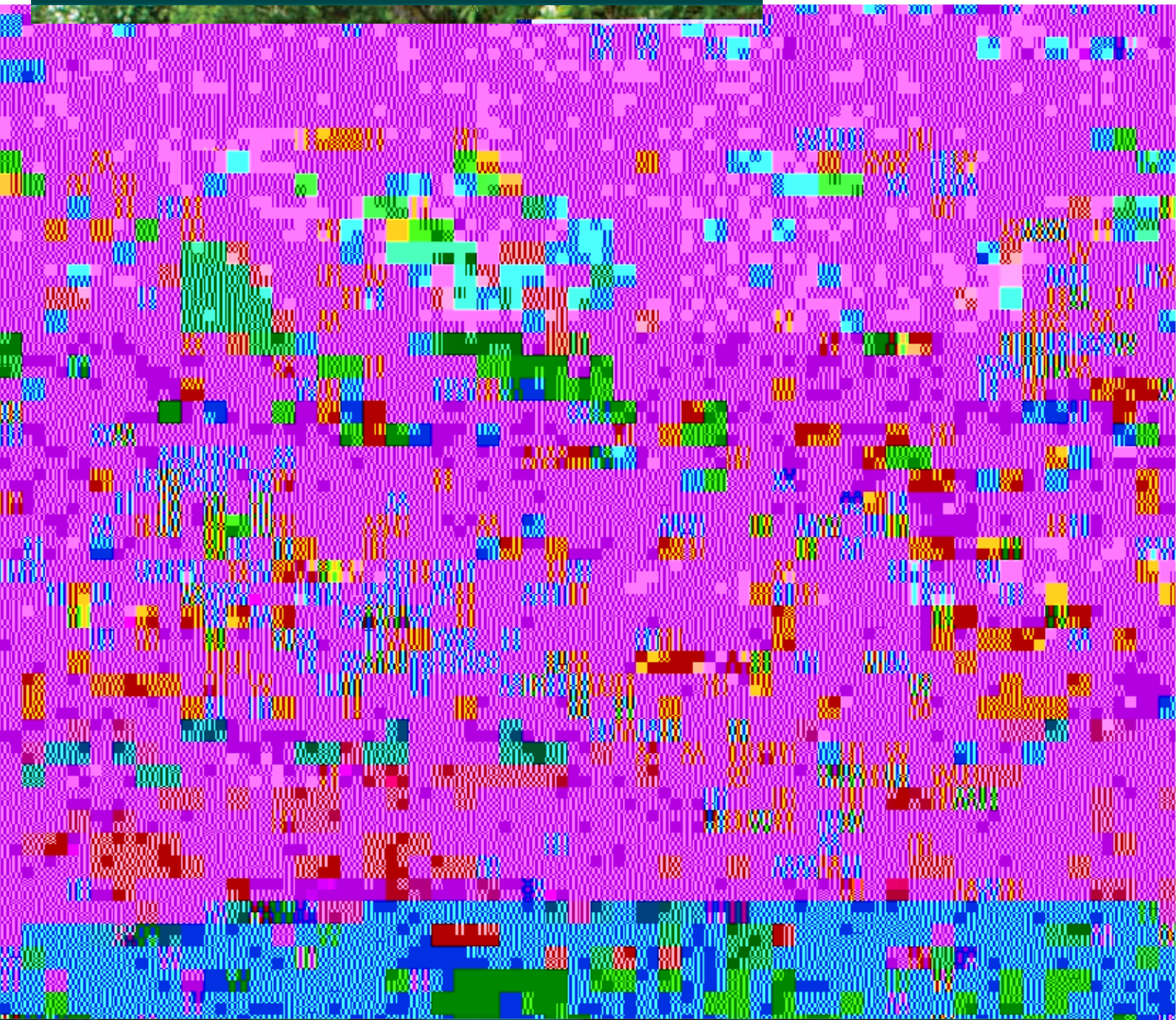


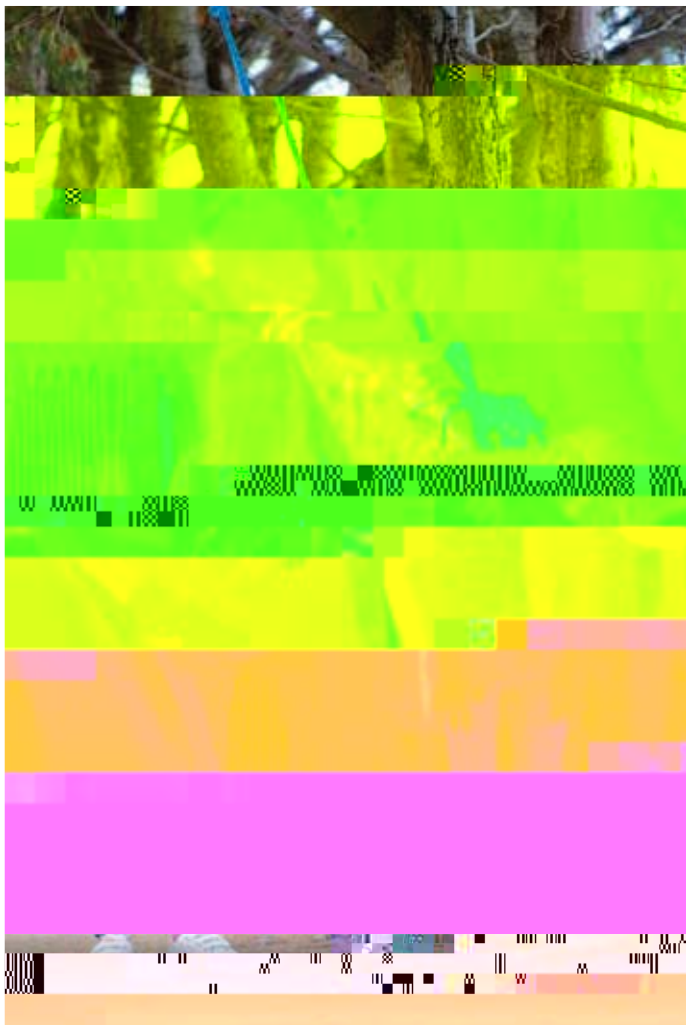
# Community Toolkit





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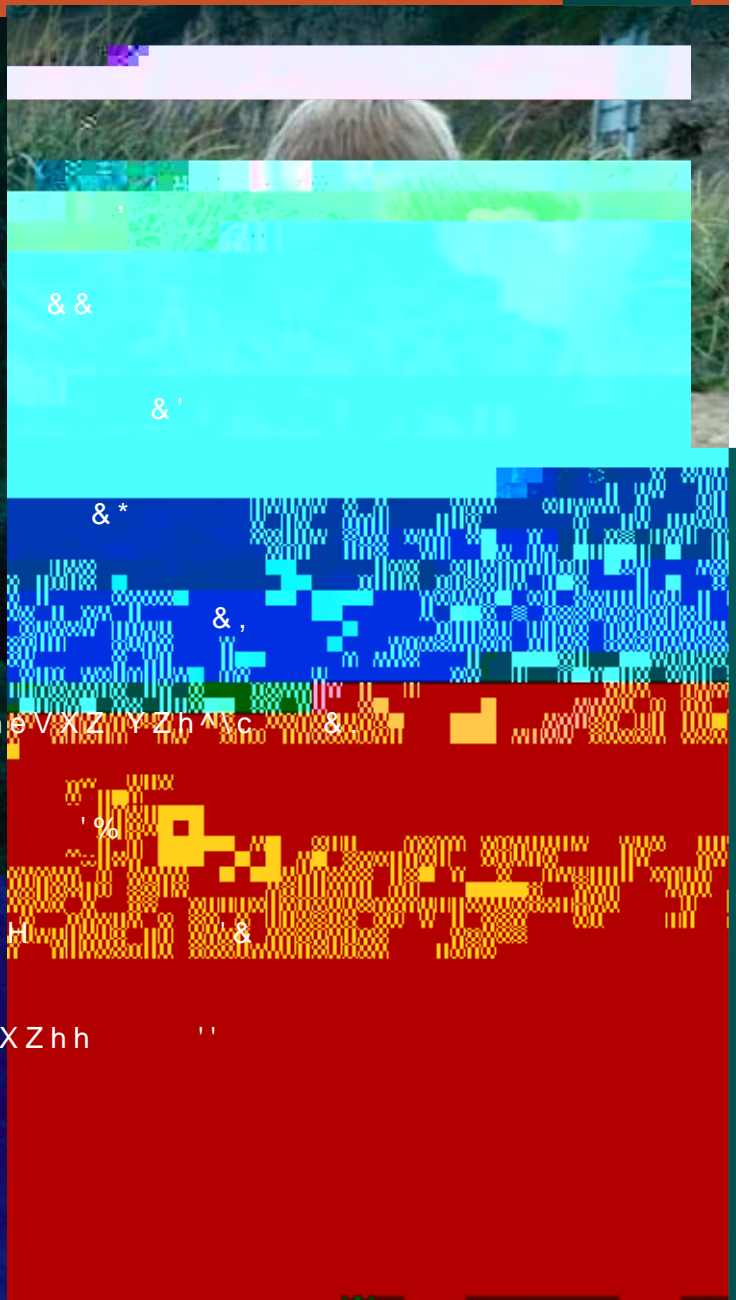


# What policy or legislation supports this toolkit?

Children's Rights



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When looking to develop or refurbish a play space, being able to identify the areas or pieces of equipment that are most used and how they are used, will help to ensure that existing play opportunities are safeguarded and add value to what is already available.

A well-conducted play space audit also helps in other ways. Firstly, it forms part of the participation and engagement process and can help us gather evidence to support what the community and children are telling us. Secondly, conducted at regular intervals (for example six monthly) it can be used to help monitor how the space is being used and how often.

