

Playful Childhoods

www.playfulchildhoods.wales



**Playful
parenting guide**

Playful parenting guide

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

Children get the most out of playing when they get to choose what they play, how they play and who they play with. This kind of play brings children enormous physical, social, learning and wellbeing benefits – and it reduces stress on their parents and families, too.

Play Wales has 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 Playful Childhoods website:

www.playfulchildhoods.wales



www.playfulchildhoods.wales



Playful Childhoods



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Benefits of play

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

Playing helps children...



CHALLENGE THEMSELVES



KEEP FIT



**MAKE SENSE OF
DIFFICULT THINGS**

Playing helps children develop...



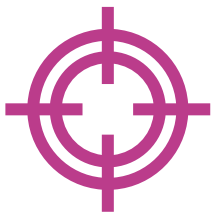
BALANCE



BIGGER BRAINS



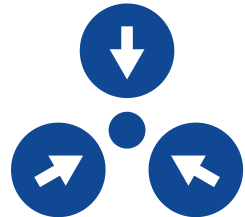
COMMUNICATION SKILLS



CONCENTRATION



CONFIDENCE



CO-ORDINATION



CREATIVITY



IMAGINATION



SELF-ESTEEM

But most of all playing is fun!

Why PLAY MATTERS for your CHILD

Play is every child's right

The importance of children's play is recognised throughout the world. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* – which lists the rights of all children and teenagers – states (in Article 31) that every child has the right to play.

This convention applies to all children and teenagers, whoever they are, wherever they live and whatever they believe. So as parents and carers, it's important to make

sure your child has the space, time and company of others to play. Playing is your child's right wherever they are – at home, in childcare and at school.

How you can support your child's play

You can help make sure that play is part of your child's everyday life. To get the most out of playing, children need parents to provide:

- **Time:** Try to make sure your child has some 'downtime' every day, so they have more opportunity to play. ('Downtime' is when there are no activities – like sports practice and music lessons – structured by adults).
- **Space:** Try to give your child a place to play – somewhere they can get messy, move things around and change how they use things.
- **Permission:** One of the best ways to allow play to happen is to just watch and listen – children are experts on playing. Show you are interested without taking over. You can join in if your child invites you, or if they ask for your help.
- **Stuff:** Give your child simple, everyday materials and other things they can use however they want, for example cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes, paper bags and fabric.



How PLAY HELPS your child DEVELOP

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.

