristol City Council (2003) Proposed Alterations to the Bristol Local Plan
- Bristol City Council (2003) Bristol Sustainable Development Guide For Construction
- Bristol City Council (2001) Environmental Access Standard
- Bristol City Council Equalities Unit. (2003) Equalities Policy
- Department of the Environment. (1994) Planning Policy Guidance note 24: Planning and Noise.
- Department of the Environment (1997) Planning Policy Guidance Note 1: General Policy and Principles.
- Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (2001) Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: Transport.
- Joint Replacement Structure Plan (2002) Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire.
- National Playing Fields Association (2001) The Six Acre Standard Minimum Standards for Outdoor Playing Space.
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002) Planning Policy Guidance Note 17- Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation.
- Sport England (1999) Planning Policies for Sport.



## Conclusion

Safety in play provision is not absolute and cannot be addressed in isolation. Play provision is first and foremost for children and young people, and if it is not exciting and attractive to them, then it will fail, no matter how 'safe' it is. Designers, managers and providers will need to reach compromises in meeting these sometimes conflicting goals. These compromises are a matter of judgement, not of mechanistic assessment. The judgements should be based on both social attitudes and on broadly-based expert opinion informed by current best practice. They should be firmly rooted in objectives concerned with children and young people's enjoyment and benefit. And they should take into account the concerns of parents. Ultimately the basis of these judgements should be made clear in the policies of the play provider as written down in policy documents. These policies should in turn be understood and embodied in practice by all the key stakeholders.

## The Play Safety Forum

The Play Safety Forum brings together the main national organisations in England with an interest in safety and children and young people's play. Members include representatives from providers, regulatory bodies and expert agencies. The aim of the Play Safety Forum is to build consensus on issues around risk and safety in relation to play provision. It is an independent body hosted by the Children's Play Council at the invitation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

## Play Safety Forum members

- Association of Play Industries
- Child Accident Prevention Trust
- Children's Play Council
- Health and Safety Executive
- Institute for Sport and Recreation Management
- Institute for Leisure and Amenity Management
- Kidsactive
- Local Government Association
- National Early Years Network
- National Playing Fields Association
- National Family and Parenting Institute
- National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- PLAYLINK
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
- Adviser: David Ball, Centre for Decisions Analysis and Risk Management, Middlesex University
- Observer organisations: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Play Wales.



## Making play even more fun...

The overriding objectives of this play policy are to increase the quality of children's play opportunities in a variety of settings and to ensure that all Bristol's children and young people have easy access to such opportunities.

This means providing easy access to a range of play opportunities in their own neighbourhoods including designated play spaces and shared public space.

“ States Parties recognise 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 ”

*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 31.  
Ratified by the UK Government, 1991*

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# Why we should have a play policy

**consistency of principles** - a play policy identifies an agreed set of principles and definitions about play and its value for children's well being and development.

**focus on children and young people** - a play policy provides the context in which the focus can be shifted from existing institutions and practice to the needs of children and young people, creating the possibility of change, innovation, and long term development.

**transparency** - a play policy clarifies the purposes of provision for providers, service users, funders and regulators.

**local commitment** - the process of creating a policy unlocks local interest and energy and creates commitment to services; children and young people, parents, carers and local communities get involved.

**a necessary first step** - a play policy is essential for identifying service objectives and planning strategies.

**a basis for quality** - quality has no meaning unless it is related to the specified purposes of the services and provision; the purposes are themselves justified in the terms of the policy.

**a foundation for safety practice** - without the framework of a policy, and the practice which is derived from it, providers will have difficulty in determining what is appropriate safety practice and in demonstrating that they have acted reasonably where negligence becomes an issue.

**a framework for the allocation of resources** - a play policy provides the rationale for an allocation of resources which can be explained and justified both in relation to competing claims from other services and to the public. Children and young people benefit from expenditure being more accurately targeted to their needs and wishes.

**consistency between training and practice** - the commitment to common principles specified in the play policy provides the link between service and practice development locally and the national standards for playwork education and training and the professional development of playworkers.



## A play policy for the children and young people of Bristol

We believe that every child needs opportunities to play. It is therefore critical that play provision is welcoming and accessible to every child. This includes children and young people regardless of their age, gender, HIV status, impairment and emotional distress (disabled people), race or religion, or whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and will not be discriminated against in line with Bristol City Council's Equalities policy.

