

St Matthews Children's Action Group

Play Policy

Every child has the Right to play as stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

We believe that within every child is the drive and the need to play, and that children will play anywhere. Playfair Playgrounds provide spaces for great play possibilities, and ones in which children can use play to solve their own problems and create new understandings.

Children are under more pressure than ever; their free time is often over organised and filled with a focus on academic achievement. Time to play is important and vital to children's wellbeing. Play makes children's lives better now, in their moment of play and into the future.

The Play Environment

- Our settings offer opportunities for children to climb, swing, explore, experiment, and offers challenge as well as spaces of privacy, reflection and quiet; it is adventurous and feeds the imagination.
- A rich play environment is considered key to children's creativity, development and freedom. This means that children may get dirty or wet or come home smelling of bonfire; all these experiences are important for children's positive development.
- Our settings are places where friendships can both be built or broken, where risks both physical and emotional can be taken and where children can be different.
- In our settings every day will be different. Children might get bored or upset but also excited and exhilarated, and through their play will find ways to deal with their emotions.
- Our settings are a place to learn through experience, without being taught. Adventure playgrounds give children the chance to be together without adults intervening, unless there is risk of serious emotional or physical harm.
- When children feel safe and secure, they learn to trust other people. Children who don't feel safe can be anxious and unhappy. But when they learn that they can trust themselves and others it helps them grow up happy, healthy and to enjoy the world around them.
- Children are supported to resolve their own problems; qualified playworkers are ready to step in if required.
- Through a rich and varied play experience children will develop resilience.
- Our settings are places where all behaviour can be explored. They are the children's spaces which means their play is free from adult judgment. Everything and anything is possible.
- Our settings are not artificial places; we do not hide children from the realities of life and there is no right or wrong in play.

Signed: Supna Thadha
Position: Chair

Date: 19th April 2024
Review Date: 19th April 2025

- There will always be an adult supervising the outdoor spaces of our settings when children are playing, however this adult will not be surveying all the children's actions or the content of their play.

Playworkers are part of a rich play environment

- The role of the playworker is to ensure the space is free from unacceptable risks and to make the space more playful.
- Playworkers will act as advocates for children's play and will challenge adults and work with strategies rather than procedures to support individual children through challenging situations, with hints and tips instead of rules.
- We will speak up for children's play, even when adults find it challenging. Playworkers intervention always balances risk with the developmental benefit and wellbeing of children (as stated in the Playwork Principles see Appendix A).
- Playworkers understand that children want to feel safe when playing and that this sense of safety contributes to their ability to feel relaxed and confident to fully express themselves and explore the world. It is also understood that children need and want to take risks when they play and that their ability to do so is vital for their positive development.
- Children at our settings are supported to be in control of their play and playworkers will only intervene if the risk is unacceptable.
- Playworkers value children's ideas and support children in their play, following their interests, and work with parents and carers to increase their understanding of the importance of play in the lives of their children.
- Our role is to reduce the impact of adult concerns on children's play in order that children get a broad and exciting play experience. We believe children need time to play without adults telling them what to do, and Playfair Playgrounds provide those spaces.

Appendix A: The Playwork Principles

These Principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and as such must be regarded as a whole. They describe what is unique about play and playwork and provide the playwork perspective for working with children and young people. They are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and wellbeing of individuals and communities.
2. Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. 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.
3. The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

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4. For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.
5. The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.
6. The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, and reflective practice.
7. Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.
8. Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and wellbeing of children.

Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, Cardiff 2005.