Interaction between all age groups and members of society is a vital process that supports all children and young people to feel more confident about playing out and hanging out. Building relationships with other children and young people gives an opportunity to share knowledge of the people and geography of neighbourhoods and to share lore. For example, traditions of playing, rules of games, places for play – an example of this could be an old lamppost which has been used for generations as the base when playing games such as hide and seek or What’s the time Mr Wolf?

Understanding the audit tool

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The Play Space Audit tool on the following pages is intended for an observation that should take a minimum of 30 minutes. Ideally, observations should be undertaken during different times of the day to see how different age groups use the space. For example, undertake an observation during the weekend or after school and another during the day to observe pre-schoolers using the site with their parents or carers. Choosing when to undertake observations will depend on the site.

**Walking, travelling through the space** – If there is a pathway running through the space it may be that children play as they move through it even if they aren’t intending to stop. Behaviours can include jumping off kerbs on bikes or scooters, swinging off trees, jumping over things, running down a bank, free running/parcour. Consider actions which change the way children travel through the space, such as re-routing a pathway, as they may encourage better or more play opportunities.

There are a number of play behaviours under the ‘activity observed’ heading – these are described in more detail below to help with the observation. There will be play behaviours that can be identified without needing to see children playing. For example, if children hang out on boulders or seated areas, there will be signs of wear from scuffing feet or holes dug with toes or sticks.

**Sitting, gathering, hanging out** – Even without formal seating areas there will be places where children choose to hang out. Look for signs of wear on the ground near seating areas, under climbing frames, at the base of trees/boulders or items brought in to the space such as pieces of carpet, crates or buckets that could be used as chairs. Where there are no current obvious opportunities for formal seating areas, or gathering places, creating these will support to make the space a more social place that can be used by a wide range of ages – from families with younger children to older children hanging out with their friends. Seating should be placed in circles, U or L shapes to encourage social play – placing benches in a line does not reflect how people like to gather and socialise.

If the space is an appealing place for children it is likely there are a number of factors that contribute to this. Children have told us that issues such as how well lit the space is, how close it is to homes, and whether or not there are places to shelter contribute to a sense of feeling safe and appeal to a broad age range. If this is the case the space will need to be designed in a way that provides for that wide age range and for a changing demographic.

**Riding (bikes, scooters, skateboards)** – Observe how children are using bikes in the space – are they used just as transport to the space or are they being ridden in and around the site? What features are they using to ride down, jump, skid on? Is there evidence of construction from children – such as mud ramps and timber? Are there any improvements that can be made to support wheeled play opportunities in an informal way?

All children have different play needs and wishes that can change with time. Separating people into age and other groups is not necessarily beneficial (although some may need particular support to meet their own needs).



Use of natural features (e.g. trees, bushes, mounds, hills)

– What existing natural features are being used? Look for informal access points into wooded areas, and under trees/ bushes for signs of litter or items brought in to the space that could show den building activity or secret spaces. Wear on bark or bases of trees and broken limbs on trees show evidence of children climbing trees. Are there things up in the trees such as planks of wood, rope, fabric? Is there a way to increase such natural features by planting that will create more play opportunities?

Playing with the elements – Do children have access to







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Once ownership of the land has been established, we check with them what arrangements need to be made regarding leasing or buying the land. Leasing refers to a financial arrangement between the landowner and us for use of the land. The cost of leasing can be a significant sum of money; a 'peppercorn lease' is another option, where a small financial contribution is required to make the agreement legally binding but where the landowner isn't looking for financial gain from the arrangement.

We also need to establish who will take responsibility for maintaining the grounds and any equipment that is placed on it. See also Maintenance and inspection, Forming partnerships, Risk-benefit assessment tool sections of this toolkit.

If leasing the land and/or maintaining the equipment ourselves we need to identify how this will be funded. Explore if it's possible to apply for a maintenance/leasing budget as part of an application for the development of the site.

The types of organisations and individuals who may own land that we are looking to develop can include:

- Local Authority** - scope for negotiating terms relating to leasing, insurance, maintenance.
- Community Council** - scope for negotiating terms relating to leasing, insurance, maintenance.
- Ministry of Defence (MoD)** – may be required to address how children living on the military base can make use of the play provision or whether/how community members access the site.
- Farmers/Privately owned** – arrangements with private landowners may be possible in some communities but it is recommended that legal advice is sought over responsibilities relating to insurance and maintenance in this instance.

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Before proceeding with developments on the play space there may be additional paperwork that needs completing, some of which will cost money. The complexity and cost will largely depend on the size and location of the site and what we are planning to place on it.

It is best practice to seek advice from the local planning department on this process.

For further information on landownership, planning applications, searches or surveys, refer to the Useful contacts on page 35.



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### Allow for change as part of the design process –

Children and young people like to be able to change their environment. This is why children build dens and knock them down, constantly adapting them. Providing elements of a play space that children can keep changing ensures that they can have a direct role in the evolution of the space over time. This can be an area that is allowed to grow wild that is entirely for children's use or a BMX dirt track that they can adapt.

