

Playful Childhoods

www.playfulchildhoods.wales



Playing at home
guide

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Playing is the most natural and enjoyable way for children to keep well and be happy. It is their way of supporting their own health and wellbeing.

Play is one of your child's most important needs. Playing has always been part of how children learn and grow. Being able to play every day is part of a happy and healthy childhood.

No matter how old your child is, playing is good for their wellbeing and development. When children are playing, they are exercising their bodies and brains without even realising it. Playing is fun – and that's important, too.

Playing needn't cost much (or anything at all) and it makes every day an adventure.

We have put together this handy guide to help you make sure your child has plenty of good opportunities to play.

It provides helpful reminders, ideas and tips about play for all children – no matter how old they are.

If you like the ideas in this guide, you'll find even more on our website: www.playfulchildhoods.wales



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Buddiannau chwarae

Benefits of play

Mae gan chwarae bob math o fuddiannau ar gyfer plant - yn gorfforol, meddyliol, emosïynol a chymdeithasol.

Playing has all sorts of benefits for children - physical, mental, emotional and social.

Mae chwarae'n helpu plant i...
Playing helps children...



HERIO EU HUNAIN
CHALLENGE THEMSELVES



CADW'N HEINI
KEEP FIT



GWNEUD SYNNWYR O
BETHAU ANODD
MAKE SENSE OF
DIFFICULT THINGS

Mae chwarae'n helpu plant i ddatblygu...
Playing helps children develop...



BALANS
BALANCE



YMENNYDD MWY
BIGGER BRAINS



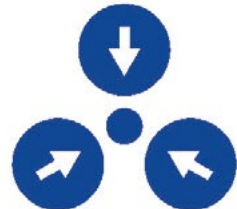
SGILIAU CYFATHREBU
COMMUNICATION SKILLS



DAWN CANOLBWYNTIO
CONCENTRATION



HYDER
CONFIDENCE



CYDSYMUADIAD
CO-ORDINATION



CREADIGEDD
CREATIVITY



DYCHYMYG
IMAGINATION



HUNAN-BARCH
SELF-ESTEEM

Ond yn bennaf oll, mae chwarae'n hwyl!
But most of all playing is fun!

Why PLAY MATTERS for your child

Having the chance to play is an important part of a happy and healthy childhood for every child. Playing is one of the most important parts of their lives – children value having time, space and freedom to play at home and in their local community. As adults, it's our responsibility to make sure this happens.



Playing makes a crucial contribution to your child's development – physical, mental, emotional and social.

- **Play and physical activity**
When they play, children are likely to be physically active – running, jumping, dancing, climbing, digging, lifting, pushing and pulling.
- **Play and learning**
When they play, children solve problems, learn new words and explore how things work.
- **Play and socialising**
When they play, children make friends, argue and make friends again, and learn to share.
- **Play and creativity**
When they play, children test things, make things, use their imagination, and express themselves.
- **Play and feelings**
When they play, children express their feelings. They often feel happy, and they come to terms with different experiences. This helps children feel less stressed.

Making time and space to PLAY at home

Our homes are great places for children to play. Making time and space for your child to play in their home every day is important. Your child will make creative use of the available space – even the corner of a room – if they have a few items to play with and the freedom to play. You don't need to fill their lives with expensive activities.

Time to play

To help your child get the most from their free time doesn't have to cost anything – it's about giving them time to play.

- **Quality time**
Your child needs time to play and they want to know that you are around if they need you.
- **Prioritise time for playing**
Playing is very important for children's learning, and for their physical and emotional health. It is just as important as lessons, homework or football practice.
- **Time out**
Children want to be outside – when possible. The time your child spends outdoors in the garden or in natural environments will cost nothing.

- **Time for cheap and cheerful**
There are lots of cheap or free alternatives to 'activities' and to expensive toys and games. See our play ideas on page 18 for inspiration for all the family.

Space to play

Your home is your child's first and most familiar play space. When they are young, your child will usually enjoy repeating the same types of play. This is important for their development, and it's easy to do at home.

Playing at home helps your child feel safe, secure and happy. If you have recently moved or are away from home, having familiar things to play with can help your child settle in.