Bristol City Council intends that play provision operates with an inclusive approach, proactively working to meet the play needs of **all** its children and young people within inclusive provision. We recognise the value of specific groups to organise separately to enable children to gain the confidence to join 'integrated' provision. It is Council policy that services providing play opportunities will work towards ensuring accessibility to a wider range of children and young people than is currently the case.

This policy does not prescribe age ranges for play provision. This is based on the understanding that children and young people across a wide age range like to play, and benefit from doing so. The setting of age ranges should be subject to local discretion.

Bristol City Council recognises and values the vital contribution the voluntary and community sector makes in providing for children's play. This Council is committed to working with partners and stakeholders for the benefit of children and young people and the communities in which they live.

## Play provision and risk

Risk-taking is an essential feature of play provision, and of all environments in which children and young people legitimately spend time at play. Play provision aims to offer children and young people the chance to encounter acceptable risks as part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. In the words of the play sector publication *Best Play*, play provision should aim to 'manage the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children and young people safe from harm'. While the same principles of safety management can be applied both to workplaces generally and play provision, the balance between safety and benefit is likely to be different in the two environments. In play provision, exposure to some risk is actually a benefit: it satisfies a basic human need and gives children and young people the chance to learn about the real consequences of risk-taking.

Therefore it is acceptable that in play provision children and young people may be exposed to the risk of minor and easily healed injuries such as bruises, grazes or sprains. On the other hand, play provision should not expose children and young people to significant likelihood of permanent disability or life-threatening injuries. However, it may on occasions be unavoidable that play provision exposes children and young people to the risk - the very low risk - of serious injury or even death. But this would only be tolerable in the following conditions:

- the likelihood were extremely low
- the hazards were clear to users
- there were obvious benefits
- further reduction of the risk would remove the benefits
- there were no reasonably practicable ways to manage the risk

For example a paddling pool, even if shallow, involves a very low but irremovable risk of drowning (even with parental supervision), but this is normally tolerable. The likelihood is typically extremely low; the hazard is readily apparent; children and young people benefit through their enjoyment and through the learning experience of water play; and finally further reduction or management of the risk is not practicable without taking away the benefits.

Providers should strike a balance between the risks and the benefits. This should be done on the basis of a risk assessment. Crucially, this risk assessment should involve a risk-benefit trade-off between safety and other goals, which should be spelt out in the provider's policy. Given children and young people's appetite for risk-taking, one of the factors that should be considered is the likelihood that children and young people will seek out risks elsewhere, in environments that are not controlled or designed for them, if play provision is not challenging enough. Another factor is the learning that can take place when children and young people are exposed to, and have to learn to deal with, environmental hazards. Play provision is uniquely placed to offer children the chance to learn about risk in an environment designed for that purpose, and thus to help children equip themselves to deal with similar hazards in the wider world.

## Good practice

Clear, well-understood policies, together with procedures that put these policies into practice, are the key to good practice in risk management in play provision. Policies should state clearly the overall objectives. Procedures, including risk assessment, should state how these policies are put into practice, giving guidance but also recognising the need for professional judgement in setting the balance between safety and other goals. Such judgements are clearly multi disciplinary in nature. For example, while they may contain an engineering dimension, of equal or greater importance is likely to be a knowledge of children and young people's development and play itself. The Children's Play Information Service (see References below) has information on sources of authoritative relevant guidance on good practice.

One valuable approach to risk management in play provision is to make the risks as apparent as possible to children and young people. This means designing spaces where the risk of injury arises from hazards that children and young people can readily appreciate (such as heights), and where hazards that children and young people may not appreciate (such as equipment that can trap heads) are absent. This is particularly useful in unsupervised settings, where the design of the equipment and the overall space has to do most of the work in achieving a balanced approach to risk.