**Questionnaires** – Targeting questionnaires to a particular group of people is the most effective way of ensuring a response. One way to do this is through targeting the local school and working with teachers to encourage children to complete questionnaires about where and how they like to play in their community. As with all participation methods the questions asked need to be open but specific enough to avoid unrealistic responses. A sample questionnaire covering play behaviours is provided on the next page. The results of the questionnaires can help ensure the play space provides for the wider range of things children like to do – surprisingly the responses will not all be about swings and slides!



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### Introduction

This project is funded by \_\_\_\_\_  
The aim of the project is to develop and maintain a community play space in the area of \_\_\_\_\_  
that is suitable and accessible for children and young people in the community.  
(Insert site name and address)

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### Purpose of Memorandum of Understanding

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is to define the method of working and roles and responsibilities of member organisations working in partnership to oversee, support and ensure the maintenance of the \_\_\_\_\_ playable space, contributing to its longer term sustainability.

The role of the partnership is to support the maintenance regime/design and development of \_\_\_\_\_ playable space to ensure that the space is able to continue to support and be effective at meeting children and young people's play needs. Through making risk-benefit assessments, any unnecessary hazards that may arise will be minimised by supporting the required actions needed to do so, including making checks, repairs, and environmental modifications. The members of the group have made a commitment to contribute to an environment of openness, active participation and understanding of the specific needs of each organisation and area.

### Parties making the agreement

Landowner/Any other parties working to support children's playable space are:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Methods of working

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ will take primary responsibility for the management of the play space and will work with partners to ensure it is well maintained and suitable for access to support children's play needs. This will include ensuring a budget to support any maintenance regime.
  - 2) \_\_\_\_\_ will provide a caretaker to ensure a daily/weekly visual inspection of the whole play space. This will include the removal of any unnecessary litter and a visual inspection of any play equipment installed for wear and tear. Any concerns will be recorded appropriately, with identified
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**build in opportunities to experience risk and challenge**

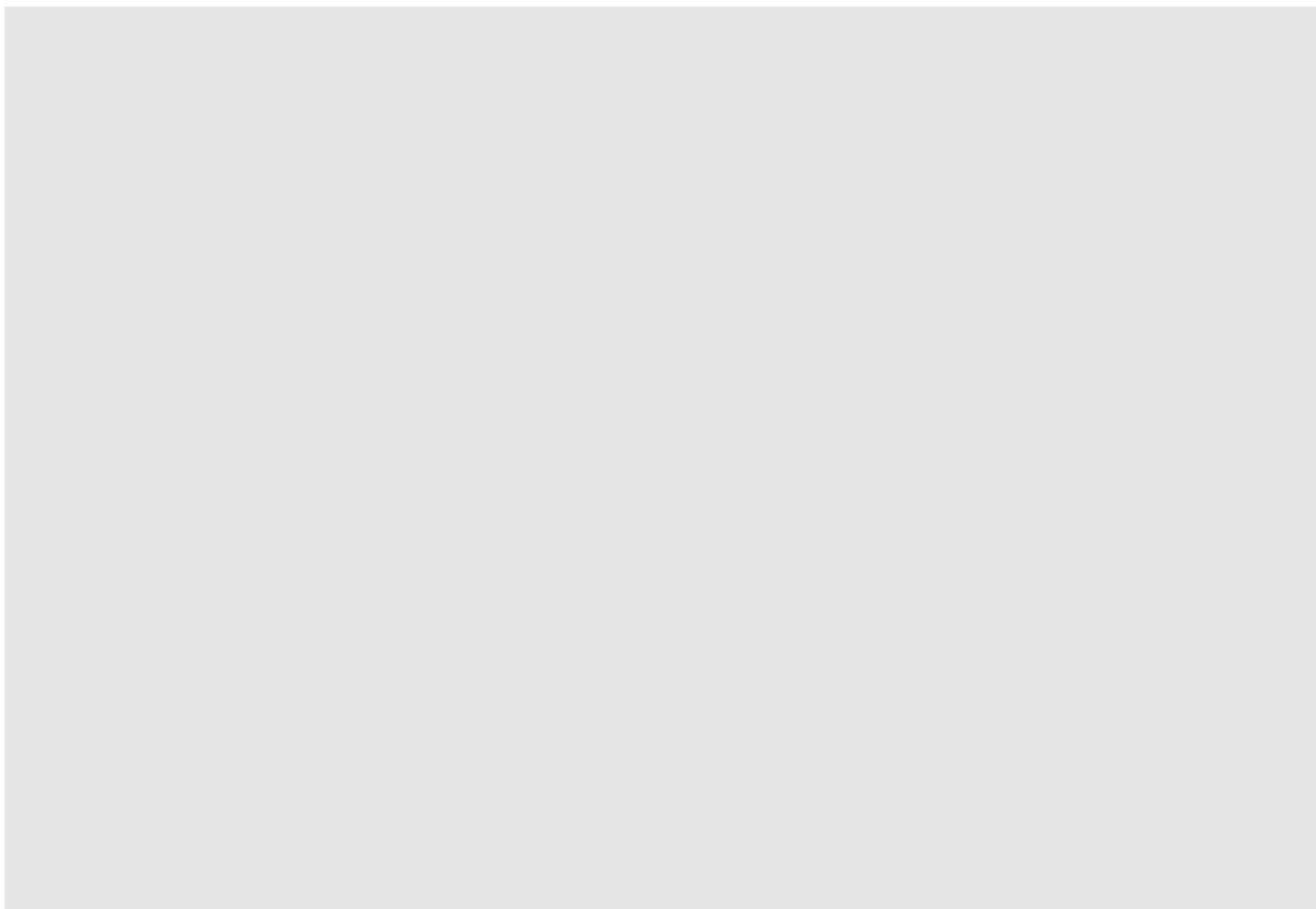
children learn from experience and taking small risks develops this learning. We're not talking about swinging children in the air, but opportunities to balance and climb and move around on uneven ground all build children's capacity

