

# Loose Parts Play



**A toolkit**  
by Theresa Casey & Juliet Robertson



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# Forewords

I welcome the development of this Loose Parts Play Toolkit and thank all those who played a part in pulling this valuable resource together.

Play is critical to a child's development and the Scottish Government recognises the importance of unstructured free playtime for children.

The addition of the Toolkit to a play setting will improve children's play experiences and provides them with the opportunity to explore new types of play.

Through our Go2Play fund we have helped thousands of children access free play opportunities across Scotland and this resource will make that investment all the richer for those communities and schools who embrace loose parts play.



**Mark McDonald MSP**  
Minister for Childcare and Early Years

Inspiring Scotland has worked in partnership with the Scottish Government over the past six years creating a track record in successfully supporting the development and expansion of free play in disadvantaged communities across Scotland.

Through Go2Play we have invested in some of the most exciting and impactful play organisations in Scotland, helping to develop the play sector and create greater play opportunities in Scotland's communities. This toolkit reflects their learning and that of others across Scotland and will enable partners to enrich their play offering through the use of loose parts.

Thanks to all ventures, partners and contributors for creating this fantastic resource, a real testament to the play sector in Scotland.



**Celia Tennant**  
Chief Executive, Inspiring Scotland



# About this Toolkit

## What do we hope to achieve through this Toolkit?

Our aim is that more children will have access to loose parts play and that adults in the play, early years and education sectors will feel more comfortable and confident about introducing 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 setting including schools, health and early learning 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 learning 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 learning 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 well-being and so a positive cycle is put in place.

Appendix 8 provides information about how embedding loose parts play can be a core part of a school or setting's approach to Curriculum for Excellence and how it enables many experiences and outcomes, particularly in Health and Wellbeing, to be effectively bundled together.

Thus this Toolkit supports the decluttering of the curriculum and providing space and time for staff to focus their time on developing skills, knowledge and understanding which support the learner's journey.

It dovetails with the advice contained in *Curriculum for Excellence: A Statement for Practitioners from HM Chief Inspector of Education (2016)*.



# Part 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 do what they need to do.

Loose parts aren't prescriptive and offer limitless possibilities. A stick, for example, may become a fishing rod near real or imaginary water, a spurtle 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 affordance than many artificial play spaces such as an asphalt school playground or a tidy urban park.

**In fixed play spaces it's like having to paint with a limited palette of colours.  
(Ivan Harper, Senior Playworker)**

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

- natural resources - straw, mud and pine cones
- building materials and tools - planks, nails, hammers
- scrap materials - old tyres, off-cuts of guttering
- 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.

I like how we get to decide what we want to do with them.  
(Child, Seaton Links After School Club)

They 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.

You can make it and then knock it down and then make it again. It rocks!  
(Child, Imagination playground in a box)

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

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)





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)

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 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 are able to 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 in order 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 free play within the home, school and community as advocated by the Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision (Scottish Government, 2013).

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.



### 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". Nicholson 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.



### 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.

### Sit back and watch loose parts play in action

Scrapstore Playpod® <http://tinyurl.com/ScrapstorePod>

Imagination Playground in a Box <http://tinyurl.com/PlaygroundBox>

Natural Play in Schools (Grounds for Learning) <http://tinyurl.com/NaturalPlayGfL>

From Australia, Play for Life POD in Action <http://tinyurl.com/Play4LifeAus>

# 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).

Most schools reported a fall in unwanted behaviours to a level below that it had been before the Pod (Armitage, 2009).

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 well-being in children (Wells and Evans, 2003)
- Children are more likely to visit greenspace as adults (Ward Thompson, Aspinall and Montarzino, 2008)

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

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, 2014)

Bristol Scrapstore ([www.playpods.co.uk](http://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.”





## Industrial inspiration

The children at Cumbernauld College Nursery had been fascinated by the delivery of sand, watching intently as workers transported the sand from the lorry, tilted the flat bed then used other machinery to convey it to the play area.

Their fascination with the machinery prompted staff to arrange a visit to Summerlee Industrial Heritage museum where the children climbed on huge steam engines, looked underneath the bogies used to transport coal and revelled at the height of working lathes and other machinery.

The next step was the visit to the DIY store where children chose full-size tools such as hammers, saws, spirit levels, pliers, screws, bolts, chains, copper wire, copper tubing, ropes, ventilator hoses, metal numbers and huge sheets of plywood. They recognised aspects of the industrial museum as they browsed through the building section of the warehouse and considered their choice of materials carefully.

The children then took over a large space in their outdoor area to create their own industrial environment which included photos of the visit to the museum and the DIY store. The children persevered with handling the large materials which were added to with a variety of wheels which staff gathered these from bikes, prams, trolleys and scooters after listening to what the children needed.

For more information and to see elements of this project in action, see the video Early Years Risk:

<http://tinyurl.com/EYRisk>



Keep medium-term planning short and focused on the main learning activities developed from the Experiences and Outcomes. Group Experiences and Outcomes together in ways which best suit learners. Short-term planning on a daily or weekly basis should be flexible and be regarded as working notes to help organise learning.

HM Chief Inspector of Education  
(2016)



# Play themes and loose parts play

The concept of loose parts and their affordances can be interwoven with studies about how children play outside, particularly in natural environments. There appear 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.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Adventure</b></p> <p>Seeking out the unknown, stretching limits of possibility, taking calculated risks, anticipation, discovery and invention.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration away from adult eyes (or perception of this)</li> <li>• Establishing a culture where risk taking is supported</li> <li>• Developing play provision to follow children's lead</li> <li>• Providing time to listen and hear children's experiences, should they wish to share</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Becoming at home</b></p> <p>Creating space, shelter, security, hiding and secret places, refuge and territorial boundaries.</p>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources for building dens</li> <li>• Props for developing the play within a den or secret place</li> <li>• Scrap cardboard and writing materials for creating signs</li> <li>• Nooks, crannies, trees and bushes or undergrowth to hide in or be alone</li> <li>• Large cardboard boxes and pieces of material both see-through and dark</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Prospect</b></p> <p>Searching out high places, views and look outs, surveying the landscape and mapping areas.</p>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being high up – top of a hill</li> <li>• Climbing trees, boulders and other objects</li> <li>• Balancing on features</li> <li>• Play on different levels</li> <li>• Spyholes, gaps and see-through spaces, including windows and doorways</li> </ul>  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Pathways and journeying</b></p> <p>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"> <li>• Map making and using opportunities – both real and through digital devices</li> <li>• Trail making with natural resources and props such as ropes or chalk</li> <li>• Freedom to explore and get to know a local area</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Hunter-gatherer pursuits</b></p> <p>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"> <li>• Time to invent and play games</li> <li>• Collecting and using natural materials</li> <li>• Containers such as pockets, bags, baskets and buckets</li> <li>• Using real tools to create, make and take apart different objects</li> <li>• Experiencing fire</li> <li>• Bushcraft type activities: whittling, fishing, foraging</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Anthropomorphism</b></p> <p>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"> <li>• Ensuring time and space to discover wildlife on children's terms</li> <li>• Creating places to hide and watch wildlife, creating habitat piles, bird feeding stations and nesting boxes, etc.</li> <li>• Simple props for dressing up and being animals</li> </ul>   |





### Imaginative narratives

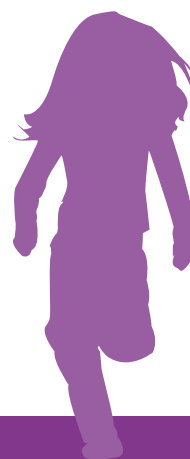
Making sense of the world through fantasy play, small world play and creating stories and accounts of experiences that connect and deepen friendships and relationships between each other and the places they play, creating memories and reaffirming order and meaning.