# Appendix 1

## Play Safety Forum Position Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision

FULL STATEMENT

### Acceptable and unacceptable risk

In any human activity, there is an element of risk. Three factors are central to determining whether or not the level of risk is acceptable or tolerable:

- the likelihood of coming to harm
- the severity of that harm
- the benefits, rewards or outcomes of the activity

Judgements about the acceptability of risk are made on the basis of a risk assessment. Risk assessment and management are not mechanistic processes. They crucially involve making judgements about acceptability based on an understanding of the balance between risks and benefits. Even where there is a risk of fatal or permanent disabling injury, this risk may sometimes be tolerable. For instance, going paddling at the seaside involves an unavoidable risk of fatal injury, but this risk is tolerable for most people because in most circumstances the likelihood of coming to harm is very low and there are obvious benefits. Social and psychological factors are also important in risk assessment. Risks that are acceptable in one community may be unacceptable in another, and policies should take this into account.

Almost any environment contains hazards or sources of harm. In many cases the existence of hazards can be justified, perhaps because they are impossible to remove or perhaps because their removal would have undesirable consequences or be too costly. Where the existence of a hazard can be justified, measures should be in place to manage it. In a controlled environment such as a workplace or a playground, those responsible are required by law to identify, and make informed judgements about, the hazards to which people are exposed. They must take steps to ensure that the risks are managed and controlled so far as is reasonably practicable while allowing the potential benefits to be delivered.

## Children and risk

Children and young people need and want to take risks in order to explore limits, venture into new experiences and develop their capacities, from a very young age and from their earliest play experiences. Children and young people would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving a risk of injury. Children with disabilities have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers.

It is the job of all those responsible for children and young people at play to assess and manage the level of risk, so that children and young people are given the chance to stretch themselves, test and develop their abilities without exposing them to unacceptable risks. This is part of a wider adult social responsibility to children and young people. If we do not provide controlled opportunities for children and young people to encounter and manage risk then they may be denied the chance to learn these skills. They may also be more likely to choose to play in uncontrolled environments where the risks are greater.

Any injury is distressing for children and those who care for them, but exposure to the risk of injury, and experience of actual minor injuries, is a universal part of childhood. Such experiences also have a positive role in child development. When children sustain or witness injuries they gain direct experience of the consequences of their actions and choices, and through this an understanding of the extent of their abilities and competences. However, children deserve protection against fatal or permanently disabling injuries, to a greater degree than adults.

Children and young people have a range of physical competences and abilities, including a growing ability to assess and manage risk which adults arguably tend to underestimate. However, children and young people typically have less experience than adults of assessing the broad range of risks and hazards that they may encounter. So it is important to give them appropriate controlled environments in which they can learn about risk.



## Listening to children and young people

Talking with the children and young people of Bristol is central to our work. We want to encourage their involvement and participation in the decision-making processes that will affect them directly. We endorse Article 31 and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 requires that:

*'State Parties shall assure the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'*

We have adopted the seven 'Best Play' objectives published in 'Best Play: what play provision should do for children', Children's Play Council.

We welcome and endorse the Play Safety Forum's Position Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision (appendix 1).

## A blueprint for action

The play policy can be referred to whenever play provision issues are raised and whenever decisions are made that could impact on the play opportunities of children and young people. It is relevant to all kinds of services for children and young people whose objectives include the provision of play opportunities.

These organisations might include after-school clubs, nurseries, youth clubs, libraries, leisure centres, playgroups, mobile play, holiday play schemes, non-supervised fixed-equipment playgrounds, schools (in breaktime), play centres, adventure playgrounds, parks, housing, open space and the built environment.

## Our commitment to the value of play

Our belief in the value of play provision for children and young people is informed by the following values and principles:

- We respect all children and young people for their own unique combination of qualities and capabilities.
- Children and young people play an active role in determining their own cultural lives and have views that must be heard and taken into account.
- We will listen to the opinions of children and young people and take into account their views on health, safety, and respect for the needs of others.
- Children and young people have a right to play in secure environments free from unacceptable levels of risk, and with complete trust for the adults involved.
- When they take control of their own play activity, children and young people can enrich their experience and enhance their development. We will aim to empower them and help them to increase their choices.
- For children and young people, play is all about fun. There needn't be a goal or end product, although children and young people have the freedom to decide.
- As adults we must have consistency and clarity in our values. Children and young people must see a direct connection between what we say and what actually happens. They need to feel part of a community of trust and co-operation.



## What is play?

Play is a powerful way for children and young people to learn through experience what cannot be taught.

