

# The playtime revolution

Developing school play times to support the curriculum and nurture happy, healthy children



Staff  
training  
resource



Learning  
through  
Landscapes

Play is hugely important in almost every area of children's lives. It improves social skills, brain development and creativity whilst supporting emotional resilience, physical development, confidence and learning. Our early years colleagues have long understood the importance of play but if we're honest many schools do little to create the kind of rich play environments and experiences that can unlock these benefits for children.

In recent years, a number of Scottish primary schools have developed innovative approaches to enabling child-led outdoor play in morning and lunchtime breaks. This training resource has been created to share the learning from these schools. Its aim is to demonstrate how free play in schools can support children's learning and development and to share practical, tested ideas and approaches to providing richer play experiences in primary schools.

### Who is this resource for?

Outdoor free play should be of interest to anyone who has a responsibility for children's wellbeing at school. However, it is often support staff that play a lead role in managing play times. This resource has been designed with the particular interests and concerns of support staff in mind. In the accompanying film clips, you'll hear primarily from support staff about why they have developed these new approaches and how they deal with the various practical issues that arise.

### How to use this resource

This resource has 11 sections, each of which covers a particular aspect or type of outdoor play provision. Each section has a short film, accompanied by some discussions, questions and links to other useful online resources. The resource is designed to be used by a small group of staff who meet regularly to learn, discuss and plan together. Each section should take around 30 to 60 minutes to complete, depending on how talkative you are! There is space in each section to record your notes and thoughts. Doing this will help you to turn your discussion and learning into planning.

Start with sections 1 and 2 and end with section 11. The other sections can be completed in any order so feel free to follow your own particular interest. If you are reading a hard copy of these discussion notes and wish to follow the online links then you can access an electronic copy at [www.ltl.org.uk/playtimerevolution](http://www.ltl.org.uk/playtimerevolution).

### Find the films...

You'll find all the films, together with a pdf version of these notes that you can print off, at [www.ltl.org.uk/playtimerevolution](http://www.ltl.org.uk/playtimerevolution).

# Section 1: The value of play in schools



## Pre viewing

Take a few minutes to talk together about your favourite childhood play memories. Think about where you played, who you played with and what you played.

- What do you think you learned as a child from these play experiences?

- What kind of play goes on in your school playground? How does this differ from the kind of play you recalled from your own childhood?

- How much outdoor play do your children get out of school? Do you know where they play outside locally?



**Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

Make a note of the different kinds of valuable experiences that you saw children engaging in in the film.

- How does play in the film clip differ from the kind of play that children in your school currently experience?

- How do you think children in your school would respond to having these kinds of opportunities?

- How would you feel about supervising these kinds of activities in your school? Make a list of:

### The things that excite you about this

### The things that worry you about this

### The people that would need to be on board with this for it to happen at your school.

- How could you encourage your school community to think about introducing the kind of ideas shown in the clip?

- Is there one thing you saw in the clip that you think you could make a start with now?

## Taking it further

- Find out about the amazing natural school playgrounds of **Berlin in these case studies** and this **short film**.
- **Find inspiration** from Scottish schools that have developed their play provision in these case studies.
- This **TESS feature** describes the impact of improving outdoor play on a Scottish school.
- **Play Scotland** have produced a helpful summary of the research evidence on the importance of play for children.

# Section 2: The role of adults



## Pre viewing

Think back to your own childhood play experiences that you shared last time. How many of these memories involved the presence of an adult?

- Describe your role as a playground supervisor. List the kinds of things that you do outside during a typical playtime.



**Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

In the clip, free play was described as 'behaviour that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated'. What kinds of play did you see in the clip that fitted this description?

- What are the benefits of this kind of play v games and activities that are organized by adults?

- Below are some of the suggestions from the clip about how adults can support free play. Discuss and make some notes about how you feel about these ideas.

"Stand back and allow children to lead, resisting the temptation to 'show them how' or to suggest activities and mediate in disputes."

"Create an environment where children feel empowered to take control and direct play."

"Involve children in the development of a basic set of rules of conduct, especially relating to safety and mutual respect."

"Observe children's play closely to gain an understanding of what is happening – not just what children are physically doing but what is going on in their minds and relationships as they do it. Use these observations to guide your planning about resources, materials and rules."

- Is there one thing you saw in the clip that you think you could make a start with now?

## Taking it further

- Have a look at the **playwork principles**, widely regarded as describing good practice for adults who support play.

# Section 3: Construction



## Pre viewing

This clip looks at how ordinary materials like planks, logs, crates and tarpaulins can be used to construct imaginative structures for play. Share any memories you have of this kind of play from your own childhood.

- How do you think children can benefit from this kind of play?



**Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

- What kind of skills did you see children using when engaged in this kind of play?

- What type of social grouping and interaction is taking place?

- How are children being given control of their play in these kinds of activities?

- Where might you be able to source some of these materials easily or cheaply?

- Where would you store them?

- What are the risks or concerns you would have about managing this kind of activity in your school?

- Take a few minutes to look at each of these concerns and to discuss how you might manage them.

- What would be a simple starting point for introducing loose construction materials into your school?

