

QUALITY AREA 1

Children's freedom and control

THE STANDARD

We see children's freely chosen play as an outcome in itself as well as contributing to other outcomes. Children's freedom and control over how and what they play are at the centre of our approach. Our play environment and organisational policies and procedures are designed and reviewed to ensure they support and do not unduly constrain children's freely chosen play.

The Playwork Principles say that all children and young people need to play and that it 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, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way, for their own reasons.

This means much more than children having choices between the opportunities or activities on offer in the play environment. The Manchester Circles model informs the Quality in Play structure, with the playing child at the centre of the play environment, the organisational framework and the wider context. A central principle is that the playing child should have more influence on the play environment and the organisational framework than the other way round, and that these should support rather than constrain their play.

This does not mean that absolutely anything goes. An individual child's freedom and control needs to be continuously considered within the context of other children's well-being. While much of children's freely chosen play is about negotiating and developing the 'rules' of their play, conflicts can and do arise.

The overall provision should be carefully assessed for how well it equally offers freedom and control to support all children's play. You should particularly look at how your equal opportunities policy supports the play of disabled and minority community or other potentially marginalised children.

Research suggests that being able to engage in freely chosen play has an effect on the areas of the brain to do with emotion, motivation and reward, leading to flexible responses to what children encounter in their environments. This helps to develop resilience, a way of coping with the world that includes dealing with primary and secondary emotions, developing healthy responses to stress and building attachments to people and places.

Commitment and planning

a. We are committed to children engaging in play as a principal outcome in itself as well as an essential part of meeting other outcomes for children

Getting started
date

Nearly met
date

Fully met
date

b. We have plans that ensure children have a real say in what we provide through looking at what works, using observation and reflection

c. We are committed to children's widest possible control of how, why and what they play

Action

a. We have integrated Articles 12, 23 and 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the *Charter for Children's Play* into our practice,

b. We use current thinking about play, observation and listening to children as part of our daily playwork practice.

c. We adapt and improve our service to support children's play by using reflection and a minimum-intervention approach,

Review

a. We evaluate how well we have supported children's freedom and control over their play, including access and inclusion in its widest sense.

b. Children's engagement in freely chosen and personally directed play is a focus of our annual review.

c. We use the results of the annual review to refine, adapt and improve our support for children's play.

Commitment and planning

- How does our policy put play as an outcome in itself at the centre of what we do?
- How can management and staff explain or show how the policy works in practice?
- What plans, processes and techniques do we have or use to ensure children have a real say?
- How could we show that we meet the Playwork Principles in our planning and practice?
- What evidence do we have in other quality areas that could help to show how we meet this standard?

Action

- Can we give examples of how we integrated the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Charter for Children's Play in our practice and who was involved?
- How can we show that there were real results for children as an outcome of listening and reflecting?
- Have we got actual examples of these results that children agree have happened?

Review

- What have we done well that has supported children's play and how could we build on this?
- How do we know, and what do the children think?
- How does our equal opportunities policy and practice support all children to play?
- What are we going to do next year and beyond to refine and improve how we support children's play?

QUALITY AREA 2

The physical play environment

THE STANDARD

Our physical play environment supports children's freely chosen play to the greatest extent possible within our resources. We assess and reflect on how it provides enjoyment of play for its own sake and how children can influence and change it. We balance the benefits of challenging play opportunities against potential risk, and ensure that children are involved in the design and modification of a flexible playable space.

Children are the experts in their play and should have a strong influence over the play environment, through shaping it as well as adapting to it. The play environment should as far as possible contain a variety of diverse and flexible features, play props, loose parts and sensory experiences that children can respond to, interact with and change as they play.

The standard recognises that every play environment is different and that what shared space in a community hall can offer will be very different from that in an adventure playground. This does not mean just settling for what you have, but rather making the best use of what you've got and thinking creatively about how to maximise what the physical play environment offers to the playing child.

Playwork Principle 5 describes the role of the playworker supporting all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play. This means enabling rather than directing or controlling, and a good test is to assess the extent to which children are able to influence the shape and content of the play space. How children get to and from, move around and feel included in an accessible, inclusive and playable environment is fundamentally important.

The physical play environment should be regularly assessed for the availability and range of loose parts; how children can move around interact with and change in natural and built elements; how they encounter challenge and manage risk for themselves; and how accessible and inclusive it is for all children. Benefit should be balanced with risk when carrying out risk assessments.

Research shows that children's well-being is greatly enhanced if they can play outdoors, experience the elements, interact with nature and have a full range of sensory experiences. In quality play provision this should be evident to the greatest extent possible.

The physical play environment — Assessment

Commitment and planning

a. We are committed to creating and maintaining a physical environment that supports all children’s play and their enjoyment of play for its own sake to the greatest extent within our resources.

Getting started
date

Nearly met
date

Fully met
date

b. Our planning is based on observations of children’s use of the play environment and what children tell us explicitly or implicitly and we prioritise accordingly to support their play.

c. We have a plan to maintain and increase the range of diverse and flexible indoor and outdoor play opportunities and experiences, where possible.