- 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

### Making rituals

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.

- 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



## Broxburn Family Centre: Taking Loose Parts Play to New Heights and Deeper Challenges

Simple hammocks and rope bridges provided insufficient challenge to the primary school aged children using the services of Broxburn Family Centre on a regular basis so the staff had to find ways of developing this and other outdoor interests further. After the success of several woodland outdoor activity weeks running during the school holidays, Broxburn Family Centre secured two different woodland sites to use throughout the year. Nathan McGillivray, Senior Play Worker, describes the impact:



*“One of the many pros to having our own woodland site is being able to develop the site with dens and shelters, as well as creating magical spaces for stories or chilling out. Another benefit of working with the estate is access to a gamekeeper. This provides us with professional advice and a sustainable source of rabbits to skin, gut, cook and eat with the children. This opportunity has provided many discussions around death and mortality, topics that are often difficult to approach. It is one of the most memorable and profound experiences for children who we find still discuss it years later. In the winter months, we run short sessions in the afternoon and early evening after school. Some of the woodland play in the dark using torches and head torches has seen the children using the space in a different way.”*





# Part 2: Practical guidance

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# Getting started

Consider the use of loose parts within your overall approach to play.

Work out your approach to evaluation right from the start – it's great to have evidence showing the difference 'before and after' the introduction of loose parts.

Involve and educate staff, parents and carers about the use and benefits of loose parts.

Accessing training to equip adults with knowledge, skills and confidence is likely to be a worthwhile investment.

Get your procedures in place for the management and use of loose parts.

Ensure that loose parts play is facilitated in line with the Playwork Principles. (See Appendix 1)

Work on your risk-benefit assessments of loose parts play. (See Section 3)

Try out some taster sessions ideally with support from an experienced playworker or play organisation.

Develop an ongoing action plan.

Work out where and how you will store your loose parts.

Gather your initial supply of loose parts and figure out how they will be replenished.

Plan, do, review!

Online film clips, small study visits and presentations are all very useful.

You will review these as time goes on.

Bear in mind these are likely to be adjusted as you and the children gain experience.

Ensure children are fully involved at every step.

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 your 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 to make 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? Etc.
- 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 your playground rules, policies and procedures – are there any that are unnecessary, contradictory or missing? Think about what they tell you 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.

According to the accident logbook, there was approximately a 50% reduction in accidents and incidents of all kinds following the landscape changes and introduction of loose materials for play. (Head Teacher, Edinburgh)

Many play organisations offer audits as part of their package of support which also include how to seek the opinions of children who are very young or who have additional support needs. These may also link to key national approaches such as Getting It Right for Every Child or Curriculum for Excellence.

## Further reading and templates

Play Wales: Play space audit template

<http://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](http://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/>

# Loose

Man-made



Natural



“Accept that anything not nailed down in your playground will be used during loose parts play sessions. Picnic benches, bins, planters etc., will all be utilised during loose play sessions by children seeking new ways to construct and design their own play spaces. Likewise ramps, slopes, railings, basketball nets and stairs will all become useful when children experiment with the play possibilities within resources.”

(Louise Caldwell, Play Development Officer, City of Edinburgh Council)





## Top five types of loose parts?

“Rubber inner tubes, rope, fabric, cardboard boxes, chunky cardboard tubes (from inside rolls of carpet etc.)” (Ivan Harper, Senior Playworker)

“Suitcases and tyres, especially the big ones; wooden planks cos you can use them like a seesaw; bin lids like captain America; those big foam things; life jackets; the nets and stuff; Playpod for hiding behind it.” (Law Primary School pupils)

“Pegs, cardboard boxes, guttering, logs, fabric.” (Silvia Maccagnano, Childminder)



## Temporary



“To me, loose parts aren’t things. It is a way of thinking, an approach. To me everything and anything can be a loose part, even me for the children to use how they see fit in their play space. It is about children using their imagination to create spaces to play using whatever is in their vicinity, the more choice and variety the better.” (Nathan MacGillivray, Play Development Worker)



Useful little bits





# Acquiring 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 parents and community.
- Unexpected and unusual donations stimulate play in new and exciting ways.
- The sustainable collection of natural resources requires adults and children to develop awareness and understanding of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
- “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, bore pipes and cable drums may be donated by building companies. Outdoor adventure centres may use old sails and canoes so that gear no longer fit for purpose can be used in a play context.

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. A Play Ranger may prefer items which can be carried in a holdall or backpack. Appendix 5 has a list of tried and tested loose parts.

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

## Tips to keep your 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 – builders, plumbers, farmers, designers etc. Ask them directly to look out for things that could be donated.
- Make friends with your local builders, countryside rangers and tree surgeons.
- In general, make sure people know you are looking for loose parts and supplies are likely to come!

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

# 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 – your 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. You may 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.

You might also 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 just left out. Sites surrounded by housing may benefit from informal oversight. Use your 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.

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

Smaller items are sometimes necessary to facilitate good play. We provide pegs and sticks to make dens. These all have their own place within the pod, so that goes back to the storage and managing of loose parts.

(Lesley Fox, Smart Play Network)





# Checking loose parts before and during each session

## Checks before going out to play

- Check out the area to be used in advance. Take immediate action to clear up litter, broken glass, dog fouling etc.
- Cordon off or mark clearly any hazards that can't be dealt with on the spot.
- If you can't deal with the hazard there and then, note any concerns which need to be addressed and pass them to the person responsible for health and safety.
- 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.

Undertake an initial risk-benefit assessment before introducing materials and have some basic agreements in place. The children usually make sensible suggestions. They can also advise on what needs to happen should a child's actions give cause for concern.

## 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 - batteries, leaky components, etc.
- Electrical concern - wires and circuits, plugs, etc.
- 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.



You may choose to create a simple checklist for staff, so that they know what checks to make and measures to put in place.

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.

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:

We support schools to create ‘maintenance crews’ with older children. The ‘crew’ carries sand paper and tape and children know to approach them if they come across anything they think needs attention – the responsible older children will attempt to repair and highlight the issue to the playground staff. (Lesley Fox, Smart Play Network)

- Most plant material can be composted.
- Know which material may require special disposal methods – contact your local authority waste disposal services.
- Replace worn clothing, accessories, nets, tarps 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.





## Aberdeen City - Promoting partnerships for loose parts play at a local level

Local and national organisations have been proactive in supporting loose parts play through their strategic improvements. The Environmental Services department in Aberdeen City has been proactive in supporting loose parts play in public spaces. Parks, nature reserves and beaches are well-managed and maintained with active voluntary groups so that local families and organisations can freely access the spaces and concerns raised are promptly addressed. In addition, the Environmental Services staff provides advice to local childcare organisations, schools and nurseries about developing their grounds using a range of loose parts materials and have supplied quantities of top soil, sand, stumps, bark and logs.

The ES Manager is a director of the Aberdeen Play Forum.

