



Resources for playing – providing loose parts to support children’s play

A toolkit

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About this toolkit

What do we hope to achieve through this toolkit?

Our aim is that more children will have access to resources for loose parts play and that adults in the play, early years and education sectors will feel more comfortable and confident about providing loose parts play within their settings.

Toolkit aims

- To raise awareness of the value of loose parts to children's play
- To provide practical guidance about loose parts play to those who work with children and young people of all ages
- To advocate the use of loose parts as an approach to developing play opportunities at home, school and in the community.

Who is the toolkit for?

The toolkit will be useful for people working with children and young people across all age ranges, in many types of settings including schools, health, early years and childcare settings, and for the many organisations that seek to engage children and families. This may include those who design or manage public spaces and visitor attractions, the creative sector, event organisers and businesses which provide services to families.

Throughout this toolkit we have included examples and quotes from settings which are using loose parts as part of their provision for play. These come from a range of settings including early years and childcare, schools and community-based projects. As the underlying approach remains the same, examples provided can easily be applied to different contexts, environments and age ranges and to be inclusive of children with additional need of support.

Special note for schools and early years and childcare settings

Loose parts are about real world learning for all children and young people. The process both of introducing them and of playing with them involves collaboration, sharing, thinking, problem-solving and decision-making where the outcome is evident – better play experiences. The impact of facilitating quality loose parts play is improved health and wellbeing and so a positive cycle is put in place.

Appendix 7 provides information about how embedding loose parts play can be a core part of a school or setting's approach to Estyn's Common Inspection Framework, showing how access to loose parts play links to many of its aspects. It also dovetails with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) *Inspection guide for child minding, daycare and open access play*.



'Most schools create attractive learning environments and have enough suitable learning resources. In the best cases, they plan outdoor space imaginatively to provide pupils with a wide range of physical and creative opportunities and challenges. Where schools need to improve the physical learning environment, this mostly relates to improving the access or the provision for outdoor learning in the Foundation Phase.'

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales
2015-2016

The toolkit also responds to Welsh Government statutory duties on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area. The Play Sufficiency Duty comes as part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda which recognises that children can have a poverty of experience, opportunity and aspiration, and that this kind of poverty can affect children

from all social, cultural and economic backgrounds across Wales.

As part of their Play Sufficiency Assessments, local authorities must assess to what extent schools provide children with an interesting play environment for breaks during the school day. Section 11 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 places a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area.

Schools provide an important opportunity for children to play during the school day and for periods before and after classes. The Welsh Government recommends that local authorities advise schools to provide high quality play space and sufficient time for children to play during the school day and give full consideration to opening this provision during out of teaching hours.



1. Loose parts

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What are loose parts?

Loose parts create richer environments for children to play, giving them the resources they need to extend their play. Loose parts aren't prescriptive and offer limitless possibilities. A stick, for example, may become a fishing rod near real or imaginary water, a spoon in a mud kitchen, a tool to nudge a football that is stuck in a tree; it can be thrown, floated, snapped, pinged, bent, hidden, added to a pile, burnt, tied to something else, split, catapulted or discarded.

Static, unchanging play spaces do little for children whereas environments which can be manipulated, where things move and can be moved open worlds of possibility. At a beach, for example, there is an abundance of water, sand, stones, rocks, smells, sights, vistas and textures which enable children to be highly inventive and creative in their play. Natural environments such as mature woodland or beaches often provide significantly more loose parts with higher levels of possibilities than many artificial play spaces such as an asphalt school playground or an urban park.

Children who play outdoors or in large indoor spaces with others do not need many toys. By providing perhaps just a few well-chosen toys but numerous loose parts we can enrich the play space and facilitate play.

'As the bikes and scooters have worn we haven't replaced them as we feel the children get more physical enjoyment and experiences with the loose parts than with any other equipment or resource I have seen in my 15 years.'

Sam Maitland-Price, Nursery Manager

The list of possible loose parts is endless but can include:

- natural resources – such as straw, mud and pine cones
- building materials and tools – planks, nails, hammers
- scrap materials – old tyres, off-cuts of guttering
- bark which can be both safe playground surfacing and a loose part
- and, most essentially, random found objects.

Children need environments they can manipulate and where they can invent, construct, evaluate and modify their own constructions and ideas through play.

Children require opportunities to develop ownership of the environment where they play. The introduction of loose parts, such as scrap materials, sand and water increases the possibilities for children to engage in these types of behaviours even in 'artificial' environments, outside or in.

Abundant loose parts for children to play with are central to the adventure playground ethos going back to the famous 'junk playgrounds' (skrammellegeplad or byggelegeplad) first created by landscape architect C. Th. Sørensen in Emdrup, Denmark in 1943. Inspired by Scandinavian examples, a network of adventure playgrounds began to grow in the UK in the late 1950s and 60s with Lady Allen of Hurtwood credited for the critical role she played as well as her insistence on play opportunities for disabled children.

(IPA, 2011)



'Since we have had the play shed there has been less arguing. The playshed has brought us closer than before. The playshed has made us happier in school. The playshed has made playtimes really fun.'

Child, Ysgol Llanfynydd

In the post war years, children were often to be found in derelict and brown field sites where the junk provided endless play opportunities. From such roots, adventure playgrounds developed in the mid-twentieth century. More recently, initiatives such as the Scrapstore Playpod® in Bristol, have demonstrated the play value of scrap material in school playground environments and provided a catalyst for the expansion of loose parts into schools at playtimes.

Early childhood theorists and pioneers over several centuries have been staunch advocates of the benefits of young children playing outside, accessing mud, sand, water and spending frequent time in nature. There is a long-standing tradition of using household items for play, using tools for gardening and woodworking, and having 'tinkering' tables where children can experiment. For the very youngest children, heuristic and experiential play offers treasure baskets of simple objects such as wooden spools and cotton reels

for babies to explore with their hands and mouths. Children learn best when they can play freely. They need to be able to use real resources in their play, as well as toys. Many education approaches such as Steiner Waldorf or Montessori advocate the need for real experiences to acquire life skills. Playing with a variety of loose parts assists with these approaches.

The introduction of loose parts should be part of a wider approach to developing opportunities for play within school and the community as advocated by the Welsh Government in its statutory guidance to local authorities regarding play sufficiency duties.

It is most effective within a collaborative, inclusive and rights-based approach that fully involves children and young people at every step. When adults enable processes which allow children's thoughts, feeling and opinions to be listened to, acted upon and included, it is empowering for all involved.

Play is *'essential to the health and well-being of children and promotes the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, as well as physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills'* (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013).

Nicholson's Theory of Loose Parts

The term 'loose parts' came into use in 1971, after an architect, Simon Nicholson, published a paper called 'The Theory of Loose Parts'.

Nicolson described loose parts as 'variables' and provided examples such as: materials and shapes; smells and other physical phenomena, such as electricity, magnetism and gravity; media such as gases and fluids; sounds, music, motion; chemical interactions, cooking and fire; and other humans, and animals, plants, words, concepts and ideas. With all these things all children love to play, experiment, discover and invent and have fun.

'Every child should have access to a play shed.'
Midday supervisor, Ysgol Llanfynydd
(Playful Futures School project)

Affordance theory

When children play in a space or with an object they experience it in a unique way. Rather than its intended purpose, they may view it in terms of its 'affordances'. American psychologist James J. Gibson (1979) suggested that environments and objects within them have values and meanings that are unique to the person perceiving them. The 'affordances' of an object or space are all the things it has the potential to do or be. For example, a brick wall may be built to make a clear boundary between a pavement and a garden but for many children, it would offer a place to sit, walk along, balance, hide behind and jump off.

'In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.'

Watch loose parts play in action

Scrapstore Playpod®

<http://bit.ly/ScrapstorePlaypod>

Imagination Playground in a Box

<http://bit.ly/PlaygroundinaBox>

Natural Play in Schools

(Learning through Landscapes)

<http://bit.ly/NaturalPlayinSchools>

Community playwork sessions

(RAY Ceredigion):

<http://bit.ly/RAYCeredigion>

From Australia, Play for Life POD in Action

<http://bit.ly/PlayForLifePOD>



The benefits of loose parts play

'When children interact with loose parts, they enter a world of "what if" that promotes the type of thinking that leads to problem solving and theoretical reasoning. Loose parts enhance children's ability to think imaginatively and see solutions, and they bring a sense of adventure and excitement to children's play.'

(Daly and Beloglovsky, 2015)

There is a growing body of evidence (Hyndman, Benson, Ullah and Telford, 2014) of the benefits of playing with loose parts including:

- Increasing levels of creative and imaginative play
- Children play co-operatively and socialise more
- Children are physically more active
- Curriculum outcomes occur through informal play with loose parts (Wagland, 2015)
- Loose parts facilitate communication and negotiation skills when added to an outdoor space (Maxwell, Mitchell and Evans, 2008).

The development of nature play opportunities and naturalised play spaces provides evidence about the benefits of playing with naturally occurring loose parts. This includes:

- Improvements in young children's physical coordination (Fjørtoft and Sageie, 2000)
- Children feeling better able to focus and it enhances cognitive abilities (Wells, 2000)
- Time in nature aids psychological wellbeing in children (Wells and Evans, 2003)
- Children are more likely to visit green space as adults (Ward Thompson, Aspinall and Montarzino, 2008)

'Cheap items like crates and buckets encourage children to be more active and creative than expensive play equipment, researchers have found. The findings are the result of a long-term study into the play differences of primary school children with access to different playgrounds. Introducing simple, everyday objects during recess and lunchtime can cut sedentary behaviour by half, improve creativity and boost social and problem-solving skills.'

