



Hastings Adventure Playground Playwork Policy



Summary	This policy sets out our understanding of Playwork and within that, explains the role that adults (playworkers) fulfil at Hastings Adventure Playground
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Document Control

Date	Version	Action	Amendments
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Introduction

This policy sets out our understanding of Playwork and within that, explains the role that adults (playworkers) fulfil at Hastings Adventure Playground (HAP).* This policy applies to all HAP staff (including volunteers) and should be read in conjunction with our HAP Play Policy and our What is an Adventure Playground document..

What is Playwork?

Playwork is a profession that exists to support children's needs and rights to play. This is done through the creation of spaces where children can play. (See our HAP Play Policy for more information about play)

Playworkers do whatever they have to do so children can play in the way we understand play to be. In a world where children's opportunities to play are being restricted and inhibited, the playworker's role is to create environments that enable children to experience the sort of play opportunities and experiences that are needed for a rich play diet.

Playworkers work to support children's play and protect their play spaces from the external world. Their aim is to ensure that children have enriching play experiences, but there are no other outcomes in mind beyond this, making playwork different from, for example, education. This is because many of the benefits of play are derived when children are free to follow their own instincts and interests, and these particular benefits are not available to children when adults programme activities.

The role of the playworker is to support the process of play as it unfolds (if their support is desired or needed by the children), and to create the conditions that help enriching play experiences to happen in the first place, and this is where professional skill is so important.

A common misconception is that playworkers always play with children. In reality playworkers have a unique way of working that enables children to extend their own play and the playworker protects and enhances the play space so that it is an environment where children are able to make a wide range of choices; where there are many possibilities so that they can invent and extend their own play and the playworker only joins in when invited to do so.

Playwork is a highly skilled profession, rooted in an understanding of the vital nature of play, based on academic knowledge and research combined with the everyday reflective experience of being a playworker. It takes place where adults support children's play, protecting those spaces from anything that acts to restrict the children's play and it is not driven by prescribed education or care outcomes.

As the playworker works in ensuring that children can play sometimes we see play that we are not comfortable with but we don't immediately intervene! We recognise that when children play sometimes what happens may not be pleasant or kind but this is the child working out their world. The playworker will observe what is happening and only then would an intervention be considered.

The exception to this was if a child was in imminent danger of seriously harming themselves or others, physically or emotionally, then the playworker would step in immediately.

The wider benefits of Playwork

Evidence shows that because of the play-centred approach of playworkers, children can build confidence to play games, take risks, test boundaries, and socialise with others in a way that is not always possible at home, on the street, at school or in unsupervised playgrounds. This means that playworkers are often uniquely placed to support particularly vulnerable children dealing with the significant challenges of unstable families lives, changing schools or wider social problems and can provide informal counselling, mentoring, and coaching along with advice on drugs, sex and staying safe as well as sign-posting and referral to statutory services, including local safeguarding boards.

In simple terms:

- Playworkers facilitate inspiring spaces where the conditions are right for freely chosen play to occur.
- Playworkers provide children with access to a wide range of resources which help them play.

- Playworkers support children to construct, dismantle and therefore adapt their own play environments.
- Playworkers try to avoid getting in the way or interfering with the play process whenever possible and only become involved in play if necessary due to health and safety reasons or if invited to do so by the child.
- Playworkers understand the importance of children experiencing challenge in their play and are trained to balance risks with need to protect children from serious injury.
- Playworkers identify and remove barriers to children's play.
- Playworkers empower children and therefore support them to raise their self-esteem and build their confidence.
- Playworkers strive to remember what it was like to be a child and are sympathetic and supportive of children's play behaviour.

Staff at Hastings Adventure Playground

All staff at HAP will have, or be working towards, a playwork qualification. In addition, it is crucial that they understand and are committed to the adventure playground ethos of playworkers being a resource for children rather than leading or directing their play. The relationships between playworkers and children that develop over time are an aspect of playground life highly valued by our children and families.

As well as core playwork skills, the staff team also have necessary skills in the design, construction, modification and maintenance of adventure playground structures and features, to ensure that the playground can evolve and change in response to the children's needs and desires.