### A note about tyres

Old tyres have fantastic value on play spaces both as loose resources and for making semi-permanent structures. Commercial tyre companies have to pay to dispose of old ones so are happy to give them away. However, they do present particular hazards to be aware of:

- Tyres present a fire hazard and should be stored safely.

- Most tyres have steel bracing; they should be checked for protruding wires and not used if they have any.
  - Tyres fixed in place should have holes drilled for drainage (this is a useful thing even for loose ones as tyres can hold stagnant water).
  - Tyres fixed together to create structures must not create wedge trap points.
  - Nylon brace tyres are safer for swings where their impact absorbing qualities are important.
- (See Potter, 1997)

### Further reading

North Lanarkshire council (2011) This Place is Like a Building Site

<http://tinyurl.com/NLanarkYT>

Scottish Outdoor Access Code [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com)

Potter, D. (1997) *Risk and Safety in Play*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.





# Taster play sessions

Organising some 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 professional playworkers facilitate loose parts play and how this compares to current practice.

It may be possible to bring in professional playworker or play organisation to run or help you run the taster sessions. If not, make sure the person responsible has support and has had opportunities to visit other settings with loose play in action.

## Raise awareness of the sessions

Ensure everyone knows what loose parts are and the purpose of their introduction. Parents/carers should be informed and asked to ensure that their child has suitable clothing and footwear. See Appendix 3 for sample letters to parents.

## 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 the all staff have the 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



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: 26)

of resources. Almost all children settle into deeper play, given sufficient time. You might want to wait until things have settled in a bit before inviting in the people you want to persuade of the benefits.

## 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.

For your taster sessions remember to follow the advice provided in Section 3: Facilitating Loose Parts Play in this toolkit.



# Part 3: Facilitating loose parts play

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## The role of adults

The development of any play provision is more than the acquisition 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.

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)

In particular, adults who work with children must understand what free play involves as outlined in **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.”

**Principle 3** defines playwork and states: “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.

Thus adults need to be aware of exhibiting positive messages about play and about valuing the benefits of being outside, for example: being up for picking up litter; expressing interest in a worm that a child has found; appreciating children’s rickety self-built creations and being pro-active about addressing environmental issues and matters.

## 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/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 what the impact is of this on children
- using this understanding to inform future decisions about resources, materials and boundaries, etc.
- 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

Louise Caldwell, a Play Development Officer with Edinburgh City Council works with educators, playworkers, parents and other professionals to develop play. Through her work, she has developed useful advice:

- You need to practise your practice because stepping back and getting children to think for themselves is hard to do, especially if this is not normally how you work with children.
- Discuss with children how to move resources around, looking after themselves and each other rather than telling children how to use or play with resources. The focus on manual handling avoids influencing how children play
- Never expect children to have to share, which causes tensions and biases about what is fair and who carries the most power. Instead, respect children's rights to choose the resource they want to use by:
  - Making sure there are enough resources for the number of children playing with them (at least five things per child).
  - Asking children to use the resources until they are finished or done and then pass them on to whoever asked for them.
  - Asking children to 'swap' or negotiate using a resource, by offering something of theirs in return.



- Asking the children if they think they can work out a solution to the problem themselves.
- Practise counting to ten before intervening in children's play and only do so when invited. It gives you time to formulate the right open question needed for the situation, such as:
  - “Do you feel safe?”
  - “I am worried, why do you think that might be?”
  - “How can we work this out together?”
  - “Tell me about what you have made.”
- Practise re-directing problems back to children to solve for themselves:
  - “How do you think this will work?”
  - “What might happen?”
  - “What could you use?”
  - “What have you tried already?”



As a parent helper I agree to:

Encourage the independence of my own child

Help children to risk assess their activities

Allow children to run, climb trees, get messy and play with sticks during free-play

Encourage the children to lead activities

Have fun

Additional information:

Please only take photographs of your child.

Please follow the risk assessment as discussed with the teacher.

Parents can only take their own child to the toilet.

**Cults Nursery briefing sheet for parent volunteers for their Wee Green Spaces sessions in the woods.**

### Further reading

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:

<http://www.ltl.org.uk/learning/PlaytimeRevolution>

The Play Ranger Toolkit provides important information and guidance for workers in 'detached' community settings. Play Rangers are qualified playworkers who facilitates children and young people's play through open access provision in local parks and other open spaces. They work in public spaces within communities, enabling and encouraging all children to play freely outdoors and the children are free to come and go as they choose.

<http://tinyurl.com/PlayRngr>





# Setting up loose parts play routines

## Zoning your 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 ages at all times

Loose parts play works 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 suchlike. 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.

Removing age segregated play has meant much more socialising between older and younger children. Accidents have reduced.

(Support for Learning Assistant)

## 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, then consider opening a room indoors so there is a choice available for children who wish to remain inside.



We wrote to parents and notified them of our outdoor play sessions and that we would be playing with sand and mud so not to worry if their child came home dirty. Parents have been very supportive and value the opportunities that their children have. (Karen Campbell, Howford Primary School, Glasgow)

## Agreements about use of the 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 you as much as simple, understandable prompts to make managing loose parts easy, for example laminated 'sunshine' sheet showing that a resource is best used when the weather is dry.

## Tidying up and gathering in

Tidying up and gathering in loose parts is part of the process and routines for doing this need to be agreed. In most settings, gathering resources back in 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 your 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 jumping off 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 your particular setting.



## Introducing and embedding loose parts play

### Suggested starting points for regular sessions

- Begin with a play session in one part of your 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 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 start of the session and issues around their use discussed as necessary.
- Employ a qualified 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 in order 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.



It can be very hard to quantify what a child is getting out of playing with something – for example what are they getting out of throwing one thing repeatedly? But we should remember that the object itself might be of interest – the texture, the smell, how it moves, its weight. For some children object play might be more prevalent than combining loose parts into something else. Not all children need that imaginative, transformative quality of combining things to make something new – it's the object itself that is fascinating. However, some children might also enjoy combining elements with some support and inspiration. For the adult it's that leapfrogging approach – sometimes following, sometimes leading.  
(Ivan Harper, Senior Playworker, The Yard)



# Keeping the momentum going

As with all activities, interests wax and wane. 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 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 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...
- Put a request for real Christmas trees to be donated after the holidays so that the brushings can be used or pretend forests created.
- Keep the long plant stalks and other dead plant material after a winter garden clearance.
- Put a call out for leaves in autumn.

## A calendar of play dates

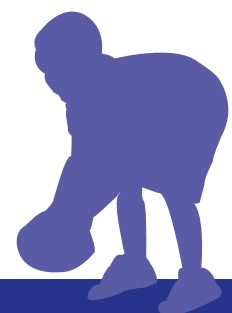
World Play Day – **28th May**. Toy Libraries worldwide invite you to celebrate play.

Play on the Longest Day – **21st June**. Keep the play going long into the evening.

International Mud Day – **29th June**. Invite parents to join in!

UK Playday – **first Wednesday in August**. Perfect for summer holiday fun.

Universal Children’s Day – **20th November**. Celebrate the right to play in the autumn



## Simple changes play workers can facilitate 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, e.g. a jerry can of water attached high up.
- Objects hanging down – from a rope line or tree branches.



**Surfaces**

- Switch from horizontal to vertical, e.g. water in a tarp-tyre to a water wall.
- 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: steep to gentle, etc. using tarps or guttering.
- Change the surface: grass to tarmac, add bubble wrap down a slide, or have different materials available, etc.