(Science Daily, 2016)

- Children and young people are more likely to develop pro-environmental behaviours and attitudes as adults (Chawla and Cushing, 2007)

Bristol Scrapstore (www.playpods.co.uk) describes succinctly the benefits seen in the introduction of loose parts in school playgrounds, which enabled children to *'be really creative in their play, simply because they are non-prescriptive and encourage a range of different play types. It enhances the physical and human environment within schools, creating stimulating and interactive spaces where children can learn through play.'*

'Most schools reported a fall in unwanted behaviours to a level below that it had been before the Pod.'

(Armitage, 2009)

Play themes and loose parts play

The concept of loose parts and their possibilities can be interwoven with studies about how children play outside, particularly in natural environments. There appears to be patterns to children’s play which emerge almost regardless of climate, culture, class, gender, developmental level or age. They link to how humans grow and their need for identity, attachment and a sense of connectedness to place, as well as people. In our rapidly changing world, we need to ensure children have opportunities to develop this sense of belonging and being with, rather than apart, from nature.

White (2014) considered the work of Appleton (1975), Sobel (2008) and Pelo (2013). Noticing similarities in their ideas, from different decades and from work with children and young people of various ages, she proposed that the themes could be merged to provide a framework of reference. This framework can help adults to understand how children play, to develop children’s attachment to nature and place and to provide engaging environments for playing with loose parts.

Play theme	Loose parts play provision
<p>Adventure Seeking out the unknown, stretching limits of possibility, taking calculated risks, anticipation, discovery and invention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration away from adult eyes (or perception of this) • Establishing a culture where risk taking is supported • Developing play provision that is child led • Providing time to listen and hear children’s experiences, should they wish to share
<p>Becoming at home Creating space, shelter, security, hiding and secret places, refuge and territorial boundaries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources for building dens • Props for developing the play within a den or secret place • Scrap cardboard and writing materials for creating signs • Nooks, crannies, trees and bushes or undergrowth to hide in or be alone • Large cardboard boxes and pieces of material both see-through and dark

<p>Prospect Searching out high places, views and look outs, surveying the landscape and mapping areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being high up – top of a hill • Climbing trees, boulders and other objects • Balancing on features • Play on different levels • Spyholes, gaps and see-through spaces, including windows and doorways
<p>Pathways and journeying The need for exploration, mapping out an area in many ways, finding short cuts and secret routes, tunnels, knowing the local area, making one's mark in the landscape.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map making and using opportunities – both real and through digital devices • Trail making with natural resources and props such as ropes or chalk • Freedom to explore and get to know a local area
<p>Hunter-gatherer pursuits Searching, finding and collecting, stashing and hoarding, treasure hunts, traditional games like hide 'n' seek, foraging, bushcraft skills, fire, tool use.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to invent and play games • Collecting and using natural materials • Containers such as pockets, bags, baskets and buckets • Using real tools to create, make and take apart different objects • Experiencing fire • Bushcraft type activities: whittling, fishing and foraging
<p>Anthropomorphism Projecting self onto other living things, feelings for, and empathy with, plants and animals of all kinds, developing personal connections to wildlife through direct experience and fantasy, the significance of names.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring time and space to discover wildlife on children's terms • Creating places to hide and watch wildlife, creating habitat piles, bird feeding stations and nesting boxes • Simple props for dressing up and being animals

<p>Imaginative narratives</p> <p>Making sense of the world through fantasy play, small world play and creating stories and accounts of experiences that connect and deepen friendships and relationships between each other and the places they play, creating memories and reaffirming order and meaning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constructing and deconstructing miniature worlds outside or in • Dressing up inside and out with open-ended props such as quick dry materials and simple, open accessories, marking or painting face and body • Making and creating fantasy characters • Listening to the stories children tell and recording them where appropriate • Ensuring ample undisturbed time for play to spark and emerge
<p>Making rituals</p> <p>Deliberate, ceremonial, meaningful actions often with metaphysical or transformational intent, invented by and participated in by individuals or groups; honouring or celebrating events, places, features through art, music, dance and role play; giving and receiving gifts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending to, honouring and supporting the development of the simple but significant rituals of children • Providing space, time, freedom and space for children to dance, make music and explore art inside and out • Celebrating play • Re-visiting places regularly and frequently such as local greenspace



'I feel like I grew up on junk modelling; it was the go-to activity for just about every club I ever attended in my early years and primary school days.

From Sunday school to summer club, everywhere I went had a huge box full of junk and every parent that dropped their kids off would be weighed down with even more donations. Cardboard tubes, old bobbins, lengths of material, cardboard boxes, bags of dried leaves and a vast array of what looked like scraps of waste.

Junk modelling was ace; everyone seemed to enjoy it. We used copious amounts of glue and tape to fashion monsters big and ugly. We made vehicles, rockets and space stations. We had adventures in outer space, were cops and robbers, or mechanics carefully repairing cars. We made houses with rooms and furniture, crafting domestic ideals, often to be played with in some form of pretend play, but equally often forgotten the moment we felt they were complete. We made swords and guns and fought valiantly to the death in service of our king and country, or our damsels in distress.

Child development

Junk is cheap. The stuff to fix it together is inexpensive, and we know even more now than what my child carers knew then. Non-directive toys, materials, props, equipment and so on leave space for the child to exercise their creativity and inventiveness.

Combining dissimilar materials, for example toilet rolls and a shoe box to make a robot is problem solving. More to the point, it is divergent problem solving, which is a higher-level thinking skill.

We also understand now that play is about process much more than it is about product. The adaptability of junk, and the fact it can be used for different purposes and in different ways, helps support infinite process opportunities. The non-directive nature of junk means what is needed to make a robot one day, may be the exact same thing used to make a space station the next.

Non-directive play

Settings that provide junk and loose parts provide variability, flexibility and adaptability. When children can engage with environments and resources like this in their play they can express their creativity, innovation and cognitive ability. Children can create and solve problems, and as a result generate feelings of motivation and reward. This in turn supports them to develop self-confidence, self-concept and identity. With these materials they practice complex skills from fine and gross locomotor skills to higher executive functioning; skills such as sequencing, hypothesis testing, analysis and evaluation.

The immersion and ownership of their play is increased and therefore children are more likely to try to resolve problems for themselves. This will help develop intra-psycho capability (self-reliance) and support the development of a growth mind set (a belief in one's self as a learner and thinker).

Flexible behaviour

Junk modelling, loose parts play or experiential play all work on the principle that non-directive materials support a greater degree of flexible behaviour and as such support innovation and creativity.

Parents want the best for their children but sometimes they haven't been privileged enough to know this sort of information. So, let them know and they are sure to be very happy about this sort of play next time their Easter craft comes home with a monster head, a sword and is driving an all-terrain vehicle!

Adapted from a blog by Ben Tawil which first appeared on: www.pacey.org.uk

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Getting started

Consider the use of loose parts within the overall approach to play.	
Work out the approach to evaluation right from the start – it's great to have evidence showing the difference between 'before and after' the introduction of loose parts.	
Involve and educate staff, parents and carers about the use and benefits of loose parts.	Online film clips, small study visits and presentations are all very useful
Accessing training to equip adults with knowledge, skills and confidence is likely to be a worthwhile investment.	
Put procedures in place for the management and use of loose parts.	You will review these as time goes on
Ensure that loose parts play is facilitated in line with the Playwork Principles.	See Appendix 1
Work on risk-benefit assessments of loose parts play.	(See Section 3: Facilitating loose parts play) Bear in mind these are likely to be adjusted as staff and the children gain experience
Try out some taster sessions ideally with support from a playworker or play organisation.	
Develop an ongoing action plan.	Ensure children are fully involved at every step
Work out where and how loose parts will be stored.	
Gather an initial supply of loose parts and decide how they will be replenished.	
Plan, do, review.	

Bear in mind that things can take longer than expected! Taking the time needed to work through matters which arise will embed loose parts play even more firmly in the setting's way of working.

Auditing current provision

Children and adults can work collaboratively to undertake many different audit activities. Within a school, a class may volunteer to undertake this aspect of work and report back to the rest of the school. Alternatively, a range of classes may each take one aspect of the audit to ensure a whole school approach that is integrated into the curriculum. Don't forget to re-visit each activity once loose parts play is embedded so that you can effectively gauge the impact and celebrate the efforts of everyone involved in making it happen.

Information about the environment and play features/affordances, routines and rules, the roles and perceptions of children and adults in relation to play and the resources currently available for play, would all be useful to collect and understand.

How can this information be captured?

- Photos or videos are powerful and good for comparative purposes.
 - Draw a site map, make plenty of photocopies then ask everyone to mark them up from their point of view with points such as: favourite place to play? Trouble spots? Who does what where? Most under-used space?
 - Take time-lapse pictures (or simple snapshots at regular intervals) of the same area over the course of a day to see what really happens there.
 - Make an inventory of existing play resources and features – visual methods (photos, sketches), lists and wall charts are good.
 - Create a run chart for monitoring first aid, absences or other data that is routinely collected to see if the introduction of loose parts impacts on these statistics. This is a useful data handling challenge for children.
- Check out the playground rules, policies and procedures – are there any that are unnecessary, contradictory or missing? Think about what they reveal about how play is perceived and valued.
 - Be brave! Find out what the children really think about how adults are supporting or hindering play through their actions.

'Our PlayPod is a huge success and has enormously increased the children's play opportunities. It has improved the quality of the children's play, with significantly fewer disputes; and imaginative, adventurous play across all ages is observed.'

Head Teacher, Vale of Glamorgan

Playworkers and play organisations across Wales are forging better relationships with local schools by supporting the non-curriculum part of the school day through the provision of loose parts projects. Play organisations are supporting schools to undertake playground audits of the existing play space. Many provide training for lunchtime supervisors that support them to better understand a wide range of play opportunities. They provide information and advice specific to supporting play at play and lunch times.