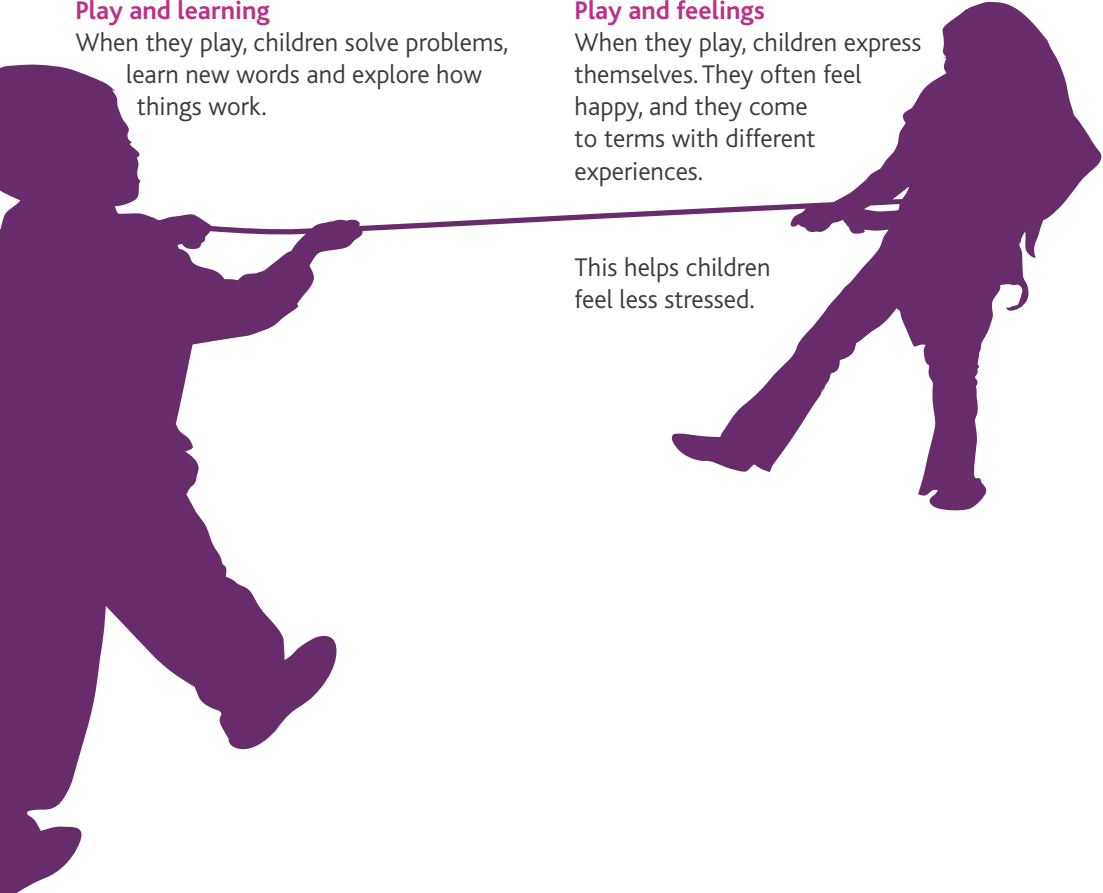
Play and creativity

When they play, children test things, make things, use their imagination, and express themselves.

Play and feelings

When they play, children express themselves. They often feel happy, and they come to terms with different experiences.

This helps children feel less stressed.



Preparing your child to play outside SAFELY and CONFIDENTLY

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.



IDEAS FOR PLAY – things to do

Your child will play independently but sometimes they will welcome your help in getting started, finding stuff to play with or thinking of ideas for games.

Finding stuff to play with

Giving your child everyday things to use however they want is often the starting point for lots of imaginative and creative play. These could be things like:

- Household items like cardboard boxes, old newspapers, old sheets, pegs, pots and pans
- Natural things like pebbles, twigs and puddles.

Thinking of games to play

You can get play ideas by thinking about what you played as a child. Asking friends and older relations can be helpful, too. Here are a few ideas to get you – and them – started:

- Fill a box with old clothes for your child to dress up
- Get some chalk so your child can draw on the pavement
- Draw a pattern for a hopping game like hopscotch
- Build a den
- Make mud pies
- Hang a swing from a tree
- Go for a walk in the dark
- Organise group games like rounders and tag with neighbours or friends
- Get a rope for skipping.

Sometimes your child might like you to join in. The most important thing you can do is make sure play is part of their everyday life.



STUFF for PLAYING

'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 playthings. 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, rope, tyres 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.

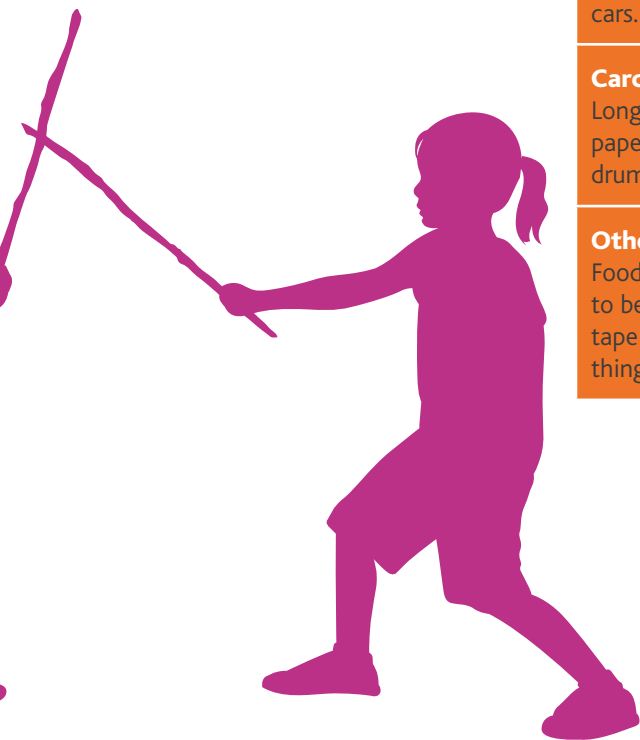
Loose parts are great for children's play because they:

- 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, sheets and cushions can become dens, stepping stones in a river or a wizard's cape.

Cardboard boxes

Big, small, by themselves or together, they can become houses, castles and cars.