**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 wheel barrows, trolleys, suitcases including pulley systems.
- Have materials around which can be transported or moved: leaves, water, soil, etc.
- Space to run and move about.

**Add holes**

- Holes are useful for posting stuff through, poking tubes through, adding guttering, playing games. This includes cardboard window frames, bore pipes and animal tubes.
- Make a holes into a container which can be moved around (e.g. animal tubes can be bent).
- Create or poke holes into containers so that water or dry sand leaks out.
- Partitions and flaps
- Create entrances and exits – piece of material hung up, etc.
- Create dams and places that stops the movement of water, sand or other materials.
- Create partitions: dens can have rooms, children can work on different tarps laid on the ground, etc.

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 addressed.
- Check there are no underground utilities such as water pipes which may be affected by your plans.
- Consider whether your 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 has lots advice and guidance about play structures: [www.rospa.com/play-safety/](http://www.rospa.com/play-safety/)  
Muddy Faces booklets on Den Building and Mud Kitchens <http://www.muddyfaces.co.uk>

## Risk-benefit assessment for loose parts play



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*. 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 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 or statement 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
- technical inspections for fixed equipment.

As much as possible, make the process of risk-benefit assessment participative and involve children, parents and staff who work with children.

Take care about how children are involved in the risk-benefit process. Children should be involved using a positive, common sense approach, using appropriate language and pitched at a suitable 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. 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 your play provision is run or managed by a local authority or larger organisation, then you will have to follow their risk assessment procedures. They 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 you use. 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.

Health and safety is more than paperwork. It's about effective communication, personal responsibility and looking out for each other.  
(Canadian Forestry Industry)



### Further reading and templates

Grounds for Learning, the Scottish school grounds charity, has produced a series of generic risk-benefit assessments for their work which follow this also approach:

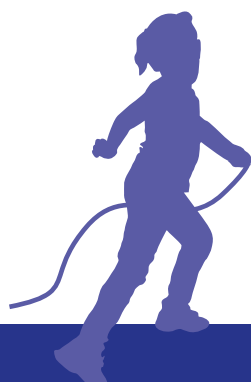
[www.ltl.org.uk/spaces/ltlriskbenefit.php](http://www.ltl.org.uk/spaces/ltlriskbenefit.php)

Play Wales: This risk-benefit assessment template/example is 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](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit)

Ball, D., Gill, T. and Spiegall, B. (2008) Managing Risk in Play Provision. London: Play Safety Forum. [www.playengland.org.uk](http://www.playengland.org.uk)

Health and Safety Executive (2012). Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>





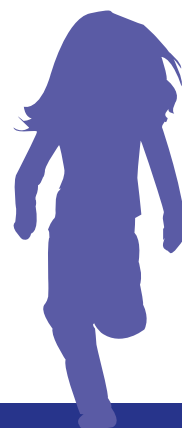


## Developing an action plan

Action plans can be created once the community of a setting have 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 is a necessary 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 modification to the space required?
  - How will loose parts be acquired?
  - Developing a system for checking incoming loose parts.
  - Developing the system for using and maintaining the 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?
- Do you need to link the action plan to wider improvements within your organisation and current local or national initiatives?

Appendix 4 has an example of an action plan prepared by Aberdeen Play Forum.



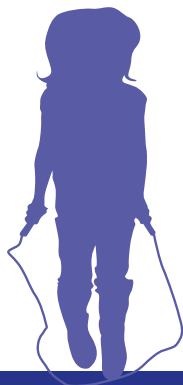
## Loose parts used in school design projects

Landscape architect, Felicity Robinson, uses loose parts in her practice as a to engage children and school communities in design projects. In one primary school, loose parts were used for an 'experimental playground' day where all the children and staff were involved in a complete re-imagining of play and playtimes.

The children were asked to use any of the loose parts to play including boxes, tubes, mobile frames, chairs, stage blocks, rugs, carpet tiles and tyres. No other prompts were given but careful observation and conversations with the children aimed to find out what sort of places they needed in this otherwise featureless tarmac play space.

The children created quiet chat spots, group gathering places and physical challenges. From this and further engagement with children and staff the key priorities for the re-design were established.

Loose parts can also be used as problem solving resources, where children play with ideas and test solutions. For example, in one school a quiet area was anything but quiet. Experimenting with loose parts led to the solution of creating boundaries and access points such as a stile and an archway that slowed children down and were also fun. For more information and additional ideas, please look at the case studies at [www.landscapesnaturally.co.uk](http://www.landscapesnaturally.co.uk)



# Developing a play statement or 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, the place and the space to play on a daily basis, including outside as much as possible.

Schools and early learning 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.



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. It will be useful for funding applications clearly laying out your aims and objectives and the overall impact you are working to achieve. Appendix 6 has an example of a Play Statement.

## Recommended reading

Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision <http://tinyurl.com/PSVision1>

Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan

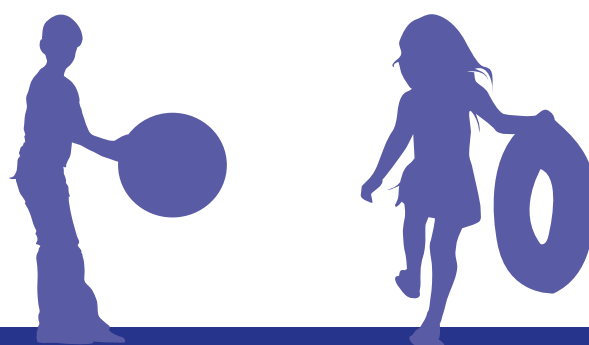
<http://tinyurl.com/PSActionPlan>

Play Map Guide for Community Planning Partnerships

<http://tinyurl.com/PlayMap1>

Care Inspectorate (2016) My World Outdoors. Dundee: Care Inspectorate.

<http://tinyurl.com/MyWorldOutdoors>





# Advice:

## addressing common concerns and issues

Nathan MacGillivray (NMac), Ivan Harper (IH) and pupils from Law Primary School (the Lawyers) respond to common problems with advice garnered from their combined years of experience on the play frontline.

**Question:** The children are getting more scrapes, grazes and skelfs (splinters) since we got into loose parts play – the children don't mind but the parents are starting to grumble. Any advice?

**NMac:** Set up a display depicting happy engaged children as well as the many benefits of using loose parts. Frank and open discussion with the parents also often helps.

**IH:** Invite the parents in to join in. It's about them experiencing the joy of playing with the materials with their children. You can help them reflect back – what kind of experience was that? How did it feel? They also need to remember that we accept bumps and grazes with sports or skateboarding etc. and it's no different with loose parts.

### The Lawyers:

- “If you see a piece of wood and there is a nail and you are falling you could jump to avoid it.”
- “Yes, but we have to be careful, don't use them as weapons, don't be silly with them.”
- “Or you can just keep away from them if you think you might get hurt.”
- “But you still have to take responsibility – everybody does.”



*The Lawyers*

**Q:** When we introduced loose parts the children went crazy and everything was destroyed in no time! What can we do?

**NMac:** Remember Playwork Principle number 2: Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. If the children want to smash things up and destroy things, then get them things that they can take apart, smash up and destroy. One time I sourced lots of huge cardboard boxes, thinking the children could make houses or a maze out of them. Some of the children did do this and had a great time, but some children saw the boxes and just wanted to jump on them and flatten them. **This isn't a one size fits all approach.** All children will have different ideas and thoughts on how they view a play space, it is up to us as workers to help meet their needs.

