

Fair Play: A summary of the consultation on the play strategy

A commitment from
The Children's Plan



department for
children, schools and families



department for
culture, media
and sport

Foreword by the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families, and Culture, Media and Sport



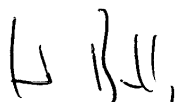
We all want our children to have fun and be safe as they play. It is fundamental to the successful development of every child. Play encourages creativity, teaches children to be innovative, to learn about risk and increases their sense of independence. It is essential to children's physical health and development, and helps children learn how to get on with each other.

The Children's Plan set out a new agenda on how our departments will work together to support children to play with the biggest ever investment in play of £225 million. We've now added an extra £10 million to this, meaning that over the next three years we'll be spending £235 million on helping children to play. This is a vital investment in our children and our shared future.

Every parent wants safe places for their children to play close to where they live. We need public play space that is safe but also exciting and stimulating. Play areas should be well looked after and respected by children and adults alike and all children – of all abilities and backgrounds – should be able to access them. We need children and their parents to be involved in the design of play spaces that are near where they live, and they should be able to help decide what is right for their communities.

We also want people who control what happens in local areas to think about play more, including those people who work in the planning, transport, housing and environmental sectors. We want local authorities to give a high priority to supporting and promoting outdoor play, with play and public play space being seen as an essential characteristic of a healthy community. This is why, from 2009, we will introduce a new indicator on what children think about the parks and play spaces in their local area.

This consultation document seeks to promote discussion about how we could all do better at this and build a society with more and better opportunities for all children to play. We want to hear your views so please get involved and tell us what you want.



Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families



Andy Burnham, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

Executive Summary

1. Strong, vibrant communities should offer a variety of places for children to play, places in which children have a stake and that they can help shape through their active involvement in design and decision making. All children and young people should be able to find places, near their homes, where they can play freely and meet their friends. They should feel confident and safe to play, both indoors and out, and in a manner that is appropriate to their needs and interests. Play will support community cohesion and help keep children healthy.
2. Government's aim is that:
 - a. in every residential area, there is a variety of places for play, free of charge, supervised and unsupervised;
 - b. local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play;
 - c. routes to children's play space are safe and accessible for all children and young people;

- d. parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well-maintained and well-used;
 - e. children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours;
 - f. children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property;
 - g. children, young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces; and
 - h. play places are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, children of both genders, and children from minority groups in the community.
3. Play is not only a vital part of the way children enjoy their childhood, but it is central to all the *Every Child Matters*¹ outcomes. Play is essential for children’s good physical and mental health and development. Through taking risks whilst playing they also learn how to manage risk – helping them to stay safe. Play develops learning skills, central to achievement, and is essential for the development of the skills that children and young people need as they become adults and move on in education or into work.
4. However, while there are more opportunities for children and families now than ever before to use dedicated play

1 See www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims

facilities, a number of barriers still exist. Parents worry about children's safety if they are playing outside, access to good play spaces is still a problem, and the quality of parks and play spaces often puts families off going to these. The needs of children are not always taken into account when public spaces are designed, and estimates suggest there is much less play space per child than standards recommend.

5. This consultation sets out government's proposals on play, structured around the priorities identified by research and through consultation with parents, play experts, and children.

Supporting play throughout childhood

6. Play should be at the heart of children's everyday lives and experiences throughout childhood. Children play at school and home, in parks and green spaces, and while travelling. They take part in games with their friends, play as part of learning, and in both supervised and unsupervised play. We want children to enjoy a healthy balance of both structured and unstructured activities in their leisure time.
7. Government believes that play should be an integral part of our wider policies for children and young people.
8. In order to support play throughout childhood, government has;
 - a. given children the opportunity to learn through play in **early years**;
 - b. made proposals to increase the support for play offered by **Sure Start Children's Centres**;

- c. set out how we propose to support play through **schools**, including a focus on improving play facilities on school sites;
- d. given children and young people more opportunities for **physical activity, physical education and sport**;
- e. emphasised **creativity in play**;
- f. set out the importance of **play for children visiting parents in prison**;
- g. emphasised links between play-based activities and other provision for **young people**; and
- h. set out how provision must support the inclusion of **disabled children**.