Play enables children and young people to understand themselves and the world around them. It is a vital component of the life of every child and young person. If denied access to play, for whatever reason, the child or young person's capacity for positive development will be inhibited or constrained. They need every opportunity to explore the physical and social environment around them, to play with ideas and concepts and to deal with situations that might trouble or frighten them.

The best play provision offers children and young people access to a wide range of experiences in a setting free from 'unacceptable risk'. It is self-satisfying, creative and freely chosen. Children and young people might use special objects or equipment, they might be energetic or contemplative, play on their own or with others, have a goal or end product, be light hearted or very serious. The important thing is that they choose their own direction.

Bristol City Council will create play opportunities that allow children and young people to explore, manipulate, experience and affect their environment within challenging but secure settings, free from unacceptable levels of risk, regardless of age, gender, HIV status, impairment and emotional distress (disabled people), race or religion or whether they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and will not be discriminated against in line with Bristol City Council's Equalities policy.

## Play and formal education

Play and formal education should be complementary. Through play, children and young people learn by experience what cannot be taught. They develop a sense of themselves and their freedom and ability to make choices, they learn to work with others, to solve problems, overcome anxieties, and much more.

Bristol City Council ranks play alongside formal education in terms of its fundamental role in enabling children and young people to engage positively with the complexities of the world around them.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that free play has a direct and positive impact on children and young people's ability to meet formal educational goals. For instance, a Head Teacher who improved free play opportunities during school breaktime reported that:

'The children value the freedom of playtime and find that the range for their choice is wider so that they are more ready to accept the work load demanded during the time of their formal education.' Play at School published by PLAYLINK

Bristol City Council will support measures to enhance children's free play opportunities during school breaktimes.



## Notes and References

The following notes and references have formed the basis for this play policy.

- Charter for Children's Play (1998) National Voluntary Council for Children's Play (now known as the Play council).
- United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Hillman, M (1993) Children, Transport and Quality of Life. Senior Fellow Emeritus. Policy Studies Institute.
- Heseltine PJ A Review of Playgrounds and Related Studies. Studies of Accidents are numerous- out of all proportion to their frequency and severity in the overall pattern of childhood accidents. This indicates the necessity for playground safety to be kept in perspective. Children's Play Information Centre.
- Hilmann, M (1992) One False Move Senior Fellow Emeritus, Policy Studies Institute.
- Open Access Play and The Childrens Act PLAYLINK
- Risk & Safety in Play (1997): The Law and Practice for Adventure Playgrounds by Dave Potter PLAYLINK. SPON.
- Ball D, University of East Anglia (1994) Risks on Playground. HAPA 13
- Petrie, Dr P (1996) Exploring the Possibility of Daycare. PLAYLINKS Magazine January Edition
- Melville, S (1996) Playcare... A Workshop. PLAYLINKS Magazine January Edition.
- Hughes, B (1996) Play environments: A Question of Quality. PLAYLINK
- Hughes, B (1996) A taxonomy of Play Types (1st Edition). PLAYLINK
- Final Report. Play at School Scheme. PLAYLINK.
- Children's Play Council NPFA and PLAYLINK (2000) Best Play: what play provision should do for children.
- Play as Culture: incorporating play in cultural strategies PLAYLINK.
- Promoting play in out-of-school childcare. DfES Good Practice for EYDC Partnerships No 13.
- Local Government Association Leicester (2001) Hear by right: setting standards for the active involvement of young people in democracy.
- Young People's Charter of Participation (Reprinted 2002) The Children's Society.



## Getting feedback

“Meaningful ‘consultation’ is a creative process and takes time, skills and a variety of means including observation of what children do on their own.”

*Extract from ‘messages from the 6th annual PLAYLINK/Portsmouth City Council Play Conference October 2002*

We aim to consult people’s views whenever possible and practical. However, we believe that some questionnaires and user surveys will have limited relevance unless we first establish the meaning of terms like ‘play’, ‘children’, ‘young people’, ‘acceptable risk’, ‘unacceptable risk’, ‘accident’. All of these can have different meanings for different people. We will work towards common and unambiguous definitions.

Some consultation exercises are based on the assumption that provision of play equipment equals provision of play opportunities. We will use the criteria for an inspiring play environment detailed above to help counter this restrictive approach. Our belief is that, where possible, children and young people themselves need to be involved in the initial brief for a playground project.