The playworkers source appropriate clean and safe scrap, such as nets, cardboard and tubes, that is suitable for children's play and is collected from businesses and manufacturers. Many of the playworkers help the school to identify and provide a purpose built structure suitable for playgrounds to store the scrap and other play equipment. The playtime staff and midday supervisors oversee the opening of the structure and support children to access the resources and return them when playtime finishes.



Welsh play organisations report that schools have identified a range of benefits to transforming playtime, such as:

- Happier children
- Significantly fewer incidents and accidents
- Children returning to class ready to learn
- Empowered lunchtime staff
- Positive parental responses
- More children playing more often during play time than they did when only a limited amount of traditional playground equipment was available (for example balls and ropes)

Further reading and templates

Play Wales: Play space audit template
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit

Shackell, A., Butler, N., Doyle, P. and Ball, D. (2008) *Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces*. London: Play England.
www.playengland.org.uk

Just Playing is designed to help develop play opportunities within school grounds and local areas, whether you're just starting out or looking for further inspiration.
<http://justplaying.org>

Local authorities' play services across Wales:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playassociations

Loose parts



'We would not have been able to offer such a rich play experience without the use of loose parts, it is the key to our work. Rocking up to a local community open space venue with a van full of loose parts has meant that children get to choose what they play. We have used barrels on slides to make things more fun, built shelters within shelters with the use of cargo netting and material. We have made go karts with the children, as well as working with fire offering orange cakes, scrambled eggs, dampers and much, much more.'

Jackie Dorrian, Play Development Officer,
Purple Routes Play Project

'My first thought about the Playshed was that I didn't think it would have a big impact on the children in our school. How wrong I was. From day one that the shed was up and open, the imagination and creativity of the children has blown me away. One year four child who always played on his own now interacts with others and can't wait to get outside to play. Cardboard boxes, old wedding dresses, drain pipes, pots, pans, sleeping bags are now turned into fashion shows, pirate ships, car races, dens and loads of other creative ideas.'

Midday supervisor, Ysgol Llanfynydd,
Playful Futures School project

'I stumbled across a training course called Managing a Holiday Play Scheme Award (MAHPS). From that course we went completely loose parts mad! Listening to the trainer and her team talk as passionately about play and children made me feel that loose parts would work in our setting. They gave me inspiration to show my team how it is done and to reinvent ideas for the nursery. After that we went on a bus hunt during the school holidays collecting parts from all businesses we were friends with or had friends that worked there! We collected bread crates, cardboard boxes, cable reels, tyres, plastic tubes (the list goes on!) and created a loose part space in our garden.'

Sam Maitland-Price, Nursery Manager



Gathering plentiful loose parts

Embedding environmentally sustainable approaches into play

- Reuse and recycle unwanted home, trade and business scrap.
- Most loose parts are free as they can be donated by parents and the community.
- Unexpected and unusual donations stimulate play in new and exciting ways.
- The sustainable collection of natural resources requires adults and children to support an awareness and understanding of the goals of The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 'Real life' resources enable children to make connections to their family interests, local cultural, natural heritage and the world of work.
- Loose parts tend to be free from gender, social and cognitive bias.

Loose parts can reflect the local community and culture. In coastal and island communities an old boat, fishing nets, boxes, buoys, seaweed, shells and lobster creels might be seen in family gardens and childcare settings. In an urban environment, bricks, pipes and cable drums may be donated by building companies. Outdoor adventure centres may use old sails and canoes so that equipment no longer fit for purpose can be used in a play context.

It is important to think carefully about the sourcing of resources and adopt an environmentally sustainable approach. Different contexts require different approaches, for example, loose parts play in a woodland is different to that of a playground. An outreach playworker may prefer items which can be carried in a holdall or backpack. Appendix 5 features a list of tried and tested loose parts.

Many of the resources will get worn so as well as building up an initial collection, it is important to think about ways of replenishing the materials. The supply of loose parts needs to be planned for and a system put in place to ensure the resources are kept fresh and interesting.

Tips to keep supplies of loose parts topped up

- Set up a cupboard or area where children can deposit materials from home so that it can be checked and prepared for play.
- Add reminders for 'stuff' to newsletters, Facebook pages, tweets and websites.
- Find out which parents work or have hobbies likely to produce a good supply of loose parts – for example builders, plumbers, farmers, designers – and ask them directly to look out for things that could be donated.
- Make friends with local builders, countryside rangers and tree surgeons.
- In general, make sure people know there is a need for loose parts and supplies are likely to come!

Remember that the organisation is responsible for the management, maintenance, supervision and disposal of any loose parts from the moment they are obtained.

Storage

Loose parts must be easily accessed, managed and maintained by children with the ongoing assistance of adults.

Storage considerations

- Containers or sheds outside in the play area work well.
- Make sure children can access them independently and that the doors are wide enough to allow this to happen. Double doors on the longest side work well.
- Consider the layout inside a shed or container for ease of access.
- Stable-like storage with open boxes against the sides allow the materials to be roughly sorted and stop the loose parts from becoming one huge inaccessible pile.
- Alternatively, have several small sheds but keep the double door approach.
- Old suitcases or child-sized trolleys and carts can be used for transporting materials to and from sheds as well as being used for play.
- Have bags or boxes of themed resources. Bear in mind this takes extra time to organise and keep fresh and don't be precious – adult theme ideas may not match those of the children.

The location of the storage space

Location needs to be discussed with those responsible for the maintenance and management of an outdoor space to ensure:

- Sheds and other large containers are not situated over manholes, drainage holes or water hydrants.
- There may be a need to check plans for the location of underground pipes.
- Access for emergency vehicles.

- The location doesn't provide easy access to a roof, creates a fire risk or a route to climb over a boundary wall.
- That the shed is open prior to children starting a play session – precious time is not lost searching for keys.
- The storage space is sited in the area where the loose parts will be used. Some organisations find that placing storage facilities *en route* to the entrances back into the building makes tidying up easier.

Other considerations

Deciding which loose parts can be left outside:

naturalised play areas with sand, stones, bark chip and vegetation are by their very nature made up of loose parts. Many loose parts are unlikely to be tampered with or stolen and can be left out depending on local circumstances. Some organisations are happy to take a low-key tolerant approach to children playing with loose parts out of hours providing no damage is done. Some organisations may take the view that the storage sheds themselves are the most likely target of vandalism and so some loose parts are less likely to draw unwelcome attention if left out. Sites surrounded by housing may benefit from informal oversight. Use local knowledge to make a judgement.

Size matters: large loose parts can be quicker to tidy away. Little loose parts like cones and shells can easily get scattered outside. Having them as part of the outdoor environment such as a cone pit or using shells as mulch in raised beds and containers means less gathering. Synthetic small items (such as polystyrene packaging or sequins) are difficult to tidy and could impact the environment if left outside so avoid using such materials outside. However, smaller items are sometimes necessary to facilitate play. For instance, many settings provide pegs and sticks to make dens.

Wet items: think about how materials and resources will be dried on inclement days. Quick-dry materials such as tarpaulins and synthetic fabric can be easier to manage than cotton-based materials for den building and dressing up.

Thinking outside the box – creative approaches to storage

Although sheds and storage containers provide ideal storage for loose parts, they may not always present the most realistic or workable option. Sometimes, some creativity is needed when considering the best way to store and provide loose parts.

Concrete Patch project

A group of Cardiff Metropolitan University students has re-energised a tired un-used outdoor concrete space on the university campus and transformed it into a colourful outdoor play, learning and teaching space. The project called for the creative design of storage of loose parts to support children's play.

The team of students from Cardiff School of Art and Design designed and made storage suitable for storing loose parts. The space provides significant benefits for Early Childhood Studies (ECS) and Primary Education Studies students as it offers an additional space to host workshops with students, teachers, school pupils and the local community. As well as providing storage, the colourful boxes have become play features in their

own right – places to sit, hide behind and perch on. The lids and batons of wood used to 'lock' the boxes become shields, swords, conductor batons and fishing poles.

The space shows that playing can be supported even in the most barren of spaces and demonstrates that even small, concrete, 'unusable' spaces are capable of creating inspiring play environments.

Play Stop project

The Play Stop project is a community and school initiative developed across the Vale of Glamorgan in a partnership project led by the Play Development team.

The project recognises that many communities have a number of areas where children can and do play. This could be a cul-de-sac, a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), an open space, or a park.



All too often it is lack of equipment that is a barrier for children to create, build, test, imagine and construct.

The Play Stop is a wheelie bin filled with loose parts such as tubes, nets, rope, material and tarpaulins. The bins are located in communities that have taken a keen interest in supporting children's play and are willing to take responsibility for taking the bin in and out at agreed times of the day. This could be a school, community building, library or shop that is in close proximity to where the children are playing (for ease of use).

Play Box project

Conwy Voluntary Services Council's Play Development Team and Wrexham County Borough Council's Play Development Team, have created a project called Play Box. The boxes are large containers that are put into a space and filled with junk resources for children to play with. The boxes are opened and cleared away by volunteers such as parents and community members. In Conwy, a pilot community was chosen and met with outstanding success and positive comments from both children and parents.

To start the pilot the Play Development Team approached the community house within the area and attended community meetings to introduce the idea of the box. The team worked with a community house worker from Cartrefi Conwy housing association to fix the box in place on their land. Over the school summer holidays parents were supported in opening the box and using the resources. This resulted in volunteers coming forward to act as key holders to the box. Accredited training was delivered to the volunteers and other interested community members as part of the development work surrounding the installation of the box.



