

OPEN ACCESS PLAY PROVISION

— WHY IT'S IMPORTANT



Open access play provision — like Adventure Playgrounds — are free, accessible play spaces for children. What makes them different to other play provision is that children can leave unsupervised. This unique type of staffed play provision can give crucial support to some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

Children leaving unsupervised — legal requirement

Children being able to leave unsupervised is not an optional part of open access provision that providers can pick and choose.

It is a legal requirement of the provision, set out in the [Childcare Act 2008](#):

It's also included in the [Ofsted Early Years Registration Handbook \(Annex A, page 30\)](#).

“Open access childcare” means childcare, other than childminding, under the arrangements for which a child, other than a young child [under 5 years old], may leave the premises unaccompanied.’

Regulations give parents clarity

The regulations are intended to make it clear to parents what the arrangements are so that they understand when they register that their child will be free to leave unsupervised. This doesn't suit all parents and so some choose not to register. Play England would regard it as good practice for play providers to give clear information to parents about the nature of the service.

If the play setting is going to require parents to pick up and/or collect children then it is a childcare setting and **MUST** register on Ofsted's compulsory childcare register (and meet all requirements of this register — which is generally more expensive and the route usually chosen by after-school clubs that charge for their services).

Children's safety when leaving the play provision

If there are concerns about children's safety outside the play provision, then these should be addressed by carrying out a Risk Benefit Assessment that is specific to the play provision concerned. If traffic is a concern, then ask the local authority to look at what can be done to reduce the risks from the traffic. For instance, is a barrier needed? Should pedestrians be given greater priority in this area? Should speed, parking or traffic restrictions be introduced at peak times? (This is done for a **number of schools**.)

Some local authorities install traffic bollards and barriers around gates to adventure playgrounds to prevent cars from mounting the pavements and children from running into the road.

As with all risk benefit assessment, providers need to weigh up the benefits and risks and decide what to do based on that.



Benefits to open access provision

There are many benefits to open access provision. It increases children's independence, mobility, confidence and resilience.

Vulnerable children use open access provision

Open access provision seems to be particularly attractive to vulnerable children, perhaps because it is free and easy to access — in contrast with more formal provision. As a result, play providers are often at the frontline of work with more vulnerable families, as they can be the only professionals in contact with children.

Open access provision is particularly effective at reaching disadvantaged and socially excluded children who are not accessing more formal provision. For instance, where children have been excluded from school, or the growing number whose parents have been **pressured into home educating their children**.

Play providers should be able to work closely with local safeguarding teams to support children at risk of abuse or neglect.

If providers introduced a requirement for parents to pick up and drop off, these are the children who are most likely to be excluded or left out and about on the streets on their own or home alone in front of a screen.

Play England is the national charity for children's play. We provide guidance for thousands of play providers: adventure playgrounds, after-school clubs, parks departments, parents, volunteers and schools. Play is an essential part of every child's life. It is vital for children's enjoyment as well as their social, emotional, intellectual and physical development.

Quality play services with skilled, qualified playwork staff greatly enhance children's play experience, helping them build resilience and confidence. This is particularly important for vulnerable children and those living in areas of high social deprivation.

Campaigning together, we can make a difference.

Join Play England today. It's free!

<http://www.playengland.org.uk/get-involved/join-us/>



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