‘Playground designs should reflect the individual spirit of their locality and stimulate all the senses. Children and young people need and want to play in the natural world; playgrounds are primarily about children and young people not equipment.

Designers, artists and ecologists should be involved in the initial brief for a playground project.’

*Extract from ‘messages from the 6th annual PLAYLINK/Portsmouth City Council Play Conference October 2002’*

We have two invaluable sources of information about children’s needs and wishes:

- our own adult knowledge and memory of what we enjoyed as children and young people
- the unobtrusive observation of children and young people when they are playing.

The most obvious and effective way of finding out what children and young people want is to talk to them. We are actively developing a culture of conversation and dialogue that respects the voices of both children and young people as well as the adult.

## Play strategy

This play policy forms the strong foundation for a comprehensive play strategy for Bristol.

## Promoting the value of play

We recognise that play is often misunderstood and undervalued. Bristol City Council is committed to promoting an understanding of play and the Play Policy that underpins it..

## Reviewing the play policy

To ensure that this play policy continues to be relevant we will review it three years from the date of its endorsement by Council.

## Find out more

To find out more about ‘Making Play Matter: A play policy for the children and young people of Bristol’ please contact our Young People’s Services on 0117 922 3723.



## Play and culture

Through play, children and young people have the opportunity to learn how values, beliefs and traditions transform into the ways of life they see around them. This is the kind of understanding that simply cannot be taught by formal education.

Leisure pursuits and play are often undertaken voluntarily and do not require a specific goal or outcome. They are simply enjoyable activities for their own sake. Freely chosen, these activities enrich and give meaning to our lives, and it is because of this that we should value them.

*“The culture of childhood has play at its heart. By recognising this, and fully incorporating play provision into Local Cultural Strategies, local authorities will be extending the enhanced quality of life that the strategies are designed to achieve to children, whose voices too often go unheard in the planning and development of local services but who represent all our futures”.*

*Rt Hon Richard Caborn MP,  
Minister for Sport, DCMS  
One of three Ministerial endorsements  
to PLAYLINK’s Guidance Play as Culture*

Bristol City Council will ensure that play forms a key part of the cultural strategy for Bristol.

## Open spaces, open minds

Bristol’s health and vibrancy depends very much on how people see and use its public spaces and thoroughfares. Urban planning, design and architecture, and the sensitive uses of public space can help to create a sociable and inspiring city.

We aim to ensure that the city’s common spaces, its parks, thoroughfares, shopping areas, and housing estates are safe places for individuals and communities to meet and interact. Imagine the sight of children and young people playing and having fun in public spaces – it is just one of the hallmarks of a vital, living city.

Children and young people should be able to play safely in a wide range of public spaces, including those near their homes. Their parents and carers have every right to expect these spaces to be available for children and young people to play free from unacceptable levels of risk.

Of course, people may have perceptions of crime and community safety that may make them wary about letting children and young people play in such spaces. It is a complex issue and one which we are addressing.

We are taking a holistic approach to enhancing the environment around us and creating a city for everyone. It’s just one way that we are ensuring children and young people have easy and extensive access to play opportunities.



## Seven 'Best Play' objectives

We have adopted the seven 'Best Play' objectives outlined below and published in 'Best Play: what play provision should do for children', Children's Play Council. The work is based on wide consultation.

The objectives that follow are broad statements that are intended to set out how the definition of play and the underpinning values and principles should be put into practice. They form the basis against which play provision can be evaluated.

**Objective One:** The provision extends the choice and control that children and young people have over their play, the freedom they enjoy and the satisfaction they gain from it

**Objective Two:** The provision recognises that children and young people need to test boundaries and respond positively to that need

**Objective Three:** The provision manages the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children and young people safe from harm

**Objective Four:** The provision maximises the range of play opportunities

**Objective Five:** The provision fosters independence and self-esteem

**Objective Six:** The provision fosters children and young people's respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction

**Objective Seven:** The provision fosters children and young people's well-being, healthy growth and development, knowledge and understanding, creativity and capacity to learn.

## Creating an inspiring play environment

When it comes to creating opportunities for play, you are only limited by your imagination. If the idea is fun, then children and young people will have fun too. The following guidelines to creating an inspiring play environment are published in 'Best Play: what play provision should do for children.' Bristol City Council aims to ensure that these guidelines are met wherever children and young people are able to play. The examples are not exhaustive, but they do illustrate the great potential for diversity in play activities.