Cardboard tubes

Long tubes (that come with wrapping paper) can become wands, swords, drumsticks or a trumpet.

Other junk

Food cartons can be used for pretending to be in a shop or kitchen. String and tape help children create and change things.

Everyday PLAY ADVENTURES

Encourage your child to play outside

Every child benefits from the opportunity to play outdoors. You don't have to spend money on expensive activities or travel miles to a particular playground – everybody can provide low-cost opportunities in their own communities. Here are a few simple ideas to help you make play part of your daily routine:

Make the journey fun

If you're going out locally, leave the car at home and play as you walk. Take roller skates, scooters or skateboards. Think of games you can play on the way.

Your child is more likely to play if they are with friends, so, why not invite friends along, too.

Make the most of what's around

Children naturally play wherever they are – they don't always need a playground. Everyone's community is different but there will be playable space in your area. If you live on the coast, build sandcastles on the beach. If you live near a park, take a picnic or climb a tree. If you have a garden, build a den.

Get outside whatever the weather

Your child will want to play whatever the weather, so don't be put off going out because it's raining. Be prepared: put on wellies and raincoats, take umbrellas, and get ready for some puddle jumping!

Buy active toys

Traditional toys like hula hoops, skipping ropes and space hoppers are still popular with children. They're ideal for playing in the garden, or outside on the pavement close to your home.

Encourage adventures

Children need to have adventures outdoors, even if it means a few scrapes and grazes. Let your child enjoy physical challenges such as climbing trees. Children learn through taking risks, so don't be overly protective if the worst that can happen is a bump or a scrape.



Share your memories

Think about the kinds of active games you used to play when you were a child – tag, rounders, piggy in the middle. Tell your child about the games you used to play and play them together. Grandparents might want to get involved, too, sharing the games they played when they were young.

Lead by example

Don't be afraid to get stuck in and play outdoors with your child. You're never too old to play, and playing active games is a fun way of making exercise part of your daily routine.

Build a sense of community

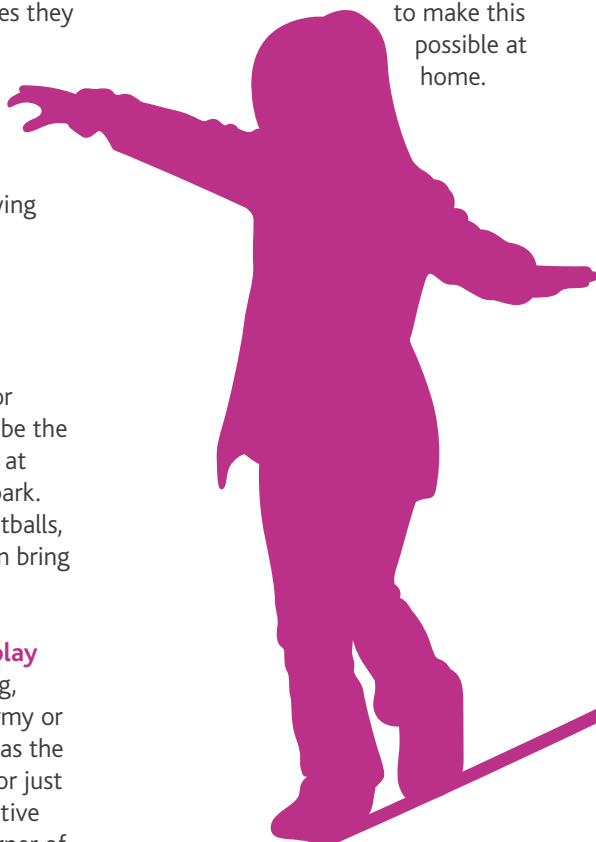
Get together with other parents and neighbours to provide a safe space for children to play outdoors. This could be the lanes between houses, a green patch at the end of your street or your local park. Children can bring their scooters, footballs, skipping ropes, chalk ... and adults can bring their cups of tea!

Make your home a great place to play

Your home is a great place for playing, particularly when the weather is stormy or it's too dark to be out. If your child has the freedom to play – with friends, toys or just bits and pieces – they will make creative use of even a small space like the corner of a room.

Lots of fun ideas don't need too much room – for example, hide and seek or building a den out of cushions and blankets. Whatever their age, your child needs space to play inside. Rough and tumble is an important part of how children play, so try

to make this possible at home.



