

ST MATTHEWS CHILDREN'S ACTION GROUP

OPEN ACCESS POLICY

St Matthews Children's Action Group believes that in Leicester the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 31 should be upheld and that as a right children's access to provision should not be determined by ability to pay and that there should be no other entry conditions other than those pertaining to safety and welfare of self and others.

Play is defined as behaviour which is: freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated and performed for no external goal or reward. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

Open Access Play provision has a specific terminology which identifies three essential ingredients: these are referred to as the 'Three Frees':

1. Free of charge at the point of entry: No child should be required to pay to use a play provision because play is a fundamental right of all children.
2. Free to come and go: Children are not restricted in their movements, other than where related to safety matters and are not prevented from coming and going as and when they wish. No child should feel confined to the play provision. This is a legal requirement of the provision, set out in the Childcare Act 2008.
3. Free to choose: To assist in the development of self-esteem and confidence children are freed to choose what play activities they wish to undertake and with whom they play.

These three elements form the cornerstone which helps to define the purpose and experience of open access play provision.

To protect children from abuse and to help them protect themselves we make it clear in our information and registration that our facilities are free of charge staffed PLAY PROVISION, not childcare, parents should not use it as that.

All children attending require a completed registration signed by a parent / guardian including the attached "Open Access" Statement stating that they understand: -

- "Open Access Play" refers to Child Centered Play Provision where children are free to come and go and staff are not empowered to stop them.
- If a child needs to leave the playground an agreement is in place between the parent & child that the child can return to a designated place of safety.
- That parents/carers keep their information supplied to the playground always up to date. Parents/guardians of children under 8 years old are required to be always contactable.
- Once a child leaves the premises, they are no longer the responsibility of playground staff.
- If it becomes apparent that a child is being left in contradiction of "Open Access Play" policy the parent /guardian will be advised that this is not appropriate provision for their child and will be directed to the Children's Centre for advice on alternatives.

We understand that, some children, because of their age or ability, are vulnerable in the context of "Open Access Play". If a parent or guardian does not want their child to leave the playground, it is up to the parent to impress that upon the child and advise playground staff accordingly. If a child wants to leave staff will verbally discourage them or endeavor to make safe arrangements by: -

Signed: Supna Thadha
Position: Chair

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- Telephoning the parent to ascertain that they are happy the child returns home or to somewhere the Parent/Guardian considers safe.
- In the event of telephoning the parent it is established that no one is at home and the parent wants the child to remain at the playground. The staff will if possible, advise the child to stay while recognising that they cannot use force, or restrain, to prevent the child from leaving.
- If the child still decides to leave, staff cannot take any further responsibility for the welfare of the child.
- If a parent cannot guarantee that their child can return to a place of safety at all times, whilst at the playground, they will be notified that Open Access Play provision is NOT APPROPRIATE to their needs.

In respect of any children deemed vulnerable by their parents, who remain uncollected by the time the playground closes, staff will: -

- Telephone the parent or emergency contact as above.

Staffing Ratios

Standard 15.14 of National Minimum Standards for children aged 8-12 requires: -

“Staffing ratios should be sufficient and proportionate, contributing to a positive environment for all children attending. Staffing ratios should reflect the circuses dances of the setting, including the site and level of activities undertaken, how risks are managed, the experience and qualifications of staff, community context, age and abilities of the children attending and allow for contingency in case of emergencies. The ratio of persons with current first aid qualifications will need to reflect these circumstances”.

“The responsibility for setting ratios in the new standard will rest with the service and will depend on the diverse circumstances that may apply in the provision.”

The minimum staffing ratio for children under 8 years old is 1:13.

Further to the above the association takes safeguarding children a priority and we will: -

- Create an environment in which children are safe from abuse, and any suspicions will be promptly and appropriately responded to.
- Ensure that all staff, committee members, trustees and volunteers are subjected to an enhanced DBS Check.
- All staff will take part in child protection training and any other relevant training.
- We will operate in accordance with the local Safeguarding Board Guidelines.
- Ensure that any significant change in a child’s behaviour or appearance is logged for investigation.
- Ensure that every effort is taken to be as open and honest with parents from the outset of any concerns.
- Promote children’s awareness of their own personal safety and provide the opportunity to discuss important issues.

Pick Up from school

If a child is to be collected by our team from school in term time and is not at the meeting point at school, the school will be informed and the parent/carer of that child will be contacted if the child cannot be located on the school grounds. Please inform us if your child is not at school on a pick-up day.

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