In Wrexham, the boxes were placed in primary schools and afterschool clubs. Alongside the provision of boxes of loose parts, the team facilitated a programme of a series of mentoring sessions delivered over a 12 month period which included elements of training around contemporary play theories, planning for play, risk management and reflective practice.

Useful links

Conwy Pop Up Play shop
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/conwypopupcases-tudy

Concrete Patch:
<http://bit.ly/ConcretePatch>

Play boxes:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/wrexhamgreentime-projectcasestudy

Checking loose parts before and during each play session

Undertake an initial risk-benefit assessment before introducing materials and have some basic agreements in place. Children usually make sensible suggestions and solutions.

Checking the space before using loose parts

- Check out the area to be used in advance. Take immediate action to clear up litter, broken glass and dog fouling.
- Cordon off or mark clearly any hazards that can't be dealt with on the spot.
- If hazards can't be dealt with there and then, note any concerns which need to be addressed and pass them to the person responsible for health and safety or risk management.
- If necessary, have an alternative area earmarked for use.
- Never leave hazards undealt with either by immediate action or reporting.
- Check the numbers of children and supporting adults who will be in attendance. This needs to be proportionate to the size of the play area and the amount of resources available. As a rough guide, multiply the number of children by four or five to work out how many items of loose parts you might need.

Checking resources

The loose parts need to be safe enough for children to use. Set up a system of checking any new items, regardless of where or how they were sourced. Common sense will be your best guide but do consider potential risks such as:

- Entrapment of fingers and head
- Loose bits which may come off/choking hazards

- Chemical concerns – for example batteries, and leaky components
- Electrical concern – for example wires, circuits and plugs
- Sharp items
- Likelihood of splintering or shattering, especially under pressure or temperature changes
- Flammability of materials
- Bacterial infection through damp, wet storage or stagnant water.

Think about the actions needed to manage these risks, for example:

- Sand down sharp edges or splintery wood
- Remove protruding wires, staples or nails
- Check pockets and lining of second-hand clothing and accessories
- Wash and clean resources.

Creating a simple checklist with staff, so that they know what checks to make and measures to put in place is a good starting point. Consider whether any of the maintenance work can be undertaken by children. This can be very empowering and helps them understand that they have to manage the loose parts from start to finish.

The risk-benefit assessment should include the measures taken to manage the visible and hidden risks – those which may not be apparent to children. A risk management policy template and risk-benefit assessment example can be found at: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit

Certain aspects of loose parts play require specific maintenance measures. Sand pits require sand to be swept up and to be raked over regularly. Items used in mud play will need to be hosed down from

time to time. It is worth thinking about this aspect of provision before introducing.

Disposing of loose parts

When an item is beyond repair or hazardous, it needs to be removed promptly:

- Most plant material can be composted
- Know which materials may require special disposal methods – contact your local authority waste disposal services
- Replace worn clothing, accessories, nets, tarpaulins and other materials on an ongoing basis.

Adults will need to be proactive to encourage children to put broken or worn items into a specific container or place for repair or removal.

Further reading and resources

North Lanarkshire Council (undated)
This Place is Like a Building Site
<http://bit.ly/NorthLanarkshire>

Routine Play Space checklist:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit



Taster play sessions

Organising introductory play sessions can help children, parents and staff understand what introducing loose parts is all about. Starting with a small group of children usually works best. In a school, have a couple of classes or a mixed age group involved rather than the whole school.

Facilitating the taster sessions

One of the most important aspects to understand is how playworkers facilitate loose parts play and how this compares to current practice. It may be possible to bring in playworkers or a play organisation to run or help run the taster sessions. If not, make sure the person responsible has support and has had opportunities to visit other settings with loose parts play in action.

Raise awareness of the sessions

Ensure everyone knows what loose parts are and the purpose of their introduction. Parents and carers should be informed and asked to ensure that their child has suitable clothing and footwear. See Appendix 3 for a sample staff room poster and Appendix 2 for a sample letter or leaflet to parents. Some settings find that social media is the best way to communicate with parents. A fun and cheery post can engage parents and ensure that they understand how the setting works. Displays with information and photos is another effective way of getting the message across to parents and visitors.

Ensure adults see children playing

It is often seeing children playing with loose parts and how the play is facilitated that helps bring about that all-important 'lightbulb' moment when people start to understand all the benefits and pleasure of loose parts play. In schools, make sure all staff have an opportunity to be involved so that they can see what is happening and witness first-hand the benefits of free play with loose parts.

It is common for the playing to be quite fast and furious initially, especially during the first few sessions as the children are excited about the range of resources. Almost all children settle into immersed play, given enough time. It might be useful to wait until things have settled before inviting in the people you want to persuade of the benefits.

Rough and tumble play was initially seen when the play pods were introduced but *'all schools reported that this phase did not last and that at some point construction play "suddenly" began.'*

Armitage, 2009

Remember to have a debrief afterwards with children and adults

Discuss what worked well and what needs to be remembered when embarking on loose parts play. This is a good time for concerns to be raised and to think of ways to address them. This can be followed up with a further session to create an action plan.

Section 3: Facilitating loose parts play provides useful advice to support staff in the facilitation of taster play sessions.

Open All Hours Project

Play Wales, School of Education, Cardiff Metropolitan University (Early Childhood and Education Studies team) and Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences

Three student volunteers on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood and Education programme at Cardiff Metropolitan University received Introduction to Playwork training to enable them to facilitate after school staffed open access play sessions in three schools.

To engage with children in the schools before the play sessions started, the students used tools from Play Wales' *Right to Play Workshop*. The workshop pack is available to download at: www.playwales.org.uk/eng/righttoplayworkshop

Each of the schools provided space to store materials and resources – loose parts such as tyres, rope, tarpaulins, large pieces of fabric and chalk. Although limited in quantity, the provision of loose parts acted as a springboard for play in each of the three schools. In two of the schools, parents stayed behind with younger children and expressed a desire to help to sustain out of hours access to school grounds.

'For the first few days, there was the constant reliance on a football, and then they'd go off and look through the stuff we had and think "Well what does this do?". Then in the first week, girls were making dresses out of bin bags and using the length of string as necklaces and belts. Then they'd go back to the football and then they'd go and think "What's this big yellow sheet doing?"

As the time progressed more of the children were playing together. In the last week, we didn't even have a football and nobody asked for it. The football wasn't there, and it was raining, so they were like "Oh let's build a den".

'The community where the school was set had very limited space outdoors for children to play and in some cases there were larger families living in small flats with no outdoor space. I felt the project was important as the children were able to play outdoors and burn off some energy after being in school all day.

'After speaking to a number of parents they informed me how their children's behaviour had improved when they were able to stay and play for an hour or so after school. It was also a chance for the parents to relax and watch their children play with the knowledge that their children were in a safe environment.'

Student volunteer, after school play project



Responding to frequently asked questions

As with any new idea or initiative, there will be questions from staff, parents and others involved with the setting. Here, we draw on collective responses from children and practitioners who have contributed to the development of the toolkit.

Are loose parts toys?

The British Standard European Norm (BS EN) 71 Directive defines a toy as ‘any product designed or intended, whether or not exclusively, for use in play by children under 14 years of age’. There are some exceptions to this, such as Christmas novelties. With loose parts, confusion may arise because the materials are not manufactured as toys. For instance, a bread crate is designed and manufactured to be used as a bread crate. It was never designed to be used as a toy, therefore, the Toy Safety Standard BS EN 71 does not apply.

There are lots of resources and products that are used in schools and homes which are not toys. Paper, pencils, wooden spoons, cardboard boxes are not toys, yet we give them to children to use on a daily basis. Children need to experience using such products and resources. It is necessary to learn how to live in a world which is ungovernable by safety standards for every facet of our lives.

Does playing with loose parts cause more accidents and injuries?

The intention of supplying loose parts for play is to provide more varied opportunities for children to play. Children may take risks through their play. However, we know that taking managed risk is an important part of children’s healthy development. Exposing children to opportunities that involve risk taking allows them to learn to manage risk independently.

The Scrapstore Playpod® project notes that ‘during the research phase of the project where 9 schools participated, it was recorded that there was a significant reduction, between 50% and 70%, in recorded minor accidents and injuries’.

Are loose parts safe for children to play with?

There are some common steps that are taken to ensure that all materials provided for children’s play do not present an unnecessary hazard.

These include:

- All resources are assessed for suitability by staff before the children use it
- The session is supervised
- Staff support children in their play
- Positive interventions are made when necessary
- Equipment is checked regularly for suitability.

All resources and loose parts are monitored and thrown away or recycled if things become unsafe or hazardous to the children’s play.

How does all this stuff get put away?

Some settings will be able to leave some larger loose parts out. If they need to be put away, settings can encourage children to be involved in the tidy up process. Although some children may find this difficult and unappealing, on the whole, most settings manage to develop a tidy up strategy that is easy to implement.

Mess and mud tips

- Having a shoe changing area outside: rubber playground matting can help drain water away
 - Having scrubbing brushes and water available for children to scrub down their muddy clothing and footwear before entering buildings
 - Large matting that is designed to absorb wetness at the entrances into buildings
 - Sufficient cloakroom space or places to hang or store wet clothing
 - Commercial drying units can be used which are surprisingly effective
- Set up temporary washing lines
 - A dirty cupboard, where you store all your dirty muddy equipment
 - An outside tap, with a simple shower head attached if possible, or a big Belfast sink outside means you can clean things outside rather than bringing them in
 - The problem is dirty stuff in clean spaces so you need a transition space
 - Stay outdoors!