More places to play

9. Having more high quality and safe places to play is a priority for both children and parents across England. Significant investment is already being made in improving access to play. £124 million has been allocated to local authorities through the BIG Lottery £155 million Children’s Play initiative to support development of free, local, inclusive play spaces, with the remaining funds being used to support play infrastructure and local projects.
10. The Children’s Plan announced a significant programme of capital investment to make more play areas safe and exciting places to be. We are making our biggest ever investment of £235 million in play over the three years 2008–11. Exciting new public play areas will be developed

with this investment, led strategically by local authorities working in partnership with district and town councils, the third sector, children, families and community groups. In April 2008, 63 local authorities will begin using their funding to improve local play offers, including 20 large scale pathfinder authorities.

11. Play space needs to be of high quality and good design to attract children and families and become a valued part of the local environment. Poor quality, unimaginative space will not be attractive to children, will not be valued by the local community, and will fall into disuse and disrepair. Good design is a good investment.
12. In order to create more high quality places to play, we propose to:
 - a. invest £235 million over the next three years to **develop up to 3,500 public play areas;**
 - b. support **pathfinders to develop 30 adventure playgrounds** or play parks aimed at 8–13 year-olds in disadvantaged areas;
 - c. work with local authorities to ensure sites are stimulating, exciting, and attractive to children – including through closely **involving children, families and communities** in planning and design;
 - d. provide clear guidance on developing **interesting and fun places to play;** and
 - e. emphasise the importance of **maintaining sites.**

Playing safely

13. Children need to take risks to learn how to manage risks. This is an essential part of growing up, and play is one of the most important ways in which they develop this vital skill. Riding a bicycle, climbing a scramble net, or pushing a friend on a swing all involve risk. It is essential that we do not try and remove all the risk from play or wrap children in cotton wool.
14. Concerns about safety are among the biggest barriers to outdoor play that children face, but this does not mean we should be stopping them from learning and exploring. The Government is committed to addressing these concerns and to tackling safety issues and perceptions that are preventing children from enjoying play.
15. Children and young people today are, in many ways, safer than in previous generations. Eighty seven per cent of young people responding to the *Staying Safe*² consultation thought children were safe, and rates of accidents are down, including on the roads. Yet three-quarters of parents say they think children today are more at risk than children five years ago.
16. We propose to help children play safely by:
 - a. **tackling bullying** in public places;
 - b. continuing to work with our partners to **improve safety from crime on the streets**;

² See www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/stayingsafe

- c. improving **road safety** in a number of ways, including a focus on improving skills and behaviour and creating a safer street environment; and
 - d. increasing the availability of **supervised play**, including through working with the volunteering sector to test a new local volunteer infrastructure to support play.
17. We will focus on risk and the benefits of play through:
- a. increasing parents' **knowledge and understanding of the risks and benefits of play**;
 - b. taking action to address **negative perceptions of children and young people**; and
 - c. investigating whether **excessive health and safety fears** can cause local authorities to buy unstimulating and unpopular play equipment.

Child-friendly communities

18. Designated play areas must not be the only places where children are allowed or expected to play. It is important that the wider environment encourages play, and sometimes a pavement pattern or a grassy area can have as much play value as a piece of dedicated play equipment. Children's needs should be reflected in the planning of local areas, and local communities should be empowered to be involved in these decisions.
19. A community where children are playing is a healthy and sustainable community and, to support this, children need

to be given the time, space, and opportunity to play. Yet children's needs can be ignored in public space design, reducing the opportunities available for them to play outdoors. Similarly, play is often inappropriately moved away from housing and adult activity because of concerns about noise and nuisance from children's play. We need to put an end to the culture of 'no ball games here'. We are determined to make it the rule, not the exception, that children's needs are reflected in local decision-making, and believe that this will encourage flourishing, confident and cohesive communities.