Playing outside – WHATEVER THE WEATHER

We adults are often more put off by bad weather than children.

Splashing around in puddles can be lots of fun. Healthy kids and adults don't need to let a bit of bad weather stop them playing outdoors. Here are a few practical things you can do to make it easier for your child to play outdoors in the rain.

Dressing for the weather

Make sure your child is wearing old clothes and wellies when they're playing outside. You are less likely to get stressed about your child playing with water and mud if they – and you – are wearing clothes you aren't worried about.

Keeping it fun

Think about how you can make use of rain to add to the fun – water slides, water balloon games, hunting for worms. Once you feel comfortable being out in wet weather, you can start thinking about mud – mud pies, mud slides and mud painting.

Being prepared to go indoors

When you feel positive – and even excited – about going outside, the chances are your child will, too. Children are less bothered by challenging weather conditions than adults, especially when they can play with water or mud.

But if your child starts to complain about being cold or wet once you're outside, start

by asking a few questions. Which bit of them is feeling cold? Are their clothes the problem? (If they are, change them.) Are they worried about getting muddy?

Try a different activity to see if that makes a difference. How about exploring your neighbourhood together? Jumping in puddles? Chasing raindrops? Making mud pies?

If nothing helps, be prepared to go back inside. Playing outside is supposed to be fun, so there's no point in staying outdoors if your child isn't having a good time. There are all sorts of ways your child can play at home.



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.

The benefits of messy play

Being messy is a natural part of childhood. It shows your child is creative and interested in learning about the world.

Things that may concern parents

It's natural to worry about germs when your child picks things up from the ground or puts things in their mouths. But it's interesting to hear that some people feel we may have gone too far in our efforts to protect children from germs. Many experts now believe that children's immune systems may be stronger if they are exposed to germs.

Mess or dirty clothes can make extra work for you. But your child will get more out of playing if they feel they don't have to worry about getting messy or dirty.

The important thing is to find the balance that works for your family.

Tips for dealing with messy play

- Keep a supply of old clothes for your child to wear so that you won't mind them getting dirty.
- Let your child know you don't mind them getting wet, muddy or dirty when they play.
- Involve your child in sorting out messy clothes and toys.
- There are a few things you can do to stop too much dirt coming indoors:
 - Make it a habit for your child to take off their dirty shoes or boots at the door.
 - Clean mucky things outside, if possible, rather than bringing them indoors.
 - Set up a washing line outside so that muddy or wet clothes, shoes and toys can dry.

There are also things you can do to help you cope with messy play indoors:

- 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.
- Involve your child in cleaning up.
- Accept that spills and mess will sometimes happen.
- Keep a supply of old, adult-sized t-shirts for your child to wear for painting and other messy activities.

Screen time

Many parents struggle to find a solution to the challenges caused by screen time. As parents we can support our children to use screens in a balanced way that is good for them.

The rules have not changed

The approaches we recommend for parenting offline apply online, too. Children expect adults to set limits and help them manage their time. It is as important to know your child's friends and where they are spending time online as offline.

Online is an 'environment'

Children do the same things online that they have always done – the only difference is that their play is virtual. Digital technology is the same as any other environment: it can have positive and negative effects. Your child needs your support to learn about these.

Engage with children

When parents join in with digital technology, children benefit from the conversations you have and the time you spend together. Playing computer games with older children or watching younger children play with electronic toys and devices helps you understand what they are doing.

Talking is good

Very young children learn best through two-way communication. Language

development comes from adults talking and playing with children – passive screen time doesn't help them learn your language.

Playing is important

Children get a range of exercise and significant mental health benefits when they play actively. Give your child a range of opportunities to play. Make sure your home has times and places where technology is not used each day, for example, mealtimes and bedtimes.

Providing choices

Children who have a range of things to do and places to play are usually better at managing their own use of digital technology.

Think about how you use technology

If you limit your own screen use, and model moderate use of devices in front of your child, they will learn from you.

Being online is okay for teenagers

Online relationships are an important part of teenagers' development. Social media helps them to stay in touch with friends and feel connected. Ask them what they are doing online – it is acceptable (whatever they say!) and will help you understand more about the content and the situation.

Making mistakes

Children, like adults, will make mistakes using digital technology. If you are supportive and handle the situation with understanding, you can help your child to learn and solve problems.