© New Model Army Photography

'After the first month of the loose parts sessions being introduced at a school in Flintshire the number of accident forms being completed reduced from 50 to 20. It would therefore appear that there is early evidence of a reduction in accidents. It basically reduces collisions due to the space being used less for locomotor types of play exclusively.'

Simon Bazley, Playful Futures

3. Facilitating loose parts play

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The role of adults

'Playworkers and play rangers turn physical spaces into places of opportunity, imagination and belonging. For many children in many places, investing in hardware will never be enough. The best opportunities to play are shaped by people – the "software" of play.'
Beunderman, 2010

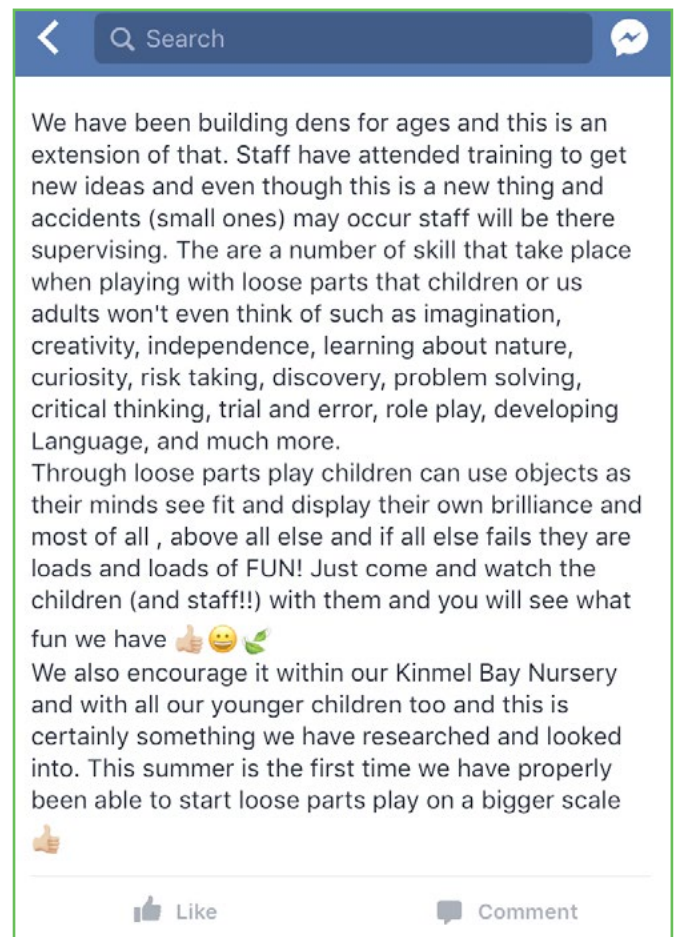
The development of any play provision is more than the gaining of materials. Adults who understand their role in facilitating free play with loose parts have a crucial role. The Playwork Principles (Appendix 1) are a professional and ethical framework, providing useful guidance.

Playwork Principle 2: Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

Playwork Principle 3: The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

Adults who work with children should have access to training and support for their role in this development. This goes beyond those who work at the frontline. Managers and head teachers have to invest time and strong support; staff who manage the land have to understand that children have a right to play and that this needs to be enabled rather than confined and restricted by management agreements and health and safety fears.

Adults who work with children also have the responsibility of being a role model. Children observe the behaviour, words and actions of adults in their lives. So, adults need to be aware of exhibiting positive messages about play and about valuing the benefits of being outside, for example: being willing to pick up litter; expressing interest in a worm that a child has found; appreciating children's rickety self-built creations and being proactive about addressing environmental issues and matters. Working with children to establish and agree ground rules can be a very effective way of helping them to identify and manage their own behaviour and understand that of their peers.



Little Lambs Nursery introducing the idea of loose parts to parents through their Facebook page

Playground supervision

Rather than policing play, the role of staff supervising the playground changes to:

- Providing an environment that has lots of play possibility
- Deciding what materials and spaces will be available for a particular play session
- Creating an environment where children feel empowered to take control and direct play
- Involving children in the development of a minimum set of basic rules of conduct, especially relating to safety and mutual respect
- Standing back and allowing children to lead their play and resisting the temptation to suggest activities or mediate in disputes
- Observing 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 – and the impact of this on children
- Using this understanding to inform future decisions about resources, materials and boundaries
- Ensuring that children take responsibility for managing materials including tidying up and storage
- Only intervening when absolutely necessary for children's welfare.

Learning through Landscapes (2013)
The Good School Playground Guide

Top tips for developing your playwork practice and supporting children's play

The more children play the more playful they are likely to become. Being playful ourselves can also encourage play but as a general principle we should be cautious about getting too involved when children are playing. However we should get involved when:

- Children ask for it. Sometimes children will directly ask us to play. At other times this invitation may be subtle and may consist of a nod, a wink, a grin or a hundred other small signals. These invitations or cues mean we need to stay vigilant so we can recognise the cues and respond. All children give out these cues and they can come at any time.
- Children need us to act as a resource, such as providing an extra pair of hands.
- A child is unhappy or distressed. This requires a great deal of sensitivity to judge accurately and is an area where knowledge of the child or children involved is especially important.
- There are serious disputes that the children have been unable to resolve themselves. Again these situations require great sensitivity. We need to listen and observe and be wary of jumping to conclusions as often children are able to resolve disputes themselves. Children greatly prize fairness in adults who are involved in their play.
- There is violence, harm or danger. No one wants to see any child seriously hurt or injured and it is our responsibility to ensure the play environment feels safe and secure even when children are engaged in risky activities.
- When there is a hazard that has not been detected by the child. While many children are very capable of assessing familiar and obvious dangers this is not the case for unseen or unknown hazards.

A study undertaken by Glyndŵr University indicates that access to quality play opportunities supported by playworkers during playtime helps improve activity levels (Taylor, Tawil and Baker 2014). In a school based research project across six schools in Wrexham, physical activity levels of children were assessed in normal playtime and in sessions, which were led by playworkers. Playworkers operated under the Playwork Principles and implemented a playwork intervention. In the playwork led sessions, children were given access to a wide range of loose parts and encouraged to engage in self-directed play, as part of this playwork intervention.

Children wore heart rate monitors and accelerometers to build up a picture of the children's physical activity levels. Physical activity was measured using different intensities; moderate physical activity (MPA), vigorous physical activity (VPA) and a combination of the two; moderate and vigorous physical activity (MVPA). The study showed:

- Loose parts play increased MPA, VPA and MVPA when the initial levels of physical activity were taken into account.
- Loose parts play had a greater effect on girls and significantly increased the amount of health enhancing physical activity undertaken.
- Loose parts play increased physical activity in those individuals and schools that had previously been the least active.
- Providing loose parts offered a more inclusive approach to school play time. The provision of a plentiful supply of materials enabled a more inclusive and democratic use of the space, particularly for those children who do not naturally get involved in more traditional play time activity (such as team sports).



Further reading and viewing

Play Wales' PLAY | CHWARAE short film:
bit.ly/PLAYCHWARAE

The Playtime Revolution videos and support material created by Grounds for Learning and Education Scotland may be useful for professional discussions as part of the training:
www.ttl.org.uk/learning/PlaytimeRevolution

Play Wales information sheets, for example:
The Role of adults in children's play and
The Playwork Principles – an overview
all available to download at:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/information sheets

Setting up loose parts play routines

Thinking about the outdoor space

It may be helpful to identify a designated area within the grounds or play space so that children can immerse themselves in loose parts play without coming into conflict with or being displaced by other interests such as football. Tidying up might also be quicker. In time, this can change as everyone gets used to the routines and further play areas such as sandpits or muddy areas are developed.

Access by all at all times

Loose parts play lends itself to all ages playing together with children accessing the loose parts when they wish to, rather than being restricted by a rota or similar. As much as possible, adults should let children play and only intervene as necessary. Unobtrusive observation of play can provide very useful insights and is an essential skill in facilitating play. Children provide non-verbal cues that indicate levels of engagement and wellbeing. Being aware of this is particularly important when working with children who have limited verbal communication.

'We do still have resources and toys. However, the staff are so much more confident with the loose parts equipment and all children use them. Babies use the pallets to climb over, toddlers use the bread crates to jump off and build a bridge, pre school use the tools to hammer and build and after school attempt something new every night with the loose parts in the garden.'

Sam Maitland-Price, Nursery Manager

'Children were more active – all the children not just those who were usually active, and everyone reported back that more mixed age/gender play took place and less disagreements.'

Gill Byrne, Executive Officer,
RAY Ceredigion

Playing out in all weathers

Playing outside should be encouraged all year round. This allows children to further experiment and use the elements to their advantage. Think ahead about clothing, footwear and the management of wet gear. If your organisation does not have outdoor shelters, consider opening a room indoors so there is a choice available for children who wish to remain inside.

'Even on wet days the shed is opened and the children have taken control of what is coming out and what needs to stay inside to keep dry. I can count on one hand the arguments we have had to sort out since the shed has arrived and usually it's about who wears the wedding dress.'

Midday Supervisor, Ysgol Llanfynydd
(Playful Futures School project)

Agreements about use of loose parts

Children should be fully involved in setting up agreements and expectations about playing with and managing the loose parts. Complex or hard-and-fast rules may not help as much as simple, understandable prompts to make managing loose parts easy, for example a laminated 'sunshine' sheet showing that a resource is best used when the weather is dry.

Tidying up and keeping loose parts

Tidying up and keeping the loose parts is part of the process and routines for doing this need to be agreed. In most settings, keeping resources is part of the process that enables loose parts play to happen on an ongoing basis. These routines might begin five minutes before the end of the session, with signals for children to wind up their play.