**are sustainable and appropriately maintained**

whether the play space is big or small plans need to be in place from the beginning as to how the space will be maintained and sustained in the future. Will the group continue to be involved in managing the space? Are regular inspections of sand required? Is there funding to continue to develop and maintain the space?

**allow for change and evolution**

children like to be able to change their environment to keep it fresh and exciting. This can be done by ensuring there are moveable items, including natural elements or by developing the space over a long period of time so it evolves rather than arriving on the back of a truck one day and never changing.





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Remember that wheelchair accessibility is an important factor but that the space should be accessible to a broader range of children too. For example, purchasing an expensive wheelchair roundabout will allow children who use wheelchairs to experience the roundabout but take into account some practical considerations:

- What proportion of our budget would one piece of specialist equipment cost – could we purchase several smaller items that provide a range of opportunities at the same cost?
- Do we want to segregate children to pieces of specialist equipment?
- Do we know if there are currently any wheelchair users in the community who would make regular use of such a feature?
- Do we only want to provide one play opportunity for children who use wheelchairs or would we rather have several non-specific items that can be used in a number of different ways by wheelchair users and non-wheelchair users?

Remember that purchasing items that can be used by more than one child means that the child can be supported by a parent, carer or personal assistant. Also, 'inclusion' is a social term – it is essential to ensure access to the social experience of playing with and around other children, not necessarily to every piece of equipment.

Below is a list of examples of traditional equipment and natural features that can be included in a play area that offer play opportunities to a wide range of children.

**Slides** – a wider slide provides more flexible options than a traditional narrow slide. If the slide is built on a slope, an accessible pathway can be built to make access to the top easier.

**Swings** – basket swings take away the need for a child to be able to support their own weight as they can lie down or take someone else with them for support.

**Ladders, ropes, climbing walls and ramps** – we shouldn't avoid providing these in an effort to be inclusive. Providing a range of ways for children to use equipment gives more options to access it.

**The surrounding area** – lighting, parking, accessible toilets, width and operation of gates/grids and dropped kerbs are elements that make entering the space easier. We may not have control over some of these elements but they are factors to consider in planning in the longer term.

**Natural Features** – logs, boulders, loose materials – remember that these items are 'non-prescriptive' in that they do not have a right and wrong way to play and interact with them – this allows children to interpret how to use them in their own way.

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**Sensory experiences** – sand and water play – provide fantastic sensory play opportunities for children. It is also a valid Impact Absorbing Surface (IAS) so it can be placed underneath equipment, although we need to consider if this compromises accessibility to certain equipment.

**Planting, trees and shrubs** – these not only look pleasant, they also divide the play space and provide further sensory opportunities. By selecting species with non-poisonous berries or leaves that fall in Autumn we are providing further opportunities for play with natural elements – some children enjoy creating and sorting with leaves, twigs and berries.

**Moving around the space** – design 'desire lines' (pathways and playful routes) through the site that are even and on the same level – this provides an accessible way of moving around the space. This does not mean that we can't have landscaping and less uniform ways of exploring the space but it allows for accessible social play throughout the space.



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## EA6NA>C@ ¶ AZ\Va De^c

In 2006 PLAYLINK commissioned Counsel's Opinion from the law firm Public Interest Lawyers. They analysed PLAYLINK's play policy and approach to managing risk in play spaces. It is not a legal precedent but the informed judgement of a legal expert:

It stated that

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There is no specific legislation on play safety in the UK, and undertaking a 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment is the primary legal requirement. There are agreed Europe-wide industry standards that should always be considered when carrying out a risk assessment although compliance with standards is not a legal requirement.

Standards are important tools in managing risks and give guidance about some difficult issues. However, a misunderstanding of their role and status has created problems in the past.

Confusion can lead those who design or commission play spaces to focus exclusively on whether or not the items can be shown to meet the standards. In the past this has led to limited use of play features that are not specifically discussed in the standard, such as logs, boulders, hard landscaping, planting or changes of level. Instead there has been a tendency to choose equipment styles that fit most closely into those directly described by the standard, such as swings, slides, carousels, and multi-play and rocking equipment.