Lots of fun ideas don't need much room, including old favourites like hide and seek, and building a den out of cushions and blankets. All sorts of things around the home can be used for play – cushions can be stepping stones, a blanket over a table can become an instant den, and empty cardboard boxes can be made into cars, castles or spaceships.

Supporting children's WELLBEING through PLAY

Playing is the most natural and enjoyable way for children to keep well and be happy. Playing is something that children do whenever they have the chance. It's their way of supporting their own health and wellbeing.

Even if children may sometimes seem distressed, play is the healthy way for children to come to terms with news and it provides parents and carers with an insight to how they are feeling. Playing can contribute to improved wellbeing for everyone during times of uncertainty.

Time

If children are absorbed in play, it's okay to leave them to it. Try to resist the urge to start a specific activity or stepping in to help, unless you are asked to.

Having time to watch children play can help you find out a bit about what they enjoy doing and give you a clue to how they may be feeling.

Try not to worry if children say they are bored, that's okay. Many children have become used to their time being filled and the experience of boredom is unusual. But it's a natural and important

experience that we often see before a period of creativity.

Make the most of your time outside by valuing play. As much as they will enjoy long walks and cycling, children get most of their physical activity from playing. Scooting, exploring, jumping and climbing on walls are great examples of how children will make a walk more playful.

Space

There are lots of things around the house that encourage imagination and creativity. Allow children to play with things like cardboard boxes, old sheets, pots and pans.

Make a place to play – using items such as a cardboard box, sheets and cushions to build a small den – that allows children to be quiet and calm.

Try to allow for noisier and even destructive play. Children might want to play fight with their siblings, destroy something they have created, or hit things to make a noise. Acting like this helps them to vent frustration and understand what is happening.

Permission

Remember that older children still need room and space to play too. They may be boisterous or might enjoy doing things they did when they were younger. This can give them a sense of security.

Try to let children decide how and what they are playing. Some things may be hard or upsetting to watch, but fantasy play helps children to make sense of and work through difficult and distressing issues.

Try not to stress too much if your children are playing alone. When playing alone, children begin to recognise their own emotions, feelings, and thoughts, as well as how to control them. They are also learning to feel comfortable with being by themselves and learning ways to manage their boredom on their own.

Through playing children experience a range of emotions including frustration, determination, achievement,

disappointment and confidence, and through practice, can learn how to manage these feelings.

Focus on play ideas without rules or that don't need a specific skill. These are fun for family members of all ages and will help pass the time in a playful way.



ACTIVE PLAY in and around the HOME

We all know how important it is for our health and wellbeing to be active.

Playing is a great way for children to be active, helping their coordination, balance, and physical skills. Active play includes everything from rolling and crawling to running about, playing chasing games, catching balls, jumping in puddles and doing cartwheels.

Playing actively raises children's heart rate and makes them 'huff and puff'. Active play is good for children's physical and mental wellbeing. Remember, any activity is better than none, and more is better still.

Moving around and playing burns energy and this helps children keep fit and healthy. It also helps prevent serious illnesses in later life like type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Making sure children have time, space and freedom to play is a great way of making sure they are moving around – and having fun, too.

There are four Chief Medical Officers in the UK. In 2019, they published information and recommendations about physical activity. The Chief Medical Officers recognise the importance of play for children's development. The guidelines recommend that children should have as much active play as possible.



Guidelines for early years

Infants (younger than a year old):

- Babies should be physically active several times every day in lots of ways, including interactive floor-based activity, such as crawling.
- Babies should have at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day while awake. They should also have chances to reach and grasp, push and pull themselves up independently and roll over.

Toddlers (1-2 years):

- Toddlers should spend at least 180 minutes (three hours) a day doing lots of different types of physical activities, including active and outdoor play, spread throughout the day.

Pre-schoolers (3-4 years):

- Pre-schoolers should spend at least 180 minutes (three hours) a day in a variety of physical activities spread throughout the day, including active and outdoor play. More is better and at least 60 minutes should be normal-to-energetic physical activity.

For practical ideas see: [Play ideas](#) on our website

Older children (5-18 years)

- Children should take part in normal to energetic physical activity for 60 minutes a day. The activities can be spread throughout the day.
- Children should also take part in some activities that develop movement skills and muscle and bone strength across the week. Activities such as: hopping, skipping and swinging using body weight or working against resistance.
- Children should not spend long periods of time sitting still or not moving. Adults need to help children and teenagers to spend less time doing things like screen-time (watching TV, computer use, video games), sitting to read, talk, do homework, or listen to music.