Depending on the context there are advantages to leaving loose parts out in the setting so that children can return to things they have started to construct. Children often gain inspiration from the other children's half-made or abandoned creations and use them as a starting point for their play. There is also an argument that children benefit more from the immersion in play and so tidying up is less important than the play benefits. Think carefully about the practicalities and what's reasonable in a particular setting.



The Wonder Room – inclusive loose parts play inside for all ages

'A "Wonder Room" is a concept with roots in the traditions of curiosity cabinets. It began as a room at Nottingham University Samworth Academy (NUSA) where students go and explore at advertised times. There is stuff everywhere. Suitcases and boxes ooze materials, walls and even ceilings are filled with ideas. The tables and shelves have items crammed upon them. It is a space where children can share wonderful things through carefully put together collections of interesting exhibits – both natural objects and artefacts. These are grouped in themes which change as items get worn or broken or used-up and others are donated or created. It is a place for direct, shared experiences, for conversations, surprises, humour, and the "hook" of interest.

It is rare that direct formal teaching happens, although 'teachable moments' are frequent. The children simply play with the stuff and in their interactions become curators, guides and enthusiasts. Some days the room may be filled with the sound of shrieks – when a particularly smelly plant or surprise object has been discovered. At other times, silence descends and only the tapping of typewriter keys and pings can be heard.

Some of the key concepts that underpin the room are theatre, treasure, plentitude, meaningfulness, variety, novelty, access, mystery, surprise, aesthetics, organised chaos, real ownership and co-construction. It is an inclusive approach to offering loose parts inside that anyone of any age can access. Matthew McFall, the founder, has always insisted that growing and promoting the idea are key – the energy of wonderment extends beyond the Wonder Room into classrooms and shared school spaces and, more importantly, into pupils' homes and lives.

Introducing and embedding loose parts play

Suggested starting points for regular sessions

- Begin with a play session in one part of the outdoor space for a small mixed-age group once per week until adults and children acclimatise and routines around tidying up and managing the resources are establishing themselves.
- Introduce gradually, starting with the older children, working down the school/setting and then integrating everyone. If the older children feel some ownership, it can lead to eagerness to support the younger children to use the items and play with them.
- Introduce one type of resource at a time. Some organisations begin with tyres, then add in stumps, then den building kits. New resources may be highlighted at the start of the session and issues around their use discussed as necessary.

- Employ a playworker to work alongside staff to model good practice and help to embed the systems.

When working with children and young people who do not express themselves verbally, adults should take care in their observations and interactions to introduce loose parts which match their interests, with appropriate adaptations where necessary. For example, providing cobble stones which are too large to swallow may give endless hours of interest to a baby who enjoys investigating heavy items or a child who explores their environment through putting items in their mouth.

Showing children photos of themselves playing outside and offering a range of loose part materials to choose to use, can help some children remember previous sessions and provide a springboard to becoming immersed in play.



Keeping the momentum going

As with all activities, interests increase and decrease from time to time. Sometimes there is a flurry of den building over several weeks and this is replaced with another interest such as creating obstacle courses and so on. Most children will happily initiate and generate ideas without any prompting. However, temporary items can be added to the core collection of loose parts to celebrate the seasons, cultural events or specific child-led interests. Here are some examples:

- Develop collections of themes based upon colours and light, textures, sounds, water, mud, sand, constructions, etc. This can be a way of involving children in gathering additional resources from home and the local community.
- In spring, leave grassy areas to grow dandelions, buttercups and daisies. These are all robust plants with high play value that can withstand being picked.
- Metal magic week – save up donations of tin foil and aluminium. Add in foil space blankets.
- Bring in some hay bales – these are fantastic for construction and defining spaces. Hay does go everywhere so be prepared for this, however it can be gathered and used as mulch or compost in due course.
- Have a ‘Challenge of the Week’ using children’s ideas which can be announced in assembly or at the start of the session, for example ‘I wonder who can build an interesting robot and what would it do...’
- Make a request for real Christmas trees to be donated after the holidays so that the branches can be used or pretend forests created.
- Keep the long plant stalks and other dead plant material after a winter garden clearance.
- Make a call out for leaves, conkers and pine cones in autumn.

Playing is an everyday experience, but linking it to days of celebration help to advocate for play to a large audience. A calendar of dates:

- **World Play Day** – annually in May. Toy Libraries worldwide invite the celebration of play.
- **International Mud Day** – annually in June. Invite parents to join in!
- **UK Playday** – first Wednesday in August. Perfect for summer holiday fun.
- **Universal Children’s Day** – 20 November. Celebrate the right to play in the autumn.



Simple changes that can be facilitated to keep the play going

Take a three-dimensional view of every space and make the most of its affordance for all types of play. Consider:

Levels: Think about the availability of levels

- Going below ground level e.g. by digging a hole or jumping in a puddle
- Working at ground level
- Waist height – at a table or on a wall
- Opportunities to directly experience height including stretching or stepping up to reach, for example a jerry can of water attached high up
- Objects hanging down – from a rope line or tree branches.

Surfaces

- Switch from horizontal to vertical
- Work on either side of a wall or above or below a surface, e.g. under as well as on top of a bench
- Create a slope e.g. water slide on the flat surface, to one on a gentle hill
- Change the angle of the slope, e.g. steep to gentle using tarpaulins or guttering
- Change the surface, e.g. grass to tarmac, add bubble wrap down a slide, or have different materials available.

Transporting – objects, materials and self

- Containers: bring in different types and variety. Big containers are especially useful for people to get into
- Add wheels: bring along wheelbarrows, trolleys, suitcases including pulley systems

- Have materials around which can be transported or moved e.g. leaves, water and soil
- Space to run and move about.

Add holes

- Holes are useful for posting stuff through, poking tubes through, adding guttering and playing games. This includes cardboard window frames, bore pipes and plastic tubes
- Make holes into a container which can be moved around e.g. plastic tubes that can be bent
- Create or poke holes into containers so that water or dry sand leaks out.

Partitions and flaps

- Create entrances and exits e.g. piece of material hung up
- Create dams and places that stop the movement of water, sand or other materials
- Create partitions e.g. dens can have rooms, children can work on different tarps laid on the ground.

This advice is adapted from Tom Bedard's Design Elements which can be found at:

<http://tomsensori.blogspot.co.uk>



Semi-permanent play structures

Often children and adults want to make semi-permanent structures which provide children with opportunities to learn life skills such as planning, design and construction. The use of real tools and the time spent working alongside competent adults is a valuable and memorable experience for many children and young people.

When creating play structures with children:

- The children's needs and interests should drive the project, not the adult desires.
- If off-site, the landowner or manager needs to be consulted beforehand and permission sought.

- Find out whether there are any public liability, access, health and safety or engineering and structural matters which need to be addressed.
- Check there are no underground utilities such as water pipes which may be affected by the plans.
- Consider whether the organisation has the appropriate staffing, resources and competences to undertake the project. If not, find out who can assist in either a paid or voluntary capacity and ensure that safeguarding measures are in place.
- The building or installation needs to be risk assessed as well as the management and use of the structure once it has been made.

Further reading

Harrop, P. (2006) *Rope swings, dens, A risk based approach for managers facilitating self-built play structures and activities in woodland settings*. Forestry Commission England.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) provides advice and guidance about play structures:
www.rosipa.com/play-safety

Muddy Faces booklets on den building and mud kitchens:
www.muddyfaces.co.uk



Risk-benefit assessment for loose parts play

Playing with loose parts all-year round in almost all weathers provides children with experiences which cannot be replicated inside. Alongside this comes the opportunity to develop a range of skills which prepare children for life. As its name suggests, a risk-benefit assessment is an approach to risk management which considers these benefits alongside the risks.

It is a concept which is supported by the Health and Safety Executive in their high-level statement, *Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach* (2012). It is about taking a balanced and proportionate approach to the risk assessment process.

The unique context of each organisation influences the benefits and the risks around the use of loose parts. The differing physical, social and cognitive abilities of children and young people have to be taken into account, as must the prevailing weather conditions and the environment. The facilitation of play needs constant adjusting to reflect this through dynamic risk-benefit assessment. This is where the professional judgement of an adult is needed to decide if any intervention is necessary. For example, children who are new to a setting may initially need a closer eye kept on them than children who know the resources, routines and procedures.

Risk management involves a number of elements:

- A play policy setting out the approach to risk in play
- Written risk-benefit assessments containing judgments and actions to be taken
- Where adults are present, dynamic (on-the-spot) risk-benefit assessment of play as it happens
- For fixed equipment, technical inspections.

As much as possible, make the process of risk-benefit assessment participative and involve children, parents and staff who work with children. As well as gathering different points of view, it will ensure greater support and understanding from the whole community.

Consider how children are involved in the risk-benefit process. It should be a positive approach that uses common sense, appropriate language and is pitched at an appropriate level. For example, the phrase 'What do we need to remember when playing with...' is a useful opener that avoids overtly focusing on the risks. When children raise a concern, adults can ask for their advice about managing this concern, which promotes the value of children being capable of problem solving and taking responsibility for themselves and looking out for others.

Keep the written risk-benefit assessments up-to-date. Encourage everyone to help keep them fresh, especially if a minor accident or near miss occurs. They need to be living, working documents that accurately reflect procedures and practice. Think about where they need to be displayed or kept to ensure this happens.

If the play provision is run or managed by a local authority or larger organisation, then you will have to follow its risk assessment procedures. These may not include reference to the benefits. In this situation, attach the benefits as a separate sheet or add an extra column to the standard risk assessment forms used. This can be done in several ways:

- Stating the general benefits of outdoor play
- Stating the specific benefits of using loose parts
- Stating the specific benefit in relation to the specific risk, for example the benefits of children playing when it is wet or icy outside.

'Those providing play opportunities should focus on controlling the real risks, while securing or increasing the benefits – not on the paperwork.'

