

PI A manifesto for Play

Policy proposals for children's play in England



The importance of play

Play is vital for all children and young people. It's the main way they enjoy their daily lives, make friends and learn about the world around them.

Through play children develop social, physical and cognitive skills, creativity, cultural awareness and resilience. They learn to manage risks, make decisions and develop their identities.

Children play whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Play is different from adult-led or sport-based activities. When they play, children follow their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way.

Play is essential for happy, healthy, capable and resilient children.

The role of government

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires governments to respect, protect and fulfil the right to play of all children through legislation, planning and budgets.

However, children are experiencing many barriers to play including traffic, crime, time spent on screens, social segregation, and the busy, structured lives of children and parents.

As children's opportunities to play have reduced, there has been a growth in childhood obesity, mental health problems, and excessive use of screens and social media.

Leadership is needed. The UK government, local authorities and civil society can together make sure that children and society benefit from better play opportunities.

Initiatives in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland show what can be done, but play needs support from governments throughout the UK.



Policy proposals

1. Leadership – create a Cabinet minister for children with responsibility for play

The government should create a cabinet post for children with responsibility for developing a national play policy for England, coordinating across government departments whose work has an impact on children's play.

2. Legislation – make planning for play a statutory duty

The government should introduce a Play Sufficiency Duty requiring local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area, based on the successful model in Wales.

3. Investment – more and better play opportunities, spaces and services

● Neighbourhood play

Funding should be made available for local authorities to deliver free, accessible and inclusive opportunities for children and young people to play in their neighbourhoods, including in parks and public spaces, playgrounds, housing, play streets and through better maintenance of existing play spaces.

● After school and holiday play schemes

Play should be the main focus of after-school clubs and holiday playschemes, which should be regulated for quality and to ensure that staff are properly trained and skilled in playwork and safeguarding. There should be workforce investment in playwork training.



● Adventure Playgrounds

There should be dedicated funding for staffed adventure playgrounds and play ranger schemes, targeted in areas of disadvantage. Additional support should also be available to disabled children to access play provision.

● Play in schools

Schools should be required to protect and develop time and space for play before, during and after the school day. School grounds should be open for local children outside school hours.

4. Delivering for play

Investment is needed to develop the skills and capacity of the local and national community play sector in England to carry out the vital roles of advocacy for children, providing expert advice and guidance and supporting high quality play provision and training.