Normal physical activity should make children feel warmer and breathe harder, such as: brisk walking, riding a bike, dancing and rollerblading.

Energetic activities make talking harder and include: running fast, playing tag and skipping.

STUFF for PLAYING with

‘They’d rather play with the box the toy came in, than the toy itself!’

We have probably all heard or said this.

When your child chooses to play with a box rather than a toy, it’s because they see its potential for play. Children see potential in all sorts of stuff. They see that it can be used in more than one way.

What kind of stuff is good for play?

Stuff like boxes, string, sticks, paper, cushions and fabric often make the best play things. Used by themselves or together, they can become anything your child wants. And they are ideal, because they are usually things that are lying around the house, or easy to find.

Things like sand, water, shells, fabric, buckets, boxes and wood are easy to find outdoors and don’t cost a lot.

‘Loose parts’

We call these sorts of everyday things ‘loose parts’. Children can move them around, carry them, roll them, lift them, pile them on top of each other, or put them together to create interesting, original structures and experiences.

Loose parts are great for children’s play because they:

- Increase their creative and imaginative play
- Help them play co-operatively and socialise more
- Encourage them to be more physically active
- Help them develop their communication and negotiation skills.

What stuff should you give your child?

A few well-chosen toys and lots of loose parts will improve your child’s play space and allow them to be in charge of their own play. Toys that can be used again and again in different situations are ideal – things like building blocks, arts and crafts things, and stuffed toys.

Some ideas of how your child can use loose parts

Fabric

Old curtains or sheets can become dens, stepping stones in a river or a wizard's cape

Cardboard tubes

Like the ones in wrapping paper become wands, swords, drumsticks or a trumpet

Cardboard boxes

The list is endless – big, small, by themselves or together, they become houses, castles, cars

Other junk

Food cartons for playing shops or kitchen, and string and tape help children to create and change things



How to deal with messy play

Playing at all ages can be messy and dirty, whether your child is outside in the mud or inside being creative. Being messy is a natural part of childhood. The important thing is to find the balance that works for your family.

Mess or dirty clothes can make extra work for you – here are our tips for dealing with messy play in and around your home:

- Keep a supply of old clothes for your child to wear so that you won't mind them getting dirty
- Cover the floor or table with old cloths or newspaper
- Talk with your child and agree together where it's okay to be messy in your home – and where it isn't
- Accept that spills and mess will sometimes happen
- Involve your child in cleaning up
- Clean mucky things outside, if possible, rather than indoors
- Set up a washing line outside so that muddy or wet clothes, shoes and toys can dry.

Parenting PLAYFULLY

Supporting your child's play is less about what you do – and more about how you do it. Children need time, space and support to get the most out of playing. Here are our tips to help you support your child to play at home and out in the community:

Let your child choose what they play, how they play and who they play with

In their day-to-day lives, children get a lot of instruction from adults, so playing in their free time should be led by them.

Let your child solve their own problems

Showing children the 'right way' to do something stops them from discovering things for themselves. They'll learn a lot more if they work it out.

Take a step back and keep an eye on your child from a distance

Children are more likely to play in their own way, and they will benefit from experimenting and experiencing things for themselves. They won't need a detailed plan of activities.

Let your child enjoy physical challenges

For example climbing trees or balancing on a wall. Try not to be overprotective. The worst that can happen is usually a bump, a bruise or a scrape.

Give your child a few things to help them play in their own way

All they need is a few toys, everyday household items, and play resources. Some of the things that will encourage them to be creative and use their imaginations are: fabric, cardboard boxes and tubes, sticks, pots and pans.



Getting involved in your child's PLAY

When your child is playing, one of the choices they make is whether to play with someone else. Your child may naturally prefer playing alone, or in a small group, or with lots of children. This may change from time to time. Sometimes your child will love having you involved. At other times they won't need you at all.

Children have different ways of inviting people to play with them. Sometimes they use clues rather than giving a straightforward invitation. Your child might:

- Ask 'Can you play with me?'
- Start doing funny things or making funny faces to get your attention
- Start annoying you to get your attention
- Throw a ball or toy for you to catch
- Touch you and run away to start a chasing game.

