

Hastings Adventure Playground Play Policy

Summary	This policy sets out our understanding of play and why we believe it to be important to the work of Hastings Adventure Playground.
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Issue date	January 2021
Version number	2.0
Review date	January 2025

Document Control

Date	Version	Action	Amendments
January 2021	1.0	Policy first implemented	N/a

Introduction

This policy sets out our understanding of play and why we believe it to be important to the work of Hastings Adventure Playground (HAP).* This policy applies to all HAP staff (including volunteers) and should be read in conjunction with our HAP Playwork Policy and our 'What is an Adventure Playground?' document. This policy is underpinned by the Playwork Principles.

Hastings Adventure Playground provides places where children can play. In our play spaces children can run around, climb, jump, roll, balance, scream, play with mud and water, get dirty, make things, destroy things, dress up, read, be quiet, be on their own or play in large groups. In other words – be children. We believe that play is essential in children's lives, and know that when children are asked about what they think is important in their lives, playing (or playing with friends) is often top of the list. But how do we describe what 'play' actually means?

What is play?

At HAP, we understand the importance of having a shared understanding of what we mean by 'play'. We strongly believe in Article 31 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) ratified by the UK in 1991. This states that every child has the fundamental right *'to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.'* Following concerns raised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the poor recognition given by Governments to Article 31, in 2013 the UN published [General Comment 17](#) to confirm the importance of the set out in detail the measures governments are urged to take to ensure implementation of the rights in Article 31 for all children. The legal definition of play as stated by the UNCRC is set out below:

'Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise.

Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end.

Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental, or emotional activity, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood.

The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility, and non-productivity. Together, these factors contribute to the enjoyment it produces and the consequent incentive to continue to play.

While play is often considered non-essential, the Committee reaffirms that it is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development.

In simple terms:

- Play is an essential part of every child's life
- Play is freely chosen – it is an activity or behaviour that the child engages in of their own volition
- In play, the child does what they want, when they want and for no other reason than they want.
- Play may or may not involve equipment
- Children's play can be on their own or with others
- Play can be active or sedentary
- Play can be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light-hearted, or very serious
- Play can cause a child to be sad or even upset
- Play can be messy
- Children can and will play without adult intervention
- Children can discover their world through playing
- Play has no outcomes other than play
- When children are playing it might seem, sometimes, like they are doing nothing
- Whilst children may learn through their play, they do not play to learn
- If the child can't quit, then it probably isn't play
- Sometimes the play of children can be disturbing or unsettling for adults who are watching

At HAP, our aim is to resource the space and leave the children to do what they want to do. This is play!

The benefits of playing for children, families, and the wider community?

Research suggests that children's access to good play provision can:

- increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
- improve and maintain their physical and mental health
- give them the opportunity to mix with other children
- allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
- promote their imagination, independence, and creativity
- offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
- provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning

- build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
- provide opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community.

Research also highlights the wider benefits of play provision for families and communities, suggesting that:

- parents can feel more secure knowing that their children are happy and enjoying themselves
- families benefit from healthier, happier children
- buildings and facilities used by play services are frequently seen as a focal point for communities
- it offers opportunities for social interaction for the wider community and supports the development of a greater sense of community spirit, promoting social cohesion

As play is the reason for Hastings Adventure Playground's existence, all other HAP policies and procedures are subject to this and should not counteract or disagree with this play policy.

* What is an adventure playground?

Play England describes an adventure playground as:

'a space dedicated solely to children's play, where skilled playworkers enable and facilitate the ownership, development and design — physically, socially and culturally — by the children playing there. It is enclosed by a boundary to signal that the space within is dedicated to children's play and to enable and encourage activities not usually condoned in other spaces where children play, such as digging, making fires, or building and demolishing dens and other constructions. It is a place where children can engage in a full range of play behaviours. The children and playworkers continually create and adapt challenging and exciting play structures and features to make a place that children feel belongs to them and where anything is possible'

It is important to note that adventure playgrounds are by their very nature individual to their location due to the fact that they are shaped by their users. They evolve with children's and community participation, as spaces that children 'own' and are empowered to shape and develop.

The essential elements of an effective adventure playground include:

- Staffed by skilled and appropriately qualified playworkers (refer to our HAP Playwork Policy)
- Allowing for spontaneous free expression of children's drive to play
- Opportunities to access a rich play diet and engage in the full range of play types as chosen by children
- Exploration of physical, social, emotional, imaginary, symbolic and sensory spaces

- Free flow in giving and responding to “play cues” to ensure children can determine the content and intent of their play
- Creating a shared flexible space that children feel has a sense of ‘magic’
- A rich play environment that continually changes and evolves, where children can play all year round and in all weathers
- The active involvement of children and young people in creating and modifying the play space, within a varied landscape
- The playground is at the heart of the community

Other essential elements, often shared with other forms of play provision are:

- It is designed to be accessible to all children, and is based on inclusive practice so that disabled, non-disabled children and children from minority communities are welcomed and enabled to play together
- Entry to the playground is free of charge, children are free to come and go and free to choose how they spend their time when there
- Risk management is based on the principle of risk-benefit assessment, balancing the potential for harm against the benefits children gain from challenging themselves in their play.