The key standards for play spaces are:

- BS EN 1176** on fixed play equipment and surfacing
- BS EN 1177** on a method of testing for impact attenuating surfaces
- BS EN 14974** for wheeled sports facilities such as skate parks and BMX cycle tracks
- BS EN 15312** for ball sports facilities such as ball games areas

Find out more about compliance with European standards from your registered playground inspector or briefings are available on The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents' (RoSPA) website: [www.rospace.com](http://www.rospace.com)



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This Play England publication was developed to provide detailed guidance on legal requirements and approaches to conducting risk assessments of play spaces. In particular, spaces that include play features that do not have a European standard such as natural features.

The guide is available to download for free at: [www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-in-play-provision-implementation-guide.aspx](http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/managing-risk-in-play-provision-implementation-guide.aspx)

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It should be noted that some large organisations, such as Local Authority departments, have a procurement policy, which states how to conduct the tender process, including format of design briefs and minimum costing in order to require tendering (thresholds).

Procurement thresholds set out by the Welsh Government are available on their website and public sector bodies (such as Local Authorities) need to advertise their tender opportunities on the Sell 2 Wales website if the project exceeds the threshold – [www.sell2wales.com](http://www.sell2wales.com)

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Once two or three possible candidates have been identified, we will need to arrange to discuss their proposals in more detail. Ensure there are two or three members on the panel in order to compare notes.

Before the meeting decide what criteria are the most important in order to reach a decision. These can be: value for money, track record, environmental awareness, experience of accessible play spaces or knowledge of the local community.

Below is a sample template that can be used to help with the scoring process. Note that there is a column to weight the answers in order of importance.

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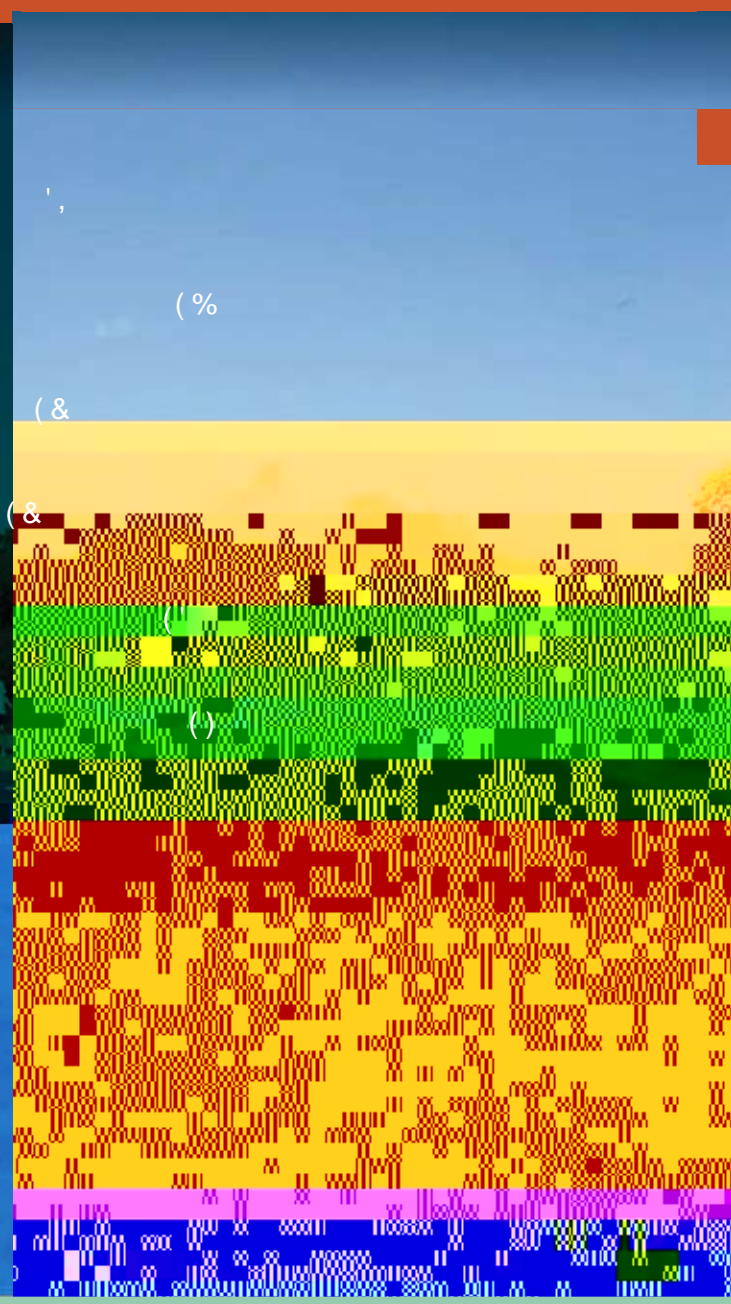
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or emotional. Childhood is a continuous process of trial and error with the potential for achievement, but also the inevitability of accidents. Children would never learn to walk, climb stairs or ride a bicycle unless they were strongly motivated to respond to challenges involving risk of injury.

We have a duty of care to try and protect individuals accessing our services and facilities from the potentially, long-term, damaging effects of being exposed to serious and unreasonable physical and emotional harm. However in doing this we must not overlook, or seek it at the expense of, also enabling children to actively participate in their own personal development of health, wellbeing and resilience, as a result of engaging in situations with uncertain outcomes.