Health and Safety Executive

Further reading and templates

Barclay, M. Bazley, S. and Bullough, D. (2016) *Dynamic risk management of common but potentially hazardous play behaviours - guidance paper*

<http://bit.ly/dynamicrisk>

Play Wales: a risk-benefit assessment template/ example designed to include value-based risk-benefit assessment as described in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) endorsed *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation guide*

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit

Ball, D., Gill, T., Spiegel, B. (2012) *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide*. London: National Children's Bureau

www.playwales.org.uk/eng/riskresearch

Health and Safety Executive (2012) *Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach*

www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf

Developing an action plan

Action plans can be created once the community of a setting has had an opportunity to see or be involved in a loose parts play session. Bear in mind, introducing loose parts play can be a significant undertaking in a large organisation such as a school so an action plan can be a useful implementation tool. Involve children as much as possible in action planning.

- What is the intended outcome? Have a clear vision. Refer back to the audit.
- What needs to be done, by whom and by when? Do this step-by-step:
 - Where will the loose parts be stored and accessed?
 - Where will the loose parts be used outside and are any modifications to the space required?
 - How will loose parts be gathered?
 - Developing a system for checking incoming loose parts
 - Developing a system for using and maintaining loose parts – what routines need to be put in place or changing?
 - Plan how the loose parts play sessions will be introduced
 - Create a risk-benefit assessment
 - Monitor and refine the loose parts play sessions
 - Re-visit the original audit and evaluate the impact
 - Keeping the loose parts play going. What will be needed to ensure this provision becomes embedded into the life of the organisation?

- What problems may need to be overcome and what strategies will be used to address these problems? This is particularly important so that concerns are mitigated and stakeholders know that their views are being taken on board.
- Has everyone who needs to be involved had an opportunity to have their say?
- Does the action plan need to link to wider improvements within the organisation and current local or national initiatives?

Appendix 4 includes an example of an action plan prepared by Aberdeen Play Forum and a blank template.



Developing a play statement or policy

'Play is first and foremost the process of a child's own, self-directed learning and as such is a process that has a validity for all ages of children. It is a such a vital component of a child's life that the child's capacity for positive development will be inhibited or constrained if denied free access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.'

Welsh Government Play Policy

It may be beneficial to create, with the input of the children and wider community, a play statement or policy as part of the approach to introducing loose parts play. The statement or policy will help create a shared understanding of play in the setting, and help new staff or prospective parents to understand that children have the right, the time, and the space to play on a daily basis, including outside as much as possible.

It is worth re-visiting the original audit of play undertaken to consider the impact of the changes made. What improvements have happened? Look for ways of capturing the evidence and seeking the viewpoints of all stakeholders. If necessary, link this to the self-evaluation approaches used by the organisation to consider the next steps.

Schools, early years and childcare centres may choose to have explicit reference to why outdoor play and loose parts play are part of the overall ethos and approach to learning and teaching and this could also be included in other relevant policies (for example, health and safety, learning and teaching). Remember to include informative statements in any organisational material such as handbooks and websites.

'Despite the obvious changes to the play environment, the introduction of loose parts was not the most crucial element to improving the conditions for play in schools and out of school clubs. Instead it was primarily the development of a play policy that brought about the change in attitude and practice of staff to allow more play opportunities (including the use of loose parts) to happen.'

Play Development Team,
Wrexham County Borough Council

In community-based projects, it is also important to create a policy or statement which will allow new users to understand the ethos of the group and again tie in with any other relevant policies. Clearly laying out the aims and objectives and the overall impact being worked towards will be useful for funding applications.

Appendix 6 provides an example of a play policy statement

Further reading

Welsh Government Play Policy documents:
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/walesplaypolicy

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4. Appendices

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Appendix 1: The Playwork Principles

These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork, and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people.

They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and wellbeing of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.
3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.
4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and wellbeing of children.

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005
www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples

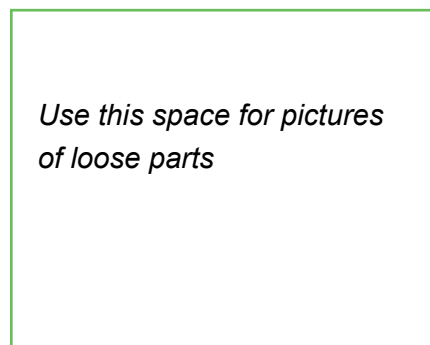
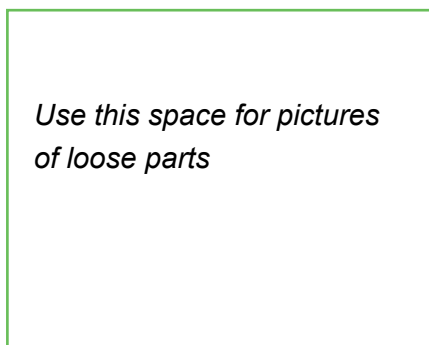
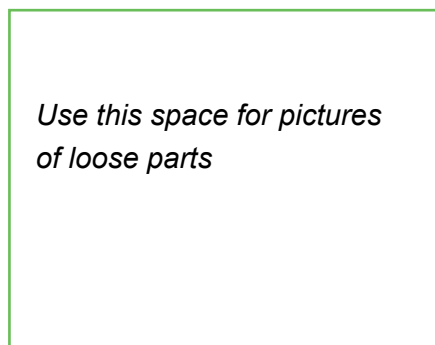
The *Pocket Guide to Playwork* published by SkillsActive is a useful free download
<http://bit.ly/pocketplayworkguide>

The Playwork Principles – an overview information sheet published by Play Wales
<http://bit.ly/principlesoverview>

Appendix 2: Sample parent letter/leaflet

Introducing loose parts play

This term we are introducing loose parts play. Staff will be encouraging children to use their imagination, playing with resources including cardboard boxes, tyres, bread baskets, tarpaulins, wooden planks and plastic guttering. These are called 'loose parts'.



They can be used in many different ways, allowing children to make anything from a pirate ship or castle to an assault course or den.

Loose parts play will happen within class time and during play time; it will be a chance for children to:

- Play freely with friends
- Investigate
- Discover
- Explore
- Create
- Use lots of trial and error to learn for themselves
- Learn to make their own judgments about adventurous play and recognising safe limits.

Please ensure your children are dressed for the weather so they can join in properly – they might need wellies, waterproof jackets, gloves or sunscreen, sun hats etc. depending on the weather.

- Staff and children will be working together to introduce the loose parts.
- Staff will receive additional training to further support the children's play.

- Issues including how to use the resources safely have been investigated.
- Children will be involved in discussing health and safety issues.
- All items will be checked initially and on a regular basis for safety.

Parents and carers

Would you like to come and see what's happening? Get in touch and we'll arrange a suitable time.

Do you have resources to donate? We will need a supply of loose parts to keep things interesting. Currently we are looking for:

-
-
-

Let us know if you'd like someone to collect donated items.

Appendix 3: Sample poster for staff room

(produced by Playful Futures)



The Playful Futures project is bringing a shed stocked with play resources called loose parts to try and support more playful playtimes in this school. The term 'loose parts' was first coined by the architect Simon Nicholson in the 1970s who proposed that the more moveable and adaptable materials an environment contained the more creative and inventive children would be. Once the project is underway the children will then be able to play with the stuff however they choose under the supervision of the midday staff who will be encouraged to adopt a playwork approach to further extend and enhance children's play opportunities.

We would really appreciate your help on an ongoing basis to help gather new and interesting things to facilitate and encourage play at playtimes. We suspect that you, your family and/or neighbours will have all sorts of playful junk in your attics, garages, wardrobes etc. and we want it! Stuff like:

Cardboard boxes (the bigger the better ... new dishwasher? fridge freezer?)

(Watch 'Adventures of a Cardboard Box' or 'Caine's Arcade' on YouTube for inspiration!)

Pieces of fabric such as old blankets, sheets or curtains and/or sticks from pruned trees for den building, milk crates, bread trays, plastic boxes,

dressing up stuff like hats, scarves, dresses (the brighter and more interesting the better, with bonus points for wedding dresses!), old household items like pots and pans, wooden spoons, mixing bowls, telephones, computer keyboards, remote controls, buckets, clothes pegs, bits of scrap wood, rope, old guttering, hosepipes, cable reels, cushions, carpet off-cuts ...

The list is infinite and we want literally anything that you think has play value!

All that we ask is that you use a bit of common sense as we don't want anything that is likely to cause injury such as items with sharp edges. Once the shed arrives a designated person from the midday team can arrange to check the stuff for play value and suitability before it goes into the shed.

So, start thinking, start searching, start gathering and let's get playful!