**IH:** Give it a decent run over a number of sessions. If children haven't had much experience of loose parts they may not know what the parameters are and test the limits to start with.

**Q:** As soon as there is a small incident then staff start wanting to control children's play again. For example, there was an argument in a den so den-building was banned. Is there a better approach?

**NMac:** Would you ban snack because there was an argument at the snack table? Again think about Playwork Principle 3: the prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process. If the children are arguing over a den, try to give them the space and time to sort it out for themselves. Sometimes a little support is all that is needed, some impartial advice or ideas on how to sort it out. Don't take control of the situation or how will the children ever learn to deal with these sorts of situations by themselves?

**IH:** Change around how you see things. Children do fall out and have arguments. What a great opportunity to look at problem-solving and better communication. Facilitate carefully in a non-judgemental way.

**Q:** Adults have different ideas about what they consider acceptable levels of risk in play. Loose parts can be difficult because the level of risk children create is unpredictable which makes some adults nervous. What would you advise?

**NMac:** The staff team needs to be open and honest with each other. Everyone will have different ideas



on what is an acceptable level of risk, but **the team/organisation has to have a stand point on what they deem to be acceptable.** Use a risk-benefit approach, if something is risky/challenging and you are unsure, ask yourself, what are the benefits of the child/children doing what they are doing? Do the risks outweigh the benefits or vice versa? This shouldn't stop staff members asking each other and getting a second opinion or some advice.



*Nathan MacGillivray*



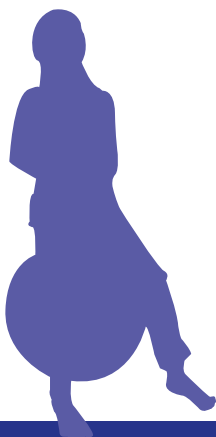
*Ivan Harper*



**IH:** Try to establish a ‘bandwidth’ of risk that everyone can be promoting. That comes about through practice, experiential learning and reflection. You need your basic risk assessments and dynamic on-the spot assessments which are made in real time. Your team also really need to understand what the benefits are to make a proper judgement. All of this eventually brings about a visual recognition of risk and benefit and instinctive understanding of when you might need to step in.

#### The Lawyers:

- “Without a bit of risk, what could we play?”
- “I think we should have a bit of risk because like, I hope most people are clever enough to not do any dumb stuff on a tiny bit of risk.”
- “What would you think if there was no risk?”
- “I think that because nearly everything has a bit of risk, then everything would have to go away then.”
- “We would just have plain concrete, then it would look like the Savannah desert.”
- “The Sahara.”
- “Like it’s a never-ending desert.”



### Sticks

Sometimes concern is expressed about children playing with sticks. Initially these may not be part of the loose parts available or only twigs and long poles offered. This can change and develop through time as routines are embedded and everyone’s confidence and understanding grows.

**Q:** The parents genuinely cannot afford to keep washing or replacing dirty clothes. How can we help?

**NMac:** We bought a couple of boxes of washing powder/liquid capsules for parents to take for free with a sign saying “**You can wash away the dirt, but you can’t wash away the memories.**” We also bought a supply of spare play clothes like leggings and t-shirts. We have discussed with parents bringing in a change of play clothes that they can leave at the setting (we have a washing machine on site, which we use to wash the children’s play clothes if needed). And another thing we have done is to speak to a local outdoors shop to strike a deal for some cheap waterproofs for parents to buy.

#### The Lawyers:

- “Your uniform gets messy sometimes and that’s your responsibility but I guess it’s just normal for children to get messy.”
- “Yes.”
- “It’s the fun bit about life.”
- “It’s not normal for grown-ups.”

Nathan MacGillivray is the Play Development Worker at Family & Community Development West Lothian.  
[www.fcdwl.org](http://www.fcdwl.org)

Ivan Harper is the Senior Playworker at the Yard, Edinburgh.

[www.theyardscotland.org.uk/](http://www.theyardscotland.org.uk/)

The Lawyers are pupils at Law Primary School in East Lothian.

[www.edubuzz.org/law/](http://www.edubuzz.org/law/)



## 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 the buildings
- Large matting that is designed to absorb wet at the entrances into the 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 simply 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!



The Lawyers suggest:

- “Just clean your shoes really.”
- “Get a door mat.”
- “I know, gather up enough money and get a giant box and with a cleaning machine that cleans you ‘cos it gets you wet and dries you.”

The “Problems and Solutions” activity outlined in *Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland* (p101) can be easily adapted for children and adults to complete together and can ensure everyone has a say. Many of the suggestions can be used to create a risk-benefit assessment of the loose parts play.

<http://tinyurl.com/OutdoorES>



## 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, docents 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, challenging entropy, real ownership, co-construction and propagation. 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 propagation and growth 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.

### Are loose parts toys?

The 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.



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# Part 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 well-being 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 well-being of children.

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005 <http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples>

The Pocket Guide to Playwork published by Skills Active is a useful free download  
<http://tinyurl.com/PocketPlay1>



## Appendix 2: Summary of links, organisations and useful publications

### Scottish Context

Scottish Government (2012) *Learning for Sustainability: The Report of the One Planet Schools Working Group* Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision <http://tinyurl.com/PSVision1>

Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Action Plan <http://tinyurl.com/PSActionPlan>

Play Map Guide for Community Planning Partnerships <http://tinyurl.com/PlayMap1>

Care Inspectorate (2016) *My World Outdoors*. Dundee: Care Inspectorate  
<http://tinyurl.com/MyWorldOutdoors>

Scottish Outdoor Access Code [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com)

### Getting Started

Play Wales: Play space audit template <http://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](http://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/>

*The Good School Playground Guide*  
<http://tinyurl.com/GoodPlayground>

### Risk-benefit assessment

Grounds for Learning series of generic risk-benefit assessments [www.ltl.org.uk/spaces/ltlriskbenefit.php](http://www.ltl.org.uk/spaces/ltlriskbenefit.php)

Play Wales: risk-benefit assessment template/example [www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit)

Ball, D., Gill, T. and Spiegel, B. (2008) *Managing Risk in Play Provision*. London: Play Safety Forum. [www.playengland.org.uk](http://www.playengland.org.uk) Health and Safety Executive (2012). *Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach*. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf>

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents Play Safety [www.rospa.com/play-safety/](http://www.rospa.com/play-safety/)





## Managing loose parts

North Lanarkshire council (2011) This Place is Like a Building Site  
<http://tinyurl.com/NLanarkYT>

Scottish Outdoor Access Code [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com)

Potter, D. (1997) Risk and Safety in Adventure Playgrounds. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.

Muddy Faces booklets on Den Building and Mud Kitchens <http://www.muddyfaces.co.uk/>

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.

Worthington, R. (2008) Nature Play: Simple and Fun Ideas for All. Forestry Commission England  
<http://tinyurl.com/ForestryPlay>

## The role of adults

Playtime Revolution videos and support material created by Grounds for Learning and Education Scotland  
<http://www.ltl.org.uk/learning/PlaytimeRevolution>

The Play Ranger Toolkit  
<http://tinyurl.com/PlayRngr>

## National organisations

Grounds for Learning <http://www.ltl.org.uk/scotland/> has a comprehensive resources section and a website dedicated to play <http://justplaying.org>

Play in a Pod [www.smartplaynetwork.org/play-in-a-pod](http://www.smartplaynetwork.org/play-in-a-pod) offers a range of resources, templates and curriculum-linked activity cards downloadable from their website.