How to support your TEENAGER'S PLAY

Playing isn't only for younger children – teenagers play too. But your teenager may call it something else, such as hanging out. Playing, relaxing, and socialising all contribute to your teenager feeling well, happy, and able to cope with life's ups and downs.

Relationships matter

Teenagers want more freedom and independence, so your relationship with them will be changing. But it does still matter to them.

Risk and challenge

It's normal for teenagers to look for some risk and challenge, whether in physical activities or social experiences. They will naturally test their own limits – and probably yours too. As parents, we want to keep them safe but it's also important to allow them to grow into capable, independent young people.

Talk about risk-taking

Keep the lines of communication open between you and your teenager. Discuss the kinds of activities and experiences that might come their way – and decide on the level of potential risk involved, for example meeting new people, staying out after dark or getting into a car with someone who's just learned to drive.

Get-out clause

Some families have a 'code word' (or phrase) that their teenager can use in a text or phone call if they want their parents to come and get them. This gives

them a way of resolving a situation without embarrassment.

Making mistakes

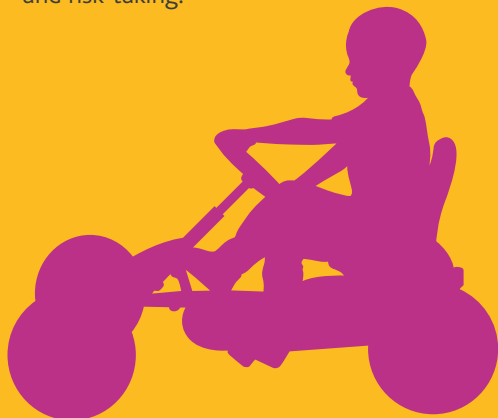
Everyone makes mistakes. The important thing is to learn from them and find ways to avoid repeating them. Ask your teenager questions like: 'What happened?' rather than 'What did you do?' or 'How did it happen?' rather than 'Whose fault was it?' This will help them reflect on what happened without feeling blamed.

Limits and boundaries

Even if they say they don't need them, teenagers still benefit from knowing the rules and boundaries. Involve them in setting limits and be willing to negotiate.

Encourage positive risk-taking

Encourage your teenager to try activities that have an element of risk and challenge if they are offered the chance at school or clubs. Things like mountain biking, sailing, outdoor challenges, and camping will give your teenager a positive sense of challenge and risk-taking.



Things PARENTS WORRY about

The best things about playing are that it's fun, anyone can join in, and it doesn't have to cost much. But sometimes parents worry about play and this can get in the way. It can stop you playing together as a family, or giving your child the time, space and freedom to play.

It's natural and normal for parents to worry about their children and what they are getting up to when they're playing. Here are some of the worries we hear most frequently – and our answers.

Should my child spend less time on screens, playing on the computer or watching TV? How can I tackle this?

Computers and screens are now part of children's lives, so what matters is balance – time for school, time for computers and other devices, and time for playing.

Read our tips for screen time on page 16

What happens if my child gets hurt when we are playing outside? I don't want to seem irresponsible.

Parents and carers hear powerful and sometimes contradictory messages about keeping children safe. Try not to let this stop you allowing your child to play outdoors. The benefits of playing outside greatly outweigh any risks.

Try to avoid focusing on all the – probably unlikely – ways your child could get hurt while playing outside. Take a careful but

positive approach. You know your child better than anyone else, so watch them while they play. You will see that most children don't put themselves at risk of serious harm.

Part of your job as a parent is to help your child learn to make their own decisions about risk and possible dangers. This needs to start when they are young. This is the best way of preparing them to make good, confident choices. When the time comes for them to play outside without you, they will be able to do this confidently and wisely.

There's nowhere in our neighbourhood for my child to play – where can they go?

Most children will play anywhere if they have the freedom, time, and space to play, and other children to play with. They don't need an official playground.

But local authorities in Wales do have a responsibility to provide play facilities and staffed play provision in their areas. You can find out more about what is available by looking online, for example search for your local authority's website and see what play provision they offer.

Everyone's neighbourhood is different, but there's sure to be a local park, playground or 'playable' space close to where you live. If there aren't any play areas or parks, there are usually other open spaces that can be used for playing such as a patch of grass.

Should we really play outside when it's raining?

We adults are often more put off than children when the weather is bad. Splashing around in puddles can be great fun! There are lots of practical things you can do to make it easier for your child to play in the rain.