Thanks from Simon @ Playful Futures and the Play Champions

'Playing in a space rich with loose parts supports a wide range of development including flexibility, creativity, imagination, resourcefulness, problem solving, self-esteem and spatial awareness.'
Play Wales

Appendix 4: Example action plan for introducing loose parts play

(produced by Aberdeen Play Forum)

Implementing Loose Parts Action Plan

Action	By when (achievable date)	Completed
<p>Discuss theory of loose parts with entire staff team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all staff team are enthused about implementing loose parts • Ensure all staff read the <i>Resources for playing - providing loose parts to support children's play</i> toolkit • Encourage staff to attend loose parts play training • Undertake an audit of current practice 		
<p>Send out introductory information to parents/carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are loose parts? • Why is free play so important? • Add information that the children will be involved in loose parts play and they will be outdoors more • Be aware of children's access to outdoors – providing appropriate clothing 		
<p>Secure appropriate storage</p>		
<p>Start collecting loose parts</p> <p>Don't introduce to the children just yet... (Before use, each item should be checked and risk-benefit assessed – this can be done very quickly and simply together with staff and children. This process can be easily integrated into existing routines – see below)</p>		
<p>Children to write letters to local businesses, family and friends to request donations for the loose parts kit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including writing and drawings 		

<p>Introduce loose parts to children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tidy up routines • Routines for using the loose parts (safety) • Introduce items gradually – (risk-benefit assess each item with the children) 		
<p>Maintain the loose parts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the gathered loose parts are ready and suitable for playing with • Check anything that requires fixing, discarding or replacing has been dealt with 		
<p>Develop a play policy/statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This could be a play policy • Play statement • Play strategy • And/or including ‘play’ into health and safety/other policies 		
<p>Put a loose parts article into each newsletter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform families of what the children have been up to with the loose parts kit • The benefits of implementing loose parts has had on the children 		
<p>Create a loose parts information leaflet</p> <p><i>Could link in with the introductory information or a new leaflet on loose parts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are loose parts? • The benefits of play • Challenging play or adventurous play • Appropriate clothing for all weather conditions or muddy play • Top tips • Donation list – suggested items to donate <p><i>Could this be added into the induction packs?</i></p>		
<p>Keep loose parts risk-benefit assessments up to date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s a working document – update as new loose parts arrive or issues arise with certain items • Review every six months 		
<p>Host a family fun day for parents and carers to experience loose parts in action</p>		

Action	By when (achievable date)	Completed
<p>Discuss theory of loose parts with entire staff team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Send out introductory information to parents/carers</p> <p>Main points to cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Secure appropriate storage</p> <p>Proposed storage solutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Start collecting loose parts</p> <p>Proposed methods/sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Introduce loose parts to children</p> <p>Proposed schedule and steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Risk-benefit assessments</p> <p>Forms and procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		

<p>Forms and procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the gathered loose parts are ready and suitable for playing with • Checks have been undertaken and anything that requires fixing, discarding or replacing has been dealt with 		
<p>Develop a play policy or statement</p> <p>Steps to be taken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Put a loose parts article into each newsletter</p> <p>Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Create a loose parts information leaflet</p> <p>Topics to cover</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Keep loose parts risk-benefit assessments up-to-date</p> <p>Paperwork and assessment, review plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • 		
<p>Host an open loose parts play session or day for parents and carers to experience loose parts in action</p>		

Appendix 5: Tried and tested loose parts

Natural	Man-made
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooden pennies (slices of wood about three inches thick) • Logs of different heights and widths • A variety of lengths of wood • Willow or hazel rods at least 1.5m long • Sticks – various lengths • Whisky barrel planters: for mixing and collecting <p>Surfaces and features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planted willow tunnels, dens and fedges (a fence / hedge) • Water: supplied from an outside tap, a barrel pump, water butt or jerry cans with taps • Sand (and small resources for sand play and maintenance – including sieves, buckets, spades, trowels, long handled sturdy brooms, brushes and rakes) • Gravel • Bark chips • Mud • Long grass • Trees – worthwhile planting for future generations of children • Fire pit (temporary or permanent) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick drying materials such as fabric, fleece blankets and shower curtains • Tarpaulins (various sizes and colours – big, small, green, blue, white, transparent) • Milk and bread crates • Wooden pallets – tough ones • Tough buckets • Cable drums or reels • Tubes, guttering and funnels (plastic or bamboo), hosepipe or bore pipes • Nets • Tyres – bicycle, motorbike and car • Large shallow tray • Trolley on wheels to help aid tidying up, e.g. garden trolley or sack trolley, tub truck trolley, large metal trolley or small trolley • Wheelbarrow • Old suitcases • Baskets for collecting or transporting • Resources to enhance small world play, e.g. mini figures, dinosaurs and vehicles • Steering wheels • Computer keyboards • Old clothes for dressing up, e.g. jacket suits, waistcoats and handbags • Portable seats, sit-upons: aluminium bubble-wrap, camping ones or gardening mats
More temporary	Useful little bits (some may be kept by adults in pockets or bags)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chalk • Straw bales • Cardboard boxes – various sizes and shapes • Leaves, feathers, shells, pine cones • Stones, pebbles, cobbles • Air drying modelling clay • Tree branches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Velcro straps • Fence clamps and hooks • String, cord, 'high vis guy ropes' • Big karabiners • Pegs • Duct tape, masking tape

Appendix 6: Play statement example

The Welsh Government places great value on play and its importance in the lives of children in our society. We believe that children have a fundamental right to be able to play, and that play is central to their enjoyment of life and contributes to their wellbeing.

Welsh Government, 2014

[school/setting/group name] recognises the importance of all the children who attend having sufficient time and good places to play freely as part of their day.

To children, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. Playing contributes to children's health, wellbeing and happiness as well as to their learning and their ability to learn. Some children only have the opportunity to play with their friends at school. Most importantly playing contributes to children's ability to thrive and survive.

We believe that we can make a very positive contribution to children's lives by valuing their urge and desire to play and providing for a broad range of play opportunities within the school's playground before, during and after the school day.

This school/setting/group recognises that children will naturally create and/or seek out challenging situations; while making the most of their play some children may have accidents, get dirty or wet or upset. We recognise that any potential risk of harm to children needs to be balanced with the potential for good that may come from their taking part in a particular form of play. We will do our best to avoid children coming to serious physical or emotional harm by carefully managing the play opportunities that we provide.

This school/setting/group believes that adults' attitude towards, and understanding of, children's play behaviour will have a significant effect on the quality of the play opportunities offered within and outside the school/setting/group. This school/setting/group will therefore seek out training opportunities and support research among its staff so that they are confident to facilitate children's freely chosen, self-directed play.

Appendix 7: Loose parts play and Welsh Inspectorate Frameworks

Estyn's *Common Inspection Framework* and Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales' (CSSIW) *Inspection guide for child minding, daycare and open access play* both include and promote outcomes which relate to wellbeing, care, learning and development and the environment.

The inclusive, collaborative and rights based approach to embedding loose parts play advocated for in this toolkit can assist schools, early years and childcare settings to respond to the advice and expectations of the inspectorates, particularly if:

- Children and young people of all ages and abilities are active participants in the process of gathering, maintaining and playing with loose parts. In this way, introducing and embedding loose parts play is a relevant context for learning.
- As much as possible the process is integrated into ongoing class and session activity.
- Paperwork and documentation are kept to a minimum: examples of different sorts have been provided which can be quickly adapted as needed.

The benefits of embedding loose parts play are covered in Section 1: Loose parts. Children need time to play. The chance to explore, experiment, create and be active through free play with loose parts, all contribute to improving children's health and wellbeing. This is particularly beneficial when it happens in a natural space. Nature can have a restorative impact that makes children feel better able to concentrate afterwards.

Embedding loose parts links to many aspects of the Estyn *Common Inspection Framework*, particularly:

- Wellbeing and attitudes to learning
- Learning experiences
- Care support and guidance.

Embedding loose parts play links to these key areas of the CSSIW inspection framework:

- Wellbeing
- Care and development
- Environment.

Playing is crucial to children's physical, mental, social and emotional health and wellbeing, and therefore to their families and to communities as a whole. Children have an inborn urge to play – research suggests that playing has an impact on the physical and chemical development of the brain – it 'influences children's ability to adapt to, survive, thrive and shape their social and physical environments' (Lester and Russell, 2008).

Wellbeing

Children develop confidence when free play is facilitated in line with the Playwork Principles. They explore their ideas and have an opportunity to act out situations as a way of making sense of the world, developing their values and beliefs. They learn to self-regulate their behaviour and how to relate to others. In turn, this develops their self-awareness.

Outdoor free play with loose parts is an essential part of a healthy and active lifestyle. It helps children assess different sorts of risk and make informed decisions. Children can achieve success in play which may be less visible in a formal learning context.

A participative approach to introducing loose parts enables children and young people to be active citizens and develop their sense of belonging to their school community.

Attitudes to learning and learning experiences

Playing enables children and young people to develop experience, knowledge and judgement skills. The approach to introducing, embedding and playing with loose parts appeals to children and young people. They become enthusiastic and motivated to play and learn outside. Links are made between home, class and the playground with the skills and ideas being transferred.

The high affordance of loose parts creates possibilities that encourage children to be open to new thinking and ideas. They communicate with each other and apply their literacy and maths skills in their play. Children play both in groups and independently. Their constructions require critical thinking, constant evaluation and experimentation to achieve success. Learning happens through playing.

Embedding loose parts play enables children and young people to learn life skills such as:

- Making sensible choices about resources for play and how to source and care for these.
- Problem solving strategies by having to sort out real issues which arise both in the introduction of loose parts and also through playing with them.
- Facilitating the children's creative and imaginative play thereby developing their capacity to think.
- Working with others through a process of change.

Care, development, support and guidance

Loose parts play provides a context where children and young people learn through their interactions with others:

- The provision of open-ended resources that frequently require co-operation between children during their play.
- Providing a context where children have opportunities to interact with other children and develop the social and cognitive skills necessary for understanding and being able to reach out to others. Everyone needs compassionate friends.
- Having to consider the needs and perspective of the whole setting. This is about developing personal and social responsibility. For example, ensuring that everyone helps to tidy up after a session.
- Understanding that all children have an equal right to play.
- Accepting that how we relate to others has both positive and negative consequences. This can be experienced through adults facilitating loose parts play sessions in ways that give every child the opportunity to explore social and emotional risk taking and decision making.

Facilitating loose parts play enables:

- Children and young people to experience situations which require them to consider how they treat others.
- Democratic decision-making processes to be explored through both the process of embedding loose parts play as well as the play itself.

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