
Overview

This unit is about identifying the play needs and preferences of children and young people, developing play spaces that will meet these needs and supporting children and young people during play. The unit is appropriate for all settings whose main purpose is providing children and young people with opportunities for freely chosen, self-directed play.

The unit is divided into three parts. The first part describes the four things you have to do. These are:

1. collect and analyse information on play needs and preferences
2. plan and prepare play spaces
3. support self-directed play
4. help children and young people to manage risk during play

The second part describes the knowledge and understanding you must have.

The third part gives some examples and explanations of some words we use in this unit.

This unit is for experienced staff working directly with children in a setting whose main purpose is to provide children and young people with opportunities for freely chosen, self-directed play.

This unit is underpinned by the Playwork Principles and staff must be familiar with these and committed to them in their practice.

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Performance criteria

You must be able to:

Collect and analyse information on play needs and preferences

- P1 collect information on children and young people's play using a range of methods
- P2 investigate and take account of the needs of children and young people who experience barriers to access
- P3 analyse information to identify play needs
- P4 consult with children and young people and take account of their ideas on play needs and preferences
- P5 research and identify a range of play spaces and resources that will meet the play needs of children and young people

You must be able to:

Plan and prepare play spaces

- P6 plan play spaces that will meet the needs of children and young people and can be adapted by them to meet new needs
- P7 make sure the play spaces provide for a range of different play types
- P8 obtain the resources needed for these play spaces
- P9 work within the available budget or find other creative ways of obtaining or making resources
- P10 create the planned play spaces involving children and young people wherever possible
- P11 make sure that the range of play spaces will be accessible for all children and young people who could take part
- P12 make sure the play spaces take account of health and safety requirements

You must be able to:

Support self-directed play

- P13 encourage children and young people to choose and explore the range of play spaces for themselves, providing support when necessary
- P14 leave the content and intent of play to the children and young people
- P15 enable play to occur uninterrupted
- P16 enable children and young people to explore their own values
- P17 ensure children and young people can develop in their own ways
- P18 hold children and young people's play frames when necessary
- P19 observe play and respond to play cues according to the stage in the play cycle

You must be able to:

Help children and young people manage risk during play

- P20 allow children and young people to experience and explore risk during play
- P21 identify hazards when they occur
- P22 assess the risks that these hazards pose in a way that is sensitive to

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- the nature of the children and young people involved
- P23 raise children and young people's awareness of hazards and manage risk themselves
- P24 balance the risks involved with the benefits of challenge and stimulation
- P25 only intervene if the level of risk becomes unacceptable

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Knowledge and understanding

You need to know and understand:

For the whole unit

- K1 how the Playwork Principles specifically relate to this unit
- K2 the short and long term benefits of play
- K3 the playworker's role in supporting play
- K4 how play and interactions with others in the play environment help the child/young person to understand themselves and the world around them and realise their potential
- K5 indicators/objectives you can use to evaluate play provision
- K6 how to provide further range of play types that are commonly accepted in playwork
- K7 how to provide for the following play types:
 - K7.1 communication play
 - K7.2 creative play
 - K7.3 deep play
 - K7.4 dramatic play
 - K7.5 exploratory play
 - K7.6 fantasy play
 - K7.7 imaginative play
 - K7.8 locomotor play
 - K7.9 mastery play
 - K7.10 object play
 - K7.11 role play
 - K7.12 rough and tumble
 - K7.13 social play
 - K7.14 socio-dramatic play
 - K7.15 symbolic play
- K8 the mood descriptors associated with play and how to recognise these:
 - K8.1 happy
 - K8.2 independent
 - K8.3 confident
 - K8.4 altruistic
 - K8.5 trusting
 - K8.6 balanced
 - K8.7 active or immersed
 - K8.8 at ease
- K9 the main stages of child development and how these affect children's play needs and behaviours
- K10 the particular needs of disabled children and how these need to be met when planning for and supporting play, including helping them to manage risk

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You need to know and understand:

Collect and analyse information on play needs and preferences

- K11 why it is important to identify children and young people's play needs and preferences
- K12 different types of information you can use to identify play needs and preferences and how to access these
- K13 the barriers to access, including disability but taking account of others, that some children and young people may experience and how to address these
- K14 why it is important to consult with children and young people on play needs and preferences
- K15 the range of different types of play spaces that can meet children and young people's needs and preferences

You need to know and understand:

Plan and prepare play spaces

- K16 why it is important to create spaces that children and young people can adapt to their own needs
- K17 how to obtain and/or create resources needed for a range of play spaces
- K18 how to involve children and young people in the creation of play spaces
- K19 the health and safety requirements that are relevant to play spaces and how to ensure you take account of these

You need to know and understand:

Support self-directed play

- K20 why it is important for children and young people to choose and explore play spaces for themselves
- K21 the types of support you may need to provide and how to decide when it is appropriate to provide support
- K22 why it is important to leave the content and intent of play to children and young people
- K23 why it is important to allow play to continue uninterrupted
- K24 why it is important to allow children to develop in their own ways and not to show them 'better' ways of doing things when they are playing unless they ask
- K25 the main stages of the play cycle
- K26 how to define a play frame
- K27 how to identify play cues
- K28 how to identify when and how to respond to a play cue

You need to know and understand:

Help children and young people manage risk during play

- K29 why risk is important in play and how to encourage and support acceptable risk taking
- K30 levels of risk acceptable according to organisational policies and procedures
- K31 the range of hazards that may occur during children's play and how to recognise these
- K32 how to assess risk/benefit according to age and stage of development

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K33 the importance of balancing risk with the benefits of challenge and stimulation

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Additional Information

Scope/range related to performance criteria

1. **methods**
 - 1.1. researching playwork theory and practice
 - 1.2. observing children and young people at play
 - 1.3. interacting with children and young people
2. **play spaces**
 - 2.1. physical
 - 2.2. affective
 - 2.3. transient
 - 2.4. permanent
3. **hazard**
 - 3.1. physical
 - 3.2. emotional
 - 3.3. behavioural
 - 3.4. environmental

Glossary

Affective play space

Spaces that: a) pay attention to and support the variety of feelings and moods that children and young people bring with them or have during play; b) have particular areas, materials and/or props that at different times stimulate or encourage the expression, experience or experimentation with a range of emotions; and c) have playworkers who seek to develop via diverse means, an overall ambience of welcome, acceptance, freedom and playfulness

Barriers to access

Things that prevent or discourage children and young people from taking part in play provision. These may include physical barriers for disabled children, but also include wider issues such as discrimination, lack of positive images, lack of culturally acceptable activities and customs, language barriers and many other factors that affect different communities

Behavioural hazard

Some behaviours during play are potentially hazardous eg. egging on, showing off, excluding, hyperactivity, dominating, etc. and playworkers need to be aware of these in case their support is needed

Children and young people

All children and young people with respect for any impairment, their gender, race, culture, language, sexuality, health, economic or social status and any other individual characteristics

*** Communication play**

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Play using words, nuances or gestures for example mime, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, debate, poetry

* **Creative play**

Play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise. For example enjoying creation with a range of materials and tools for its own sake

* **Deep play**

Play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear. For example leaping onto an aerial runway, riding a bike on a parapet, balancing on a high beam

Disabled Children

Children with impairments who experience barriers to accessing main stream child care and play facilities. This includes children with physical and sensory impairments, learning and communication difficulties, medical conditions, challenging and complex needs which may be permanent or temporary

* **Dramatic play**

Play which dramatizes events in which the child is not a direct participator. For example presentation of a TV show, an event on the street, a religious or festive event, even a funeral

Emotional hazard

Children will bring their moods and feelings from their day with them to a play setting and this often affects the way they behave and interact with others. They will also experience all kinds of feelings when playing – sometimes by choice and sometimes unexpectedly. Some feelings eg. fear, anger, excitement, boredom, could be potentially hazardous and playworkers need to be aware of such feelings in case their support is needed

Environmental hazard

Aspects or things in the environment that could be potentially harmful; for example extreme or freak weather, animals, changing light

* **Exploratory play**

Play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects. For example engaging with an object or area and, either by manipulation or movement, assessing its properties, possibilities and content, such as stacking bricks