Play Scotland <http://www.playscotland.org> the national organisation for children's play has lots of information download, links to research and publications and current news.

Inspiring Scotland <http://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk> has worked in partnership with the Scottish Government over the past five years creating a track record in successfully supporting the development and expansion of free play in communities across Scotland.

## Children's right to play

International Play Association: Promoting the Child's Right to Play [www.ipaworld.org](http://www.ipaworld.org)

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child <http://tinyurl.com/pampbbc>



## Scrapstores

Scrapstores Directory <http://www.scrapstoresuk.org/>

Borders Scrapstore

Selkirk (also operates in Musselburgh, East Lothian)

Tel: 01750 725 961

Website: <http://www.onlineborders.org.uk/community/bordersscrapstore>

Glasgow Play Resource Association

Glasgow

Tel: 0141 423 3033

Website: [www.glasgowplay.org.uk](http://www.glasgowplay.org.uk)

Remake Scotland

Crieff

Highlands and Islands

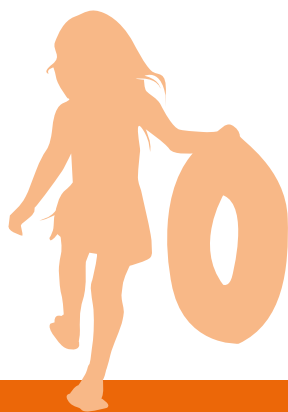
Tel: 01764 655 733

Website: [www.remakescotland.co.uk](http://www.remakescotland.co.uk)

Orkney Zero Waste

[manager.orkneyzerowaste@gmail.com](mailto:manager.orkneyzerowaste@gmail.com)

<http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/OZ/>



# Appendix 3: Sample parent letters

## Letter 1

Dear School Families,

### Lunchtime play

As part of the ongoing improvements to our school's learning community, I wanted to let you know about a new activity programme we are making available to children at lunchtimes.

From the new term in January, staff will be encouraging children to use their imagination to play with a different set of resources including cardboard boxes, tyres, bread baskets, tarpaulins, wooden planks and plastic guttering. These might seem unusual play items but the idea is that 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.

This will happen outwith class time and I expect there will be a great deal of learning taking place – from investigating how to tie a good knot to discovering how many tyres you need in a great den. This kind of play also encourages children to recognise safety and take reasonable risk for themselves, important skills needed throughout life.

Staff and pupils have worked on progressing this project together, with staff receiving additional training to further support the children's play. Issues including how to use the resources safely have been investigated and children will be involved in setting up a code of conduct to use throughout the project. All items will be checked initially and on a regular basis for safety.

The majority of pupils would like to play outdoors even during wet weather so we would really appreciate you sending your child to school in suitable clothing.

Please get in touch if you would like further information on this exciting project. Yours sincerely

Written by Mandy Tulloch of Mud Pies  
[www.mudpieadventures.co.uk](http://www.mudpieadventures.co.uk)  
March 2014





## Letter 2 (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'.

Add a picture of some loose parts you'll be using here

Add a picture of some loose parts you'll be using here

Add a picture of some loose parts you'll be using here

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 and outwith class 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.

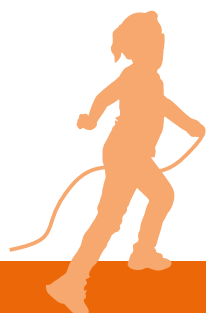
#### Parents and carers

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 4: Action plan for introducing loose parts play examples

### Implementing loose parts action plan - Aberdeen Play Forum

| Action   | Achievable date | Completed |
|--|-----------------|-----------|
| <p><b>Discuss Theory of Loose Parts with entire staff team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all staff team are enthused about implementing loose parts</li> <li>• Ensure all staff read the Loose Parts Toolkit</li> <li>• Encourage staff to attend loose parts play training.</li> <li>• Undertake an audit of current practice</li> </ul>                              |                 |           |
| <p><b>Send out introductory information out to parents/carers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are loose parts?</li> <li>• Why is free play so important?</li> <li>• Add information that the children will be involved in loose parts play and they will be outdoors more</li> <li>• Be aware of children's access to outdoors – providing appropriate clothing</li> </ul> |                 |           |
| <p><b>Secure appropriate storage</b></p>   |                 |           |
| <p><b>Start collecting loose parts</b></p> <p>Don't introduce to the children just yet...</p> <p>(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 which can be easily integrated into existing routines – see below.)</p>  |                 |           |
| <p><b>Children to write letters to local business, family/friends to request donations for the loose parts kit.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including writing and drawings</li> </ul>   |                 |           |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Introduce loose parts to children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tidy up routines</li> <li>• Routines for using the loose parts (safety)</li> <li>• Introduce items gradually – (risk-benefit assess each item with the children).</li> </ul>      |  |  |
| <p><b>Maintain the loose parts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check the gathered loose parts are ready and suitable for playing with</li> <li>• Checks anything that requires fixing, discarding or replacing has been dealt with</li> </ul>             |  |  |
| <p><b>Develop a play policy/statement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This could be a play policy</li> <li>• Play statement</li> <li>• Play strategy</li> <li>• And/or including ‘play’ into health and safety/other policies</li> </ul>                  |  |  |
| <p><b>Put a loose parts article into each newsletter</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To inform families of what the children have been up to with the loose parts kit</li> <li>• The benefits implementing Loose Parts has had to the children</li> </ul> |  |  |





|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Create a loose parts information leaflet</b></p> <p>Could link in with the introductory information or a new leaflet just on loose parts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are loose parts?</li> <li>• The benefits of play</li> <li>• Challenging play/ adventurous play</li> <li>• Appropriate clothing for all weather conditions/muddy play.</li> <li>• Top tips</li> <li>• Donation list – suggested items to donate</li> </ul> <p>Could this be added into the induction packs?</p> |  |  |
| <p><b>Keep loose parts risk-benefit assessments up to date</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's a working document – up-date as new loose parts arrive or issues arise with certain items;</li> <li>• Review every 6 months</li> </ul>   |  |  |
| <p><b>Host a family fun day for parents/carers to experience loose parts in action</b></p>  |  |  |



# Appendix 5: Tried and tested loose parts

## Natural

- Wooden pennies (slices of wood about 3 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

## Surfaces and features

- 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, rakes etc.)
- Gravel - chuckies
- Bark chips
- Mud
- Long grass
- Trees – worthwhile planting for future generations of children
- Fire pit (temporary or permanent)

## More temporary

- Chalk
- Straw bales
- Cardboard boxes – various sizes and shapes
- Leaves, feathers, shells, pine cones
- Stones / pebbles / cobbles
- Air drying modelling clay
- Tree brushings
- Leaves