### ■ **Creating a varied and inspiring environment**

Examples: Objects and things at different levels, spaces of different sizes, places to hide, trees and bushes, things that have been made, places to inspire mystery and imagination.

### ■ **Challenge in relation to the physical environment**

Examples: any activity which tests the limits of capabilities, rough and tumble, sports and games, chase.

### ■ **Playing safely with the natural elements - earth, water, fire, air**

Examples: campfires, digging, playing snowballs, flying kites.

### ■ **Movement - running, jumping, rolling, climbing, balancing**

Examples: beams and ropes, soft mats, bike riding, juggling equipment, ladders, space.



## Letting children and young people decide

We will actively encourage children and young people to take part in influencing the decisions that can affect their lives. Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 provides a set of principles and standards and states that it is:

“...the duty in all actions to consider the best interests of the child.”

Article 12 states that:

“...all children have the right to express views on all matters of concern to them and to have those views taken seriously.”

Our commitment to involving children and young people in the decision-making process means that:

- The quality of our play provision services will be more informed and relevant
- Children and young people will benefit from being involved in making decisions
- Our democratic community will become healthier with their active participation in local democracy.

In addition, the inclusion of children and young people in the development of the play policy is a government requirement and our work will be evaluated on this basis.

Our overall aim is to actively engage the children and young people of Bristol with the local democratic process. They are young citizens and have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of the local community, and they represent a section of every community that has its own needs, views and aspirations. Getting them involved now will have far-reaching benefits later for all of Bristol’s communities.

## Access to quality play for all

Play providers have access to a range of planning policy documents at national, strategic and local level. There is a full list of these documents in Appendix 2.

The location of play facilities in relation to other uses, particularly residential ones, is also of key importance. Our play policy endorses Policy L2 of the Bristol Local Plan.

Children and young people should have easy access to play opportunities in their own neighbourhoods. This should involve specifically designated play spaces and opportunities with shared public space. Bristol City Council is developing a holistic approach to meeting the play needs of children and young people. We will assess how parks and open spaces, school grounds, thoroughfares, residential estates, out of school provision, and designated play provision, could contribute to local play opportunities. We will make changes in speed restrictions, by-laws and regulations, and the management of these spaces, where necessary to ensure that these spaces become accessible to children and young people to enrich their play opportunities.



“ Partnerships have a crucial role in the promotion and development of good quality play opportunities for children of school age. If they do not recognise and capture the initiative in this, children’s opportunities for growing and developing through the benefits of play will be eroded ”

*DfES Good Practice for EYDC Partnerships  
No. 13, 2001*

## Assessing the risk

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992) employers must undertake regular Risk Assessments. A Risk Assessment is based on a holistic approach to assessing risk. This means that it looks at all the elements and the connections and relationships between them that comprise the work – or play provision - environment.

Those responsible for the regulation, inspection and implementation of health and safety are required to make judgements appropriate to the particular circumstances of the individual provision and its aims and objectives. What might be appropriate for one provider will not necessarily be appropriate for another. Factors to be considered will include the ages and capabilities of the children and young people who use the provision, the level and types of accidents that have occurred, and - if applicable - the level of supervision and support that is available. Risk Assessment can be a highly effective tool in supporting the development of quality play environments. We will make sure that play providers are given the play specific training and support they need to be able to conduct effective risk assessments.



■ **Manipulating natural and fabricated materials**

Examples: materials for art, cooking, making and mending of all kinds; building dens; making concoctions; using tools; access to bits and pieces of all kinds.

■ **Stimulating the five senses**

Examples: music making, places where shouting is fine, quiet places, different colours and shapes, dark and bright places, cooking on a campfire, rotting leaves, a range of food and drink, objects that are soft, prickly, flexible, large and small.

■ **Experiencing change in the natural and built environment**

Examples: experiencing the seasons through access to the outdoor environment; opportunities to take part in building, demolishing, or transforming the environment.

■ **Interacting with each other**

Examples: being able to choose whether and when to play alone or with others, to negotiate, co-operate, compete and resolve conflicts. Being able to interact with individuals and groups of different ages, abilities, interests, gender, ethnicity and culture.