## Taking it further

- More detailed information on managing loose materials in primary schools is available in **this comprehensive guide** developed by North Lanarkshire Council.
- The guide is accompanied by **this short film** exploring the use of loose materials, including for construction.

# Section 4: Wet and wintry weather



## Pre viewing

- What are your favourite childhood memories of playing out in the rain or snow?

- How could you play in or with a puddle? See if you can come up with at least 10 ideas.

- What rain and snow restrictions are in place for outdoor play in your school?



**Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

- How would you explain to a parent why it is beneficial for their child to play out in all weathers?

- All-weather play is very common in the early years. Why is it much less common in primary schools? Is this mostly a matter of culture or are there any real practical differences between early years and primary?

- What kinds of play work particularly well in wet, wintry weather?

- How feasible would it be to offer children in your school a choice about whether they go out to play in rain or not?

- What are the top 3 challenges to providing all-weather play in your school? Take some time to come up with solutions to each of these.

- What one step could you take now to start getting your children out more often in wet and wintry weather?

## Taking it further

- Ideas for making the most of snow in school, from **Creative Star Learning**.
- Ideas for **playing in the rain**.

# Section 5: Physical literacy




## Pre viewing

This clip is about how play can help children to develop important movement skills, like jumping, balancing and being able to negotiate uneven terrain. Share your own childhood experiences of clambering, balancing and jumping. Think about features like trees, walls and railings as well as playground equipment.

- What kinds of features are there in your school playground to support this kind of play?

- Do your playground rules currently support or restrict this kind of play?

 **Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

- Why are these basic movement skills so important for children?

- What evidence did you see in the clip of children's ability to master these skills through play?

- Why does this kind of activity usually not lead to an increase in accidents?

- What are your main concerns about introducing more of these kinds of opportunities in your school? How could you manage these concerns?

- What would be the best way of introducing more of these opportunities in your school?

## Taking it further

- Further detailed advice on the use of fallen trees as climbing structures can be found [here](#).
- More on how **physical literacy** can build fundamental movement skills for sport and a healthy active life from Sport Northern Ireland.

# Section 6: Risk in play

This section has two films to view, totalling around 20 minutes. Support staff often identify risk as one of the most significant challenges to providing free play, so it may be helpful if you can set aside a little more time to complete this section.



## Pre viewing

Adults with responsibility for children have a duty of care to ensure that they are not exposed to unnecessary levels of risk. However, there's evidence that in recent years we have allowed concerns about risk to deprive children of important and enriching play experiences. The Health & Safety Executive has expressed concern that this kind of over-protective approach to children's play leaves them ill equipped to manage risk in their adult lives.


"Play – and particularly play outdoors – teaches young people how to deal with risk. Without this awareness and learning they are ill equipped to deal with working life.

Young people are curious, and they learn quickly. We should not deny them the opportunity to learn by taking risks. Seeking to protect them from every conceivable hazard, rather than sensibly managing the genuine risks they face, ultimately leaves them in harm's way, not to mention robbing them of memories that last a lifetime."

**Judith Hackitt, Chair of HSE**

- Do you agree with this view? If so, why? If not, why not?

- The Early Years Framework states that "Children are entitled to take part in physical activities and to play, including outdoors, and have an opportunity to experience and judge and manage risk." How much risk do you allow children to take with their play in your school?

 **Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

- What did you observe about the way children used the more risky features in the films?

- When the Forestry Commission evaluated more adventurous free play in a Glasgow primary school they found a 'dramatic reduction in physical injuries'. Why might this be?

- Why can more risk in play be good for children?

- How can children be involved in developing rules about the use of features that have a greater degree of risk?

## Taking it further

Introducing opportunities for more risky play needs careful planning. One of the key approaches that has emerged in recent years, known as 'risk benefit assessment' involves carefully weighing up the pros and cons of introducing a new type of play, and then making sensible decisions about how to manage risk in a way that avoids pointless or serious accidents, while allowing children to experience the positive benefits of playing with the feature.

- **Detailed guidance** on using the risk benefit approach to manage risk in play.
- A **helpful statement** from HSE on how to achieve a sensible balance to risk in play.
- Some simple **example risk benefit assessments**. These should not be used as a substitute for your own risk planning, but give you an idea of the approach.
- Read the Forestry Commission's evaluation of the impact of a more adventurous school play landscape on accidents **here**.



# Section 7: Water play




## Pre viewing

- Why are children so attracted to water for play?

- Share your memories of water play from your own childhood or from watching children.

- Are there any forms of water play currently available in your playground?

 **Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

- What skills did you see children using and developing while engaged in water play?

- What would be the simplest kind of water play you could introduce in your school?

- How could you introduce water play in a way that helps children to set and keep sensible ground rules?

- Where could you source some of the resources shown in the film; buckets, watering cans, pipes, guttering etc?

- One of the best resources for outdoor play in school is an outdoor tap. Do you have one already? If not, how feasible would it be to install one?

## Taking it further

- Fun and effective **outdoor water play ideas** from Creative Star learning and others.