## Man-made

- Quick drying materials such as organza, fleece blankets and shower curtains
- Tarpaulins (various sizes and colours - big, small, green, blue, white, transparent etc.)
- Milk and bread crates
- Wooden pallets – tough ones
- Tough buckets
- Cable drums or reels
- Tubes, guttering and funnels (plastic or bamboo), hosepipe, bore pipes
- Nets
- Tyres – bicycle, motorbike and car
- Large shallow tray
- Trolley on wheels to help aid tidying up, e.g. garden trolley / sack trolley, tub truck trolley, large metal trolley or small trolley
- Wheelbarrow
- Old suitcases
- Baskets for collecting / transporting
- Resources to enhance small world play, for example mini figures, dinosaurs and vehicles
- Steering wheels
- Computer keyboards
- Old clothes for dressing up, e.g. jacket suits, waistcoats, handbags
- Portable seats/ sit-upons: aluminium bubble-wrap, camping ones, gardening mats

## Useful little bits

- Velcro straps
- Fence clamps and hooks
- String, paracord, high vis guy ropes
- Big karabiners
- Pegs – Ecoforce have spring-free pegs
- Duct tape, masking tape

# Appendix 6: Play statement example

*All children and young people enjoy high quality play opportunities, particularly outdoor free play in stimulating spaces with access to nature, on a daily basis in early learning and childcare, nursery and school (Scottish Government, 2013).*

This school recognises the importance of all the children having sufficient time and space to play freely as part of their day. To children, playing is one of the most important aspects of their lives. For some children school offers their only regular opportunity to play with friends.

Playing contributes to children's learning and their ability to learn as well as their health, wellbeing and happiness. This school will offer opportunities for children's to play that support children's wellbeing indicators – being safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included.

We will aim to make a positive contribution to children's lives by providing for a broad range of play opportunities within the school and school grounds before, during and after the school day.

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. In this school we recognise that children need a degree of risk, challenge and adventure in order to grow and develop.

We also recognise that any potential risk of harm to children needs to be balanced with the benefits that may come from playing. 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 believes that adults' attitude towards, and understanding of, children's play will have a significant effect on the quality of the play opportunities offered in school. This school will therefore seek out training opportunities and offer support to staff so that they are confident to facilitate children's freely chosen, self-directed play.

See also:

<http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit>



## Appendix 7: List of charities funded through Go Play and Go2Play

The following Charities received funding and support from Inspiring Scotland and Scottish Governments Go2Play Fund. Many of these charities features within this toolkit and offer free play opportunities for children and use loose parts in their daily play practice.

- 3D Drumchapel
- Aberdeen Play Forum
- Aberlour (and Leisure Culture Dundee)
- Baltic Street Adventure Playground (via PEEK)
- Barra Children's Centre
- Bounce Higher (St Andrews Church in Bo'ness)
- Broxburn Family Centre
- Canongate Youth
- Capability Scotland
- Care and Learning Alliance (CALA)
- Circle
- Concrete Garden
- Crossreach Daisy Chain
- Cumbernauld YMCA YWCA
- CVS Wigtownshire
- Dads Rock
- Dornoch Allsorts After School Club
- Dumfries and Galloway CVS (The Bridge)
- Early Years Scotland
- Earthtime
- East Ayrshire Community Play Forum
- East Lothian Play Association
- Edinburgh Leisure
- Enterprise Childcare
- Falkland Stewardship Trust
- Family Support Projects Camphill School
- Friends of Craighalbert Centre
- Glasgow Playschemes Association
- Grounds for Learning
- Healthy Valleys
- Highland Mobile Toy Library
- Home Start Glasgow South
- Home-Start Stirling
- IPA Scotland
- Jeely Piece Club
- Lothian Autistic Society
- Maryhill Mobile Creche
- Midlothian Association of Play
- North Lanarkshire CPA (formerly CVS North Lanarkshire)
- NATLL & National Playbus Association
- North Edinburgh Arts
- North Lanarkshire Community Play Association (Formerly CVS North Lanarkshire)
- One Parent Families Scotland
- Parent Action for Safe Play
- PEEK (possibilities for Each and Every Kid)
- Play Scotland
- Playbusters
- Quarriers
- Reidvale Adventure Play Association Ltd
- Scottish Borders Out of School Care Network
- Scottish Childminding Association
- Scottish Out of School Care Network
- Scottish Outdoors Education Centres
- Smart Play Network
- Stepping Stones for Families
- Stramash
- Stranraer YMCA
- The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)
- The Environmental Trust (West Dunbartonshire)
- The YARD
- The Zone
- Women's Aid South Lanarkshire
- YMCA Edinburgh
- YMCA Stranraer
- Youth Scotland
- Youth Highland





# Appendix 8: Loose Parts Play and Curriculum for Excellence

The advice contained in Curriculum for Excellence: A Statement for Practitioners from HM Chief Inspector of Education is about ensuring that any improvement focuses upon how children will benefit as well as tackling workload. It cites the need to take full account of the values, capacities and curriculum design principles that underpin Curriculum for Excellence.

The inclusive, collaborative and rights based approach to embedding loose parts play advocated by this Toolkit can assist schools and early learning and childcare settings to embed this advice, particularly if:

- Children and young people of all ages and abilities are active participants in the process of acquiring, 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 classwork.
- 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 of this Toolkit. 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.

Teachers should be empowered to use the flexibility that CfE provides to organise learning for children and young people in ways that best meets learners' needs.

(HM Chief Inspector of Education, 2016)

## Values

*The Scottish approach to the curriculum is values-based. Wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity define the values for Scottish society (HM Chief Inspector of Education, 2016) and apply to, and can be reinforced through, the process of introducing and embedding loose parts play. Through playing, children learn about these concepts experientially.*

## Wisdom

Wisdom is about developing experience, knowledge and good judgement. Embedding loose parts play enables children and young people to learn life skills that develop wisdom 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.



### Compassion

Compassion is about empathy, sympathy and concern for others. Loose parts play helps children and young people develop compassion by:

- 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 community. This is about developing personal and social responsibility. For example, ensuring that cleaners are not left to clean up any mess created by lots of wet feet coming into school.

### Integrity

This value is about honesty, developing moral principles and purpose and being true to these. Loose parts play provides a context where children and young people learn through their interactions with others about integrity. This includes:

- 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 gives every child the opportunity to explore social and emotional risk taking and decision making.

### Justice

Justice is about respecting others and being fair and reasonable. 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 such as consensus or different ways of voting to be explored through both the process of embedding loose parts play as well as the play itself.

## The four capacities and embedding loose parts play

### Developing successful learners

The approach to introducing, embedding and playing with loose parts appeals to children and young people. They become enthusiastic and motivated to play 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 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.

### Developing confident individuals

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.

### Developing responsible citizens

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. The acquisition of loose parts which are scrap and unwanted household and business items helps children consider environmental and other issues around society's use of resources. Donations from communities reflect their social and cultural heritage. In turn, this contributes to developing informed, ethical views of complex issues.

### Developing effective contributors

Embedding loose parts play into schools is an enterprising approach that fosters partnership working. Children and young people have to communicate in different ways to different people and organisations. It requires them take the initiative and lead on different aspects of the changes, applying critical thinking skills in a new context. It is necessary for children be solution-focused in their approach.

## Curriculum design principles and loose parts play

**Challenge and enjoyment:** play is active. It engages and motivates children and young people.

**Coherence:** play brings many strands of learning into an experience that has meaning and purpose to the children and young people. It is holistic where physical, social, cognitive and emotional development is happening simultaneously.

**Relevance:** loose parts play provides a real world context that children can experience on a daily basis.

**Personalisation and choice:** choice about what to play and with whom.

**Breadth:** a wide range of open-ended resources with no defined way of using them provides almost infinite possibilities. The opportunities are further extended in well-designed natural school grounds.