Action

a. We use a range of methods to assess how well our physical environment supports all children’s play.

b. We provide a range of loose parts and encourage children to change and adapt the play environment.

c. We observe children’s play, listen and respond to their ideas to make changes and improvements.

Review

a. The annual review focuses on what we have done well and on what we could do more of in the physical environment to support children’s play.

b. We evaluate how well our physical resources have supported play for all children.

c. We use the results of the annual review to refine and improve our practice and financial planning.

Commitment and Planning

- Where is the physical play environment covered in our written policy on play?
- How can management and staff explain or show how observations and children's wishes have been used in planning?
- How do we show that our planning and practice is consistent with Playwork Principles 5 and 7?
- What evidence do we have in other quality areas that could help to show how we meet this standard?

Action

- What have we done to ensure that all children can access and play in our physical play environment?
- What examples could we give of how we ensure access and inclusion for all children?
- Who was involved in deciding priorities for change or improvement, and how can we show that these were based on what we learned from the children?
- How could we show that our budget and financial planning is consistent with our policy on the physical play environment?

Review

- What difference have we made over the last year in the physical play environment, and what were the outcomes for children's enjoyment of play for its own sake?
- Have we made any changes to how we use assessment methods as a result?
- What specific things are we going to do next year and beyond to refine and improve our service delivery?

QUALITY AREA 3

The human play environment

THE STANDARD

The way we relate to, interact with and safeguard children creates and maintains a play environment that is emotionally warm and welcoming, fully inclusive and accessible. Our staff and management policy and practice is in support of the playing child to enhance the ambience or 'feel' of the provision as experienced by all children in the community, and our approach is fully consistent with the Playwork Principles.

One of the most important aspects of quality play provision is that the people who manage and directly provide it relate to each other and to children. Personal relationships and attitudes experienced by children are fundamental to their well-being. The attitudes of staff and management to providing emotional warmth; a sense of inclusion in the widest sense, and opportunities to encounter and manage risk, uncertainty and challenge while keeping children safe, are what make the biggest differences for children and families.

In this quality area and others 'all children' means exactly what it says. Disabled, minority community or other potentially marginalised children have an equal right to engage in play behaviours and activities by themselves, or with others, according to their choice and to have a sense of being valued encouraged and supported both as an individual and as a member of their family and community.

There is a fine balance between providing human play environments that feel welcoming and safe while offering children the opportunity to test and push boundaries. Equally, play providers need to be skilled at recognising the difference between playful, challenging and unacceptable behaviour. Play provision needs to meet the need for emotional comfort as well as adventure, and recognise that children will differ, individually and as they grow, in what they perceive as comfortable, exciting or downright scary.

Playworkers and managers in quality play provision develop policy and practice that is consistent with the Playwork Principles to ensure that their vision considers the need and the right of all children to play, and communicates this well internally through effective teamwork. They use internal and external feedback to step back and reflect on how children, families and the community perceive their human play environment.

The human play environment — Assessment

Commitment and planning

a. We are committed to providing a welcoming, caring, stimulating, challenging, mutually respectful and inclusive play environment for all children, consistent with the Playwork Principles.

Getting started
date

Nearly met
date

Fully met
date

b. We consider the ambience and 'feel' of our environment and recognise, in our planning, children's need for a range of emotional and sensory experiences.

c. We have written guidance for staff, children, carers and visitors on expectations about behaviour and relationships in the human play environment.

Action

a. Management and staff work sensitively to support children's play and distinguish between playful, challenging and unacceptable behaviour so as not to unduly intervene in children's play.

b. Our management and staff attitudes in practice are consistent with our policy and support the playful feel of the setting for all children.

c. We ensure that the way people behave respects, values and supports children's play

Review

a. We use our observations to identify areas for improvement in our policy and practice.

b. We consult children, carers and visitors and take into account their perspectives on the feel of the setting when planning.

c. We review our practice and build the results into our planning for organisational and professional development.

Commitment and planning

- How can we show that our policy is fully consistent with the Playwork Principles and promotes accessibility and inclusion for all children?
- What methods do we use to consider the ambience and 'feel' of the play environment to ensure it supports a range of emotional experiences for all children?
- How was our written guidance developed, maintained and communicated and how do we support each other to meet shared expectations?

Action

- How could we show or explain how our management and staff attitudes ensure our written policies, information and guidance are put into practice?
- What examples could we give to show how staff respond sensitively to children and that any interventions are based on principles of good playwork practice?
- What evidence do we have to show how expectations around behaviour and relationships have been developed jointly and shared with everyone concerned?

Review

- What difference have we made over the last year in the human play environment, and where was this discussed and recorded?
- How did we gather feedback from children and others on the feel of the human play environment and what it felt like for people who work or visit here?
- What specific things are we going to do next year and beyond to refine and improve our management and staff development?