Read our tips for playing out whatever the weather on page 14

I'm on a really tight budget and can't afford toys or play equipment – what can I do?

Most of us have a free outdoor play area or play facilities close to where we live. Wherever your child is playing – indoors or outdoors – there are usually things you can find around the house that they can use for playing.

Read our ideas about stuff for playing on page 10

Is it really safe for my child to play outside?

Most of us remember the joy and freedom we felt when we were children and played outside. The benefits were enormous:

- We met and had adventures with friends
- We got to know our own neighbourhood well and travelled around it confidently
- We got to know the people in our area – working out who to avoid and who to trust. And they got to know and trust us (or not!)
- We were physically active, self-reliant, resourceful and independent.

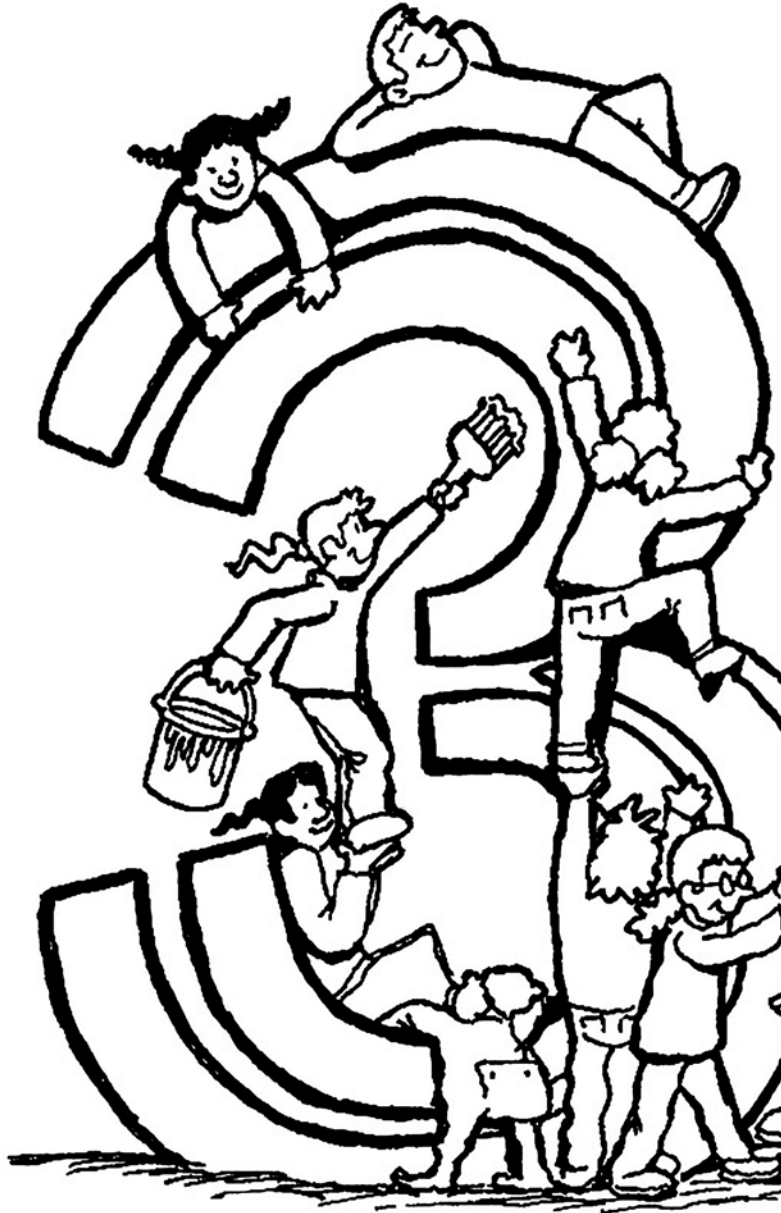
We all have a responsibility to support and prepare our children so they can play outside confidently in our local communities.

What if I can't bear the mess and noise?

It's normal for children to be noisy and messy when they're playing. Noise shows that your child is communicating and interacting. If the noise is a real problem, try suggesting quieter games, or a different place where they can play and have more freedom.

Read our ideas for dealing with messy play on page 15

ARTICLE 31 - EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO PLAY



ERTHYGL 31 - MAE GAN BOB PLENTYN YR HAWL I CHWARAE