**Depth:** children and young people can focus on a key passion or interest on a daily basis developing a depth of knowledge and skills. This could be imaginative contexts or practical skills such as involved in den building.

**Progression:** daily opportunities for outdoor free play with loose parts in all weathers all year round enables children to acclimatise to the weather, seasons and landscape for play purposes and experience the ebb and flow of play themes and interests.



## Bundling together experiences and outcomes through loose parts play

The following experiences and outcomes dovetail with the Loose Parts Toolkit. Enabling play for the sake of it matters. Ensuring children and young people have daily access to free play with loose parts can be an essential part of embedding Curriculum for Excellence at all levels, particularly with regard to aspects of health and wellbeing. At the Early Level, the availability of loose parts benefits children by providing a range of learning contexts across all curriculum areas.

1. Introducing loose parts contribute towards developing children's understanding and experience of citizenship.

**HWB 0-09a / HWB 1-09a / HWB 2-09a / HWB 3-09a / HWB 4-09a**

**HWB 0-10a / HWB 1-10a / HWB 2-10a / HWB 3-10a / HWB 4-10a**

**HWB 0-11a / HWB 1-11a / HWB 2-11a / HWB 3-11a / HWB 4-11a**

**HWB 0-12a / HWB 1-12a / HWB 2-12a / HWB 3-12a / HWB 4-12a**

**HWB 0-13a / HWB 1-13a / HWB 2-13a / HWB 3-13a / HWB 4-13a**

**HWB 0-14a / HWB 1-14a / HWB 2-14a / HWB 3-14a / HWB 4-14a**

**SOC 0-16a / SOC 1-16a / SOC 1-17a / SOC 1-18a**

2. If the adults working with children and young people are facilitating loose parts play in line with the Playwork Principles, then their interactions will support children to acquire the skills to express their emotions in appropriate ways when playing.

**HWB 0-01a / HWB 1-01a / HWB 2-01a / HWB 3-01a / HWB 4-01a**

**HWB 0-02a / HWB 1-02a / HWB 2-02a / HWB 3-02a / HWB 4-02a**

**HWB 0-03a / HWB 1-03a / HWB 2-03a / HWB 3-03a / HWB 4-03a**

**HWB 0-04a / HWB 1-04a / HWB 2-04a / HWB 3-04a / HWB 4-04a**

**HWB 1-24a / HWB 2-24a / HWB 3-24a**

**HWB 0-45a / HWB 1-45a**

3. Play is when children develop friendships and learn the art of building relationships and being considerate of others, including co-operating, turn taking and learning about fairness.

**HWB 0-05a / HWB 1-05a / HWB 2-05a / HWB 3-05a / HWB 4-05a**

**HWB 0-08a / HWB 1-08a / HWB 2-08a / HWB 3-08a / HWB 4-08a**

**HWB 0-19a / HWB 1-19a / HWB 2-19a / HWB 3-19a**

**HWB 0-23a / HWB 1-23a / HWB 2-23a / HWB 3-23a / HWB 4-23a**

**HWB 0-44a / HWB 1-44a / HWB 2-44a**

**HWB 0-44b / HWB 1-44b / HWB 2-44b / HWB 3-44b / HWB 4-44b**

**HWB 0-45a / HWB 1-45a / HWB 2-45a / HWB 3-45a / HWB 4-45a**

**HWB 0-45b / HWB 1-45b / HWB 2-45b / HWB 3-45b / HWB 4-45b**

**RME 0-02a / RME 0-05a**

**RME 0-09a / RME 1-09a**

**SOC 0-17a / SOC 1-17a**

**SOC 0-18a**

4. Free play with loose parts facilitates children's ability to listen and talk in informal situations and when engaging with others. This includes turn taking, when to talk, listening to others and acknowledging differences of opinion.

**LIT 0-02a / 1-02a / 2-02a / 3-02a / 4-02a**

**ENG 0-03a / ENG 1-03a**



5. Children and young people learn how to take care of themselves, develop self-awareness and personal safety through their free play with loose parts.

**HWB 0-16a / HWB 1-16a / HWB 2-16a / HWB 3-16a / HWB 4-16a**

**HWB 0-17a / HWB 1-17a / HWB 2-17a / HWB 3-17a / HWB 4-17a**

**HWB 0-33a / HWB 1-33a / HWB 2-33a**

**HWB 0-42a / HWB 1-42a / HWB 2-42a**

**HWB 0-48a / HWB 1-48a**

6. Children and young people have daily opportunities to be physically active, playing in ways that suit their developmental needs. Playing in natural spaces can be particularly effective for developing movement skills.

**HWB 0-21a / HWB 1-21a / HWB 2-21a / HWB 3-21a**

**HWB 0-22a / HWB 1-22a / HWB 2-22a / HWB 3-22a**

**HWB 0-25a / HWB 1-25a / HWB 2-25a / HWB 3-25a / HWB 4-25a**

7. Children learn experientially about beliefs and values and their impact on behaviours and actions through free play, including those around sustainability and caring for the environment.

**RME 0-07a / 1-07a / RME 2-07a / RME 3-07a / RME 4-07a**

**RME 1-08a / RME 2-08a / RME 3-08a / RME 4-08a**

**RME 1-09b / RME 1-09c / RME 2-09d / RME 3-09c / RME RME 3-09d**

**SOC 0-08a / SOC 1-08a**

**TCH 0-02a / TCH 1-02a**

8. Creative expression in many forms arises during free play. This can include art, drama, dance and music where the loose parts are the stimuli in conjunction with the space.

**EXA 0-02a**

**EXA 0-05a / EXA 1-05a / EXA 2-05a**

**EXA 0-12a / 1-12a**

**EXA 0-13a / EXA 1-13a / EXA 2-13a**

**EXA 0-14a**

**EXA 0-18a / EXA 1-18a / EXA 2-18a**

9. Children design and build constructions frequently during loose part play. This requires skills such as critical thinking and using problem solving strategies achieve success.

**EXA 0-06a / EXA 1-06a / EXA 2-06a**

**TCH 1-11b / TCH 2-11b**

**TCH 0-14a / TCH 1-14a / TCH 2-14a**

**TCH 1-14b / TCH 2-14b**

**TCH 0-15a**

**TCH 0-01a / TCH 1-01a / TCH 2-01a**

**TCH 1-01c**

**TCH 0-11a / TCH 1-11b / TCH 2-11b**

**TCH 0-12a / TCH 1-12a**



## Appendix 9: Evaluation and Monitoring advice

By reviewing your loose parts play, and effectively evaluating your progress against the outcomes you hope to achieve, you will be able to show the difference it has made and how it can be improved. This is useful for your stakeholders, funders, colleagues and parents.

There are many evaluation tools available, it therefore would be wise to consider what your outcomes are and set about developing tools and techniques that work for your organisation or project, its scale and location.

Some useful web links when understanding and implementing effective evaluation and monitoring of your Loose Parts Play activity.

<http://tinyurl.com/G2PFramework>

<http://tinyurl.com/EvalScot>

<http://tinyurl.com/EvalScotGuide>

Our Play Ranger Toolkit has sample evaluation logic models and forms which may also help you to evaluation your loose parts play.

<http://tinyurl.com/PlayRngr>





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