# Section 8: Den building and hiding



## Pre viewing

- Did you ever make dens as a child? Were there adults supervising?

- How much opportunity do children have these days to play away from adult eyes?

- How might children benefit from being able to hide in small intimate spaces during school playtimes?



**Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

- Schools that feature in the film report that allowing secluded play doesn't create behaviour problems. Why might this be?

- Is there anywhere in your own setting that children can play hiding games, be alone with friends, etc? How do you supervise this? What are the current rules?

- Could you adapt any ideas from the clip for use in your own setting?

- What supervision/management strategies could you use to enable more secluded play in your school?

- Are there 'out of bounds' areas that could be opened up for secluded play?

## Taking it further

- **This short film** explores how 3 schools are providing secluded play in woodlands that are either in or immediately adjacent to their school grounds.
- Find out more about woodland play in our special **guide for schools** and in these free **case studies**.

# Section 9: Sand



## Pre viewing

- Share your childhood memories of sand play at the beach or in sand pits.

- Why is sand play so attractive for children?

- Sand play is very common in early years. Why do you think it's not so common in primary schools?



**Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

- List the different activities you saw children doing with sand. Try to remember as many as you can.

- What skills did you see children developing through sand play?

- What kind of additional materials and resources were used to enrich sand play?

- How were schools dealing with the practical issues of mess, clothing and cat poo?

- How might you be able to introduce temporary sand play in your school using tarpaulins?

## Taking it further

- Our **free guide** to sand play in schools gives more detailed guidance on managing sand play in schools.

# Section 10: Small world play



## Pre viewing

- This clip is about creating miniature imaginative play worlds using whatever materials and prompts come to hand. What kind of small world play can you recall from your own childhood?

- How common is this kind of play in your school at the moment? What sort of things do children do?

- Are there particular parts of the playground where this kind of play is more common? If so, why is this?



**Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the questions below first and then to make notes as you watch the film.

## Post viewing

- Why is this kind of play so important for children?

- What kinds of materials are already accessible in your playground to support this kind of play?

- How could you support more of this kind of play in your school? Think about natural materials that you could grow in the grounds as well as man-made items that you could introduce. What do you already have?

- This is perhaps the cheapest and simplest way of enriching play in your school. Make a simple action plan below of how you can develop small world play. Identify 2 or 3 actions and agree who is going to do them and by when.

## Taking it further

- Further advice on **small world play** in this guide to using loose materials for play in schools.

# Section 11: Building support and keeping it going



## Pre viewing

- Having watched these films, where do you think your school is with play on a scale of 0 (poor) to 10 (great)?

- Which 3 ideas from these films do you think would be most easy to introduce into your school?

- Whose support would you need to make these new ideas happen?

- How supportive do you think these people would be to your top 3 ideas?

## Post viewing

- What would be the best ways of getting support for your top 3 ideas from the following groups? Try to identify 2 or 3 ideas for each group.

### School management

### Parents

### Other staff

### Your Local Authority



**Now watch the film** You may find it helpful to look at the following questions first and then to make notes as you watch the film.



- Where could you get free or cheap materials for your top 3 ideas?

- Who could support you to develop and implement your ideas? Do you have early years colleagues, parents or play staff in your Local Authority who have useful skills and experience?

- Planning and managing improvements to play in your school will take time. How could you create time and a simple structure for discussing and planning play provision in your school? Who would need to be involved in this group?

- Can you identify a different play theme or development for each of the next 3 terms? How could you take this forward?

- What will be the top maintenance needs to keep your play fresh and safe? Who will do this and how?

## Taking it further

- Funding opportunities change regularly. Sign up for our regular free **e-bulletin** of funding opportunities as well as inspiration, ideas and resources. You can also access the same information more regularly through **facebook** or **twitter**.
- Our free **Good School Playground Guide** gives simple and effective ideas for improving your outdoor spaces for children.
- We provide training to help schools develop their play spaces and play practice. **Contact us** to find out more.
- **We can visit your school** to advise on how you can develop your playground for outdoor learning and play.

**'Make a start...  
Work with your  
children, open your  
eyes, use your ears,  
use your senses  
and do what you  
need to do'**

## **Go for it!**

A Head teacher from a Scottish school sums it up brilliantly, 'It could be frustrating for people seeing our playground and thinking "How could we do that? We've got a square of concrete and no money." But here's the important message: make a start. We make the path by walking. I would totally recommend to anybody to make that start. Work with your children, open your eyes, use your ears, use your senses and do what you need to do.'

## **Share your success and your challenges**

Why not use our facebook page to share your success and help inspire other schools? We'd love to see pictures or hear about how you are getting on. You can also use our **facebook page** as a place to ask questions from a wide network of educators who are interested in outdoor learning and play.



**In Scotland** Grounds for Learning (GfL)  
Telephone 01786 477190 Email [gfl@ltl.org.uk](mailto:gfl@ltl.org.uk) Website [www.ltl.org.uk/scotland](http://www.ltl.org.uk/scotland)

**In England and Wales** Learning through Landscapes  
Telephone 01962 846258 Email [enquiries@ltl.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ltl.org.uk) Website [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)

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