20. We propose to make public space more child-friendly through:
 - a. DCSF and DCMS working with the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for Transport and others to include **a stronger focus on spaces suitable for play** in the planning system, including continuing to improve our parks and green spaces;
 - b. a programme of activity to provide **cross-professional training for people who design and manage public space**; and
 - c. making **play a focus of flagship developments** such as eco-towns, healthy towns, growth points and the Olympic Park.

21. We propose to empower communities to support children playing by:
- a. supporting **local community ownership of space suitable for play** through harnessing CLG's community empowerment agenda;
 - b. helping to publicise **Grassroots Grants and Community Spaces**; and
 - c. supporting **more positive relationships between adults and children in public space**.

Sustaining and embedding play

22. Play has historically had a low profile in many local services. The DCMS publication *Time for Play* (2006)³ recommended that local authorities and other local strategic partners give play a much greater profile and priority in future than they had in the past.
23. Government wants the investment it is making to have a lasting impact and this can only be achieved through play provision being shared and managed by communities and local authorities and their strategic partners. Play needs greater prioritisation locally, the skills and capacity of the play workforce need to be increased, and play provision included in local authority policies and performance management.
24. This embedding of play in local policy has already begun. In response to the BIG Lottery Children's Play initiative, nearly all unitary and district authorities now have a play strategy

3 <http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6113A6E7-458B-4D58-894D-9AAA62CACD01/0/DCMSPlayReport.pdf>

in place⁴, and many local areas already offer a variety of exciting places for children to play.

25. We propose to sustain and embed play by:
- a. introducing a **play indicator** to the national indicator set to encourage all authorities to prioritise delivery of better play opportunities;
 - b. using our **new funding to drive high-level planning and partnerships** on policy locally, including the routine involvement of communities;
 - c. recognising play as an element of the responsibilities of **Children's Trusts, Directors of Children's Services, and local authority Chief Executives** and highlighting how local strategic partnerships can support play;
 - d. investigating how **Primary Care Trusts** can contribute to the play agenda;
 - e. clarifying **the role of Government Offices**;
 - f. professionalising the **play workforce**; and
 - g. working with **play pathfinders** to test potential solutions to barriers to play.

4 Guidance to local authorities on preparing strategies for improving children's play opportunities was published by PlayEngland in 2006. See http://www.playengland.org.uk/downloads/pdf/planning_for_play.pdf.

How to get involved

26. This is an open consultation and we want to hear your views. The full version of this consultation is available at www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations. We welcome your views on what can be done to make public space more welcoming for play.
27. Here are the questions where we would like to hear your views:

General

Is this the right national vision and set of aims for play in England?

Are the areas we have identified for new action right? What other areas could be considered and what more could we do?

Who is responsible for helping children to play, and what are they responsible for?

Supporting play throughout childhood

How can schools best support play, both for their pupils and for their local communities?

What more could be done, and in what settings, to support disabled children to be able to play?

Are there groups of children who do not have opportunities to play and what could be done to help them?

More places to play

What do parents and children see to be the biggest gap in the play facilities that are currently available to them?

What can we do to make play spaces more appealing – particularly for children aged 8-13?

How can communities be best involved in the design and running of new play spaces

Playing safely

What needs to change for parents and children to be less concerned about outside play?

Where, when, and by whom should play be supervised, and where should it be unsupervised?

What further improvements to road safety and accessibility do parents and children want in order to support children's play?

How can government and local communities support play through changing negative perceptions of children and young people?

Are worries about being sued leading to play areas that are dull and unstimulating?

Child-friendly communities

What needs to happen in order for the work we're suggesting on planning to make a difference on the ground?

What contribution should parents and communities make to support children playing outside?

Sustaining and embedding play

How can we ensure that play is given a high priority by local areas?

What is the specific role of PCTs and primary care professionals in promoting healthy, active play?

What role should playworkers take in delivering this agenda?

- 28.** We will be running a series of events during the consultation period to discuss these issues, including focused work with children, young people, and their families.

To submit your response to the consultation in email or writing, please send it to:

Play.Consultation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk, or

Play consultation team

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29. We will use your responses to help shape the final play strategy, which we will publish in autumn 2008.

You can download this publication or order copies online at
www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

Search using the ref: DCSF-00299-2008

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