■ **Playing with identity**

Examples: dressing up, role-play, performing, taking on different kinds of responsibility.

■ **Experiencing a range of emotions**

Examples: opportunities to be powerful/powerless, scared/confident, like/disliked, in/out of control, brave/cowardly.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The criteria above are adapted from those given in B. Hughes 'Play Environments: A Question of Quality', published by PLAYLINK

“ The streets, canals and riversides, parks and open spaces - as distinct from designated playgrounds - are places where children must be seen, heard and given opportunities to play ”

*Play as Culture. Guidance on incorporating play in cultural strategies, Published 2002*



## Extending play opportunities

Services for children and young people - for example, after-school clubs, junior youth clubs, schools - are designed to meet a range of objectives, i.e., creating opportunities for parents to work or study, offering children and young people opportunities to learn skills or participate in programme-based activities. As a result not all children's services are in a position to offer the full range of play opportunities children and young people require.

Bristol City Council believe that all services aiming to provide play provision should refer to the criteria for creating an inspiring play environment and the seven play provision objectives set out in 'Best Play' above.

The potential for creating child friendly play environments is substantial. We want all departments within Bristol City Council to play a positive role in creating a council increasingly receptive to the play needs of the child and young person.

## The playworker's role

The playworker should help create diverse and exciting play environments (see 'Creating an inspiring play environment' above) and act as a friendly, informative resource when needed. Every other play-based decision should be up to the child or young person. They should be encouraged to create and direct their own play activities with as little intervention as possible from the playworker. With this kind of freedom, they can really enjoy and benefit from their own self-directed learning experience.

*"When children have 'free time' and the inclination, they play. They choose what they will do, how they will do it and who else will be involved... Most importantly they are not being directed by adults but are making choices and deciding their own actions."*

*DfES Good Practice for EYDC Partnerships No. 13, Published 2001*

Along with a 'low intervention, high response' approach, we believe the playworker should underpin their own work with the values and principles we have talked about above.

Bristol City Council believe that one of the most effective ways of ensuring service quality is through valued and motivated staff. That is why we are committed to improving opportunities for play provision staff through structured development and training programmes.



## Non-staffed playgrounds

The main aim of non-staffed, fixed equipment play provision is the provision of play opportunities. However, the range of play opportunities created is often limited by the focus on the use of the equipment. We want to look at these play spaces in a new light, creating vibrant, exciting and safe fixed-equipment playgrounds which are equally accessible to all children and young people. The play policy and play environment criteria outlined above will enable us to do just that.

## Safety and risk combined

Our belief here is simple - give the child or young person every opportunity to take an acceptable risk and their capacity to deal with the wider unsupervised world will become strengthened. While the safety of children and young people at play is a vital consideration, we believe it should not limit their experience. Children and young people should be encouraged to take acceptable risks (that is, to freely undertake actions and involve themselves in situations that test boundaries of their own capacities) in environments that are challenging and stimulating. In this way children can open themselves up to much greater learning experiences.

*“Children need and want to take risks when they play. Play provision aims to respond to these needs and wishes by offering children stimulating, challenging environments for exploring and developing their abilities. In doing this, play provision aims to manage the level of risk so that children are not exposed to unacceptable risks of death or serious injury.”*

*Play Safety Forum Position Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision<sup>2</sup>*



*“While the same principles of safety management can be applied both to workplaces generally and play provision, the balance between safety and benefits is likely to be different in the two environments. In play provision exposure to some risk is actually a benefit: it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about the real consequences of risk taking.”*

*Play Safety Forum Position Statement*

<sup>2</sup>*The full Play Safety Forum Position Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision and a list of Forum members forms Appendix One of this play policy.*

Bristol City Council believe that when children and young people are allowed to take acceptable risks in their play activities they are less likely to search out unacceptable challenges and risk elsewhere. By giving them the opportunity to assess risks for themselves in a variety of settings and situations they can start to develop skills needed to distinguish between levels of risk in the wider world.

Disabled children and young people

*“.... have an equal if not greater need for opportunities to take risks, since they may be denied the freedom of choice enjoyed by their non-disabled peers.”*

*Play Safety Forum Position Statement*

We welcome and endorse the Play Safety Forum's Position Statement on Managing Risk in Play Provision.