* **Fantasy play**

Play, which rearranges the world in the child's way, a way which is unlikely to

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occur. For example playing at being a pilot flying around the world or the owner of an expensive car

Hazard

Something that may cause harm to the health, safety and welfare of users of the play setting

*** Imaginative play**

Play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply. For example imagining you are, or pretending to be, a tree or ship, or patting a dog which isn't there

*** Locomotor play**

Movement in any and every direction for its own sake. For example chase, tag, hide and seek, tree climbing

*** Mastery play**

Control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments. For example digging holes, changing the course of streams, constructing shelters, building fires

*** Object play**

Play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements. For example examination and novel use of any object e.g. cloth, paintbrush, cup

Observing play

The purpose of observation within a play environment is to observe and sometimes record children and young people's play behaviours, in order to ensure that the environment is providing effective play spaces. These observations may therefore include play types, play cues and returns seen. These observations are not for the purpose of monitoring children and young people's development, or planning a curriculum of activities. Observations may or may not be recorded

Permanent play space

Spaces that are fixed and cannot move; eg. certain structures, kitchen, etc., but these spaces may still also incorporate transient play spaces at different times

Physical hazard

Something physical that may cause harm and may or may not be removable; for example, broken glass, faulty equipment, traffic

Physical play space

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Spaces that support children and young people in physically playing in any way they wish ie. running, jumping, climbing, swinging, dancing, wrestling, sliding, chasing as well as all the fine motor skills too

Play

Play is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated

Play cues*

Facial expressions, language or body language that communicates the child or young person's wish to play or invite others to play

Play cycle*

The full flow of play from the first play cue from the child, its return from the outside world, the child's response to the return and the further development of play to the point where play is complete. The cycle includes the metalude, the cue, the return, the frame, adulteration, annihilation and display

Play frame*

A material or non-material boundary that keeps the play intact

Play needs

What individual children and young people have to have in order to be able to play but are not always able to have for a variety of reasons; for example lack of access, overprotective adults, lack of outdoor environments, etc

Play preferences

What individual children and young people are interested in and choose to play – based on their prior experience

Play space

Any area – physical, affective, permanent or transient – that supports and enriches the potential for children and young people's self-directed play. A play environment may consist of one or any number of play spaces

Risk

The likelihood of a hazard actually causing harm; this will often be influenced by the age or stage of development of the children and young people involved

*** Role play**

Play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. For example brushing with a broom, dialing with a telephone, driving a car

*** Rough and tumble play**

Close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with

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touching, tickling, gauging relative strength, discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display. For example playful fighting, wrestling and chasing where the children involved are obviously unhurt and giving every indication that they are enjoying themselves

* **Social play**

Play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended. For example any social or interactive situation which contains an expectation on all parties that they will abide by the rules or protocols, i.e. games, conversations, making something together

* **Socio-dramatic play**

The enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. For example playing at house, going to the shops, being mothers and fathers, organising a meal or even having a row

* **Symbolic play**

Play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding, without the risk of being out of one's depth. For example using a piece of wood to symbolise a person, or a piece of string to symbolise a wedding ring

Transient play space

Spaces that change, get modified, adapted or get reconstructed via a wide range of movable resources, props, materials and structures – breaking up the wider physical space into different smaller spaces for different kinds of play at different times. For example, creating dens and hideyholes; using fabrics and loose parts to create imaginative places like a hospital or a forest; shifting furniture back or around to accommodate particular games. A transient play space could be the couple of cubic feet behind a piece of furniture, a whole room or field; it could be created spontaneously or planned beforehand

Unacceptable risk

Risk is considered unacceptable when a child engages in play behaviour which is likely to result in their death or serious injury. Other risks, whilst being perceived as dangerous and potentially harmful are considered acceptable because the benefits of the play experience outweigh the harm that may occur

* Examples of play types taken from Hughes, B., 2002, A Taxonomy of Play Types. Available via www.playeducation.com

** Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else, 1998, The playground as therapeutic

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space: playwork as healing (known as “The Colorado Paper”), published in *Play in a Changing Society: Research, Design, Application*, IPA/USA, Little Rock, USA

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