Decisions about what is reasonable and the desirability of children engaging with hazards will be made using a risk-benefit approach. This process involves considering the potential benefits afforded by an opportunity alongside any potentially negative outcomes and then making a judgement about whether the potential for injury is proportional to the benefits. That is, do the potential benefits justify allowing risk of injury to remain?

For the purpose of risk-benefit assessments, benefits can be physical, emotional, social or environmental (and are likely to be a combination of all of these). Risk of injury can be identified by considering the likelihood of any potential injury occurring together with the potential severity of that injury.

During the risk-benefit process it may be necessary to identify control measures in order to reduce risk of injury to an acceptable level. However, the control measures

that can reasonably be implemented will depend on the resources available. The cost of any potential control measures must be justified by being proportional to the risk of injury involved.

Prior to the implementation of control measures consideration should also be given to any potentially negative impact that may result from making that intervention. For example, it is important that children's need to use their environment in novel and unexpected ways is not constrained in the search for providing absolute protection from injury.

On unstaffed play sites intermittent checks can be made to identify and manage hazards. However, the frequency of these checks will depend on what can reasonably be achieved given the resources available, the type of facility and its location.

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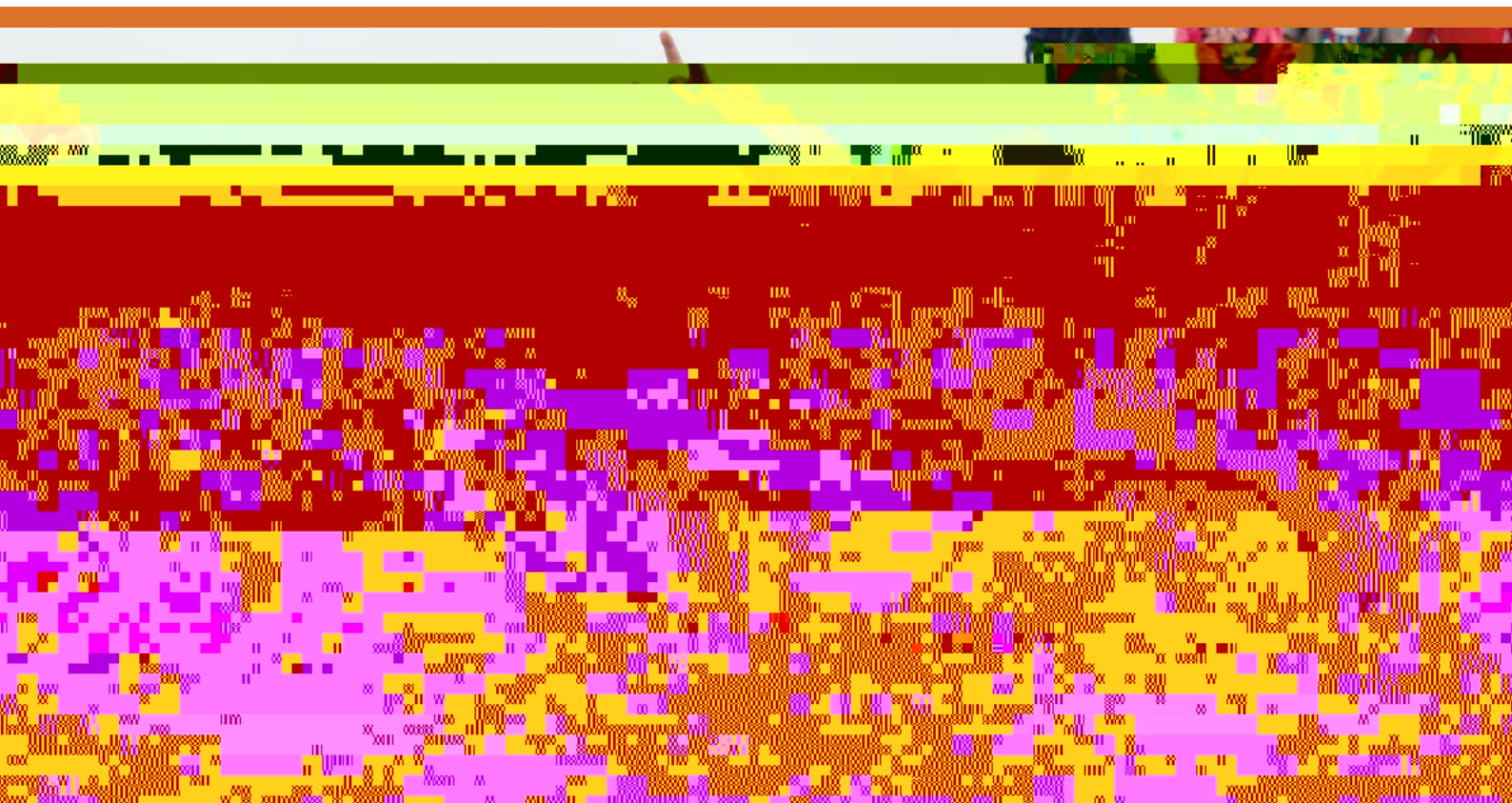
- There is intrinsic value in children experiencing uncertainty and personal challenge through their play.
- Children need to feel free to experience risk and challenge of their own choice. They will only be able to do this if we allow some degree of uncertainty to remain.
- The play provision we create aims to support children to experience reasonable levels of risk for themselves.
- There is a need for balance between ensuring appropriate levels of protection and preserving reasonable levels of uncertainty.
- We aim to manage risk so that whenever reasonably possible the risk of injury children are exposed to is proportional to the potential benefits associated with the situation.
- Controls will be reasonable and realistic whilst ensuring unnecessary risks are minimised.
- Risk management incorporates a number of different elements which work together to form a continuous cycle, improving our practice.
- Children are capable of managing some risk themselves and their competency will develop as their experience grows.