Some of the best things about playing together are having fun and enjoying spending time together. As well as joining in with your child's play, you

might find it works well to have regular family play times for your whole family. Life can be busy, so setting aside time in the family routine can help make sure you have time for play. It can be something that everybody looks forward to and helps to plan. Some ideas for inspiration:

- **Games hour**
Set aside time for board games for you and your child to play together. You could plan treats like smoothies or popcorn.
- **Outdoor games**
Make arrangements with another family to get together to play games in the street or your nearby park. Try games like rounders or frisbee.
- **Art and craft sessions**
Make up a bag full of arts and crafts things and have a fun art session. Clear other stuff out of the way, switch off screens and get making.
- **'You play you choose' nights**
Give everyone in the family a turn at being in charge of thinking up a play activity for everyone to join in with.

SCREEN time – for children of all ages

Screen time and digital technology is an important part of children and adults' lives. Smart phones and tablets are great for keeping in touch with family and friends. This is especially important for children and teenagers to stay connected to their friends.

Many families want to find a reasonable balance between time spent on screens and time for all the other fun, active and social stuff your child can do. If you are worried your child is spending too much time in front of a tv, computer screen, phone or tablet, we have lots of tips for supporting a balanced approach to screen time for babies, children and teenagers.

Positives and negatives

Screen time can create positive opportunities for:

- social circles and friendship
- information and learning
- entertainment and enjoyment
- feeling connected with friends.

Screen time can also have a negative impact on:

- health and activity
- family time
- quality of sleep
- eyesight.

Children who have a range of things to do and places to play are usually better at managing their own use of digital technology and devices. To help your child manage their screen time, make sure your home has times and places where technology is not used – for example, mealtimes and bedtimes.

Maintaining friendships online is important to all of us. Supporting this sort of online activity will help children to interact and feel connected with their friends.

We aren't suggesting taking digital devices away from your child, but it's important to give children time, space and freedom to play away from screens every day.

Preparing your child to PLAY OUTSIDE confidently

As children gain the freedom and opportunities to play out in their neighbourhoods – perhaps for the first time – we, as parents, may need to help them prepare for this.

Prepare your child to be safe around roads

Prepare your child to walk and cycle independently by explaining and showing them from an early age how they can keep themselves safe on and around roads.



Help your child to get to know your neighbourhood

Walk and cycle with your child in your local area. Help them identify safe routes to play spaces and to the other places they need to go.

Make agreements with your child

Once your child is confident enough to travel around and play out without you, you can agree with them where they are going to play and how long they'll be out. It is helpful if they can tell the time, if they know the neighbourhood, and if they know your address and phone number, too.

Keep your worries in perspective

Try and be realistic about your fears for your child's safety. For most people in most areas, the benefits of playing outside far outweigh the risks.

Take a community approach to play

Get to know local people – neighbours and other families – and agree to keep an eye out for the children in your neighbourhood. Children will be safer if more of them play outside.

30 PLAY ideas

How many can your family complete?

	Build a bug hotel
	Build a tall stack of cards
	Build your own creation with blocks or Lego
	Camp indoors or in the garden
	Create a small world with toy cars and animals
	Dance at a kitchen disco
	Dress up
	Fly paper planes
	Get creative with toilet roll tubes – make animals, rockets ...
	Get creative with vegetable printing
	Go on a jungle parade – walk like an elephant or monkey or ...
	Go on a nature hunt
	Go on a treasure hunt
	Have a go at juggling
	Have a pillow fight

	Have a teddy bear's picnic
	Have an egg & spoon race – no eggs needed, ping pong balls work!
	Make a den
	Make an obstacle course with cushions and blankets
	Make and play saucepan drums
	Make bubbles
	Make cars, castles or spaceships with cardboard boxes
	Make fingerprint or handprint paintings
	Make sock puppets
	Make superhero masks and capes
	Play memory or word association games
	Play ping pong or volleyball with a balloon
	Play stepping stones with cushions
	Play ten pin bowling with re-used plastic drink bottles
	Put on a fashion show

10 top games

Eye spy	Pin the tail on the donkey
Hide and seek	Rock / paper / scissors
Hopscotch	Skipping or French skipping (elastics)
Musical statues	Snap card game
Pass the parcel	Who am I? (sticky note on your forehead with name of a famous person)