## Section 12 5 L V N E H Q H ¿ W D V V H V V P H Q W W

The Play Safety Forum has produced a practical tool that tackles the cotton wool culture head-on and makes a positive case for risk, adventure and challenge as vital ingredients in children’s play. The initiative is supported by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the UK Government.

The Play Safety Forum’s 5 L V N % H Q H ¿ W \$ V V H V V P H Q W ) R U is an easy-to-use tool to support play providers to balance the benefits of an activity with any inherent risk, taking into account the risks while recognising the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences.





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Selecting which company will provide insurance will be a very local decision and we may already have a good relationship with an existing insurance company or the insurance may be dealt with as part of a blanket policy that covers other facilities within the community.

It is important to share the risk management policy with the insurers to ensure they are fully aware of the measures put in place to manage risks.



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It may be that we have made an agreement with the Community Council or the Local Authority regarding maintenance and inspection. If this is the case, refer to Section 4 – Forming Partnerships where a Memorandum of Understanding template that can be adapted to meet our needs is provided.

**Post-Installation Inspections** – These are usually made a condition of a contract with the supplier/installer to ensure the play space is fit for use before handover. They ensure that all equipment has been correctly installed and make recommendations on compliance with standards. As with annual inspections, these need to be conducted by a professionally competent independent playground inspector.

**Annual Inspections** – Whilst it is not compulsory to have an annual inspection of the play space, HSE and RoSPA strongly recommend them. It may also be a requirement of the insurance company and may compromise our position in the case of a compensation claim resulting from an accident.

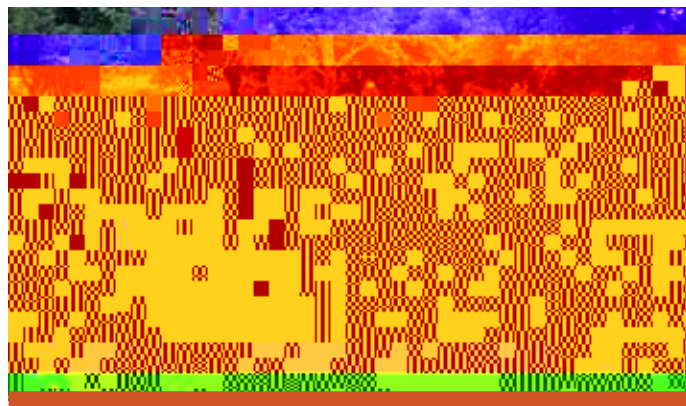
Arrange an annual inspection through a professionally competent independent playground inspector. The Register of Playground Inspectors International (RPii) maintains a list of qualified inspectors – [www.playinspectors.com](http://www.playinspectors.com)

RoSPA can also advise on inspections and may be able to save us money by arranging a 'in-sequence inspection' which will be at a specific time of the year when their inspectors are covering the local area.

**Routine (Operational) Inspections** – These should take place every three months and are intended to ensure we are checking issues identified by the annual inspector. It is sensible to use the annual inspection report as a guide for how to conduct operational inspections. It will involve a thorough check of all mechanical parts, signs of corrosion/rotting and testing all equipment.

Training is available in how to properly conduct routine inspections. For advice contact the County Play Officer or RoSPA. (See Useful contacts on page 35).

**Daily/Weekly Maintenance Checks** – These are regular daily or weekly checks which should be quick and easy to undertake. Checking for signs of deliberate misuse, vandalism and removing litter or dangerous items. How often these are carried out will depend on the level of use. On the next page there is a tool that can be used to record routine checks.



It is sensible to have a programme of routine inspection that is either covered by the organisation or contracted out.

**Maintenance Considerations** – A regular programme of maintenance will be required for the play space. How this is arranged will depend on the local situation. Below are factors to take into account in relation to maintenance.

- Can we identify a local organisation who can take responsibility for maintenance?
- What general maintenance will be required? Litter picking, mowing, general repairs can all be undertaken by the local community.
- What specialist maintenance will be required? Replacement of worn out parts on play equipment is best left to a specialist.
- How much are the maintenance plans going to cost? Once the budget has been allocated we will need to build this into our fundraising activities.

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